

BALADITYA

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OBAMYIN

INDIA

Before the battle
of
KARUR



BALADITYA

A Historical Romance of Ancient India

BY

A. S. PANCHAPAKESA AYYAR, M.A. (OXON.), I.C.S.

Author of

*'Indian After-Dinner Stories, Vols. I and II', 'Sense in Sex
and Other Stories of Indian Women', etc.*

Fully Illustrated

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DEDICATED TO
THE MEMORY OF MY BELOVED MOTHER
WHO LEFT ME WHEN I WAS FIFTY DAYS OLD.
THE AUTHOR.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
DEDICATION	iii
INTRODUCTION	vii
CHAP. I. A MIDNIGHT ENCOUNTER	1
II. THE OUTCASTE'S HUT	11
III. NARAYANA AND GOVINDA	19
IV. THE SEARCH FOR THE FUGITIVES	28
V. A GRUESOME FIND	37
VI. A BROTHER'S GRIEF	46
VII. NOON AT A COTTAGE AND AN UNEXPECTED VISIT	52
VIII. IN THE FOREST OF VISWAKARANI	63
IX. BALADITYA AND SARASWATI	73
X. ON THE ROAD TO BHARUKACHCHA	81
XI. LAKSHMI AND PARVATI	92
XII. THE RE-CAPTURE OF THE CAPTIVES	102
XIII. A WOMAN'S RESOURCE	109
XIV. THE ESCAPE FROM HUNAGARH	116
XV. THE RIFT IN THE LUTE	123
XVI. IN A WAYSIDE CHOULTRY	131
XVII. AGNANANDHAKARA	143
XVIII. A HELLISH PLOT	160
XIX. VASANTA	171
XX. A NARROW ESCAPE	179
XXI. THE VOYAGE TO KERALA	191
XXII. KALAGNI, SARVASAMMATA & SUMATI	208
XXIII. A SWAYAMVARA	237

	PAGE
XXIV. IN THE FORTRESS OF KALANJAR ...	... 253
XXV. THE FIRST VICTORY ... ..	... 270
XXVI. DHARMADATTA'S SHOP ... ..	... 280
XXVII. THE PASSING AWAY OF TORAMANA	... 291
XXVIII. THE MOMENTOUS DECISION ...	... 298
XXIX. PREPARATIONS FOR WAR IN KALINGA AND MAGADHA ... ..	... 312
XXX. MIHIRAGULA'S COUNCIL OF WAR	... 322
XXXI. THE GATHERING AT AMALAPURI	... 332
XXXII. VARAHAMIHIRA ² ... ..	... 341
XXXIII. THE BATTLE OF KARUR ... ..	... 355
XXXIV. THE AFTERMATH OF THE WAR ...	... 371
XXXV. THE DEATH OF BALADITYA ... ..	... 381
XXXVI. YASODHARMA—CHARUMATI—PURI JAGAN- NATH ... ..	... 391

INTRODUCTION

No apology is needed for writing a historical novel about Ancient India. So few novels exist about this period of India's history that the descendants of the Ancient Hindus feel it very difficult to visualize the outstanding events and personalities of old. No amount of dry historical details will serve the purpose of a novel. A historian writes what he considers to be literal truth, but, by the very nature of his work, he cannot supply his reader with that far higher form of truth, imaginative truth. In his attempts to give us the details about a period, he almost always fails to convey the spirit of the period, a correct impression of what the life of the period was like. It is as if we attempted to describe a man by giving the measurements of his face, nose, tongue, arms, chest, stomach, legs, etc. without giving an idea of his facial expression or character. It is this defect which a historical novel serves to remedy. In England the ancient national heroes Alfred the Great and Hereward the Wake have been made the subjects of novels which bring the reader in active touch with those worthies. But in India though there have been no lack of first-rate national heroes in our ancient history we have not made them the subjects of popular novels. All that our students know of such heroes as Chandragupta Maurya, Asoka, Kanishka, Samudragupta, Chandragupta, Vikramaditya, Yasodharman, Harsha, Mihira Bhoja and Lalitaditya are a series of dates and facts. Of the real men behind the dates and the facts few of our students know. No wonder, then, that these great heroes of old, and no country has produced greater ones, have remained mere names. Still, it is my firm belief that they deserve to be remembered by posterity. Their

characters must be a living inspiration to their descendants. A country's heroes are among its most valuable possessions. They are the heirlooms of the national family to be carefully preserved and fondly cherished. India has honoured the memory of her ancient religious teachers, poets, dramatists, astronomers, grammarians, physicians and philosophers. Buddha, Mahavira, Rama, Krishna, Valmiki, Vyasa, and Sankaracharya; Bhasa, Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti; Brahmagupta, Aryabhata, Varahamihira and Bhaskaracharya; Panini and Patanjali; Charaka and Susruta; Yagnavalkya, Gargi, Satyakama, Ashvaghosha and even Charvaka; these names were handed down to posterity. Little or nothing of the actual lives of most of even these was recorded. With a supreme indifference to the petty facts of this fleeting life, our ancestors concentrated their attention only on their works, the most permanent part of them. I cannot say that they were wholly wrong. It is no doubt true that we would like to hear the details of the lives of these great men, and perhaps we may understand their works better by having their lives before us. But then, there is a real danger of the details of their lives taking a prior place to their works which is the last thing these great men desired. Again, interpreting their work with the aid of their biographies not infrequently leads to the narrowing of the meaning. Hence, I do not view the lack of biographies so far as these great minds of old are concerned with unmixed sorrow. But I do consider the lack of biographies of India's political heroes as a national calamity, for it led to their undeserved oblivion.

Why did India forget these heroes who played so prominent a part in her ancient history? Four reasons may be given. Firstly, the ancient Hindus never attached much importance to political events. Wars and conquests they considered to be far less important than philosophical discussions since the former affected only this life which they

regarded as transitory whereas the latter affected both this life and the Vast Eternal from which this life and its predecessors and successors emanated. A new thought interested the ancient Hindus more than a new conquest. Alexander must have appeared to them as far less interesting a person than even a third-rate philosopher like Charvaka. Why this furious sweep from one country to another? Had this man really understood the purpose of life and the scheme of the Universe? These must have been the questions asked by them. Not that wars and conquests were in any way wanting in ancient Hindu history. There were plenty and to spare. The vast majority of the men who really counted, the thinkers, worried little about these. They left them to be recorded by some court bard whose heroic lays were forgotten as soon as his master died. No great poet like Valmiki or Vyasa or Kalidasa worried himself with these purely lay wars, devoid of any religious significance. And this in spite of the fact that some of them, like Kalidasa, were court poets. The very Kings who patronized them agreed with them in their opinion!! It is no accident that Kalidasa wrote a *Kumarasambhava* but never a *Chandraguptavijaya* or even a *Samudraguptadigvijaya*. Secondly, the old Hindu Kings confined their wars to warriors, and never molested the priests, poets, philosophers, astronomers, physicians, grammarians and farmers. So the normal life of the country was not disturbed seriously by wars. One King superseded another, but the people never seriously cared so long as he left them undisturbed. This very non-disturbance of life was an important element contributing to the forgetting of the political heroes. It is significant that when conquests began to disturb people's lives violently, as the Muhammadan conquest of Muhammad of Ghori, Indians began to remember something more of their political heroes. Prithvi Raja earned a place in the nation's memory, and a great work, *Prithvi Raja Rasau*, was

written by Chand Bardi and became very popular. Chandragupta Maurya would have become equally popular if Alexander had completed his brutal conquest of India and changed the life of her peoples.

Thirdly, the political heroes left no permanent work behind like the poets, philosophers, grammarians, physicians and astronomers. The work of the latter was permanent and had a value for all time, but not so political work from its very nature. The empires founded by Chandragupta Maurya and Samudragupta lasted but for a few decades, and what were decades in India's calculation of time by Yugas and Kalpas?

Fourthly, India had a very high ideal even from the dawn of her history. Measured by that ideal, her historical heroes were found to be wanting. Ancient India's great minds stuck to their ideal and scorned to record the achievements of these petty heroes or cherish their memories. The conquest of the three worlds was a famous ideal with them and sometimes it became even the conquest of the fourteen worlds. What were the conquests of Chandragupta Maurya or Samudragupta compared to these conquests? Did they not but conquer one small portion of one of the fourteen worlds? Did they merit a place by the side of the conquerors of the fourteen worlds? Certainly not. Again, even Bharata of old had ruled all India from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, and the whole country had been named Bharatavarsha after him. What were these Chandraguptas and Samudraguptas who were not even able to bring the whole of Bharatavarsha under one Umbrella? The political dismemberment of Bharatavarsha appeared to the ancient Indians as a falling-off from ancient ideals, and poor Chandragupta and Samudragupta were found fault with for not restoring a united Bharatavarsha instead of being praised for preparing for it.

Modern India cannot afford to consign back to oblivion her ancient heroes who have been rediscovered by much

patient research mostly by western scholars to whom we cannot be sufficiently grateful. The heroes of the past deserve a place in the heart of every Indian for they rendered yeoman service to the cause of the country in its hours of supreme need, and they also supply the necessary ideals for the growing generation. It is with the object of making two of these heroes, Baladitya and Yasodharman, familiar to every Indian that this book is primarily written.

In writing this novel, I have been more particular in representing what I consider to be the true spirit of the age rather than in sticking to historical facts even in details. A novelist is not bound to adhere to minute historical facts. Hence it is that out of seventy characters who figure in this novel, only four or five are definitely historical. The rest are of my own creation.

The period of which this novel treats was one of the most momentous in Indian History. A prosperous and powerful empire, that of the Guptas, was overthrown by a horde of fierce barbarians who had no civilization or religion of their own. The Huns are perhaps the only conquerors of India who did not contribute anything to her culture. Their sole work at first was a stupid destruction of the precious art monuments of the Gupta empire. But soon the barbarians became Hinduized. The process began even with Toramana who called himself a Maharaja after the Indian fashion. His son Mihiragula became a worshipper of Siva, and in two generations the Huns became merged in the Hindus like their predecessors the Sakas, the Kushans and the Yuehchis. The combination of Hunnish valour with Hindu chivalry gave rise to the Rajput warrior who in his best days reached the ideal of an honourable warrior. Thus out of evil came good, out of the blood-thirsty Huns came the Rajput warrior. The Gupta emperors had been administering the land so peacefully for a hundred and fifty years that the citizens had forgotten the art of defending

themselves. When the mighty empire fell and its armies were defeated by the barbarians, the common people knew not what to do. The Western provinces submitted to the invaders till the horrible tyranny of Mihiragula, so graphically narrated by Kalhana, led to the league under Yasodharman which finally overthrew the tyrant at Karur and sent him to distant Kashmir. Modern Indians, like the Indians under the Gupta Empire, have enjoyed unbroken peace for so long that they are also in danger of forgetting how to defend themselves. Fortunately, attempts are now being made to impart military training to those desirous of acquiring it and thus a serious prospective danger is being slowly averted. Let us hope that by the time the next horde of barbarians invades India from the north-west, the weakest link in her mountain frontier supplied by nature, Indians will not be found wanting as their predecessors under the Guptas were.

THE AUTHOR

CHARACTERS IN THE NOVEL

MEN

1. Baladitya, descendant of the Gupta Emperors and King of Magadha.
2. Yasodharman, King of Malwa and Maha Kosala.
3. Toramana, the King of the Huns and the conqueror of the Guptas.
4. Mihiragula, son and successor of Toramana.
5. Bhumaka, brother of Toramana.
6. Bhanugupta, King of Western Malwa under the Huns.
7. Narayana, a courtier at Ujjaini.
8. Govinda, a friend of Narayana.
9. Bhadrabahu, a Jain of Ujjaini.
10. Raghupati, a citizen of Ujjaini.
11. Hari Ram, a dacoit.
12. Agnanandhakara, a Sanyasi.
13. Subandhu, another Sanyasi.
14. Vatavyadhi, a wandering scholar, logician and grammarian.
15. Kunapadanta, a sorcerer and magician.
16. Sukracharya, a priest and astrologer.
17. Udarananda, a follower of Charvaka.
18. Kamalaksha, a choultry-keeper.
19. Vasudeva, a Yaudheya noble.
20. Nahapana Senior, the commandant of Hunagarh fort.
21. Kadpheisos, the captain in charge of the captives at Hunagarh.

22. Chastana alias Ranavir Simha, son of Nahapana, a general in the Hun army.
23. Nahapana Junior alias Dharma Simha, son of Chastana, and another general in the Hun army.
24. Mahasena, King of Kerala.
25. Mahendravarman, King of Vengi.
26. Avantivarman, King of Kanchi.
27. Kakavarna, King of Simhala.
28. Gunasagara, King of Kalinga.
29. Vyaghraraja, King of Gondwana and Maha Kanthara.
30. Vajrayudha, King of Kashmir.
31. Kumarapala, King of Kamarupa.
32. Simhabhupati, King of Nepal.
33. Aparajita, King of Devarashtra and Maharashtra.
34. Indradyumna, King of Kasi.
35. Pulakesin, King of the Chalukyas.
36. Rudrasimha, King of Sourashtra.
37. Prince Murari, son of Baladitya.
38. Dharmagupta, another son of Baladitya.
39. Narasimha, son of Yasodharman.
40. Chandrabhanu, another son of Yasodharman.
41. Ramachandra, a Sea-Captain.
42. Kalagni, a spy.
43. Sarvasammata, another spy.
44. Vidyasamudra, High priest of Gunasagara.
45. Gnanapriya, a Brahmin of Amalapuri.
46. Yuddhakesari, a noble of Maha Kosala.
47. Viswanatha, a soldier of Bhanugupta.
48. Meghavarna, brother of Kakavarna.
49. Dharmadatta, a merchant of Pataliputra.
50. Paramartha, another merchant of Pataliputra.
51. Dhanabhushan, a merchant of Bharukachcha.
52. Ananda, a citizen of Pataliputra.
53. Varahamihira, an astronomer.
54. Dandi, a poet.

WOMEN

1. Saraswati, daughter of Raghupati and Queen of Baladitya.
2. Charumati, daughter of Gunasagara and Queen of Yasodharman.
3. Dakshyani, Queen of Kalinga.
4. Mahamaya, mother of Yasodharman.
5. Tushashpa, Queen of Toramana and mother of Mihiragula.
6. Hujheshpa } Two more Queens of Toramana.
7. Vajheshpa }
8. Madhavi, an outcaste sweeper at Ujjaini.
9. Lakshmi, wife of Paramarathi.
10. Parvati, daughter of Paramarathi.
11. Arundhathi, a Brahmin widow of Amalapuri.
12. Vasanta alias Subhashini, a country milk-maid and later on a lady-in-waiting of Mahamaya.
13. Lalita, daughter of Yasodharman.
14. Narayani, daughter of Baladitya.
15. Sumati alias Karuna, a spy.
16. Chandramati, wife of Varahamihira.

CHAPTER I

A MIDNIGHT ENCOUNTER

It was a starry night; all was calm. Not a sound was to be heard in the great city of Ujjaini except the snoring of some persons sleeping on the pials. This snoring only served to intensify the silence. All along the four main streets of the great city, which formed two straight lines perpendicular to one another centering upon the huge temple of Vishnu, there reigned an unbroken silence. The tall buildings appeared more majestic in the partial light and looked like a company of giant grenadiers waiting on the huge massive temple whose mighty *gopura* towered high and almost seemed to kiss the skies.

Amidst this scene of ideal peace and repose there could be discerned approaching the town a traveller who, curiously enough, was advancing not by the public main roads but by an obscure foot-path. By his dress he seemed to be a man of considerable distinction. He wore the costume generally associated with kings and princes and the higher nobility of those days. He had on fine trousers and coat and the sandals first popularized by Kanishka. On his head there was a helmet of bronze and from his waist hung a sword whose hilt bore on it the name of Takshasila which pronounced it to be of the finest make of steel that one could buy in those days. Flung loosely over his shoulders and coming almost down to his ankles was a most exquisite piece of muslin seldom worn by any but the highest nobility.

By his appearance, the traveller could scarcely exceed the age of twenty-five, yet a deep sadness overspread his face as if he were oppressed by some great care. His whole

demeanour betokened a mind ill at ease. This was shown in his very walking. He would go on with slow faltering musing steps for a while, then unconsciously stop, gaze yearningly upon the skies, fall into a reverie, heave two or three deep sighs, and then suddenly start, look round, and resume his march. During one of these unconscious stoppings, he fixed his eyes on the heavens with rather more ardour than usual as if he would find out the secrets of their existence, and as he again proceeded on his course, he muttered half audibly, half to himself:—‘Alas! no shining stars pierce through the gloom of my dark life.’

By this time, he had approached the end of one of the main streets. His pace became quicker, a sudden overpowering desire seemed to nerve him on and there was a strange light in his eyes as he surveyed the houses on each side with an eager curiosity, not as if he were unacquainted with them but rather as if he would fain know the changes that had taken place in them since he last saw them. As he passed the splendid palace which stood at the end of the street, which was called King’s Street, he stopped for a considerable time gazing with a wistful expression, and a few tears fell from his eyes. But he quickly recovered himself, and passed on. He went along several lanes and finally near an obscure end of the great city found a house with a verandah which was screened from the street by a parapet wall. Our traveller laid himself down with a sigh of relief on the floor.

But hardly had he closed his eyes than the silence around him was broken by hot words and the clash of swords. He immediately got up and proceeded in the direction from which the sound had come. He had thus advanced some distance and was about to turn back giving up the search as useless when his attention was arrested by a sharp cry of ‘Narayana! Narayana!’ some thirty yards from where he was. Swift as thought, he rushed

in that direction with drawn sword in hand. But before he could reach the spot, he was confronted by a tall powerful man of about forty, who with a drawn sword in hand obstructed his passage. The traveller was impatient and cried loudly:—‘Let me pass, will you?’ To this the other replied contemptuously, ‘Who are you, you little mannikin, that you should come lording it over me? Hence, hence, lest you get a kiss from my sword Mohini.’

The place was a sort of waste overgrown by woodland, some two furlongs removed from the city. The time was about one o’clock in the morning. No help was to be expected; and the opponent before him was strong and apparently experienced. The traveller was for a time unsettled as to what he should do. But a second low groan determined him. ‘Mannikin or no,’ said he in a voice of thunder, ‘I want to go and see the person you have tried to murder and see whether I cannot yet give him some help. Away, lest worse befall you.’ He spoke this in such a determined voice that his opponent was for a moment unnerved and shrank back. But quickly recovering himself he said in his former tone of sarcasm but now slightly tinged with a consuming hatred:—

‘And who are you that would come between me and my prey and what is your warrant for doing so?’

‘In the king’s name I command you to make way,’ said the traveller. At this the other broke out into a loud laugh, ‘So ho! So ho! in the king’s name! in Toramana’s name! In whose name have I committed this murder as you call it? And now my mannikin, since I have satisfied your scruples and allayed your conscience, go peacefully home and drink your mother’s milk. As for that sword of yours, you had better use it for cutting cucumbers than for fighting men, and men like me. Whom do you take me for, you dolt? I am Bhumaka, the brother of Toramana the Hun, Bhumaka the Lion. And, you goose,

bless your stars that you escaped his clutches to-day, for it is seldom a man escapes me.'

The traveller gazed in surprise. Was this man really Bhumaka the Lion, the brother of Toramana, and now turned a murderer by his brother's orders? Ill he had always thought of Toramana, but he had never dreamt that he would have advanced this length. After his first fit of surprise was over, his indignation knew no bounds. 'My country! My country!' he murmured unconsciously in a very bitter tone. 'What are you meditating upon, you mannikin?' resumed his opponent. 'Art afraid thou wouldst miss thy milk to-day? Poor baby, I pity thee.'

This was more than the traveller could endure, and he cried out, 'A pretty crew you are, you and your brother! A pretty crew I say. To rule the country and murder its inhabitants, this has been ever the case with you. Not a day has passed since the vile advent of your regime but has been full of rape and murder and robbery and what not. But this will have an end. Nay, this shall have an end. Come, you Bhumaka, you cowardly murderer, as you are a man, stand on your guard and let not the lion turn sheep this day.' With this, the traveller struck his opponent with the flat blade of his sword.

Now raged a combat in earnest. At first Bhumaka treated it as child's play and was careless. But as the blows rained fast, he perceived that his opponent was not to be despised and so became very earnest. But even when in dead earnest, he could not parry all the blows of his foe, who seemed to be a born swordsman and appeared to be as much at his ease as if he were doing nothing. At last, Bhumaka was tired out, was unable to make a defence, and fell transpierced by his opponent's bright sword. His opponent knelt over him and asked him if he were mortally hurt. 'Done for! Done for!' said Bhumaka, 'but I care not the least for that. It is the idea that an obscure

swordsman killed me that oppresses me. Tell me true, what is your lineage, noble or base? Do not deny me this.'

The traveller coloured and then answered:—

'Most sorry am I that I cannot give out my name. But rest you contented that I am of no base lineage but come of a very exalted house.' Bhumaka's face showed a smile of satisfaction and instantly he fell back and expired.

'There goes one of the wretches of the land, but two greater and far worse ones are still living and have to be dealt with. God help me to deliver this my land from them and such as them!' said the traveller, and remained absorbed in thought till he was suddenly reminded of his first purpose in journeying thither by a repetition of the groan but now in a lower key. 'Oh God, I forgot!' he exclaimed, and ran to the place from which the sound had proceeded.

It was a cleared space in that woodland and on it reclined a youthful figure about twenty-four years old. He looked as if he were stunned. His eyes were shut and his face was devoid of any expression but that of an infinite weariness. He was bound with cords and beside him lay his sword broken in two. 'A little water, for God's sake, a little water, quick, quick,' moaned the man without once opening his eyes which were fast shut in pain. The traveller instantly went to a neighbouring pool and quick as lightning was back with his clean muslin dripping with water which he poured down the man's lips which drank it eagerly. Then he rubbed the man's eyes and face with his wet muslin. As he began rubbing his face, his eyes were necessarily fixed on it but at first it was in idle curiosity. In the faint light given out by the stars, it was not possible to recognize the features clearly. But something told the traveller that he had seen this face before. He racked his memory. He brought his eyes much closer to the face. Just then the moon shot out of a white cloud and shed its luxuriant light on the place where



' LET NOT THE LION TURN SHEEP THIS DAY '

both the men were. The traveller jumped back in astonishment. The face before him was that of his closest associate and dearest friend Yasodharman. What! Why did this Yasodharman come here? How did Bhumaka and he meet in this weird place at that time of night? The traveller did not know how to explain these facts. But there could be no doubt about it. It was Yasodharman himself. The traveller was thankful to God that he had come in time to save his friend. He knelt down and said :—

‘O, God! Thou knowest what is the best for us and Thou ever showerest Thy favours on us sinful men. Praise be to Thee!’

After this, he again proceeded to wipe the eyes and face of his friend, but this time far more tenderly than before. Yasodharman slowly opened his eyes and fixed them on the traveller with a vacant gaze. ‘Thanks, thanks,’ he feebly muttered, ‘thanks for the kindness which is already recorded in Heaven. What is your name, fair youth, that I might remember you ever?’ Here he stopped. A look of utter surprise overspread his features and he exclaimed, ‘What! Is it really so? Are you not Narasimha Baladitya, our lawful emperor?’ ‘Yes, yes,’ replied the traveller, ‘but slow if you are wise. And why have you come into the den of our foes, Yasodharma?’

‘When a greater than I risks his head, Yasodharman’s head is of no worth. When I heard that your majesty had gone this way, I also followed. But as mischance would have it, this dog of a Bhumaka waylaid me here and a fight ensued in which he succeeded at last in disarming me by his superior swordsmanship. Since Toramana and Mihiragula had expressly instructed him not to kill me before finding out from me where your majesty was and what your plans were, he did not immediately kill me. He tied me with some cords he had brought with him and asked me to divulge the facts he wanted. I replied that I

would rather die than reveal them, to which he rejoined that I would both reveal them and die. While we were in the midst of this altercation, we heard the sound of approaching footsteps. He immediately gave me a stunning blow with the hilt of his sword to keep me silent and then went to reconnoitre as to who the intruder was. I fainted at the terrific blow on my head and remember nothing distinctly before your giving me the water. But for your opportune arrival I would have been killed. But now I am none the worse for my adventure except that I feel a bit weak owing to the fight and the blow. Already I am almost my former self. And this Bhumaka, did you kill him?’

‘He is dead!’ replied Baladitya.

‘Then it behoves us to betake ourselves to safety as soon as we can, for should Toramana know of his death, and know he will soon, not a stone would be left unturned to find out and horribly punish his slayers. Where does your majesty propose to go? Our old adherents are all turned out of the city. The city is now full of blood-thirsty Huns. True, now they sleep in fancied security. But once Bhumaka’s death is known, they will all be vigilant. A search will take place and we will be found out. My prince, my prince, where are we to go?’ And Yasodharman looked perplexed. ‘Calm yourself Yasodharman,’ rejoined Baladitya. ‘There is nothing to be so seriously afraid of. My family has known worse days than this. Do you not remember the way in which brave Skandagupta died, and the fate of Prakasaditya my father, how he fought for five long years and at last died giving me, his sole surviving son, a dying message? Do you recollect the exact words he said?’

‘Yes,’ said Yasodharman, “‘Narasimha, my son,” said the grand old man, “Narasimha, ever remember that you are the son of the Gupta Emperors and as such bound to

rid the land of these Huns. And you Yasodharman, be faithful unto his cause in this noble mission. Children I bless you!" It is indeed difficult to forget what he said.'

'Hm! do you hear that sound? It is the cock crowing at two o'clock. Let us hasten away. First, let us throw the body of this dead Hun into the ruined well close by and then we shall proceed to the one person in vast Ujjaini who will give the descendant of the Guptas shelter in her house; I mean the outcaste 'sweeper Madhavi,' said Baladitya.

'The outcaste sweeper Madhavi! And is the descendant of Samudragupta reduced to the exigence of taking shelter in an outcaste sweeper's house? Oh! that it should come to this,' said Yasodharman.

'Peace! peace! I know almost all the people of Ujjaini, and, outcaste sweeper as she is, no holier or better person ever lives in Ujjaini than this Madhavi,' said Baladitya vehemently.

'It ill befits me to contradict your majesty's opinion. But, however good she is, she is but an outcaste *Chandala* and as such below the meanest,' returned Yasodharman.

'God knows no outcaste or *Chandala*. All that is good is acceptable to Him above, whether from the Brahmin or from the *Chandala*,' said Baladitya.

'Ay, so Buddha said,' remarked Yasodharman sarcastically.

'And said true,' retorted Baladitya. 'Now, come, lend me a hand to lift this Bhumaka's corpse and shove it into yonder old ruined well.'

'Alright,' said Yasodharman. 'How fortune changes in the twinkling of an eye! I who expected death at the hands of the Hun but an hour ago am now helping to dispose of his dead body!'

So saying, he took one end of the corpse and Baladitya the other end, and going to the ruined well, which was

about fifty yards distant from them, they slung the body and threw it in. The heavy body fell with a dull thud into the well causing many birds to fly from out the neighbouring bushes.

‘ There goes one of the hellish crew. May the rest soon follow him !’ said Yasodharman as they left the well.

‘ Now for Madhavi’s house. There is not a moment to lose,’ said Baladitya, and putting his arm on his friend’s shoulders, proceeded through a very devious path to the outcaste’s house.

CHAPTER II

THE OUTCASTE'S HUT

FOR some distance they proceeded together, each absorbed in his own thoughts without speaking to the other. The path soon became too narrow for both to walk abreast and so Baladitya went before, knowing the way, and Yasodharman followed him as well as he could. On both sides of the miserable footpath brambles and mimosas were profuse. Anthills of monstrous size were to be found everywhere. Thick short bushes abounded all over the plain, and thorny shrubs jutted their formidable branches even into the path as if to ensnare the feet of careless travellers. The whole spot looked as if human feet had but rarely trodden it and that too in some bygone age. It seemed a marvel that anybody should know this way. It could only be seen straggling for a few feet; then it was lost in the general wilderness until they walked on a little and found it again. All over the waste ground there was an appearance of desolation which was intensified by the time of night. And now, when they had proceeded a considerable distance in silence, Yasodharman suddenly broke it, twitched at his friend's arm, and said in a half frenzied tone pointing to the skies, 'See! see!'

Baladitya had hitherto kept his eyes upon the ground, meditating deeply on the problems that pressed on him, and had not noticed that in the last five or ten minutes the stars were fast disappearing and the sky was being overspread with thick dark clouds which showed clearly the impending approach of a storm. As the small light afforded by the stars had been essential for him to find out the way, he was rather distressed at this sudden change of weather. Yet not to increase the already tense fear of his friend he assumed a show of courage, and in a gay tone remarked, 'A storm? so much the better; the search will be belated.'

Not a man will stir out before it is over, and it will take a good three hours. Before that, we shall be safely sheltered. Come, come, let us hurry. We are near her house and a run takes us thither. Catch hold of my coat and follow me.' Saying this, he began to run.

His friend did as he desired him to do and followed. His strength had ebbed by this time and he found it impossible to keep up with his nimble companion. The storm had begun to rage in dead earnest. The rain fell in torrents. Thunder cleft the skies asunder, and flashes of lightning now and then lighted up the weird waste. Some ten minutes after the storm had started, Yasodharman found his strength utterly give way and what with the plashing rain and the besetting thorns and his stiffened body, he fell in a heap on the way, saying to his companion in a half articulate tone 'Leave me here, Bala, will you, and proceed. I cannot advance a foot further. Only, remember in your days of prosperity that one there was who stood by you in your days of adversity, and from his childhood to his death followed you. I wish there were some one to fill my place. God save you! For me, I am content enough to die in this bleak wilderness. Oh! did I but see you on the throne of your fathers, death would be nothing to me. But it is not so ordained on high. And what is must be. He knows best who made us.' And he fell in a swoon.

Baladitya felt his pulse and forehead for a while, half undecided as to what to do. Then he suddenly laid down the head of his friend gently and bounded swiftly towards a small light faintly discerned in the general darkness some five hundred yards away from them.

In a few minutes he had approached the light. It issued from the window of a wretched hovel looking down upon the wide moor. It was put there to scare away all the wanderers on the moor from that polluted spot, that hovel,

that abode of a despised outcaste, the very sight of which was enough to contaminate the pious onlooker. Some thirty years before, there had been no such light; but at that period a pious lady had endowed a sum for this purpose so that in Heaven when she stood before the dread tribunal of Yama, the righteous king of the dead, to answer for her many sins on earth, she might proudly point out to him this, her lasting monument of virtue, which by itself would cancel all the evil accruing to her throughout life. As for the outcaste polluting persons by day, that was impossible; for she had to beat a drum wherever she went, so that the good souls might avoid the pollution of her sight. And, reader, though now centuries have rolled on, the condition of these poor wretches is the same. No, no, there is a difference:—they are not asked to beat drums now, for nobody thinks of giving an outcaste a drum, and the outcastes cannot afford to buy one; and they are no longer asked to keep a light in their houses, for nobody is willing that even so they should have a lamp. Economy has come, superstition is said to have vanished, civilization has advanced, and people have learnt how to avoid the pollution of a Pariah without paying for it and thus unconsciously providing these dregs of society with lamps and other comforts. The Pariah now is avoided without his using a drum or a lamp; nay, he has become a by-word of nations. Every nation uses his name to denote the lowest riff-raff of society. Fifteen centuries have come and gone, but the Pariah is now only a little worse off than he was before.

But to return to our story. This light was burning at the window with a dull glow (as if the very light were ashamed of being there) and acted as a lamp in a light-house to warn all stray mariners in that wild waste to steer clear of the projecting rock of Pariahdom which would wreck all their prospects of spiritual salvation. But none the less, this son of emperors approached the hut not as one

would expect with a sense of loathing or of resignation but with a deep look of pity not unmingled with sorrow. And what is still more strange, he not only pitied the woman, but his face actually wore an expression of joy at the contemplation of meeting this woman whom he considered so good. He went to the wretched door and knocked. None answered. Then he called out, 'Madhavi, Madhavi! Open the door!'

The worthy woman of the house was sleeping, but at this repeated call she rose up. For five minutes she was stupefied. She knew not what to make of it. She was actually called Madhavi! She was actually treated as another woman would have been! For years, the only appellation she had received from all above her station, with a single exception, was '*Chandali!* wretched outcaste!' Even this was but occasionally, and she was glad when anyone spoke to her, be it but to abuse her. Generally, she was not even spoken to. But now she was called by her own name!

One there had always been who had called her Madhavi. And that was the young prince Narasimha who used to talk to her while she was sweeping the palace grounds, and sometimes even waved to her in her house as he rode by with the hunting parties of his father. Those were happy days then. She was not then a lonely woman. She was the happy mother of eight children, and, outcaste as she was, she was proud of her eight children. But one by one, they had died within two years of the arrival of the Huns, fighting as camp-followers in the Gupta army. One by one, they had all died leaving her as the lonely stem, bereft of all its branches, treasuring up all the recollections of past happy days. She had had other sorrows too. The defeat of the Gupta emperors for whom she had a great love and especially the misfortunes of the present emperor Narasimha, who was dearer to her than all her sons, had

struck down with sorrow a person already bent with it. Then too, after the advent of the Huns, she had her pay reduced in amount and even that was much in arrears. Thus



'O MY KING, MY KING!'

even material prosperity had disappeared. But through every new misfortune she had remembered and taken comfort in the knowledge that all must have an end, that even an outcaste must die—Yama could not refuse to take

an outcaste into his bosom. And she used to console herself in moments of acute distress by recalling the stories of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* in her hours of leisure, which were but few.

Now she was wondering who it was who called her by her name, and so she forgot to open the door. But Baladitya called out impatiently, 'It is I! It is I! Don't you know me?' The well-known voice was recognized, there could be no doubt as to who he was, and a divine joy overspread the old woman's features as she opened the door and admitted him.

'So it is my prince! O prince, you little know how much joy you have given me this day. In my horizon of eternal darkness the bright sun has arisen and my heart grieving for my sorrows has had abundant recompense this day. But, O my king, my king! what brings you to the capital of your enemies? Should they seize you, not God in the heavens can prevent them from brutally murdering you.' 'Madhavi,' said Baladitya, 'be quiet now, I shall tell you everything later on. My friend is lying in the rain some five hundred yards from here. He must be brought in and attended to. Will you come with me with that lamp?'

'O,' said Madhavi, 'I forgot you came in the storm. Lord, how you are drenched! Of course, I shall come with you as you desire.' So saying, she took the lamp and was followed by Baladitya. As the lamp's light fell on her, her features could be clearly traced. She was a woman of about sixty. Her face had once been pretty, but constant sorrow had deprived her of physical beauty; but now her face was pervaded by a greater beauty—the beauty of the soul. She was dressed in a poor sari, but, though the cloth was of poor quality, yet it was kept scrupulously neat.

She and Baladitya soon arrived at the spot where

Yasodharman was lying. Now the rain had somewhat revived him and he was blankly staring at the skies which were fast clearing. Baladitya stooped down and bore him in his arms. Though of slight build, he had the strength of any two men. To the surprise of the old woman, he quietly walked at ease with his burden and asked her to show the way. Thus they reached the hut and Yasodharman was put to bed on what there was in the hovel. The old woman meanwhile prepared some rice-water and poured it down Yasodharman's throat. He soon recovered consciousness and strength and was able to take off his clothes, exchanging them for some rags he got from Madhavi.

Then Baladitya told Madhavi about the incidents of the day. On her advice, he also changed his costly dress for the mean dress of an outcaste in order that he might elude notice in the search which was bound to take place next day. 'You have slain Bhumaka,' the old woman had said, 'and Toramana will not rest until he has found out his slayers and punished them brutally. I feel joyous that my condition being what it is this hovel will escape search; I feel grateful to God for the abomination in which I am held as it will be the means of saving the person I love most dearly. It is said that nothing is ordained by God but for good. Were I not so mean now, my house would not escape notice and I would not have been able to afford you as secure a shelter as I can do now. Yet how often have I felt my wretchedness though I have not directly complained about it! But now thanks to my outcaste nature, you can have safety here till the search is over and then you can go home. But, Oh! you will have to spend two or three days in an outcaste's house eating food cooked by her! Yet, truth to say, they exaggerate a great deal. The sun shines as brightly here in my wretched hut as he would in the palace. Then, too, the rice cooked

by me is almost the same as that cooked by other folk. And, would you believe me, my king, I think (I don't know if it is a sin to think so) that I give it to you with more heart than many would give you in better places.'

'Madhavi,' said Baladitya, 'I knew that you were an outcaste even before I came here. And knowing it I came. This light of yours, though it is to others the light to warn them away from danger, is to me the light to a haven of safety. But for your hut, I do not know where I could have gone for shelter. I knew that you were always my friend and so I came here. Now I am weary and want to sleep. The rest next morning.'

Saying this, Baladitya hastily drank some rice-water which the old woman had prepared and then went to sleep—(I should have said 'went to bed' but that they had no beds in that hovel). Madhavi also retired to rest. By this time, the storm had ceased, the sky was clear again, and the stars were shining as brightly as before, as if there had been no storm. 'As fickle is human fortune as this day's weather,' murmured Baladitya, 'first a day of brightness, then a day of darkness, then probably a return of brightness. First Samudragupta, Vikramaditya and Kumaragupta, then Skandagupta and Prakasaditya, then probably a return of fortune in Baladitya. But who can divine what is hidden in the womb of futurity?' He fell a-musing and at last ended by sleeping. The old dame also, after an hour's contemplation of her happiness and responsibility, was overpowered by sleep. Thus all three were asleep and the hut became quiet. The light twinkled as before at the window; only, since Madhavi had poured some more oil and had also put in an additional wick, it shone now as it shines in all houses emitting not a dull light but a bright one thus expressing, inanimate thing as it was, the change in the condition of the mistress of the house from a lonely outcaste to a happy woman.

CHAPTER III

NARAYANA AND GOVINDA

THE next morning dawned on the huge city of Ujjaini. The golden beams of the rising sun, first illuminating the *gopura* of the temple of Vishnu, gradually suffused the whole city, encircling it in a halo of splendour. The people had some of them risen and were already bathing in the vast sheet of crystal water adjoining the temple. The water was pure and had imprisoned in it the rising sun. The sides of the tank were built of granite, and the long flights of steps leading down to the water were of the same stone. This tank and temple had been built by the Emperor Vikramaditya when, after the defeat of the last of the satraps, he had made Ujjaini his capital. The Huns had not dared to pull down the temple, as it might be too great an indignity to be endured by the people, and, like all politic conquerors, they knew how to make a virtue of necessity, and tolerated a religion for which they felt a supreme indifference.

This early morning, two persons were bathing in one of the ghats and, as usual in India even at the present day, giving and taking small bits of information. One of the two was an elderly man of about fifty, with a cunning expression in his face as if he knew what is what as well as any one can. And, indeed, he must needs know something or else he could never have retained the position of courtier which he had successfully held for over thirty years. The Guptas had gone, the Huns had come. But that made no difference to Narayana. He was a clever and subtle Brahman who would never do anything against the

ruler of the day, be he who he may, and consequently had retained his post through all the troubled times.

The other was also a Brahman by caste. He was about thirty-five years of age. His demeanour towards the elder man was one of contempt for his vacillation, admiration for his talents, and envy of his prosperity. He used every day to bathe at about the same time as Narayana so that he might gather from him all possible information about the court and, if possible, in course of time to grasp also the secret of success. The time they chose for bathing was significant. All the pious citizens would have already bathed and gone to their prayers while the lazy ones would not have got up from their beds; so that they two would be generally the only persons bathing at that time. The younger man as usual addressed the elder and asked him a question that he was in the habit of asking every day during the last fifteen years of their acquaintance at the tank. 'Narayana, what news at the palace? Anything particular?'

Narayana's face beamed, and he said, 'That reminds me, I forgot. I must be earlier than usual at the palace. O! I must bathe quickly. Govinda, there is no time for chit-chat to-day. There is a mighty to do at the palace.' 'Oh!' replied Govinda, 'but who's to question you Narayana? Don't we all know that? I should like to know who is to question you.'

'Yes, that is true,' said Narayana smiling. The flatterer himself does not dislike flattery and cannot always distinguish it. 'To show how much I am free to do as I please, I shall go this day somewhat later than usual. Now, Govinda, listen. Great things are taking place at the palace and in the world around us. But stay, swear your customary twenty-three oaths on the twenty-three gods of Ujjaini that you will not let a word of this pass your lips.' Govinda swore the twenty-three oaths in a minute,

for practice had made him an expert in that, and Narayana proceeded in a low tone, 'You know that this Baladitya and Yasodharman are at large. Yesternight at eight o'clock King Toramana received information from one of his spies that Yasodharman would arrive at about one o'clock to reconnoitre for his master Baladitya. And what did Toramana do but send his brother to wait upon His Majesty of Malwa and Maha Kosala in the wasteland half a mile from here and bid him devil-speed to the dread realms of Yama. And knowing Bhumaka as we did, it seemed extremely unlikely that Yasodharman would escape.'

'Poor prince!' muttered Govinda in spite of himself.

'Psh! Don't be chicken-hearted. Now as I said, we thought Yasodharman would be easily enough settled, and we slept as usual. But Bhumaka had promised to arrive at the palace soon after the affair was finished, and he has not arrived yet. Toramana woke up at five and inquired for him. He did not find him. He awakened his son Mihiragula and asked him. Father and son are anxious on Bhumaka's score. They sent a man to the waste to see if any dead body were to be seen there. The man had not returned when I started to take my bath. Toramana and Mihiragula both asked me to return soon for they wanted my counsel. And you see I am going to return *soon*.'

'Why did not Toramana send some men with Bhumaka?' asked Govinda.

'Fool! you don't know what this Bhumaka is. When Toramana suggested the taking of some soldiers, Bhumaka replied scornfully, "What! some men to aid me in dealing with Yasodharman! Surely, brother, you don't rate my abilities so low?" "No," said Toramana, "still, it is safer to take some men." "If men are sent, I won't go, that is certain" said Bhumaka. "If you are so insistent, do as you like," said Toramana, "and, after all, what you say may be

right. A number of people are always a hindrance to quick and decisive action. They will create some noise and the wily Yasodharman may escape." "Quite so," said Bhumaka and went. He has not come back yet.'

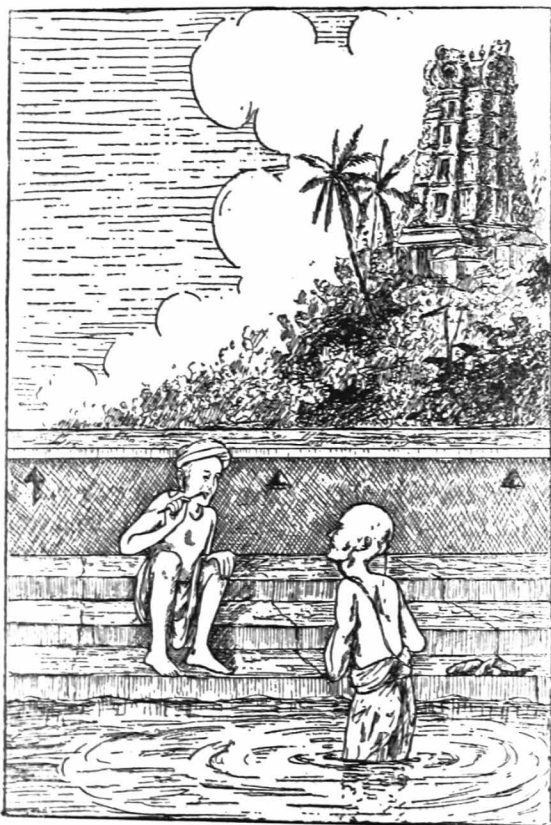
'Well, but what do you think has become of Bhumaka?' queried his companion.

'Ah, that remains yet to be seen; for my part, I think that he must have certainly wounded Yasodharman mortally and then must have been slain himself by a chance blow from Yasodharman. So they must have killed one another. Ha! Ha! Ha! But that is too good to be believed.'

'Why, what possible grudge can you have against Bhumaka?' asked Govinda.

'Possible grudge, you ask? grudge enough! Why, there was not a time when I began a-praising Toramana that Bhumaka did not cut me short saying that I was a wily Brahman who would praise everybody who had a pie to give, that I was an abandoned wretch who was reviling the rulers who had fed me for five and twenty years, that a dog would know better than to bite the hand that had fed it so long, that I was a disgrace to my caste and was using the inherited skill and ingenuity of my ancestors for perverted purposes. He often used to end by saying that it would be a godsend if some pious body took me up and hanged me. And what added to my chagrin was that Mihiragula, that boy whom I have praised for many a long day, used to laugh aloud invariably on all such occasions and say, "O, no! uncle, don't say that. No hangman can hang him for he will straightway win his heart by praising him and inventing a divine pedigree for him. He will say that the hangman is the incarnation of Yama on earth and what not. He has already changed my name from Mihiragula to Mihirakula and has assured me that I come of the solar race and thus am nobler than the Gupta emperors. Ho! Ho! Ho!" And this is the return I have for my

pains for many a long night to invent some pedigree for him. Ah! you little know how hard a usage is meted out to a courtier.'



'WHAT NEWS AT THE PALACE TO-DAY?'

'And Toramana, what used he to do on such occasions?' asked Govinda.

'Oh! he used to join in the laugh, and say that, sy-
phant wretch as I was, I was useful to them as securing in

some measure the support of the people and till a better time men such as I must be fed, and were a set of useful wretches. And Govinda, the pain I felt was aggravated by the fact that I had to pocket all this in patience, and say moreover, "our majesties are disposed to be merry this day." But in my heart of hearts I hate them all. Above all, I hate Bhumaka who often and often starts to ridicule me. Would to God he has died! If he has, here before you, I swear to break one hundred and eight cocoanuts to Ganapati to-morrow. Well, now, it is time for me to be going. They will be waiting for me impatiently.'

'Yes, but tell me one thing. Is it true that Mihiragula is going to build a huge Siva temple here, and has this *Mlechha* turned Hindu?' asked Govinda.

'Yea, yea, it is true,' replied Narayana. 'But little do people know who is the cause of his conversion. Do you know who it is? It is I! It is Narayana. Yesterday when a sheep was killed to cook him food (the *Mlechha* eats meat) the death-cry of the sheep gave him so much pleasure that instantly he ordered a whole flock to be murdered that he might revel in their death-knells; I was standing by, and, seeing him in his joyous mood, I wanted to get something out of him if I could and so what did I do but call him Samhara-rudra "the god of destruction"? He asked me what it meant, and I told him that it was an epithet of Mahadeva, the great God, worshipped by all *devas* and *asuras*, and the dread foe of Vishnu, the miserable God of the Guptas. His interest was aroused and he asked me what the worship of that god demanded. I told him that it demanded of a devotee that he should kill as many things as possible and think nothing of killing them. A great gleam rose in his eyes and he said, "O! great and mighty God, forgive me that I have so long ignored Thee. But even from my very birth I have had this passion for killing and this delight in killing, but I thought

NARAYANA AND GOVINDA

it was simply a personal taste. I never dreamt that it was from being a born devotee of Thine. But my negligence shall be richly amended. Narayana, how does it happen that this mighty god has no fane here, but that effeminate weakling, Vishnu, has the biggest temple in the city?" "O, sire," I answered, "because they were effeminate weaklings who ruled here before thee. They had no passion at all for destroying. They used to say that a king's duty was to protect and not to destroy. No wonder, they had this weakling god Vishnu to protect them all. But with the advent of your manly race, all this shall be amended. Siva the Destroyer shall come by his own. The mild age of inactivity and peace has already gone and given place to an era of manly and vigorous rule and to the death of all mawkish sentiment. Don't you remember the day on which you slaughtered thirty citizens because they chanced to be preaching the doctrine of *ahimsa* and condemning all slayers of beasts as worse than beasts? There, there, I said, is a true devotee of Mahadeva. And, oh, with what touching holy glee were you filled when each wretch gave his death groan and departed! Will I forget your pious wish that they had more throats to cut than one, that you might have the perpetual music of a death-knell? O, you are a true incarnation of Siva. I only wish that you would build Him a costly temple here instead of the petty ones He has at present." "It shall be done, Narayana," said the prince, "we have forgotten our duty for a long time, but we shall richly amend it. I shall forthwith give orders for the most costly temple to be built for Mahadeva beside which this Vishnu temple will look like a hovel before a palace. As for you, for reminding me of my duty, here; take this." And with this he gave me two diamond ear-rings which had formerly belonged to Skandagupta and had subsequently been worn by Mibiragula.'

'Let me see them, let me see them,' said Govinda.

BALADITYA

‘ Oh! I have left them at home safe ; for if I take them to the palace Toramana or Bhumaka might claim them or Mihiragula himself might repent of his generosity and demand them. But now wild horses cannot tear the secret of their hidden place from me. Now that I have told you all the news, let me go. ’

With this, he resumed his clothes. Govinda offered him some sandal for putting on the caste-mark. The other indignantly refused it, and, looking at him contemptuously as if he wondered at his ignorance, said, ‘ No wonder you are no courtier! Who would have thought that you would be blockhead enough to offer me sandal. Sandal indeed! ’

‘ Why, Narayana, I meant no offence! I had seen you up till yesterday wear sandal. So I thought that you would wear it to-day. ’

‘ Fool! ’ said Narayana, ‘ I wore it when I was a courtier of the Guptas, they being worshippers of Vishnu. And as the Huns were *Mlechhas* I continued to wear it since it mattered not to them. But since Mihiragula has turned Siva-worshipper, I must wear ashes, not sandal. From this day remember this, if you would prosper as a courtier, “ The courtier should have no religion but that of his master ” ’, saying which, he triumphantly took some ashes and ostentatiously plastered them almost all over his body. Then, swearing his friend to eternal secrecy on the topics of the day, he proudly walked in the direction of the palace.

Govinda watched him till he was out of sight, and then said to himself, ‘ So this double-dealing hypocrite thrives while I starve. He has by his scoundrellish way of explaining the functions and duties of Siva egged himself into the favour of this Mihiragula. It is a good saying that to roll a stone uphill is difficult whereas to roll it down is easily done by even a child. To find the awe and majesty of Siva and to truly appreciate His function in the Trinity is impossible for even the greatest of the sages. But to-

NARAYANA AND GOVINDA

vulgarize his functions and attributes is easily possible for even this wretch. So it is always in this world. To understand rightly is almost impossible; but to form our own vulgar estimates is easy. This fellow was all for Vishnu while the Guptas were sovereigns. Now he is all for Siva; would not even wear sandal! I wonder that he calls himself still Narayana, that being a name of Vishnu. But probably he will change it to Sankara. It is so easily done by a fellow who could change Mihiragula to Mihirakula. But I don't envy him his costly riches now. One day the pupil may take the lesson earnestly and, to show his devotion to Siva, may order this sycophant's head off and watch his execution in holy glee, as is most meet. But, is Bhumaka really killed? Well, though he was no good man, yet he was the best of the three. The crafty father and the blood-thirsty son without the control of the blunt though brutal soldier will make a pretty town of Ujjaini. O! what a contrast is this hellish crew to the divine Guptas! Then everybody throve but the hangman; now nobody thrives but the hangman. O! Vishnu, Protector of Humanity, deliver us from these fiends incarnate and bring in the lordly Gupta line again.' Saying which, Govinda also left the tank in a fit of abstraction, meditating all the way to his house upon the vicissitudes of human fortune and the miseries of his town.

CHAPTER IV

THE SEARCH FOR THE FUGITIVES

At the head of the King's street stood the mighty palace of Ujjaini, within easy distance of the temple of Vishnu. The Huns were not in any way devotees of that deity, but they found it better to occupy the palace of the Guptas than to build a new one themselves. And, in truth, the palace was of such mighty dimensions and of so splendid a build that far better architects than the Huns might well despair of building a better one. It was no palace intended to be a fortress as were all the palaces of mediæval Europe; it was pre-eminently built for pleasure.

On that morning at about seven the palace wore an anxious aspect. The servants looked serious, their remarks became few and short and each appeared to be weighed down by some unexpected calamity. From time to time, some of the servants looked significantly at a raised balcony at one end of the huge building where were seated three men in anxious counsel and in evident impatience for the arrival of somebody they were expecting every minute. Of the three men, one might be about fifty. That was Toramana THE HUN. The other two were far younger. The one was his son Mihiragula, a giant in size full six feet high, hideous to look at, with long curling moustaches, wide rolling eyes and monstrous teeth. He looked not like the inhabitants of the earth but rather resembled those ugly demons described in the *Ramayana*. Beauty of face he had none. Of that far greater beauty of heart as expressed by the face, he would be declared innocent even by the very God who made him. But his size and features were calculated to strike terror into the

beholders, and from his eyes shone an evil light under which all honest hearts quailed as before Hell-fire. His voice, when he spoke, was loud and terrible, and his laugh, when he laughed, was boisterous and uncanny as is the moaning of the wind in its passage through some tortuous subterranean cavern. The third, who was evidently of lower rank, was a supple, delicate and effeminate man of about twenty-seven who knew all the arts of pleasing, and used them for his own purposes. He had by politic support of the conquerors and timely betrayal of his former masters, the Imperial Guptas whose family name he also bore, ensured that the province of Western Malwa should be ruled by him under Hun suzerainty, and, by faithful service to the invaders, he had retained that office. His name was Bhanugupta. He had been recently sent with Bhumaka to drive out Baladitya from his last province of Magadha, and had now returned after the accomplishment of that mission. Owing to the conspicuous success of his endeavours, Toramana had given him a seat with himself and his son which would have been undreamt of before.

Now, however, all the three were serious. Toramana was absolutely absorbed in thought, or rather was wholly devoid of it, with a blank expression which mostly passes for deep meditation; Mihiragula even was grave and perplexed; and Bhanugupta too had assumed a becoming gravity to suit his countenance to the temperament of his masters. The mystery concerning Bhumaka's fate was the cause of all this anxiety. At last, Mihiragula broke out, 'Where is this dog of a Narayana that he keeps us waiting so long? Is he digging a tank to bathe in that he takes so much time?' Now, this was the thought next to Bhumaka's fate which occupied them all, and Bhanugupta replied, 'Your Highness must surely allow something for the poor fellow's inherited superstitions. He performs several ablutions after bathing, that take much time.'

'Yes, I know,' replied Mihiragula, 'but I specially told him to come earlier than usual, and here he is intending to come later than ever. But he shall be taught respect for his superiors.'

'Siva! Siva!' said Narayana, who just then entered the room. 'This is what a servant gets for over-service. It is a true saying which says "Be not over-zealous in the service of princes." If I had simply taken my bath and come here, I have no doubt but that I would have been praised to the skies. But because I rambled all over the town asking people about Bhumaka's fate and making a search for those Hell-hounds Baladitya and Yasodharman, here I am rated like any Pariah. But I deserve it. I am a dog who cannot take a lesson from one experience but must needs repeat over and over again this offence of over-devotion to the Maharaja's service. But it is hard, it is hard, it is hard,' and the wily Brahmin began to weep. 'Don't cry Narayana,' said Toramana, 'Mihira said it only in jest. If you have really taken so much trouble about Bhumaka's fate, you deserve praise instead of censure. But to the matter in hand. We are waiting to know your opinion about the course we are to adopt.'

'What do I know about it worthy of your majesty's hearing?' replied Narayana. 'But it seems to my mind that it would be best to order a thorough search of the wasteland for discovering any dead body and a thorough search of the town for the miscreants Baladitya and Yasodharman. But, stay, what did the man who was sent to inspect the waste place say? Has he not returned?'

'Yes,' replied Toramana, 'the fellow came and informed me that there was nothing to be seen there except mud and dirty water and a well swollen with rain.'

'And did he search that well?' asked Narayana.

'No, he said it was full of rubbish and dirty water,' replied Toramana. 'Then your majesty had better order

the well to be searched for it would be the most likely place in which to deposit dead bodies' said Narayana. 'He advises well,' said Bhanugupta. 'And as I should think that Baladitya also, driven from Magadha, would have come to the capital to escape capture, probably this Yasodharman's coming was connected with his, and so Bhumaka might have had to deal with two instead of one and one of them at any rate the best swordsman of us all.'

'Ay, ay, it is so! it is so! So Bhumaka is dead in all probability,' exclaimed Narayana forgetting for once the presence in which he stood, and giving vent to his deep-rooted joy at the death of the man who had most vexed him. But quickly recovering himself on seeing Mihiragula and Toramana laying their hands on the hilts of their swords, he added, 'Oh! Oh! Ah me! Ah me! . Who is to give me kind words now? Who is to give me presents? Who is to support poor Narayana?'

'Oh! you meant it as a wail, did you, you dog? I thought you were exulting over it, and would have made short work of you,' roared Mihiragula. 'In future, pray keep your wailings and rejoicings distinct, lest evil befall you.'

'God, God,' groaned Narayana, 'Oh God! How people misconstrue us! Here I was bewailing for the best benefactor I had in my life, and here is His Highness who thought that I was exulting over it. Truly do the sages say that this life of ours is full of Maya. Else, how could His Highness ever think that I could rejoice over so terrible a catastrophe?'

'Well, well, an end to it!' cried Toramana. 'Call some of our troops and order a search to be made of all the houses in Ujjaini. Also, send eighty troops to search the well and if they find anything there, let them bring it here. Yasodharman and Baladitya are proving too intolerable. By all the gods in heaven and the devils in hell, should I catch them, the nearest tree would serve them.'

‘And catch them we shall,’ said Mihiragula. ‘And I shall win the favour of Mahadeva by ordering them to be tortured to death and taking the wildest pleasure in it. By the way, Narayana, I forgot to take the necessary steps for building that Siva temple. Father, what a shame it is that we have that puny Vishnu occupying the centre of our town, and mighty Mahadeva, his deadly foe, forced to occupy a few remote corners! No, No, Mahadeva must come to his own.’

‘Son, son,’ cried the enthusiastic father, ‘you are more politic than I thought. I always used to say that a conqueror cannot always continue to rule according to foreign ideas. If the rule is to be lasting, the conquerors must adopt the customs of the conquered country. That is why I adopted the title of Maharaja. And now you propose to build the Siva temple. So be it. All the accumulated wealth of the Guptas shall go to build it. But, for the present, it behoves us to inquire into the affair of Bhumaka. Bhanugupta, you go to the waste with the eighty soldiers. And I shall, with Mihiragula and Narayana, conduct the search of the town.’

Bhanugupta bowed acquiescence and left the apartment. Going to the courtyard, he put himself at the head of his eighty troops and went to the waste. Then Toramana, Mihiragula and Narayana began to conduct the search of the town. Soon several Huns joined their king, and he despatched some of them to scour the country for the princes. With the rest he inspected every closet and apartment of every house, not even excepting those of the known Huns. Long and prolonged was the search. Severe were the sentences passed upon the unfortunate persons possessing and treasuring old Samudragupta coins and verses. Several persons were whipped, others imprisoned, and, worse than all, several were placed under suspicion which meant that they were liable to the constant

spying of the Hunnish informers and detectives. None of the unfortunate persons who had at one time or other given offence to Narayana were spared. A worthy citizen, Raghupati by name, who had refused to give his daughter to this base courtier, was almost whipped to death owing to Narayana's saying that he had heard him during the reign of Skandagupta enthusiastically shout 'Jaya, Jaya, Maharaja' ('Long live the king!' or 'Victory to the king!') and as such was capable of keeping up a continued traitorous correspondence with the Guptas. Nothing however was seen in his house; only, an old coin of Samudragupta was found in a necklace worn by a distant relative of Raghupati, a girl of three years. For this the worthy citizen and his daughter were ordered to be transported to the Aravallis, and their whole property confiscated and given to Narayana for his conspicuous loyalty.

As the search party proceeded further, they saw Bhadrabahu, a wealthy Jain of the city, treating one of his oxen with sedulous care. Narayana pointed this out with glee to Mihiragula who at once proceeded to the place with an evil light shining in his eyes. The ox was showing signs of intense pain as Bhadrabahu applied the medicine to a wound in the neck caused by the bite of a tiger from the neighbouring jungles. The Jain stroked the ox tenderly and sighed in sympathy saying, 'Poor creature, poor creature, how willingly would I endure your pains could I but do it. But it is impossible. O, beastie, this life is most miserable. But let us put up with it, even as the holy Jina¹ said, without joy and without sorrow. Oh, God, what is this Mihiragula that he is abolishing even the animal hospital founded and endowed out of the citizen's money and not at all from his own pockets? But

¹ Vardhamana Mahavira, the founder of Jainism.

I am foolish. It is too extravagant to expect of him to abstain even from animal killing ; how much more so to think of his keeping up animal hospitals !'

Saying this, he turned round casually and saw Mihiragula and Narayana approaching laughing to the place where he was. His face clouded, he wore an unusually sorrowful yet resolute expression and began tending the ox again.

'Hullo !' said Mihiragula, who went close to Bhadrabahu, 'what's the matter with you man, are you mad that you look woe-begone at your ox's wound ? Why, is it after all worth that ? You won't be ruined by its death ?'

'Oh, no,' said Narayana. 'He has several more oxen. I think it is some sneaking doctrines taught him by Mahavira or Buddha that make him so chicken-hearted. Mahavira, the great hero, taught his disciples to cry like old women at an ox's sufferings ! Ho ! Ho ! Ho !'

'Cease your laughter, fellow,' said Bhadrabahu, 'you a Brahmin ! Why, you are a disgrace to Brahminism or to any other ism you might belong to. Unless the Devil himself preaches a religion, none is likely to fit you. My lord,' said he turning to Mihiragula, 'it is not the value of the ox that matters to me but the thought of its suffering. Has it not a soul like us my lord ? And may we not be like it in another birth ?'

'From what is it ailing ?' asked Mihiragula.

'You see here. It is suffering from a tiger bite, poor thing ! The tiger also, poor thing, cannot avoid eating the ox. But it is a pity the ox is eaten.'

With this, Bhadrabahu raised the flap over the neck of the ox and revealed the wound which was about to dry up. The wicked prince with a wild glee drew his sword, and, while the holy Jain was contemplating the wound with infinite pity, pricked the wound so that it bled again saying, 'So, Bhadrabahu, I mean to give you perpetual pleasure in treating the ox. And not only this but several others also.'

And he began to inflict flesh wounds on several other oxen standing near, delighting in the cries of the poor animals and being joined in this infernal chorus by his demoniacal attendant.

The Jain stood astounded for a moment at this instance of wanton cruelty, but soon recovered himself, and, going to the wicked perpetrator of these deeds, bowed and said, 'O, prince, prick me and send me out of this wicked world, but spare these oxen, poor dumb creatures.'

Mhiragula turned round and said, 'Shut up, fellow, shut up! What! Dispute our authority? Here! some of you bind and transport to the Aravallis this villain who defies our authority!'

Soon the Jain was taken into custody by some soldiers. Mhiragula and his spiritual preceptor, after gloating over the pains of the oxen, joined Toramana and the rest who had searched every house but without any further result than the whipping of innocents, the transportation of good men and the institution of suspects.

Thus the search was concluded, and they were returning to the palace when a Hun cried aloud that the outcaste woman's house had not been searched. 'But who will search the *chandali's* house?' asked Narayana. 'That will you and I,' said Mhiragula.

'Your Highness is surely jesting,' returned Narayana, 'you cannot really mean that I, a Brahmin, should actually search the *chandali's* house? Oh, that would ensure me perpetual Hell.'

'Ho! Ho! As if you would escape it anyway! Come, come, let us go,' said Mhiragula.

'My lord,' said Narayana, 'there are certain limits beyond which it is not safe to press a man.'

'What, you dog, dare you defy us?' asked Mhiragula fiercely.

'My lord, consider my caste. It would be lost should I

enter the *chandali's* house. And besides Your Highness will be polluted,' whined the courtier.

'That is my own concern. Come, walk in front,' said Mihiragula.

'And, lastly, my lord,' said Narayana in a loud voice, an idea having struck him, 'these Guptas, whatever they are, however bad in themselves, yet are too proud to take refuge in a *chandali's* house. So there is no use searching the *chandali's* house. So you see it is not my sentiment that holds me back but the consciousness that it is useless, absolutely useless.'

'What the Brahmin says is true,' said Toramana. 'The descendants of the Guptas are not likely to take shelter in an outcaste's house. It is mere waste of time to undertake that search.'

So the search was abandoned, and the party returned to the palace deeply disappointed at the issue of that day's proceedings.

CHAPTER V

A GRUESOME FIND

MEANWHILE, Bhanugupta and his eighty soldiers had proceeded to the ruined well. They found it filled with rubbish and muddy water. The sun shone brilliantly, rather more brilliantly than was desirable. The soldiers had but small desire to dig down the well and dirty themselves. They told their leader that it was a wild-goose chase, that a body could not be thrown in without its being at the surface, and such like excuses as are most convincing to the speaker but not so to the hearer. Bhanugupta peremptorily asked them to execute the command of the Hun. The soldiers painfully bailed out the dirty water. Then some of them went down into the well and began to dig while others dragged up the mud in baskets lowered down and raised by ropes. Gradually, they got over the reluctance to dig and began in right earnest. At first, they got nothing but mud and sticks and other rubbish, and had almost despaired of getting anything when one of them felt his spade sticking into something. Soon one and all became eager and in a few minutes had discovered the thing in which the spade had stuck to be the head of a man. This news was promptly communicated to those standing outside the well, and Bhanugupta hurriedly got down the well to see whose head it was. He had two or three bucketfuls of water thrown upon the face to wash off the mud, and all plainly distinguished the lineaments of Bhumaka the Lion, and showed their grief by a universal moan. Bhanugupta asked them to take out the whole body and to send it up and soon went up himself. Though at first the eagerness of the search had taken away from the soldiers the horror of the spectacle before them, yet now that they saw Bhanugupta sneaking away with his face full of physical revulsion

they also shared part of it. But the work had to be done; and so at last they dug the body out and sent it up. Their leader had it carefully washed and put on a speedily constructed *asanti* (coffin). The features of the Hun, sufficiently massive and gigantic when he was alive, had now become monstrously so owing to the action of the water. Having covered the body with a piece of clean cotton cloth, Bhanugupta asked the soldiers whether there was anything else there. On their saying that there was nothing else, he asked them to get up and accompany the procession carrying the dead body.

As they were about to start, he saw Narayana approaching them. By this time it was getting very hot, the sun had reached the zenith, the search had been concluded, and Mihiragula had despatched Narayana to expedite the search of the well. That worthy soon came to Bhanugupta and asked him whether he had succeeded in his search. Bhanugupta simply told him that they had discovered the body of Bhumaka the Lion. Narayana could hardly believe his ears. It was too good to be true. 'It is impossible,' he said.

'There is he; look at him yourself and if you say it is not the Lion I am not my mother's son, that's all,' returned Bhanugupta. The Brahmin flew to the coffin which had escaped his notice at first. He lifted the cloth and examined the body carefully. After a minute he covered it with the cloth and said, 'It is so! It is he! It is the Lion! O! How swollen is the body! I thought his body could hardly be exceeded without imminent danger of bursting. But here he is twice as large as ever he was when alive.' Then turning to Bhanugupta, he told him, 'Let us go on in front to let the Maharaja know of this. These fellows will bring the corpse behind.' And taking the hand of Bhanugupta, he walked on. The soldiers watched them till they went out of sight and then one said, 'There go two of the cunningest,

fellows in this world, but knaves, arrant knaves.' 'Well but that is no reason why we should be fools,' said another, 'for none but a fool would speak anything to hurt Narayana.' 'That is very true' put in a third, 'it was but yesterday when a man spoke something offensive to this Narayana. His Highness had him whipped.'

'His Highness and Narayana are pretty thick,' remarked a fourth, 'and now there is this proposal to build a Siva temple. The rascal has convinced our prince that he is a born devotee of this Mahadeva, and all this simply because His Highness takes a fiendish pleasure in killing things for which I am sure the wily Brahmin hates him.' 'Well, well, be that as it may,' grunted a philosopher, 'the sun is getting pretty hot, the load we have to carry is very heavy: so to it, comrades.'

'This corpse, what a corpse it is! Would, it could carry me rather than I it. Yet it was the corpse of a better man than any of his kinsmen' said one. 'So it is,' said another. 'Bhumaka was always more addicted to us soldiers than to such worthless flatterers as Narayana.'

'Say you so?' said another, 'I remember a day when some of my companions and I were accompanying Bhumaka on the march to Pataliputra. This Narayana was with us. We were searching for Baladitya. He was out hunting with his favourite hounds. We could have caught him but for the obstinate hostility of every one of the poor creatures who died rather than let their master be touched. Bhumaka was so touched that he stood inactive for some time during which the Gupta made his escape. Narayana shouted out, "There he goes, Catch him, catch him." Bhumaka fiercely handled him and said, "Wretch, are you more depraved than those dogs there? One and all of them died rather than betray the hand that had fed them. But you, a rascal who was petted by the family for over twenty years, you are turning against them and want to

hunt down a poor fugitive, once your master ! Oh, what an essentially vile thing is a courtier !” And from that day I think Narayana hates him.’ ‘Well, it is a pity he is dead,’ said a fourth, ‘now let us carry him.’ So they carried the bamboo litter on their shoulders and the rest followed, having agreed to take their turn later.

Meanwhile, Narayana and Bhanugupta were marching in front. For some time they walked silently. But when they had lost sight of the soldiers, Narayana began thus :—

‘Bhanu, how do you take this death of Bhumaka ? Is it not a most lamentable calamity ?’

‘Assuredly. Only, I don’t think that you take it in so sorrowful a light as was proved in your remark yesterday which well-nigh cost you your head. But you cleverly added something useful,’ said Bhanugupta. ‘Yea, yea, these Huns are pretty free with their swords. But thank God, I have words which match them. Had God given them words too, they would destroy the world. Now for lack of these they are led by babies’ said Narayana.

‘If babies be like you’ said Bhanugupta.

‘Or like you, either,’ returned Narayana.

‘Oh no ! Some of them proved too much for me, especially this Bhumaka,’ said Bhanugupta.

‘Oh, he was a regular brute,’ agreed Narayana. ‘The fellow was shrewd though. He stopped me short in many of my best eulogies and called me a base-born courtier, a frivolous changeling, a grasping opportunist and a disgrace to my caste. No wonder I don’t feel much sorrow at his death !’

‘Nor I,’ returned Bhanugupta. ‘Never were we together in the Magadha campaign when he did not call me either a turn-coat or a scoundrel. He told me that my having the name Bhanugupta ¹ and being so changeful unlike the

¹ Bhanu means the sun

steadfast sun in the firmament was a disgrace to the very sun himself; that I was no more a Gupta than he was a god; and he used to end by saying that if he had his will I would sooner be hanged on the nearest tree than be appointed the Raja of a province. No wonder that I also rejoice over his death. And the pity of it is that the fellow was so big and strong that it was no child's play to quarrel with him, and so I had to stomach all his insults. But now all that is over.' 'Don't be too sure of that,' said Narayana. 'This Toramana is a more dangerous fellow than ever Bhumaka was. For though Bhumaka guessed shrewdly he expressed his thoughts bluntly and so was not half so dangerous as this Toramana who knows us at our real worth, and is resolved to use us so long as we are useful, and then to cast us off as unscrupulously. And he can control his tongue.'

'It is so,' said Bhanugupta, 'but though it may be comparatively easy for them to hang you it is more than their heads are worth to try to hang me. I am a Gupta and a prince!'

'Yea, yea, we shall see that presently if you wish,' said Narayana.

'For God's sake keep quiet. Don't do any such foolish thing. Besides, if you betray me I might also betray you,' returned Bhanugupta.

'Poor creature, who would believe you? Would they believe that a poor courtier of theirs is plotting against them or a proud and powerful vassal connected with the late imperial house?' asked Narayana.

'True, too true. But you won't betray me Narayana, I am sure of that. We are comrades in arms,' said Bhanugupta getting alarmed. 'Say that, and know that I am the more important man. Now to better news. While you were conducting this search here we were having a far more interesting search. Our ostensible object was to

find out Baladitya and Yasodharman, but that concerned me little more than nothing. My real interest was in getting all my enemies punished. And chief among them were Raghupati and Bhadrabahu.'

'Why, what grudge have you against Raghupati?' asked Bhanugupta. 'Don't you know that yet? I will tell you. This Raghupati has one of the fairest daughters in the whole of this country,' said Narayana.

'You don't mean Saraswati, do you?' asked Bhanugupta.

'Yes, the same,' said the other.

'Why, she is a very angel!' exclaimed Bhanugupta.

'So she is. And finding her so agreeable and beautiful and accomplished, I resolved to have her to wife. So I carefully diverted Mihiragula's attentions from her and asked Raghu to give her in marriage to me.'

'And what did Raghu say? Surely, he would have scornfully rejected such an offer,' said Bhanugupta.

'That is what the fellow did,' replied Narayana. 'He told me that he and his daughter had a hearty contempt for me, that I was an old rat, a detestable rascal, a wily hanger-on of court, and several other agreeable things. And he concluded by saying that he would rather see his daughter die than wed such a creeping, crawling, snivelling worm as me!'

'Ha! Ha! Then I was not mistaken in Raghu. He was ever of such temperament,' remarked Bhanugupta.

'What! Do you gloat over my discomfiture, comrade? Remember that I have that in my possession which may send you to the gallows,' retorted Narayana.

'Oh! that I should cower to this knave!' thought Bhanugupta, yet he said, 'But Narayana, you couldn't expect a girl of seventeen to marry you, a man of fifty?'

'Why, what is to prevent that? I know of an instance where a man of eighty was married to a girl of eight,' said Narayana.

‘ Yes, but consider, such a maiden to be widowed soon ! ’ said Bhanugupta.

‘ Why not she as well as any other ? And I don’t mean to die soon. Besides, am I not as handsome and vigorous and cunning as any youth ? And what hurt me most was that such heaps of money as she possesses should elude my grasp, ’ said Narayana.

‘ Well, what did you do to revenge yourself ? ’ asked Bhanugupta.

‘ Oh, I had the man arrested for having in the reign of Skandagupta cried out, “ Jaya, Jaya, Maharaja ” and for having hung round the neck of a girl of three distantly related to him a coin of Samudragupta. His whole property in Ujjaini has been confiscated and he and his family have been ordered to be transported to the Aravallis. ’

‘ Poor creatures ! ’ ejaculated Bhanugupta.

‘ So let them beware of Narayana, ’ said the other, ‘ besides, I have pointed out Saraswati to Mihiragula and so her fate is settled. I shall have a glorious vengeance on the old rascal. And, let this be a secret, I mean to have the maiden whether the father is willing or no. Here in Ujjaini that will create some stir. But out there in the Aravallis there is none to know of it or report about it. ’

‘ Beware, beware before you take the fatal step, ’ broke out Bhanugupta, appalled at the enormity of the villainy. ‘ Beware before you break the peace of an honourable Kshatriya maiden, beware before you ruin an innocent soul ! I myself have been a suitor to her hand but not as you have been. In God’s name beware before you do this. ’

Narayana stood rooted to the ground at this unexpected outburst, then recovered his usual effrontery and said :—

‘ What have I to beware of ? Of punishments here ? No, no ; rather I expect a reward from Mihiragula. And

we shall both gloat over it for many a long day to come. As for heavenly punishments, I do not care about them at all. They don't affect me.'

'No wonder your Brahmin friends execrate you,' said Bhanugupta.

'They may execrate me as much as they like but they must needs fear me. You know what I did to that intrusive Brahmin sanyasin who told me boldly that I was a hellhound fit for the lowest depths?' said Narayana.

'Yes, you had him murdered by Mihiragula,' said Bhanugupta.

'Murdered, you call it, do you?' said Narayana. 'Well, let it be so. He thanked himself but little for that saying of his.'

'I don't know that' put in his companion. 'All that I know is that he died a hero. When he was put on the funeral pyre and the pyre was set fire to, the Brahmin folded his hands in holy prayer and cried out "Mahadeva! Deva! Deva!" Then, turning to you, he said, "Thank you, thank you for sending me out of this world to a better one without making me commit suicide which is heinous. I want only one thing to make me completely happy, and that is to be assured that you have resolved to live like a true Brahmin in future and not as you do worse than the vilest *mlechha*.'" Having said this, he calmly sat down and, with a smile on his face, remained till all was over.

'Yes, yes, the fellow did not at all give pleasure to our prince,' said Narayana. 'Mihiragula swore that he would not burn a man in future because that afforded no fun but that he would thereafter have a man pierced with hot pincers till he died.'

'His sentiments differ from mine,' said Bhanugupta, 'I was conscience-stricken on seeing that holy Brahmin burnt to death. Well, let that pass. So Raghupati and that Angel are all deported?'

'Yea, together with that big fool Bhadrabahu,' returned Narayana.

'Bhadrabahu! Is he exiled also?' asked Bhanugupta in astonishment.

'Yes, that fellow once came to me and told me that I must have been a stratum of clay in my previous birth since I am as pliable in the hands of my masters for the time being as clay is in the hands of the potter and also as impervious to all sentiments of honour or mercy as the clay is to the life-giving water. I reserved my vengeance till to-day when seeing him treating one of his oxen I pointed it out to Mihiragula who, of course, playfully pricked all the oxen and thus made the Jain exasperated. He was forthwith bound and ordered to be transported. So it is with every one who quarrels with Narayana. Sooner or later he shall come by his merited return. So let them beware.'

Bhanugupta did not reply. He simply walked on in silence meditating upon this hideous villain of a man. He thought too of his treachery to the Guptas, of his being in Narayana's power, and resolved to free himself as soon as possible. And, last but not least, he reflected on the sad destiny awaiting Saraswati. Well he knew that Narayana, had no scruples when either his avarice or vengeance was aroused, and he feared for the maiden's honour.

Suddenly, a thought struck him. He asked Narayana whether the search of the town had been complete. Narayana replied that it had been, that every house except the outcaste sweeper's had been searched, and that the latter was negligible as Baladitya was too proud to take refuge in that. He did not notice that as he said it Bhanugupta's eyes sparkled, nor did he hear him say, 'God be praised' in the innermost recesses of his heart.

They were now in sight of the palace and so proceeded in silence and becoming gravity.

CHAPTER VI

A BROTHER'S GRIEF

TORAMANA and Mihiragula were both awake and alert in the early afternoon, contrary to all their previous habits. Anxiety of the most piquant character was painted on both the faces. Mihiragula was experiencing three conflicting feelings, fear for his uncle's safety, a desire to avenge him in case he should have come to an untimely end, and impatience at the delay of Bhanugupta and his troops. At the moment of the arrival of Narayana and Bhanugupta the last feeling had predominated over the other two. On the other hand Toramana's face showed only a terrible anxiety for the fate of his brother. Nobody had ever seen him so weighed down with thought as on that day. His one thought was about Bhumaka. No doubt, he too had a desire to avenge Bhumaka in case he had been slain; no doubt he also shared his son's impatience at the non-arrival of Bhanugupta; but with him the predominant feeling was fear for his brother's safety.

As soon as Narayana and Bhanugupta were sighted at a distance by the menials, they informed their royal masters about it. Father and son both came and sat in the audience chamber just behind the gate so as to hear the news earlier and instructed the servants to send the two to that room as soon as they came. When Bhanugupta and Narayana approached the palace, their hearts quailed within them. How were they to broach the evil news to their masters? The Royal Hun and his princely son were not particularly noted for clemency and it was part of their nature to punish savagely all bringers of evil news. Each of the two cunning rogues wanted to make the other

undertake the unenviable task of broaching the evil tidings. It was amusing to see the amount of affection they pretended for each other at this juncture.

'My dear Narayana,' whispered Bhanugupta, 'how do you propose to announce the bad news?'

'What have I to do with the news?' asked Narayana. 'It is you who made the discovery. Why should I rob you of your laurels by announcing it first? Surely, you do not think that I am so mean!'

'My dear Narayana,' replied Bhanugupta, 'you know how difficult our masters are to deal with. They think nothing of experimenting with the neck of a bringer of evil news. Do you remember how a Hun general was dealt with when he announced the news of his defeat by Skandagupta?'

'Yes,' said Narayana, 'but dearest Bhanu, you forget that my neck is as precious as yours.'

'True,' replied Bhanugupta, 'but you are the intimate counsellor of His Highness and have much more influence with the king and the prince than a mere vassal like me.'

'Ah!' rejoined Narayana, 'what is a penniless hanger-on of court like me compared with a powerful Raja like you? If the Huns hang you a revolt of a province may take place and so they may think twice before doing it. But me, who cares if I am hanged? It is perfectly safe for the king to hang me whenever he likes.'

'But,' replied Bhanugupta, 'you forget that the king has nothing to profit by hanging you whereas he will get a province by hanging me. By hanging you, the Royal Hun will be only losing his best adviser whereas by hanging me he will stand to gain a fertile province.'

This was the only occasion on which both these arch-scoundrels tried to underrate themselves. But do what Bhanugupta would he could not persuade Narayana to undertake the odious job.

'My dearest Bhanu,' was Narayana's final reply, 'each mother must carry her own child. It is sometimes hard on her to force her to do this, but it is harder still to force others to carry another's child. You are the mother of this discovery and so you must carry the news.'

Bhanugupta saw that it was no use pressing Narayana further. So he said, 'Alright,' and with a heavy heart began walking towards the palace gates. Unconsciously, their pace had slackened and they were both walking at a snail's pace. When they were about fifty yards distant from the palace gates, a sentry approached them and said, 'The Maharaja's orders are that you should go in at once. Both the king and the prince are downstairs expecting you.'

'We shall obey His Majesty's will,' replied both and tried to walk briskly but their legs were ever pulling them backwards.

When they crossed the threshold and saw the king and the prince, both the courtiers' hearts began to beat at a terrible rate.

'What news?' asked Toramana and Mihiragula in one breath.

'Pardon, my liege, pardon,' blurted out Bhanugupta. 'Bhumaka the Lion, Bhumaka the Noble, Bhumaka the Generous, Bhumaka the Righteous is no more!'

'What! Is my brother dead?' asked Toramana and rolled down in a swoon from the cushion on which he was sitting.

Mihiragula roared out, 'Traitors! do you stand quiet while my august father is down?' and gave several blows to Narayana and Bhanugupta who meekly received those indignities. Then all the three again seated Toramana on the cushion and threw cold water on his face. The King slowly opened his eyes and feebly muttered, 'Bhumaka Bhumaka! Bhumaka is no more! My brother is no more

My father is dead! My mother is dead, and now my brother is dead! I alone am living!' and tears flowed from his eyes in torrents.

All were surprised and moved. None had seen Toramana moved before. When he had been defeated thoroughly by the Gupta army and when eight thousand of his best troops lay dead, the only remark that Toramana had made to his weeping followers was, 'We will come again next year, let us go now'. But now this same man was weeping like a child.

His father's tears only made Mihiragula more furious towards the two helpless courtiers. 'Scoundrels!' roared the prince, 'do you delight in standing here and witnessing the sorrows of the king, my royal father?' and he gave Narayana a good kick.

'Your Highness is pleased to kick me,' said Narayana, 'I never received such an honour before.'

'Here, take all the arrears,' said Mihiragula and gave that sycophant a regular shower of kicks. Both Narayana and Bhanugupta went out.

'My son,' said Toramana drying his tears, 'how did Bhumaka meet his death? Where is his body?'

'The wretches have not told us that yet. Narayana! Bhanugupta! where the devil are you?' roared Mihiragula.

'Here, sire,' replied both, again entering the audience chamber.

'Is this the way you are taught to bring news? You have not told us where you found the body or where the body is,' said Mihiragula.

'My lord,' said Bhanugupta, 'Your Highness was pleased to order us to go out so that we might not witness His Majesty's sorrow for the loss of his brother.'

'Fellow, don't be insolent,' returned Mihiragula, 'if I asked you not to glory in His Majesty's grief, is that any reason why you should conceal important news from me?'

'Sire,' humbly replied Bhanugupta, 'it was not my desire to conceal anything. We found Bhumaka's body in the well in the waste. Some of my soldiers are bringing the body.'

'YOUR soldiers! Pray, who are YOUR soldiers?' asked Mihiragula.

'I mean the soldiers Your Majesty graciously placed under my charge,' replied Bhanugupta.

By this time, the soldiers had come with the body of Bhumaka. With the gravest looks imaginable they entered the palace and respectfully placed the coffin and the corpse before the Royal Hun.

Toramana swiftly rose and uncovering the face of the corpse exclaimed, 'Oh! it is Bhumaka! it is my brother! it is my own beloved Bhumaka!' and fell upon the dead body embracing it and flooding it with his hot tears. The soldiers were moved. All their eyes glistened with tears which they could not restrain. Bhanugupta and Narayana forced false tears into their eyes and tried to outdo even Toramana in the vehemence of his lamentations. Mihiragula was the only man who remained as he was. No tears came into his eyes, but a savage desire to avenge Bhumaka possessed him. He made short work of the hypocritical tears of Bhanugupta and Narayana. He said to them, 'Get out, all of you and leave the Royal Hun alone. And don't come to the palace again to-day if you are wise, unless you are called. Only, Narayana should be here after an hour.' All of them cleared out with alacrity for every one of them knew how capricious and cruel Mihiragula was. As they came out, Bhanugupta told his soldiers that they might do as they liked for the rest of the day.

The soldiers were highly pleased and went their way. One soldier whispered to another, 'I never thought that the old king would be so moved by the death of his

brother.' 'Nor did I,' replied the other, 'but I never thought that the prince would be so unmoved.' 'But the funniest thing was to see those hypocrites trying to weep,' remarked a third, and all heartily laughed at this as they were now at a safe distance from the palace.

When the soldiers had departed, Narayana and Bhanugupta were left alone outside the palace. They walked to a safe distance before speaking.

Narayana broke the silence at last, saying, 'I really think that the Huns are proving intolerable. Fancy the prince's kicking us!'

'You mean you, because I was never kicked' replied Bhanugupta, coolly.

'Do you glory in that? Do you want to be kicked too? A word from me and you are done for!' said Narayana angrily.

'I say, Narayana, you won't do that? I only corrected a mistake of fact. Besides, I too was beaten really,' said Bhanugupta climbing down.

'Yes, you were,' said Narayana somewhat mollified. 'And you received the major portion of the blows.'

'Well, what do you intend to do now?' asked Bhanugupta gnashing his teeth.

'I have to attend on His Highness an hour later, don't you remember?' asked Narayana.

'So you have. I forgot. You are fortunate, Narayana,' said Bhanugupta.

'Fortunate! Why, I would rather give the best year of my life than be with the prince to-day,' replied Narayana.

'True,' said Bhanugupta, 'and now farewell.'

'Farewell,' said Narayana. And they parted. Narayana went back towards the palace and Bhanugupta took an unused path looking round suspiciously at every alternate step as if he were afraid of being watched.

CHAPTER VII

NOON AT A COTTAGE AND AN UNEXPECTED VISIT

THAT same noon, when Bhanugupta and Narayana were conveying the dead body of Bhumaka to the palace, the outcaste sweeper Madhavi was returning home after her usual duties in Ujjaini. There were but few persons walking out in that burning sun and these were scared away by the drum which Madhavi beat to announce her approach. A vast change had taken place in the demeanour of this woman, as we saw. She had been despondent and pessimistic but yesterday; now her countenance wore an air of contentment and happiness, though there was also a profound anxiety pervading her whole face. She walked now with far quicker steps towards her home than she had done in the past six years. For then she had none to await her coming, none to cheer her dark and drear abode, and she had preferred to linger as far as possible near the abode of humanity. Put now that she had Baladitya in her house her steps were quick, quick as an Indian mother's when she runs to meet her child.

So much was Madhavi out of herself this day that she occasionally forgot even to beat her drum and gravely endangered the salvation of some worthy citizens by approaching too near them while walking thus absorbed in thought. She almost jolted against a party of soldiers crossing her path. Only after she brushed against a soldier did Madhavi recollect that she had not beaten the drum, that she had actually committed the irreparable sin of touching a human being. She was speechless for a moment at her own audacity but soon her attention was drawn to the party.

It consisted of twenty soldiers escorting three persons whose faces were muffled. Their identity she could not recognize. Nor was she given much time to observe, for the soldier against whom she had unwittingly brushed, when he realized who she was, took her broomstick and gave her two blows across her back, which made her cry aloud. At this one of the persons muffled said, 'It is a woman's voice crying. Who is the hero who beats a woman?' The soldier returned indignantly, 'It is not a woman. It is a *chandali*.' 'A *chandali*! And is not a *chandali* a woman man? Has she not a soul like us? May we not be like her in another birth? What has the holy Jina said?' asked the first.

'Confound your Jina,' roared the soldier. 'Is it not for your Jina that you are transported to the Aravallis, man?'

'I pity you,' said Bhadrabahu, for he it was.

'Reserve your pity for yourself man. And now proceed without further dalliance,' said the soldier.

As they proceeded, Madhavi, looking a little carefully, discovered a woman also among the captives. Her face was completely muffled so that she could not find out who she was. The third among the captives, who always kept close to the woman, seemed very crestfallen and deeply struck down by sorrow. Before however Madhavi could make them out they had all gone past her vision and so she turned her footsteps towards her homely cottage musing on the things she had seen on the way.

She soon reached the cottage and told Baladitya and Yasodharman all that she knew about the search (which indeed was but scanty) and related also the incident on the way. Baladitya was deeply affected at the mention of a woman also being sent to the Aravallis and said, 'Oh! unhappy land! is it come to this? Are your women too ill-treated? Land of the Bharatas, what be these fiends that they respect not women's honour? But why blame

them? There be many in wide Ujjaini who support the Hun because the old inequalities among our people have somewhat vanished and the new rule crushes every section impartially. But, Madhavi, can you guess who that lady might be?’

‘Alas,’ said Madhavi, ‘I did not even see that she was a woman. I only guessed from her appearance. They were all fully veiled. Of only one among the three can anything be known with certainty. And that is of Bhadrabahu. He is one of them. That is as certain as anything.’

‘Poor Bhadrabahu,’ whispered Baladitya, ‘so you too are off to the Aravallis!’

‘Well, well, but don’t you think that we may as well devise some plan to escape this fate ourselves?’ put in Yasodharman.

‘And that is true,’ said Madhavi. ‘My lord, it is high time that you find some asylum somewhere. Let this storm blow over and then you may return.’

‘Whither am I to go?’ said Baladitya. ‘Who is there to receive me? The Hun is powerful. His friends are many, his vassals more, his soldiers determined and his punishments bloody. In my Kingdom of Magadha there is not a corner where I can hide with safety. Where shall I go?’

‘My lord,’ said Yasodharman, ‘if you will listen to my humble advice you had better betake yourself to some foreign country in disguise in order to avoid the dangers that beset you here. While I was travelling towards Ujjaini, I heard that a merchant ship will be going a month hence from Bharukachcha¹ to Keralaputra to get cocoanuts, spices and ginger in exchange for musk, asafoetida, muslins and piece-goods. Now, my Lord, to me it appears that it would be best for you to take a berth in that and go to Keralaputra. It is a rich land, a good land, a beautiful

¹ Bhroach.

land. Its kings are far-famed for charity, its people for virtues, its land for fertility, its army for prowess, its merchants for dexterity and its sailors for adventure. Its trade extends far and wide, its fleets go to Arabia, China, Sumatra, Java, Bali, and Kambhoja. There, it is interesting for a man to live, be it but to watch the customs and manners of the country, for, they say, there are there front-tufted and back-tufted people and women who have strange manners and customs some of them resembling those of the Yavanas of Gandhara. Temples too abound in that land, dedicated to all the Gods of the Vedas and Upanishads as also to the worship of Buddha and Jina. And some say there be also some Christians and Jews there. As for its warriors, I need not tell your Majesty much but ask you to recollect what difficulty even such an unmatched warrior as your ancestor Samudragupta had to conquer Ugrasena of Palakka.'

'Ay, that is a good country, an interesting country,' answered Baladitya, 'but don't you think, Yasodharman, my going there would weaken the good cause and so be an evil to my country?'

'Say rather that it would further the good cause, for who knows but that when the time comes the kings there may help us? And we need all the help we can get. For the Huns are powerful, extremely powerful; one king cannot crush them nor two. Only a confederation can crush them; and so this expedition of yours undertaken from expediency may turn out to be an epoch in our history.'

'Ay, say you so? Well, then, come what may I am resolved to go. But won't you accompany me?' asked Baladitya.

'No, sire,' said Yasodharman, 'I would rather stay behind and look after our interests here. I shall manage from time to time to let you know of the trend of events in Ujjaini.'

As soon as Yasodharman had said this, a low whistling

was heard outside. In any other place they might have taken it for a man's, but being where they were, in an outcaste's hut where no human being ever strayed, they said nothing to one another though all three felt much startled. The conversation subsided by mutual consent, and all three were intently listening to the noise again. They had not long to wait. Another whistle was heard and this time there could be no mistake. It was clearly a man's. Each one in that group had a different sensation. Madhavi felt extremely anxious for the safety of her guests, especially of Baladitya. Yasodharman feared for the safety of his master and himself. Baladitya feared the consequences if they were arrested there; for the old woman would be tortured and cut to pieces with all conceivable cruelty. As he thought of this, he felt bound in duty to defend her from such consequences and so quickly unsheathing his sword from its scabbard he sprang like a lion out of the cottage. Yasodharman, though stupefied by the suddenness of the action, followed him shortly after. And Madhavi, utterly unable to control herself, fell on the ground and prayed, 'Narayana, spare these poor younglings and take my old soul instead.'

The two youths in the meanwhile had reached the flat piece of ground adjoining the house and there in the wide rolling moor in the broad sunlight (it was just past noon) stood a man with his face muffled. As soon as he saw them approaching, he bowed low and said:—

'My lord, may I have a private audience with you on matters of extreme importance?' 'But I don't know you,' returned Baladitya. 'Who are you?'

'Don't you recognize my voice?' said he.

'No. Let us hear who you are quickly,' said Baladitya.

The stranger made no reply but slowly undid the cloth covering his face. As the last fold of the cloth was removed, Baladitya and Yasodharman saw a pale and haggard

countenance with retiring eyes half shame-filled, and they recognized in this the features of Bhanugupta.

‘Bhanugupta!’ exclaimed Yasodharman ‘and why do you hunt us out everywhere, you traitor? A pox on your private audiences and my lords! Is it not enough, you ungrateful wretch, that you should have hunted your master out of Magadha without also pursuing us to this vile refuge we have obtained? But you shall rue it. By Heaven, you shall rue it, I say. Come, draw and defend yourself if you count your life worth the smallest coin.’

And he drew his sword out.

‘Hold! Hold!’ cried Baladitya. ‘Put your sword up again. Let us hear what he wants with us. Come to your business, man, and leave us alone.’

Bhanugupta who had been embarrassed almost beyond recovery now recovered his composure and said:—

‘My lord, I care not for what Yasodharman says. I have something urgent to tell you and something very private. So will you come aside, my lord?’

‘No,’ said Baladitya ‘Yasodharman and I have no secrets between us. So that if you have anything to say, say it when both of us are present, or else go your way.’

‘Well, then, my lord, I will even tell it while both of you are present. I have no doubt of Yasodharman’s worth. Only, I thought him to be of too impulsive a nature to retain secrets,’ said Bhanugupta.

‘Well, well,’ said Baladitya, ‘an end to your criticisms! We don’t press you to tell us your secrets and so if you want to, tell us; if not, go the way you came.’

‘My lord, you don’t know with what important tidings I come here. Why are you so unkind, my lord?’ asked Bhanugupta.

‘I was not so always, Bhanu,’ said Baladitya, ‘you must know that. I once loved you and trusted you. In return you joined my foes and hunted me down in Malwa and Magadha.

Don't you think, Bhanu, that a man is forced to be unkind to such a man ?'

'True, too true, my lord,' said Bhanugupta in a very melancholy tone, and his eyes became moist. He recovered himself soon however and said in a low tone:—

'My lord, do you know that we conducted a search to-day in the town to arrest you both ?'

'Yes, go on,' said Baladitya.

'Well, my lord, Mihiragula and that vile Hell-dog Narayana undertook the search. Of course, they didn't find you. But Narayana took care to punish all his enemies. Anybody who had ever offended this viper was severely dealt with. That poor Bhadrabahu—who is ever for quoting Jina—that poor man, I say, is banished to the Aravallis,' said Bhanugupta. 'Indeed!' ejaculated both Baladitya and Yasodharman, 'then it is even as we have heard.'

'Even so, my lord,' said Bhanugupta. But worse news remains. 'Raghupati is banished too with his daughter Saraswati.'

'Saraswati! Is Saraswati banished?' asked both in the same breath.

'Ay, my lord,' said Bhanugupta.

'What will the poor girl do out in the Aravallis,' said Baladitya. 'That place is full of fierce Huns and barbarous Yaudheyas, vile Mlechchas all of them, with strange customs and strange manners. There be there Huns who think nothing of committing rape and who are only restrained here by the fear of a public insurrection. Even here, we know some such crimes have taken place. For example, don't you know the case of poor Narayani who, being bereft of her honour, mounted a funeral pyre and died a most fitting death?'

'Yes, my lord,' said Bhanugupta. 'Even so I fear will be the case with Saraswati.'

‘Even so! Never, never while one of us lives to prevent it. What, shall the fairest of the maidens of Ujjaini be dishonoured while we stand aside like poltroons? Never while Baladitya wears a sword, never while Baladitya draws breath. I am a Kshatriya and my duty is to protect the honour of maidens. But who is the vile intender of this most vile deed? Is it your most Holy Master, Mihiragula or is it the old fox Toramana? And are you so degraded as to stand by unmoved, Bhanu?’ asked Baladitya.

‘I am not unmoved my lord,’ said Bhanugupta. ‘I have been treacherous, I have been unfaithful, but I can’t stand by while the honour of our maidens is pawned.’

‘That’s bravely said now,’ said Yasodharman ‘tell us who is this Hell-hound who intends this most heinous deed, the father or the son?’

‘Neither,’ said Bhanugupta, ‘it is their vile adviser Narayana.’ ‘Narayana!’ exclaimed both the others. ‘Yes Narayana, that renegade Brahman,’ said Bhanugupta. ‘He a Brahman!’ said Baladitya. ‘Don’t abuse the Brahman name by calling him one. His whole caste hates him, execrates him. While he was in our court he did not show his villainous temper fully. Even then none of the Brahmans of Ujjaini would have anything to do with him except by way of conversation.’ ‘Ay, and I doubt whether he be a Brahman after all,’ said Bhanugupta. He comes from the far north-west, from Gandhara. He used to live in your uncle’s and grandfather’s court and nobody questioned his caste there. He always reverently worshipped Vishnu and put on many hypocrisies.’

‘Well,’ said Baladitya, ‘but was he then immoral?’

‘No, my lord,’ said Bhanugupta. ‘Dread of popular sentiment prevented him from being so. He used to go to some of those dancing girls’ houses, but that was all. And, my lord, any disorder would have been promptly punished. Probably fear of punishment curbed his naturally

lawless spirit. But constant living with the Huns, constant association with Mlechchas with no sense of morality or decency or religion has quite undermined whatever moral scruples he possessed and now he is attempting to actually dishonour a Kshatriya maiden. His passion has overmastered him, but alas that a man should attempt this !'

'O ! Bhanu, you know extraordinarily little of the world to talk so,' said Baladitya. 'A Brahman once he has lost his caste, once he is removed from his high status loses all sense of responsibility, all sense of respectability even, and becomes a mere brute with brute instincts. That is why the great Manu has said, "There is no half-way house between a Brahman and a *Chandala*. A Brahman from ceasing to be one becomes a *Chandala*." While he is still in the fold, fear of social opprobrium prevents him from being very vile and wicked. But once he has lost his caste he has nothing more to lose, he becomes a degraded animal and he stoops to anything just as a woman who has once fallen and is cast off by her society becomes generally dead to all sense of shame. But do you know the exact reason why Narayana was formally outcasted ?'

'O ! it was the same reason as mine,' said Bhanugupta. 'When that poor Narayani was outraged, the whole Brahman and Kshatriya population of Ujjaini rose up and demanded vengeance. They were crushed. From that day they resolved never to go to the court of Toramana. Narayana still went and so did I though afore God I felt as much indignation at the deed as any the best of them. Thereupon a municipal council of the citizens gathered and formally outcasted both of us, Narayana being particularly marked out for special execration. He was even forbidden to enter the temple or bathe in the tank. But Mihiragula's order that he might bathe in the tank has given him that privilege. Whenever he bathes there, none of the citizens bathe except one Govinda, a fellow looked down upon by

the whole population as a sneaking wretch. Mihiragula even ordered that Narayana should be allowed to enter the temple. But the citizens obstinately refused, and several people stood in the path-way to obstruct his path. Mihiragula was for forcing the way in, but Toramana feared the temper of the populace and advised caution. Narayana, being cast out of the Vishnu temple, thinks to take revenge on Vishnu (poor fool!) and so urges Mihiragula to build a temple to Siva. And it is already agreed to by Toramana. So you see what you say about this Narayana is true. He is a desperate wretch, dead to all sense of shame and honour, and so all the more to be feared, for he will dare anything.'

'Ay, ay, but where is Saraswati to be confined?' asked Baladitya. 'In the lonely fortress of Hunagarh in the Aravallis, two hundred miles from Ujjaini,' said Bhanugupta.

'What, is she to live in the barbarous land of the Yaudheyas?' asked Baladitya.

'Yes,' said Bhanugupta, 'and she will be there in ten days. This wretch Narayana will reach there a day later for I know for certain that he starts to-morrow. I am also resolved to aid you in the rescue of this innocent maiden. Hence I have come in disguise. The time before us is short. A day more, and rescue would be impossible.'

'It shall never be said that we were slack in rescuing a maiden,' said Baladitya. 'But how are we to get horses?'

'I have three close by, provided by one of the citizens of Ujjaini, and all of the best breed,' said Bhanugupta. 'There is no anxiety on that score. The only question is whether we three will be able to rescue them for they are strongly escorted. The soldiers are twenty in number, and they can easily gather strength.'

'Never mind numbers,' said Baladitya. 'God is with us and no numbers avail against Him. Come on, then, and before evening Saraswati shall be safe or we shall be

dead.' Saying this, he and Yasodharman bade adieu to Madhavi, and together with Bhanugupta prepared to mount their horses.

'But take your food before you go,' cried out Madhavi. 'Food!' said Baladitya, 'it shall never be said that a descendant of the Guptas stayed to take his food when the honour of a maiden was in imminent peril.' And he and his comrades rode off.

'Of the right royal spirit!' murmured Madhavi watching Baladitya ride off. 'May God favour him in his enterprise!' And she went into her hut.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE FOREST OF VISWAKARANI

THE three rode on vigorously for some time on the road to Hunagarh. The road was a good one having been made by order of the Emperor Skandagupta in the early days of his prosperity. The horses were good. From time to time there flashed sparks of fire from their hoofs. They left the old town behind and began travelling along that lonely road. The times were then dangerous. During the time of the Guptas no robber or any other malefactor would have dared to infest the roads as Fa Hien bears eloquent testimony. But after the advent of the Huns the robbers had multiplied beyond count. Some were honest citizens before who had been deprived by the Huns of their holdings and had consequently taken to robbery. Some had wild mules on which to mount. Others had but their feet. Anyhow, there were at the time we are speaking of hundreds and hundreds of this honourable profession much hindering traffic and lightening the weary traveller of part or whole (as the case may be) of his load. But even these robbers had a sense of honour. They never robbed women or old men nor did they afflict the poor or the unfortunate.

Though the robbers were thus a body striking terror into the hearts of all the passengers who had to lose anything, our three travellers were nothing perturbed at their presence; nor, it must be admitted, needed any good swordsman or spearsman fear them. They had travelled on for about an hour when they came to the gloomy outskirts of a forest dour and grim and forbidding. The road lay straight through it, and in plunged our travellers.

The change from the previous ride was obvious and refreshing. Up to this time they had been sore troubled by the scorching rays of the sun in spite of the trees planted by the Guptas, but now the sun was completely shut out and only a few rays succeeded in straggling through the dense foliage to make a patch of dead pale white in a dark and shady foreground. The travellers had till now kept a studious silence. But with the shade the horses slackened their pace, the travellers felt more comfortable, and talk naturally sprang up. It was Bhanugupta who first broke the silence :—

‘My lord, do you know this forest? It is called Viswakarani. It extends for over ten miles and is infested by a band of notorious robbers.’

‘Yes,’ said Baladitya, ‘there is one Hari Ram among them. A more dexterous swordsman they say is rarely found.’

‘Yes, rarely found,’ said Yasodharman, ‘and I know only one, that could excel him that way. And that is your Majesty.’

‘Well, well, let it pass. Hari Ram is not likely to harass us. Nor need we fear him,’ said Baladitya.

As soon as he had completed the sentence, wild conches biew and through the trees came the reverberating sound permeating the whole atmosphere. But yet it was not near. It was some furlongs off. They could see nothing, and so they stopped and laid themselves flat on the horses to hear attentively. And clearly they heard the tramp of horses at least some twenty in number. The sound appeared to be in front of them and all three by unanimous consent urged their horses to the utmost to reach the spot whence the sounds proceeded. The horses excited by the excitement of the riders exerted themselves to breaking point and so within five minutes they were within sight of the people. They consisted of a number of sturdy foresters

mounted on mules with drawn swords in their hands and a number of people whom these robbers were forcibly dismounting from their horses.

'The Huns! the Huns! our quest!' shouted out Yasodharman and straightway galloped to the cleared space in which all those people were standing. Baladitya and Bhanugupta soon followed suit. Presently they were all within the confused medley of Huns and robbers. Baladitya's eyes anxiously sought for the captives whom he had started to rescue. Soon he found them by the side of the road but to his utter horror a burly man had his hand on the reins of the horse of Saraswati. Quick as lightning he rushed to the place and said, 'You dastard! leave the reins, will you?' At first Saraswati had forgotten herself in this exigent. Her thoughts often reverting to her sad condition and the probability of a worse one succeeding had unnerved even her naturally strong mind and moreover the journey on horseback had wearied her delicate frame not used to such rides. The Huns, had directly they quitted Ujjaini taken to horse and the leader had taken Saraswati on his horse for better safety. In the affray with the robbers the leader had stoutly resisted and had been straightway felled to the ground by one good blow from the stout robber. Saraswati was bewildered from sheer exhaustion of mind and body during the affair with the robbers but now that she heard the commanding tone in which a man, apparently her friend, ordered the robber who had seized her reins to quit his hold she was a bit reassured. And as she opened her eyes and saw the handsome youthful manly features of Baladitya her confidence in him increased and she cried out:—

'O, save me, save me from this cruel marauder.'

'That shall I,' said Baladitya 'fellow, quit your hold, I say.'

The robber had till now been stupefied at the assurance

of this young man and so had not found time to reply. During a life of eight years in the forest he had not met a single one who had dared to speak to him as this young man had spoken this day. All, all had feared Hari Ram. But this young man, who was he to command him? And he was moreover insulted at the young lady calling to him for help as if he, Hari Ram, was going to insult a lady and as if this handsome boy were going to rescue her! This was intolerable. All these thoughts took place in Hari Ram's mind and he quickly left hold of the rein and said to the lady :—

‘Pardon me, madam. I meant no offence. I only wanted to see whether you had fainted. As for you, youngling,’ proceeded Hari Ram, ‘as for you, let me know what made you speak so boldly to me? Perhaps you knew me not. Certainly you don't know me. Hear and tremble! I am Hari Ram the Dacoit.’

‘I hear, but I do not tremble,’ said Baladitya. ‘You proud and insolent man, RIGHT has a greater force than a thousand Hari Rams combined.’

‘True, true,’ said Hari Ram, ‘but do you think it to be an unrighteous action to save a damsel from the grasp of the Hun?’

‘No, no, assuredly not,’ said Baladitya. ‘And now that I think of it pardon me. You say you only laid hold on her reins for seeing whether she had fainted. I attributed it to other motives. So pardon me.’

‘That is what I expected of you, young man. That is the way of all young men. First offend a man and, when the retaliation is coming, straightway beg his pardon,’ said Hari Ram sarcastically.

‘Only, Hari Ram, in my case there is no question of fearing your retaliation,’ said Baladitya. ‘I shall only be too glad to be friends with you, but that shall not deter me from being enemies with you if I think fit.’

‘Ha, Ha, you are a spirited young man I see. I shall give you a fright. Hullo, swordsmen bold, draw and stand, draw and stand,’ said Hari Ram. And immediately some twenty-five had formed a circle around Baladitya with their naked swords gleaming in the sun.

‘And now do you surrender, youngling, or do you fall? Methinks you wish yourself already in your house. Nor shall it be said of Hari Ram that he unnecessarily slew a man. Surrender, I say!’ And with this Hari Ram advanced into the circle with his sword.

‘Surrender, or you are dead,’ said Hari Ram in a thundering voice and three voices said simultaneously, ‘Surrender, my lord.’ One was of Bhanugupta, the second of Yasodharman and the third and by far the sweetest was of Saraswati.

‘Surrender! I surrender! The descendant of the Guptas to surrender to a common leader of dacoits! Come, Hari Ram, defend yourself if you are a man!’ Saying this, he drew his sword and advanced against Hari Ram. A universal shout of admiration ensued from every throat. The very followers of Hari Ram fell back astounded at the audacity of this young man and shouted, ‘Jaya Jaya Maharaja!’ Hari Ram too laughed long and loud and said, ‘Pardon me, my lord, I would not have tested your courage had I known you to be the descendant of Samudragupta. Now all that belongs to me is at your service. Would you please come to my humble lodgings to partake of what homely food I can give you?’

‘Ay! Ay! we need food, we need food,’ said Yasodharman, and so they all went with Hari Ram. For a while they proceeded through intricate pathways scarcely perceptible except to experts and at last reached a cleared space where a number of busy young foresters were engaged in cooking various sorts of savoury dishes out of the many vegetables of the forest. In the centre of the

cleared space was a big old banyan tree around whose base a stone construction was raised as is not uncommon in India even at the present day. There they rested themselves for a short time engaged in lively conversation. Raghupati and his daughter as well as Bhadrabahu were now quite relieved of fear, even the very captive Huns shared in the general joviality, and Hari Ram entertained the company with many wild stories of his adventures. And suddenly turning round to Saraswati who was sitting near her father, he said, 'Go, miss, you thought I was a villain. See how Hari Ram is scandalized by young people. Here is our prince who took me for a mere marauder; here is a lady who took me for a villain. Ah God! when will poor Hari Ram come by his own? Pray, Sir,' said he turning to Raghupati, 'what may be the name of the lady?'

'Saraswati,' returned Raghupati.

'Saraswati! A good name, a beautiful name. I shall never forget it,' returned Hari Ram, but he did not know nor could he know that the name had pierced deeper into one heart among them, that of Baladitya.

'And what may be her age?' asked Hari Ram.

'Seventeen last summer,' replied Raghupati.

'Seventeen! Then I am old enough to be her father being forty. And I shall ever regard her as such. So daughter,' said Hari Ram turning to Saraswati, 'you shouldn't be wicked hereafter. If ever after this you regard me as a villain and call to this prince here for help I shall proclaim aloud that you are in love with him. What say you to this, daughter? Agreed?' The end of Saraswati's *sari* helped her from the embarrassment of being seen blushing. But Baladitya having no such protection was unable to hide his confusion which was noted by all not excluding Saraswati. 'Nay, nay, I forgot the laws of war. I attacked an unarmed man which I shouldn't,' said

Hari Ram. 'Here, take this cloth and arm your face,' said he and threw to him a towel. All the company laughed aloud, and Hari Ram apologised for his conduct. Now the feast was ready. The company assembled, ate and criticized every dish. The same dish was vehemently pronounced to be over-salty by some and as vehemently condemned as lacking in salt by others, the rice was found both overcooked and undercooked, the water was too hot and too cool, the leaves in which the food was served were too broad and too narrow and the sugar in the sweet porridge was too much and too little. As the party came to the sweet porridge, Hari Ram insisted on somebody reciting a poem or *sloka*. No one volunteered, and he said to Saraswati, 'My dear daughter! you must sing us a song.'

'I sing a song!' said Saraswati, 'I don't remember any.'

'Then compose one,' said Hari Ram.

'Ay, she is deft at composition,' said Raghupati, and poor Saraswati was forced to sing.

'Take away that veil put on by the Hun,' said Hari Ram and she took it away. As she did so, a sudden effect was produced on the audience. It was as if in that sun-bereft forest the sun had suddenly risen, so beautiful, so divinely beautiful was the face. Her complexion was fair; and though her features were not perfectly regular anybody who saw them would pronounce her to be the most beautiful creature he set his eyes on. The beauty of the face was added to by a retiringly modest expression suffusing the whole countenance and by a candid frankness of demeanour which was strangely attractive. Her hair was pitch dark strongly contrasting with her face, her forehead was broad and wide, her eyebrows were finely drawn, her eyes, full of expression, represented the extreme contrast of black and white, her ears were soft and velvety with two diamond ear-rings adorning the end of

each. The nose was long and straight, the mouth was small and graceful, with small pearly teeth. Such was the face that confronted the rude audience. And her figure was correspondingly beautiful. The people who were talking ceased their talk and all instinctively turned their eyes to this apparition, for apparition it seemed, before them expecting it to melt and vanish as suddenly as it came into being. The concentrated glare of sixty eyes was too much for poor Saraswati, and she turned from them to a corner where to her utter confusion she was straightway confronted by Baladitya. Their eyes met, and she withdrew hers blushing as deep as her features would permit. Hari Ram noted all this and to relieve her confusion said, 'Come, come, your song!'

'What shall it be about?' she asked.

'About anything; why not about our old banyan tree here which has given us her protecting shade for so many generations and stands sombre and wise?' asked Hari Ram.

'Yes, let it then be about the banyan tree,' said Saraswati.

'Silence out there!' roared Hari Ram, and all comments on Saraswati's beauty ceased. There was dead silence while Saraswati in her silvery voice began her song.

TO THE BANYAN TREE

O! ancient grandsire of a thousand years
 Say, art thou free from time's benumbing chill?
 All other things are subject to its sears,
 But time glides over thee and leaves thee still.
 Here didst thou stand when Asoka ruled the land,
 Asoka, first of monarchs, first of men,
 And thou hast witnessed many a roving band
 O'er-run the country in thy ken.
 Ever thou watchest without sign or word
 The doings of our frail mortality,
 Hast mastered all the secret of life's current
 Denied to us who feel life's satiety.
 Silent spectator of the deeds of man
 Thou knowest more than all the sages can.



SARASWATI SINGS A SONG

Horace

As she sang, her sweet voice penetrated the whole atmosphere and enchanted the whole audience. Everyone felt an exaltation and Hari Ram said, 'Splendid! I never thought my banyan tree was so famous till now. I hope that all you said was sincerely uttered, but as to Asoka's being the first of men I don't think you believe it. Tell me truly, don't you think there is a firster? Ah! don't cry. I won't vex you. Come, everybody remove from here.' And they all went away. The party broke up and each went about his own business and those who had no business were left to their own recreations.

CHAPTER IX

BALADITYA AND SARASWATI

AMONG those who had no particular business to do were Baladitya and his two comrades as well as the three captives of the Huns. As for the Huns, they were all secured and confined in a small hut. Hari Ram and his band had much to do, and so they separated. Every one of the six went his own way and strayed into some particular corner of the cleared space. The scenery was most exquisite. Gigantic trees, whose tops seemed to reach the Heavens, with creepers intertwining made a vivid patch of green. Baladitya wandered about until he came to one side of the cleared space and was lost in reverie either about the wild scenery of the forest or about a person preoccupying his mind. Certain it is that for some minutes he stood in this manner motionless and absorbed, a figure for a statue of contemplation. While he was thus absorbed, he heard himself questioned in a soft voice.

‘My Lord, what is troubling you?’

He turned round and beheld Saraswati. He blushed. He had been thinking about her and her alone. He returned however, ‘Oh! nothing! I was simply thinking of some of my affairs.’ ‘Oh! is that all? Well, where do you propose to go, my lord? They are pretty hard at Ujjaini; in Magadha you have no foothold and you won’t stay here as it is too much beneath your dignity to put up in a robber’s den. Then where will you go?’ asked Saraswati.

This question first reminded Baladitya of his intended voyage to Keralaputra. In the hurry of the quest and in the entertainment of Hari Ram all had forgotten about it

and now her question brought the matter vividly before him. He said, 'I am going to Keralaputra,' in a melancholy tone.

'To Keralaputra? Well. And are you sorry to leave this place, my lord?' asked Saraswati. 'Till yesterday no. But now I do feel sorry,' said Baladitya.

'And what may be the cause of this change?' asked Saraswati.

'Four syllables most familiar to you, Saraswati, and written nearest my heart,' said Baladitya fixing his eyes on her. She turned away, and as she did so a tear fell down her soft cheek which she instantly wiped. After some two minutes of embarrassed silence she resumed her conversation.

'My Lord, and where do you propose to take us?'

'I propose! I have no voice in the matter. I think your father may take you somewhere. He knows best,' said Baladitya.

'He doesn't know best, my lord,' said Saraswati. 'He is old and infirm. He hasn't the resolution and strength of youth. My lord, can you think it, I wished to-day when I saw you on your gallant horse ordering Hari Ram, I wished in my heart of hearts I had such a brother—to defend, to protect and to love me.'

'Did you?' returned Baladitya, 'when I saw you in your full blown beauty singing that song of yours, I wished I had——'

'Such a sister?' laughingly asked Saraswati.

'No, not such a *sister*. I wished something different. Shall I tell it?' asked Baladitya. 'No, you needn't. Come, now, tell me where we are to go' said Saraswati.

'Why not stay with Hari Ram?' asked Baladitya.

'Stay with Hari Ram! Stay with a robber chieftain! My lord, is this all that you have to recommend? To stay with a leader of dacoits! Fie, fie, my lord! You ought

to be ashamed of yourself coming from so high a pedigree, said Saraswati.

'Excuse me, Saraswati, if I have in any way offended you,' said Baladitya. 'But I only said so because the Huns are not likely to leave any stone unturned in searching you out especially as this is a special affair of Narayana's.'

'Narayana's!' ejaculated Saraswati.

'Yes, Narayana's,' said Baladitya. 'So you see it will be a thorough search and you may be found out and taken back unless you have a powerful defender like Hari Ram.'

'True, my lord,' said Saraswati. 'But consider, there are many lawless young men here. Wouldn't I be as safe, my lord if I also went to Keralaputra?'

'To Keralaputra! What! You don't mean to say that you are coming to Keralaputra? Oh! it is a most beautiful land and it is delightful to live there,' said Baladitya.

'But now, my lord, you were moaning over your fate in having to go there,' said Saraswati smiling. 'Oh, but that is because I thought Keralaputra had no Saraswati,' said Baladitya.

Saraswati again blushed deeply and said, 'My lord, if you say such things I shall even go away and not talk to you again.'

'Well, well, don't go. I simply meant that there were no such beings there as you,' said Baladitya.

'Let that pass. And now, my lord, the question is whether you will be willing to take us over to Keralaputra with you?' said Saraswati. 'I am quite willing,' said Baladitya. 'But will your father consent? And lastly, Saraswati, can you endure a foreign part of the land very different from your own and having none of the associations and memories of your dear native part?'

'All this, my lord, I have considered and arrived at this conclusion,' said Saraswati. 'If the descendant of the Guptas can go away from the land of his fathers, why can't poor Saraswati?'

'But Saraswati, I am going only to return,' said Baladitya.

'Nor am I going to perpetually bid farewell to my native land. Never fear. When you return, I will also,' said Saraswati.

'You are a shrewd arguer,' said Baladitya.

'You are a clever evader,' said Saraswati.

'Come, come, let us ask your father and Bhadrabahu about it,' said Baladitya and walked straight to Raghupati and Bhadrabahu. Accosting them, he said to Raghupati.

'Sir, your daughter here is insistent that I should take all of you to Keralaputra. Would you like it?'

'Oh, he will like it. He must,' said Saraswati.

'Why, daughter, this is not fair' said Raghupati. 'Why ask me and compel me to answer your way? It isn't fair. I give my independent opinion that I like it though I think you are too pressing on the prince. You forget, Saraswati, that he is a prince, and so can't be troubling himself about us all. But as I was perplexed as to what to do I am only glad if Baladitya has promised to take charge of you. But, pray, has he also promised to take charge of me?'

'Yes, yes, of you and also of our friend Bhadrabahu,' said Saraswati.

'What sayeth the Jina?' said Bhadrabahu. 'An innocent heart is more worth seeing than a rising sun.' 'That is to say that Saraswati is more worth seeing than myself.¹ We need no ghost to tell us that, nor any Jina,' said Baladitya. 'Come now, do you wish to go to Keralaputra?'

¹ 'Baladitya' means 'the rising sun'.

'I hear there be many Jains there. Then it behoves me to go there to see them and gather what more knowledge of the sacred scriptures I may get,' said Bhadrabahu. 'But if there be no Jains?' put in Saraswati.

'Then it behoves me all the more to go there and preach the doctrines of Jina,' said Bhadrabahu.

'So you see both of them desire to go,' said Saraswati. 'And I too wish to be safe. When do you propose to go, my lord?'

'Just a month hence the ship *Vikrama* leaves for Keralaputra from Bharukachcha. I mean to take a berth in that. If you also come, we will have to take four berths,' said Baladitya.

'Yes, then let us tell Hari Ram about our proposal,' said Raghupati seeing Hari Ram approaching.

'What is your proposal my lord?' asked that robber chief.

'I am going to Keralaputra a month hence. These three captives also desire to come with me. I wanted to know whether I may have your consent to remove them because now they are your captives,' said Baladitya. 'I care nothing to part with two of the three, my lord. As for the third, I love her as my daughter. I don't know why, but Hari Ram has never loved a woman half as much as I do her since my daughter died some eight years back,' said Hari Ram.

'What was she? Of what age? How did she die?' asked Saraswati.

'Don't you know, daughter?' asked Raghupati. Hari Ram's countenance had waxed intensely sad and revengeful, his eyes became fiery and he laid his hand on his sword. But quickly recovering himself, he said in hoarse sepulchral tones.

'And don't you know it? And don't you know Narayani?'

'Narayani! Was she your daughter?' asked Saraswati.

‘ An only daughter I had, just your age, the image of her mother, the darling of my heart, the light of my eyes. An honest man I was, my heart was then soft, my feelings susceptible. I loved Narayani as I loved my creator. But she was too good for the world. The Huns took her. I felt on the day I heard that my daughter had been dishonoured that she had better been dead. But as soon as I heard that she had burnt herself to death I wished she were alive again.’

‘ O! sir, I pity you,’ said Saraswati.

‘ Pity not me. It was what I deserved. I never showed the least courage against the Huns. When they came to our land, I remained quiet hoping to save my lands and daughter. And Heaven sent this judgment on me. The dying Skandagupta called in vain for recruits and probably his dying curse took effect on me.’

‘ Say not so,’ said Baladitya. ‘ My uncle was not of such a nature. Had he lived to see your daughter’s shame, he would have regarded himself as solely responsible for not having defended her.’

‘ He was even of this noble mettle. I knew it,’ said Hari Ram. ‘ He was ever forgiving. He used to say, “ Narayani is so sweet a girl. She will be some prince’s bride. I will see her wedded to a Kingdom!” And now she is wedded to the grave! O! Narayani! Narayani! Narayani! ungrateful girl to leave your father so soon! so soon! to leave him without a daughter!’

All the people were deeply affected. Deep in the heart of this roving dacoit lay this ever smarting unhealed wound and all were astounded at the depth of passion he still had. They had supposed that he had quietly taken the death since they had heard that on the shame of his daughter being announced to him he had cried out, ‘ Why can’t she die?’ Now Saraswati’s heart was moved and she said going to Hari Ram, ‘ For your daughter dead, I

shall be a daughter to you.' It was as if a lightning had lit up a gloomy ever-darkened chamber. Hari Ram's countenance beamed and he said, 'O ye Gods! there is still hope then, there is still something to cheer old Hari Ram. But O no! O no! You can't be my daughter! You are Raghupati's.'

'But I have heart enough to love two,' said Saraswati.

'Well then, call me uncle always. I am your adopted uncle,' said Hari Ram, and, as he said it, there was a childish exaltation in his heart.

'Now, come to your proposals,' said Hari Ram. 'As you are now my adopted daughter, you have no occasion to leave this place but may stay here with me.'

'Nay, that I can't, uncle,' said Saraswati, 'the Huns will search this forest and will find us out and bring ruin on you also.'

'They can't take away my adopted daughter from me as they took away my real daughter. Thank God, I have more courage now' said Hari Ram. 'But, why be rash?' said Saraswati. 'It is better that we go to Keralaputra for a time. As the horizon clears, we may return.'

'Do as you will then,' said Hari Ram. 'Only, return soon. If you are all going, then I think it is better that one of you, preferably His Majesty, should go to the port to engage convenient berths for all of you especially as one is a woman.' 'Then I shall start at once,' said Baladitya, 'and you may escort the rest to Bharukachcha. Stay, but what's there creeping among the shrubs? Is it a man?' and he ran to that place but found nothing.

'O! it's nothing but a hare or a fox,' said Hari Ram. 'So you will go now and I shall follow with Saraswati and the rest leisurely because she is a woman and requires some time to travel. The distance is well over 200 miles and requires five days at least. Thank God I have got some sturdy forest ponies which will not tire within that

time and could well run above eight miles an hour on the average. The matter is full urgent. Raghupati, Bhadrabahu, Saraswati and I will come leisurely while you may go on before to arrange for us. As for money (you may need much), take this,' and he gave Baladitya a purse containing five hundred of Samudragupta's and Vikramaditya's gold coins. Baladitya agreed to the proposal, and now they were joined by Bhanugupta and Yasodharman. Bhanugupta said it was expedient for him to return to court to avoid suspicion and to throw his master off the scent. This permission was accorded him and he started off after pledging himself to eternal secrecy on all the events of that day and all that concerned the others. Yasodharman also wanted to go away to Maha Kosala where he was perfectly secure as long as the Huns did not know the approaches to Kalanjar. He told Baladitya about it and it was resolved that both should start immediately and go up to a certain point together beyond which they were to separate, one going to Maha Kosala and the other to Bharukachcha. The time was pressing, and both mounted their horses and bade farewell to all. Baladitya approached Saraswati who was by accident (no doubt) standing somewhat apart from the rest of the group.

'Saraswati, we must part,' he said.

'We part but to meet again,' she said and looked up to the skies in fervent prayer. The next moment Baladitya and Yasodharman rode off.

CHAPTER X

ON THE ROAD TO BHARUKACHCHA

THE route taken by Baladitya and Yasodharman in returning was different from the one they had followed on coming into the forest. For a time they rode leisurely, but as soon as they emerged out of the wood they quickened their speed and within an hour reached the parting of the roads. Yasodharman abruptly stopped his horse. Baladitya did the same and both remained for some time irresolute. At length Yasodharman said, 'My lord, much as I regret it, it is time for us to part.' 'You say true,' answered Baladitya, 'and you don't know how much this parting grieves me. You have ever been the dearest of my friends. Perchance, I may never see you again.' 'No, my lord, we shall meet in better times,' said Yasodharman. 'Further, Keralaputra is no unheard-of land either. One may keep up a pretty regular communication with it.'

'I hope so too and that is my sole consolation,' replied Baladitya. 'I hope to hear from you from time to time about the state of the league, the Huns, etc.'

'I shall never fail to let you know, my lord,' said Yasodharman. 'And now, my lord, that I am going to part from you, for some years it may be, will you allow me to tell you some two or three things?'

'Two or three things! you may tell ten thousand things and welcome,' said Baladitya.

'Well, then,' said Yasodharman, 'I shall proceed. Firstly, don't trust this Bhanugupta much. He was ever your enemy and he is more a fox than a lion. He will desert

you in time of need. Don't place much trust in him. It is dangerous.' 'I never trusted him over-much,' returned Baladitya. 'It is not criminal to profit by his communications. For with the help of these we have rescued Saraswati and her poor comrades. If I trust him only to the extent of profiting by his communications, surely you could not have any objection to that, Dharma?'

'Assuredly none,' said Yasodharman. 'And now to my second point. My lord, excuse me for asking it, but tell me candidly, do you love Saraswati?'

Baladitya blushed deeply at this question and answered :—

'No, I don't, but what if I do?'

'I am glad you don't, my lord,' replied Yasodharman. 'I feared it might be otherwise. I thought that your conduct at the feast and your proposal to take them to Keralaputra were all strong indications of love. I am very much relieved to find that they were merely effusions of a naturally gallant spirit.'

'Well, Dharma, letting alone the question of my loving her don't you think that she deserves the love of any prince?' asked Baladitya. 'I would be loath to deny her merits,' replied Yasodharman. 'She is beautiful beyond the race of women, talks pleasantly, and sings like an angel. But with all that, my lord, she would be a mesalliance to a person like you. She would be too low-born to be your queen and far too high-born to be anything else. So in the interests of both, my lord, I conceived it my duty to prevent such an alliance so injurious to the best interests of both. But I am now glad to see my foolish apprehensions proved false.' 'I am not in love with her,' returned Baladitya, 'but I shouldn't blame myself if I were. As for mesalliance, I call that a mesalliance where the parties concerned are divided in moral greatness and not as you take it to be, and as the world delights to call it, a mere

disparity in worldly possessions and such other vanities as pride of place, birth, etc. Judged by this standard, Saraswati is higher far than any princess I know of, and stands almost as high as Kumara Devi my ancestor, the daughter of the Lichchavis, the proud mother of Samudragupta.'

'I do care for what you call moral qualities, my lord,' returned Yasodharman, 'but they have their proper sphere. I do honour and value beauty, courage, truth, fidelity, honour, patience, etc. But a due consideration for such virtues will not incline me to place the daughter of a common citizen of Ujjaini on a level with the daughter of the Lichchavis, the world-renowned mother of the world-conqueror Samudragupta.'

'Well, well, we won't quarrel as to that,' said Baladitya, 'and now if you have any more points out with them and be done.'

'I have only one thing more to say, my lord. I hear that this Keralaputra is a country abounding in heresies. They say there are there many Buddhists and Jains besides some adherents of that same Jesus of whom we hear constantly from our skippers who trade with Roma. What I want of you, my lord, is that you be not tainted by any of their doctrines which conduce to the perdition of body and soul and may moreover prevent your being the head of a confederacy of Hindu princes against the tyrant Toramana or his son Mihiragula.'

'O! so you fear I will turn heretic, do you, Dharma?' asked Baladitya smiling. 'And let me tell you, my turning Buddhist will not prevent me from becoming the head of Hindu princes, for what was Buddha after all? Was he not the greatest of the Hindus known to History, born, bred up and died a Hindu?'

'May be, my lord,' said Yasodharman, 'but now the world doesn't need any of his teachings. Has he given us any new

truths? No. Has he given us any new ways of thought? No. Has he given us any new philosophy? No, again. Then, what has he given us? Nothing. He only repeated what is to be found in the Hindu sacred books and said he founded a new religion.'

'Well, then,' replied Baladitya. 'If he simply repeated what is to be found in the Hindu sacred books, wherein is he a heretic?'

'In that he brought out some fantastic doctrines,' said Yasodharman.

'What you call fantastic may be the essence of truth to others,' retorted Baladitya.

'True, my lord,' said Yasodharman. 'But I call it none the less fantastic. Besides, my lord, what does Buddha say? "Love your father and mother, obey them and your teacher, steal not, drink not." These are his cardinal doctrines. Did we need a Buddha to teach us these solemn truisms?' 'To teach anything peculiar or distinguishing, a third-rate intellect is enough,' said Baladitya, 'but to bring out before one's mind clearly the full force and meaning and necessity of fundamental and cardinal and common truths, always vaguely grasped by the human intellect and, by the very reason of their familiarity, possessing an elusive appearance of easiness, requires the very greatest genius. Such a genius was Buddha's. And, in a lesser degree, such was that of all world teachers, like Zoroaster, Confucius and Christ.' 'I don't know nor do I care to know the philosophical side of the question,' said Yasodharman, 'but I hate Buddhists only in a less degree than I do atheists like those of Charvaka's School.'

'Well, then since you are so obstinate on this score, I have nothing more to tell you except that it is not likely that I will turn a Buddhist or a Jain or a Christian,' said Baladitya.

'That is all what I want,' said Yasodharman, 'and now,

my lord, farewell. May God speed you in your journey and may the Divine Varuna of the blue and ever-moving waters waft you gently to the pearly shores of Keralaputra!

Saying this, and giving no time for his friend to reply, Yasodharman suddenly urged his horse and soon galloped out of sight. Baladitya watched him as he disappeared and said to himself :—

‘ A very queer man, this Yasodharman. He urged his horse in order to avoid the embarrassment of a parting. He is a strange combination of lofty ideals and low prejudices. He hates all non-Hindus and he uses the term Hindus in a very narrow sense. Now that I am a Hindu, he will follow me if need be to Hell, partake of all my sufferings, call me my lord even if I be in rags, and in all ways devoutly obey and love me. But, should I turn Buddhist (which however fortunately is not likely, but who knows what may happen ?) he will straightway disown me even though I be an emperor and he will pluck up his deep love for me by the roots though it might give him considerable pain. A strange character! But is not all the world strange too? Am I not strange? I who never loved a girl nor thought myself likely to do so, I am strangely infatuated with this Saraswati. I don't believe I am in love, but somehow or other I wish to please her and to avoid her displeasure. I feel an irresistible tendency to gaze at her whenever she is there, to talk to her whenever there is an opportunity, and, what is more, I feel a desire that she might have a good opinion of me.’

Soon he emerged out of this reverie and urged his horse in the direction of Bharukachcha. The road was generally lonely except when some stray traders strolled lazily by in the direction of Ujjaini. After an hour's riding however, just as the sun was about to set, Baladitya overtook a rather elderly man mounted on a fresh white horse going

in the same direction as he was pursuing. He accosted him with the usual salutations and said :—

‘ A fine horse, sir.’

‘ Ay, sir, you have a good eye for horses. I bought her for rather over eight thousand panas,’ said the stranger.

‘ Where did you purchase her, sir?’ asked Baladitya.

‘ At Baveru. She is of Arab breed,’ returned the other.

‘ At Baveru! You went to Baveru?’ asked Baladitya.

‘ I am a trader, sir,’ replied the other. ‘ I always have to go to places with my wares. Where did you buy your horse, sir? It appears to be of a strong breed.’ And he in turn examined Baladitya’s horse and said in utter surprise, ‘ It is of the forest breed. Are you a gentleman of the highroads, sir? But your trade will not prosper with Paramarathi. He has always small cash and hard blows when he travels alone.’ With that he drew his sword which was one of those Takshasila swords justly famous for their extraordinary strength and duration. Baladitya did not draw his. He simply coloured and said, ‘ Sir, do you take me for a robber? I am none, I tell you. And if you say it again we shall have to fight. And now, sir, finding what low opinion you have of me I shall much rather travel alone than in your company.’ And he galloped on. But before he had ridden for five minutes Paramarathi had caught him up saying, ‘ Stay, stay, sir, it shall never be said of Paramarathi that he called an honest man a robber without offering apologies. I heartily beg your pardon, sir.’

‘ You have it ere you ask for it,’ said Baladitya, ‘ only, I will have nothing more to do with you who regarded me as a robber. A robber indeed!’ he said indignantly.

‘ Is it unnatural for a man and a trader to suspect a strong person on a forest pony to be a robber, especially in these times of unsettlement when the so-called government

is nothing but a band of robbers and cut-throats?' asked Paramarathi.

'True,' replied Baladitya. 'And now, worthy merchant, may I ask of you where you go?'

'Most freely, my son,' said Paramarathi, 'I go to Bharukachcha to embark for Keralaputra on the ship *Vikrama*. And now that I have told you all about myself, may I ask of you where you go?'

'To Bharukachcha,' replied Baladitya.

'So we are bound for the same place,' said Paramarathi. 'We are companions. I feared that I might be the only one to travel these weary roads. What may be your business at Bharukachcha, if I am not inquisitive?'

'Nothing,' said Baladitya, 'but to go on board the ship *Vikrama* to reach Keralaputra.'

'Why, you rogue, you are also bound for Keralaputra. Lord! lord! lord! here are two persons both on horseback, both bound for the same place, the same ship, the same destination, and yet one mistakes the other for a highway robber and the other returns the compliment by regarding his comrade as a public nuisance,' said Paramarathi and laughed.

It was a novel sensation for Baladitya to be called 'You' and 'rogue', etc., by a commoner. And we cannot say it was altogether a pleasant sensation either. Yet he reconciled himself to the wild humour of his new comrade and asked, 'Is the *Vikrama* a big ship?'

'Not so big as some of those that go to Baveru and Roma and Java but yet big enough,' said Paramarathi. 'It could contain some hundred men besides a considerable quantity of goods.'

'Are there many passengers,' asked Baladitya.

'Many? that depends on one's conception of many. There are some fifty seats booked already. I have taken two comfortable rooms but I would like to have some

partners in this as these are too large. Each room would comfortably accommodate four persons and we are only three in all. Some four people who promised to join us disappointed us at the last moment.'

'Three! are you not alone? Have you any fellow-merchants with you?' asked Baladitya.

'Not exactly fellow-merchants,' said Paramarathi. 'But yet of the genus merchant. A merchant's wife and a merchant's daughter are both merchants I presume?'

'O! so your wife and daughter are accompanying you?' asked Baladitya.

'Ay, that they do,' replied the merchant. 'The impudent girl must needs accompany me, and her mother is so fond of her that she also persists in coming with us.'

'Are you natives of Keralaputra?' asked Baladitya.

'Oh! no! no! we are natives of Magadha,' replied Paramarathi.

'And why in Heaven's name do you come to Bharukachcha? Is it not better for you to embark from Tamralipiti?' asked Baladitya.

'Yes, if I were simply bound for Keralaputra; but a merchant has some other purpose on hand than merely reaching a place speedily. This shows you are no merchant. Why, man, you can sell all the way from Pataliputra to Bharukachcha and buy some of the rarities of those parts,' said Paramarathi.

'Ay, I forgot that,' said Baladitya, 'being no merchant.'

'What be your trade?' asked Paramarathi.

'Nothing. A mere wanderer,' said Baladitya.

'A mere wanderer!' exclaimed Paramarathi. 'Why, you are young and strong and vigorous. If you are poor, this is the time for making money to serve you in old age. Tell me not you are rich. You may be, but to keep your wealth idle, to consume it while you have the opportunity of increasing it and thus to find yourself indigent in old age is

like the foolish policy of the drone, which eats while it is summer storing nothing for winter and naturally dies of starvation whereas the bee by a little prudence stores away something thus providing for its periods of scarcity. Well, then, if you be not a trader, why go you to Keralaputra ?'

'I go simply to see the country. I have some three friends also,' replied Baladitya.

'All of them be idlers like you?' asked the trader.

'One is a holy Jaina, the other is a worthy citizen of Ujjaini and the third is a most beautiful maiden,' replied Baladitya.

'Why do they all go to Keralaputra? To see the country?' asked Paramarhi.

'No, to find asylum from the persecution of the Hun,' answered Baladitya.

'Ay, Ay, that sounds like sense. They at least have some reason, you have none. Why, has the Hun become so intolerable?' asked Paramarhi.

'Perfectly. And I also have something to fear from him,' said Baladitya.

'Then you do well to go away to Keralaputra. Why didn't you tell me this before? Why, I thought you were simply one of those hollow empty heads who go yearly visiting countries on what they call pleasure trips,' said Paramarhi.

'Why, Paramarhi,' said Baladitya, 'seeing other lands broadens one's mind.'

'So it does,' replied Paramarhi. 'Only, making money by honest trading doesn't detract from the pleasure of seeing the country. Rather, it adds to it. For you know the riches of the country by the amount of the goods bought from you and offered to you; you can test the honesty of its people by seeing whether your goods are stolen; you know the character of the people in general

more intimately than if you were merely touring about as more people see a trader than a tourist. A tourist is pursued and haunted by charlatans and idlers, the riff-raff of society, people who represent nobody, and he is rarely allowed into courts whereas a trader is surrounded by honest substantial people of all kinds, is asked to their houses by nobles, entreated into the palace by the king, solicited for special audience by the queen and princesses, and pressed to dine at everybody's. Thus you see more of the people, know more of them, come more intimately into touch with them by being a trader than by being a tourist. As for substantial fare, why, who calls a tourist to dine with him? The starveling schoolmaster who is eager to know from him the curiosities of other countries and who is desirous to know whether better prospects could be had in another country, the strolling idler who wants to while away his time and so makes this tourist his buffoon, and, lastly, the village old women who want to know what fabulous incidents were taking place in other countries, convinced that their home alone is a turbid stagnant pool while the adjacent countries are swirling currents. And with all these advantages the trader possesses over the tourist, he also possesses another, he earns money.'

'Well, we are alarmingly slow in our progress. I must reach Bharukachcha soon,' said Baladitya, 'for I must engage berths for my comrades also.'

'You needn't hasten on that score,' said Paramarathi, 'for the berths are engaged.'

'How! engaged! Who engaged them?' asked Baladitya.

'I! I have engaged two rooms. We can put the three women together in one and we four men can occupy the other,' replied Paramarathi.

'So half my problem is over,' said Baladitya, 'but yet I feel an inclination to gallop.'

ON THE ROAD TO BHARUKACHCHA 91

‘Away then! Let us see who is the better rider, I or you, my white horse or your red,’ said Paramartha. ‘We shall never pull the reins till we reach the inn some five miles from here.’

‘Agreed!’ cried Baladitya and away they started at a speed which astonished the stray passengers on the road and sent clouds of dust to the skies. Soon they were well on the way to Bharukachcha.

CHAPTER XI

LAKSHMI AND PARVATI

FOR well-nigh half an hour both rode at break-neck speed and reached the wayside inn just as the evening deadened into night. They put up their horses at the stables attached to the inn and then arranged for their meals with the inn-keeper who was well known to Paramartha. After a meal both the weary travellers slept soundly. Waking up in the early morning they again resumed their journey. Except for meals and sleep they were always on horseback. As the eighth morning dawned, they were within a few miles of their destination. Soon the shooting rays of the rising sun threw a halo of splendour on the green and bedewed fields and the tree-tops waving in the morning breeze. They saw several tanks on the way full of lotuses of various colours, red, white and blue, spreading their gorgeous petals to please and enchant the eyes of the wayfarer. While Baladitya was meditating on this beautiful scenery, Paramartha called out to him :—

‘Why didn’t you bring the lady with you? Who will bring her here?’

‘Why, I told you she had two comrades,’ said Baladitya.

‘A holy Jaina and a worthy citizen are but a poor escort to a beautiful maiden in these dangerous times,’ said Paramartha.

‘And they have another champion too, Hari Ram,’ said Baladitya.

‘Hari Ram!’ said Paramartha, ‘and so you are known to him?’

‘He himself has had a sad experience of Hun savagery,’

said Baladitya. 'He rescued these three from the clutches of the Hun and promised to take them to Bharukachcha.'

'He is a strong escort,' observed the trader, 'a very strong escort. And a good man at heart. He was a good man, a very good man, before that sad incident in his life which blasted him for ever.'

'Have you ever seen his daughter?' asked Baladitya.

'Seen her!' asked Paramarathi. 'I have known her better than I know any girl except Parvati.'

'Who may be Parvati? your daughter I presume?' said Baladitya.

'The same,' replied Paramarathi.

'What was Narayani like?' asked Baladitya.

'A very beautiful girl I assure you and a very good one. I met her many times at Ujjaini. I was an old friend of Hari Ram's. I used to put up in his house whenever my trade took me to Ujjaini. Narayani, a sly little girl of fourteen, used to come and read to me stories of Savitri and when she came to the passage where Savitri resolved to follow her husband beyond his grave the wench used to straighten herself and say, "Uncle," she used to call me so, "Uncle, do you know what I would do if my husband died? I would even follow his dead body as Savitri did." "Well, niece," I used to say, "you are not married." "But I shall be soon," she answered, "and I will marry only a person like Satyavan fully to my liking. And then when I have once married him I will worship him as a God. But sometimes I think, uncle, I shall never live to be a wife." "No, no, my dear, you will certainly get a good husband and live to be not a wife but a grandmother." I said, but when I now think of that figure and its evil forebodings, unfortunately but too true, I feel disposed to cry. Such a beautiful and virtuous girl she was, I shall never see her

like again,' said Paramarathi, and tears fell from his eyes. Baladitya too had shed tears at the story. He asked :—

' How did the poor girl sum up resolution to die ?'

' Oh,' said Paramarathi, ' after her dishonour she spoke no more to people but to ask for a knife or a sword to despatch herself with. None gave her either and so she went to her house which her father had left to hide his shame, gathered up all the firewood stored there (and a big quantity it was) and lit it up. Then she got up the burning pyre saying " Savitri¹ receive me, Sita¹ welcome me, Damayanti¹ pity me. For I come not impure and dishonoured but purified by the God Agni.² The fire burneth away the body. All over the land of Bharata shall this pyre burn. In ages to come, many, many shall follow my footsteps." Then seeing the people come below, she said, " Death to him who comes to quench this pyre. He is a beast dead to all sense of honour and were he my father I would curse him. My honour lost, let me die !" No one dared to move an inch. Smiling she sat until her beautiful dress caught fire and then her hair and it appeared rather as if Agni took her into his own than that he cruelly burnt her. And so she ended, to the last the brave indomitable girl I knew.'

Baladitya was deeply affected by the story and mused on it a while. By this time, the towers of Bharukachcha were distinctly visible on the horizon. It was a long straggling town containing houses of all kinds and with tall majestic ships sailing in the harbour. Our travellers went up to the harbour and soon descried the *Vikrama*. She was a big ship capable, as Paramarathi said, of carrying a hundred passengers as well as a big quantity of merchandise. It was both a merchant ship and a passenger. Baladitya

¹ Savitri, Sita and Damayanti, ideals of Indian womanhood.

² The God of Fire.

asked his friend where his luggage was. Paramarathi answered that his luggage was all stowed away safely and that at least one part of the merchandise would be warmly admired by him.

‘I admire muslins,’ said Baladitya.

‘O! I didn’t mean them though I have some of them with me. I meant my daughter,’ said Paramarathi.

‘Is your daughter part of your merchandise?’ asked Baladitya.

‘Not merchandise. Rather wares. But let me warn you she considers herself a rare beauty, does Parvati. She will not allow the honesty of any who contradicts this her cardinal doctrine. But should any dishonest man praise her beauty to the skies she comes and tells me that that man was not after all so very wicked.’

‘Well, well,’ said Baladitya, ‘I am little likely to offend her.’

They then hailed the ship’s boat and got on board. The captain of the ship, a stalwart man of about thirty, met them on the way and said, ‘Welcome, Paramarathi. And who may be this young friend?’ ‘He is a sort of tourist impelled to undertake his tour by fear of the Hun. I hope we may protect him Ramachandra,’ said Paramarathi. ‘Ay, Ay,’ answered that worthy, ‘and, young man, what recommendation did you bring to make Paramarathi take up with you?’

‘Nothing except it be my red pony,’ said Baladitya.

‘That red pony! isn’t it Hari Ram’s?’ asked Ramachandra in surprise. ‘Yea, Yea,’ said Baladitya.

‘And so a dacoit’s recommendation weighs much with the honest merchant! But to say truth Hari Ram is a worthy man, a very worthy man. He never robs the poor, the afflicted or the unfortunate. He robs him that is wealthy and miserly in order that others might have a greater equality with him. What is the wealth of the

wealthy man but the robbed treasures of the poor and wherein is he a robber who plunders the wealthy of his plundered property if his object is simply to restore them to the poor again?' said Ramachandra.

'None of your doctrines before me,' said Paramarthi.

'I beg your pardon,' said Ramachandra. 'I never shut my mouth for any man but I hope you consider me as in a way your host and so obliged to humour your fancies. Well, then, I have done.'

Baladitya was curiously eyeing the ship and the sailors and ended his observation by saying,

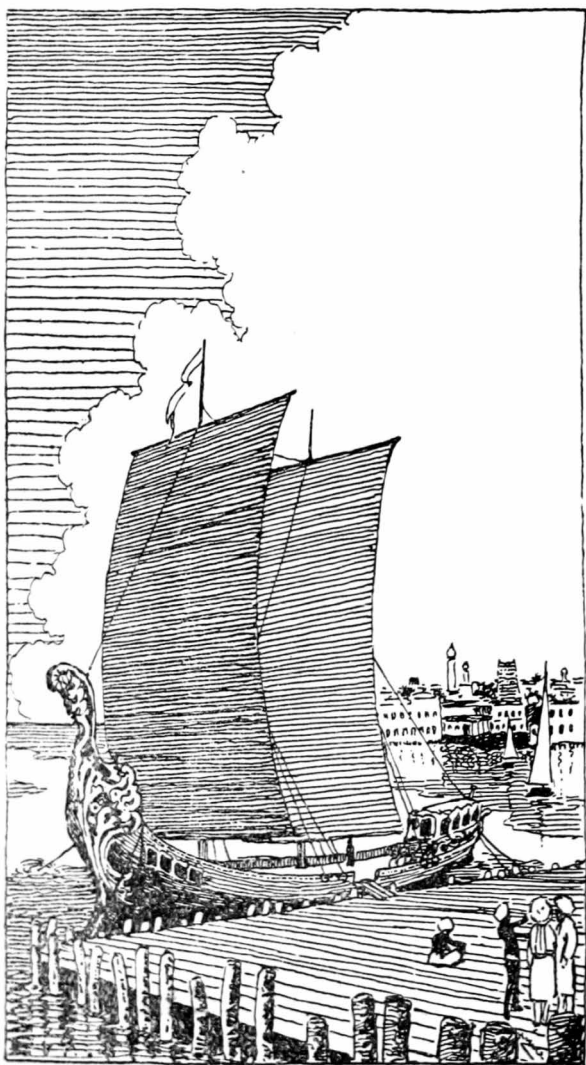
'A good ship, sir, and a very safe one, well built, well-manned and well-officered.'

'You are right,' said Ramachandra. 'I take a pride in her. She has seen many combats and many voyages. She has been to Baveru and Roma in the West, and to Sumatra, Java, Matan, Kambhoja, China and Japan in the East.'

'Ay, have you been so far? Are the ships of the East and West larger than ours?' asked Baladitya.

'Larger! why, they are considerably smaller,' said Ramachandra. 'The ships of the West are smaller than ours and also not so quick of sailing. Once a big ship of the West called the *Pegasus*, a pirate, engaged the *Vikrama* off Roma. She was about as large as the *Vikrama* and was the largest ship the yavanas¹ of the West had. She was manned by the bravest of their captains Balaeric. She delivered a huge onset full on the *Vikrama*. The *Vikrama* wheeled round and received the blow obliquely. That portion of the *Vikrama* was damaged but the main body of the ship was unaffected while their huge galleon sprang a gigantic leak and straightway sank, the uncouth barbarians shouting out "Help, comrades!" As for the ships of the East, the Chinese have their junks, the Japanese their

¹ A name loosely applied to all foreigners. Literally, Ionians.



THE 'VIKRAMA'

pattamars, but none such huge and stately ships, as ours. The biggest ships there are of the Javanese, but even they are smaller than ours.'

'What is the largest ship you have seen?' asked Baladitya.

'The *Vijaya* which carries 300 passengers besides goods. She runs between Korkai Simhala and Java,' said Ramachandra.

'Yea,' said Paramarathi, 'you say true. It is owned by a corporation of merchants.'

'And one of its owners is Paramarathi,' said Ramachandra.

'Is he?' asked Baladitya.

'Why, he is one of the richest men I know. He can buy up the *Vijaya* and *Vikrama* if he chooses. All Korkai¹ is proud of him. And even on this ship he has about 100,000 panas worth of goods. Of the thousands of Gold Panas coming annually from Roma to India Paramarathi gets a tenth.'

'Does he?' said Baladitya. And now he vividly remembered how his courtiers had often told him when in Magadha that his richest subject was one merchant called Paramarathi. But he feigned not to have known him before. Now the captain took leave of them and went to another part of the ship. Then Paramarathi asked Baladitya 'Don't you want to see Parvati and Lakshmi? I am your host. They are your hostesses.'

'I have no objection,' said Baladitya. 'Objection! What, no objection to see a beautiful girl,' said Paramarathi. 'Nay, sir, examine yourself, see you not some slight objection? Why, young man, one would believe you were bred up in a monastery!'

'I wasn't though,' returned Baladitya. 'Nay and if you were I would no more care for your worthy acquaintance

¹ An ancient port on the Coromandel Coast.

than I would for the friendship of a doll, a puppet. Come now without more delay.' And he took him with him to his friend Dhanabhushan's house. Paramartha took Baladitya straight into a very spacious and gorgeously furnished room where were seated two women. One was elderly and about thirty-five. She had not yet lost even a little of her beauty, had not even begun to fade. Though an ancient author said, 'While the daughter waxes in beauty, the mother wanes in it.' Lakshmi had bid defiance to this sage's remark and was as beautiful now as she ever was. Her complexion was clear though darkish, her features were regular, she had a winning smile and, what was better, such a good-humoured expression on her face that nobody would fear her or suspect her of anything bad. She was there seated on the cushion fondly eyeing her daughter who sat opposite combing her hair. Opposite to the daughter was a big mirror by the aid of which she was adjusting her hair. She was sitting with her back towards the door. Baladitya saw her face distinctly in the mirror. She was a very beautiful girl, almost as beautiful as Saraswati, but her beauty was of a different cast. Her complexion was like her mother's rather dark, but her features were most supple and attractive, and she had inherited that winning smile of her mother, only, in her it was perfectly bewitching. Her innate complacency at her beauty was perfectly evident and though she saw Baladitya in the mirror she did not rise up but wanted him to see and admire her in the mirror while she also might have time to see what he was like in the mirror. Thus for five minutes after they entered, this play went on while Paramartha and Lakshmi enjoyed it too immensely to break it in the middle. At last, Lakshmi said, 'Don't you see your father is come, my dear?'

'How could I see him,' asked Parvati.

'No, how could she see me while she was concentrating

her whole attention on our friend here, this promising tourist refugee?' asked Paramarathi laughing. Parvati blushed and said 'I tell you, you wicked father, you will break my heart one of these days.'

'No danger of that, my dear,' said Paramarathi, 'it is soft as down and can't break.'

'You are always so peevish. Fancy your trying to let me down before a stranger!' said Parvati.

'Oh, ho! is it that which vexes you?' asked Paramarathi.

'Well, then, my dear sir, you ought not to regard this as at all meant for your ears. It would have been best had you been deaf but as that could not be it would be a consolation if you were dumb. But as that again is impossible we desire you to be reticent upon this subject.'

'I assure you that I shall be so,' said Baladitya.

'And now, my dear,' continued Paramarathi to his wife, 'this is a worthy friend of mine who accompanies us to Keralaputra, and he has three friends, a holy Jaina, a worthy citizen and a beautiful maiden. The maiden will grace you with her company and the citizen and holy man us with theirs.'

'I am glad to have his acquaintance,' said Lakshmi. 'He appears to be extremely young. What is his name?'

'Ha! Ha! Ha! What do you think? I have forgotten his name!' said Paramarathi.

'You have always an erring memory,' said Lakshmi.

'Well, well, he hasn't forgotten my name though, for I never told it to him,' said Baladitya.

'Can't you keep quiet, you fool?' said Paramarathi. 'Why, what would they think of me if I told them that I never asked the name of a man who was my companion on the way and would be companion on board the ship? You, sir, you are perfectly intolerable,' and Paramarathi affected entire loss of hope in the man.

‘Well, well, let that be as it may be,’ said Lakshmi, ‘but what is his name?’

‘Pray tell it young man,’ commanded Paramartha.

‘Baladitya!’ said Baladitya.

‘Baladitya! Why, the same name as our legitimate emperor’s!’ said Paramartha: ‘Only, young man, he is not half so fortunate as you. You at least are free from the Hun’s utter wrath. He, poor man, is hunted. Recently, Bhanugupta and Bhumaka hunted him out of Magadha and, poor prince, he was ever good to us.’

‘I pity him,’ answered Baladitya, ‘may-hap, the rising sun¹ is the setting sun.’

‘God forbid!’ said Lakshmi, Parvati and Paramartha in one.

‘Amen,’ said Baladitya, ‘but yet I think it be likely.’

‘We don’t think so’ answered they.

‘It is no concern of mine’ said Baladitya ‘but I would not be in his position now for a hundred thousand panas.’²

‘You say true,’ said Paramartha, ‘he is in a grievous position, poor young man. Hardly twenty-five yet, left astray in the wide wide world with none to guide him except that Yasodharman. He is the only faithful follower he has got. And it is said they together slew Bhumaka the Hun. Is it a fact?’

‘Yes,’ said Baladitya. ‘I heard of it in Ujjaini. They conducted a search for the princes there. Of course, they did not succeed.’

‘So the princes escaped?’ asked Lakshmi.

‘Yes, I am sure of it,’ said Baladitya.

‘God be praised,’ said all.

‘And now let us go and take something to comfort us’ said Paramartha and all went down into the vast dining hall.

¹ ‘Baladitya’ means the rising sun.

² Coins of Ancient India worth about 4 as. 7 pies if silver and Rs. 18 if gold.

CHAPTER XII

THE RECAPTURE OF THE CAPTIVES

THAT evening when Bhanugupta left the abode of Hari Ram and returned to his palace in Ujjaini which was formerly Yasodharman's, Mihiragula sent for him and pressed him to tell him where he had been. 'Nowhere,' he said, 'except to find out the traitors. I went on purpose to trace them out if they were really anywhere near this town.'

'Well,' said Narayana, 'did you see any of our Huns?'

'What Huns do you mean?' asked Bhanugupta.

'The Huns accompanying the three captives,' said Narayana.

'I didn't see them,' replied Bhanugupta.

'I am starting for Hunagarh to-morrow,' said Narayana.

'I shall also accompany you if you like,' said Bhanugupta.

'Oh, no! you are needed here!' said Narayana. 'Moreover, you don't know anything regarding matters like this.'

'Well, then, I shall not come,' said Bhanugupta.

Just as he had said this, a man came panting up to where they were standing and falling on the ground before Mihiragula said:—

'Pardon! Pardon, my liege!'

'Pardon! Pardon for whom? For what?' asked Mihiragula.

'For Chastana! for miscarrying his charge,' answered the prostrate man.

'What!' asked Narayana in a thundering voice. 'Have the captives escaped? What has happened, quick?'

'The robbers, my lord, the robbers,' said Chastana.

'What about them?' asked Mihiragula.

'Hari Ram and his band rescued the captives and all the Huns guarding them were taken prisoners,' said Chastana.

'Then, if all the Huns were taken prisoners, how did you come here, you villain,' asked Mihiragula in wrath.

'May it please Your Highness,' said Chastana, 'I was felled by one blow with the hilt of the sword of Hari Ram and the robbers left me for dead as they went to revel in the forest, since three others had joined them. I had only been stunned by the blow and so very soon recovered. I followed the robbers stealthily. I went to a bush adjoining a cleared space where they ate and drank and talked. I could hear but little of their conversation being too distant for that and so I tried to get as near as possible when to my horror one of the three new people who had joined the robbers came near the spot where I was and searched all round. By sheer good luck I managed to escape. I saw a forest pony grazing peacefully, mounted it and soon betook myself hither. I could do nothing to rescue the Huns or recapture the prisoners. So I thought that I would inform Your Highness as early as possible about the disaster so that Your Highness may take timely steps to retrieve it and recapture the prisoners.'

'Well, well, I don't care very much for the captives,' said Mihiragula, 'but the idea of these bandits getting so insolent is intolerable. By God, I had rather die than rest content without recovering the captives. Go, order two hundred of our best horsemen to mount and attend us here,' he shouted to Chastana. Soon the two hundred horsemen were ready and Mihiragula and Narayana put themselves at their head and in a short time had galloped out of sight. They took the road to Hunagarh. As they came to a bend

in the road they imagined they heard other horses galloping but concluded that it was simply the echo of their own. Now it happened that really the sounds they heard were those of the horses of Hari Ram and his party who also had concluded that the sounds they heard were also echoes of their own. What was the surprise of the one and the terror of the other when the two parties met. Hari Ram's party consisted of but thirty horsemen. In the centre were Raghupati and Bhadrabahu and Hari Ram with Saraswati on his horse. They were all leaving the forest for a safer place on the road to Bharukachcha. Saraswati grew pale with fear at the sight of these people. The sight of Narayana, associated as his name was with Baladitya's saying that he was the cause of all this trouble, made her well-nigh swoon. She looked upon the scene hazily as if she were in a dream and did not know exactly what was taking place. Before the robbers had recovered from their surprise, the Huns had surrounded them on all sides and there was no hope of escape. Mihiragula advanced to where Hari Ram was and said, 'Surrender, or you die! Or at least surrender the girl. I have no objection at all to your robbing but restore to us our captives and promise not to interfere with us in the future.' 'Never!' said Hari Ram. 'Never shall I surrender Saraswati. Is it not enough that you illtreated Narayani? Come, you abhorred of Heaven, come, fight.' And protecting Saraswati by putting his left hand round her he drew his sword and fought on with his right. And now a general battle took place between the parties on either side. The robbers were but one-eighth the number and were soon overpowered by the overwhelming numbers of their enemy. Hari Ram even was at last overpowered by four or five men but not before he had dealt a wound to Mihiragula which necessitated his returning to Ujjaini at once. So a score of horsemen accompanied him thither after having helped their comrades

in disarming and binding the robbers. The rest formed a hollow square in the centre of which they placed all the captives and thus marched on. Hari Ram was placed by the side of Saraswati and he said to her in a low tone, 'Daughter, it has fared ill with us. The Huns are a brutish hellish race. They may attempt, nay, they will attempt to harm you. May the Gods in Heaven aid you!' 'The Gods help those who help themselves,' said Saraswati. 'I have somehow inherited a wild courage after hearing the story of Narayani. I think I could burn myself even as she did herself.' 'Oh no, daughter,' said Hari Ram, 'it will kill me; it will kill old Hari Ram.'

'There is no help. Have you any better counsel?' asked Saraswati.

'None under the circumstances, none,' moaned Hari Ram.

'I wonder where Baladitya is now,' said Saraswati.

'Why?' asked Hari Ram.

'If he were here, he would have infused such a spirit into the band that the two hundred Huns would have fled before him,' said Saraswati. 'I am not quite so sure of that,' said Hari Ram 'though he be a gallant soldier.'

'He slew Bhumaka the Lion, the best swordsman of them all,' said Saraswati, 'Ay! Ay! he is an admirable soldier,' said Hari Ram.

'And then, uncle,' said Saraswati 'what would he be thinking of us now? That we had cheated him and so left him to travel alone to Keralaputra after having first promised to accompany him thither. I can't bear the idea of his thinking that I had cheated him.' Even in the situation they were in Hari Ram could not avoid a smile at her simplicity and said, 'Daughter, I shall make Baladitya understand the position. He will not quarrel with you nor think that you cheated him.'

'You are good, uncle,' said Saraswati, 'you see he rescued

me from the Hun before and so I am obliged to him and shouldn't like him to think that I cheated him.' 'He rescued you from the Hun, Saraswati! It was I who did it,' said Hari Ram. Saraswati felt the justice of the remark but said, 'Yet uncle, I don't like him to think that I cheated him.'

Narayana who had up to this time been marching at the head now relaxed his speed and fell in with the captives. He said to Saraswati, 'Why do you look so sorrowful, my dear? Cheer up, we are not going to eat you.'

Saraswati uttered not a syllable in reply.

'Why, Saraswati, my dear, don't you know me? I am Narayana.' She again deigned no reply to the fellow's coarse familiarity.

'Don't "my dear" her, fellow!' said Hari Ram.

'You fellow! Who are you to command me, I say?' asked Narayana.

'A man who knows what is what. And a man with a heart and a conscience, a god and a principle. O! lowest of creatures, why art thou so vile?' said Hari Ram.

'I won't talk with you, you marauder, but you shall repent of your speech. As for you, proud beauty, I will make you also repent it,' said Narayana. Saying this, he rode off to his former position.

'There goes the serpent,' said Hari Ram, 'beware of him. He is a viper. Oh! more inhuman than the Hun!'

'Yea,' said Saraswati. 'What shall I do against the importunities of this heartless villain? Sita will help me. Savitri will aid me.' They said nothing again for the rest of the way but each brooded on what interested him or her most, Narayana on the best way of revenging himself on this poor girl, Hari Ram on the helplessness of his adopted daughter, Saraswati alternately on the villainous conduct of Narayana once they got to Hunagarh and the way to meet it and also about Baladitya. His image stood constantly

before her and somehow or other she began to believe that he would save her. As she thought of Baladitya, her features would brighten up and as she reverted to her present situation they would become melancholy again. The wretch Narayana turning round once to see how she was looking was pleased to see her face radiant and attributed it to her contemplation of his glory ; it being observed that even the very ugliest and vilest creature on this earth yet thinks himself capable of being admired. How else could this beast of a Narayana think that such a woman as Saraswati could have any admiration for him? Probably he thought that all had such a mind as himself. Anyhow, as we said, he was pleased. The journey to Hunagarh took ten days. The party halted at convenient camps during the nights and for meals and change of horses. For the rest, they went steadily on without stopping. On the morning of the tenth day, they came to a place where the only things visible were long rows of prisons built on the same model in the jungly slopes of the Aravallis. All were long straggling sheds with low rooms, dingy to look at, scantily aired, scantily lighted.

The only passage for air was a small window at the very end of the wall seven feet high through which a straggling stream of air and a wavering stream of light reluctantly found their way in. When the party reached this place, all the Huns got down and, at the order of Narayana placed each captive in a separate room. Raghupati entreated hard to be imprisoned with his daughter in the same room.

‘What!’ said Narayana, ‘shut up a man and a young woman in the same room!’

‘But that young woman is my daughter,’ said poor Raghupati.

‘Daughter me no daughters,’ said Narayana.

‘A shame on you fellow, a shame on you! May Holy Narayana (No, no, no, May holy Govinda, the very God is

defamed by your name) protect my daughter! O! my daughter, my daughter, why wert thou born in this miserable world? Ah me! Ah, me!' said Raghupati.

'Why, she was born for other people, fellow, not for you,' said Narayana. Hari Ram, who was hearing all this, cried bitterly. Tears came in torrents, and he said, 'God! God! When a man falls from a high station he rests not till he has reached the level below the lowest.'

'Well, well, fellow, none asked your opinion, so be quiet,' said Narayana. And with that he had Hari Ram thrust into a room and the door promptly locked. The last to be disposed of was Saraswati. The chamber she was locked in was a comparatively good one with a soft bed. Saraswati was terrified at the very comforts of the room. She would have preferred that she had been thrust into the very dingiest of all the rooms than that she should occupy such a good one which clearly stood for her as the index of the vile intentions Narayana entertained. She sat on the bed and wept and wept. Sometimes she would stop, clench her fists and say, 'Baladitya, you traitor, why do you desert me in this extremity?' Anon she would say, 'God save him! May Vishnu protect him though I die!' At last, she fell on to the bed restlessly and finally began to sleep worn out by endless care and anxiety and exhausted by weeping.

CHAPTER XIII

A WOMAN'S RESOURCE

SHE did not know how long she had slept when she was awakened by the door being opened. She rubbed her eyes, found her spirits considerably refreshed by the sleep, and sat up on the bed. Then she looked out of the window. It was night. She had slept for more than eight hours. The room was but indifferently lighted. She felt hungry. It was almost twenty hours since she had eaten anything. Her hunger had become oppressive and she looked round to see if anything had been placed there. She found a cup of milk and some plantain fruits on a shelf in the wall beside the bed. She drank off the cup and ate some of the fruits until her hunger was appeased. While she was eating, the noise of the doors being opened came nearer and nearer until it came to a door which was the third from her room. She ceased eating, put the rest of the fruits on the floor, and resumed her position on the bed waiting with breathless anxiety her turn. She had not to wait long. Within ten minutes her door was opened and by a light which one of the persons carried she saw Narayana and a person carrying a cup of milk, a tender cocoanut and a large bunch of plantain fruits. Narayana asked the man to place the things on the shelf, got the light from him and dismissed him to his bed for which he was only showing an overmastering affection. The drowsy servitor lazily walked away. Narayana stood out till the noise of his foot-steps had passed away and then advanced into the room, placed the lamp on a lamp-stand, and shut the door. Up till now, though Saraswati had wanted to speak, her fear and anxiety

had quite overmastered her. Eagerly, ardently, she had desired to appeal to the servant to stay. Her fears had ever been strong, they had grown when she saw this Narayana ask the servant to leave. Now however that he shut the door her courage returned and she said, 'Why shut the door? Why not leave it open?'

'O! simply to shut out the cold air,' he said.

'The air is not so cold. Will you please open it again?' asked Saraswati.

'Never mind. I can't go to open it again,' said he, and sat on a cushion opposite to her bed.

Saraswati felt the position intolerable. She thought of flying to the door opening it and running out whithersoever God would direct her, but she presently recollected that it was not Ujjaini, that here only savage Huns lived crueller far than ever even this Narayana could be, lustful as he—unscrupulous as he—stronger than he. So she resolved to be as quiet as possible giving no ground whatsoever for the villain's use of force. She thought—poor girl—that perchance so he might go away.

Narayana watched her and said, 'No, my dear, there is no way of escape. I sit between the door and you and moreover who is there outside? The roving Huns, the marauding thieves and the licentious soldiery. I come here out of love, they will treat you out of wantonness.' She said nothing in reply.

'Saraswati, my dear,' he said, 'will you not favour me? Will you not take pity on me?'

'I take pity on you! mock me not. It is you that should take pity on me,' said Saraswati. 'I am a poor maiden, a helpless maiden, weak and helpless as such maidens are. You are a Brahman, a man and a courtier. Take pity on me. For the love of Brahma the Creator, take pity on me and leave me. I cannot, I will not accede to your desires. They are vile, and un-Brahmanly. Go and May Brahma

help you to be a better man.' Narayana was touched in spite of himself but as in the case of such heartless villains each speech that touches them only makes their foul admiration more and thus only resolves them to action, it had no good effect on Narayana.

'No, forgive me, Saraswati,' said Narayana. 'You said you were a weak and helpless maiden. That is but now. When you were in Ujjaini, the villain Raghupati, your father, told me in answer to my gracious offer to marry you that he would sooner see you dead than marry me, that I was a wretch devoid of all sense of honour, gratitude and manliness, a monstrosity in nature, and that he was glad that his daughter also detested me as I deserved. Now that I have you in my power you say you are a weak and helpless maiden. This trick shall not avail you. Then I offered marriage. Now I offer concubinage.'

'What do you offer? Concubinage to a Kshatriya maiden! You villain, you debased wretch, you abhorred of Heaven, what do you offer? Away, I say, away to the hideous dens of iniquity, away to your palace of intrigue, away to your vile occupations of life! While the last drop of my blood runs in me, I shall resist you. You say I am a helpless maiden. I myself said I was. No, no, I erred, I erred. I am not a helpless maiden. I am aided by Sita and Savitri and Damayanti and Sakuntala. A chaste woman has the power of reducing to ashes any person, so proclaim our *Puranas*.¹ Did not Damayanti blast the libidinous forester like that?' 'Ay, Ay, so say the *Puranas*,' said Narayana. 'What are the *Puranas*, I say, but lying stories written by idle Brahmans to obtain the wherewithal to live? I never believe in the *Puranas*.'

'As if you believe in anything, you abominable wretch,' said Saraswati. 'It would be good for the world if you at

¹ Semi-religious historical writings of Ancient India.

least believed in the devil. But who knows? You may surpass the devil himself in his iniquity.'

'I am a Brahman,' said Narayana.

'Ay, but a Brahman might be a devil and the easier for him if once his powerful intellect is diverted and the accumulation of ages is turned to evil purposes. Besides, who called you a Brahman?' asked Saraswati. 'Everybody,' replied Narayana.

'Why, the public of Ujjaini outcasted you. If you Brahminism consisted in universal recognition it has ceased to exist,' said Saraswati.

'Ay, Ay, the Brahman devils of Ujjaini, they declared me an outcaste, they did,' said Narayana. 'So I have nothing to lose, cannot go lower. But this has made me extremely happy. I could with a satisfied conscience take you, for my own. Nobody expects any good from a *Chandala*.¹ Not even the great lord of Kailasa can prevent me.' With this he rose up and advanced to where she sat. Saraswati sat motionless and said, 'Gauri² protect me Parvati, protect me! O! Divine daughter of the Himalayas! Consort of Siva, guardian of all good women, protect me! protect me!' said Saraswati.

'No, no, do not call upon her, she can't aid you, poor sickly thing,' said Narayana.

'Savitri, come for a moment from the side of your dearest husband and count it not a derogation of your wifely duties for it is to protect the honour of a woman who believes in thee. Sita, thou mother of all men, whom Rama so cruelly exiled, Sita come to this vile earth and think it not a shame for it is to protect me. Damayanti, come here, my dearest friend, and reduce this villain to ashes as you erstwhile did the forester. Narayani, my step-sister, my more than

¹ An outcasted Brahman becomes a Chandala, lowest of the low.

² Gauri, Parvati, etc. Various names of the Consort of Siva.

sister, come and revenge yourself on one who brought about your ruin and now seeks the ruin of one innocent as thee,' said Saraswati.

And she relapsed into utter exhaustion. 'All these cries are in vain,' said Narayana. But her cry had not been in vain. Though no Goddess came in physical shape and comforted her, yet none the less true is it that every one of the persons whom she had invoked from the Goddess mother Parvati to Poor Narayani, from Holy Sita to sublime Savitri infused into her person strength and spirit. Saraswati felt it, and any who appeals sincerely to the Gods will feel it too. From this moment Saraswati was not alone. Parvati and Sita, Savitri and Damayanti were all fighting on her side against this wretch who had come seeking her honour.

Narayana remained for some time silent. At last, he said, 'By force or by guile I am determined to have you. If you accede to my wishes, I shall love you, honour you, respect you and have you married to a respectable man. If you don't, I shall hate you and publish your shame to the world. Answer me within a minute. I cannot for ever be trifling with a girl. I am too much of a man for that.'

'Too much of a man!' exclaimed Saraswati. 'Say rather too much of a devil!'

'I am content,' said Narayana, 'so long as I have power over you.' And he advanced a step towards her. Saraswati retired a step and said, 'Touch me not, touch not a holy maiden. I am already wedded to Baladitya in mind and like Savitri I will have only him. He is the only man whom I love, will love and should love.'

'To Baladitya! when were you wedded to him in mind?' asked Narayana. 'So you know him also? You probably afforded him refuge, did you? Well, you shall repent it. If you accede to my love, you shall wed Baladitya. If not, Baladitya shall hear of your shame.'

‘ You tell my lord of my shame ! ’ said Saraswati. ‘ Why, you won’t live to tell it again to any other body.’

‘ Yes, the fellow is such a brute,’ said Narayana. ‘ But yet I shall inform Mihiragula of your treason and he will execute you and your father.’

‘ Oh ! you villain ! ’ said Saraswati.

‘ I never posed to be an angel,’ replied Narayana. ‘ Come now, your reply.’ And he advanced another step. Saraswati considered for a moment. The fellow was past shame, past all human sentiments, was a fiend incarnate, and would carry out his word. No help was within reach, the fellow was stronger far than she, and she wanted if possible not to be touched by him. So she thought that cunning might do more with him than mere refusal. She considered. Her eyes fell upon the cocoanut brought by the villain. A brilliant idea struck her, her features brightened, her eyes shone, and she prayed fervently to all the Gods and Goddesses to give her courage. By this time Narayana was impatient and said, ‘ Well, what do you say, quick ? ’

‘ My throat dries up. I want some drink,’ said Saraswati.

‘ Why, drink the milk,’ said he and gave it to her.

‘ I don’t like milk,’ said Saraswati, ‘ some water or something else.’

‘ Here is the cocoanut I brought for you,’ said Narayana, ‘ there is nothing that Narayana wouldn’t give, my dear, so long as you obey him in all things as meet. I bought it at Ujjaini and brought it here specially for you.’

‘ Did you ? ’ said Saraswati, ‘ thank you.’

He took the cocoanut and gave it to her. She said, ‘ How shall we cut it up ? Have you a knife ? ’

‘ An excellent one,’ said Narayana and drew a long knife, with a broad blade of the finest steel of Takshasila. He took the cocoanut from Saraswati and cut it up almost ready for drinking. Nothing more was necessary but to dig a hole in the middle and the juice would come.

When this stage was reached, Saraswati took it back from him and, having also got the knife, pierced the inner skin and drank. She professed herself satisfied after drinking a little. Then she took the cocoanut, found the hole too small, made it larger, and said to Narayana, 'You, drink the rest, you also must needs be thirsty.'

And she offered the cocoanut with the left hand. The knife was in her right. Narayana said he was not over-thirsty but that to humour her he would drink it; he put the cocoanut to his lips, leaned his neck backward and his eyes upward and began drinking the water. A wild gleam shone in Saraswati's eyes, she prayed for a moment, and then plunged the knife fully up to the hilt into the exposed neck of Narayana whose eyes were averted and thus had not noticed her and her actions. The knife point came at the other side of the neck, a stream of hot blood gushed forth, and the villain Narayana fell back without a cry, without a groan—dead. Saraswati, horrified at the sight of the red blood running down even staining her hands and dress, reeled back to the bed and fainted.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ESCAPE FROM HUNAGARH

It was almost midnight when Saraswati recovered and looked round her. She had no definite idea of what had taken place and so half hazily, half bewilderedly looked round. The light was burning luridly and by its ominous night could be seen the corpse of Narayana grim and stark with blood all around it on the floor. The coconut had dropped from his lifeless hands and had rolled round to a corner. The milk and plantains were still on the table. Saraswati slowly recovered consciousness and bit by bit recollected the horrid events of the night. As she thought of it, her head reeled and to strengthen herself she took the cup of milk and drank it off at a gulp. She felt considerably relieved and pondered on what she should do. She knew that she had slain one of the most influential of the favourites of the Hun, that if she stayed there she must first lose her honour and then her life. So she resolutely got up prepared to flee. But whither was she to flee? Just then, her eye fell on the bunch of keys in the dead villain's girdle. She took it up and, much as she hated it, extricated the knife from the dead body, wiped its blade in the dead man's clothes, took it, and went out of the room after having put out the light. She was about to go off to another room when an idea struck her; she returned to her room and locked the door with the corpse within. Then she went to the next room and peeped in through the key hole. It was in perfect darkness and she could make nothing out. She however heard the man within shifting uneasily hither and thither as a man whom sleep had not enfolded in her embrace. She put her mouth close to the key hole and asked, 'Who is there?' and waited for an answer. 'I,

Hari Ram,' came the faint reply. She opened the door as softly as she could and went in. Hari Ram got up and asked, 'Who is this that comes at this untimely part of the night and with a knife too?'

'It is Saraswati, uncle,' said Saraswati in a low voice.

'Is it Saraswati? Can it be?' said Hari Ram in utter surprise.

'Yes it is she,' said Saraswati.

'And how did you manage to escape?' asked Hari Ram.

'All that later. Take this knife and cut those hempen cords of yours,' said Saraswati.

'What! got a knife to free me! You are not Saraswati. You are an angel. But I cannot move my hands or feet. Please cut them with your own sweet hands.' Saraswati cut off the intricate cords that bound his hands and freed them. Then he did the rest for himself and asked her what he should do next. She showed him the bunch of keys and gave him the knife asking him to open every door, to release every one of their party and escape while yet there was time. To delay pursuit she advised Hari Ram to lock the doors up as formerly after having released the prisoners. Hari Ram was astounded. 'Is this dream?' he said half to himself.

'No, it is dead earnest. Hari Ram, you have been a robber, you have been subject to sudden arrests and hasty releases and shouldn't be surprised at anything,' said Saraswati.

'Oh! I am not surprised at my release so much as at my releaser. How came my daughter to possess the keys and knife?' asked Hari Ram. 'Narayana came with them to my room. He came to insult me. I stabbed him. God knows I had no other way of saving my honour. He died. I took off these things, locked the room, and came here,' said Saraswati.

Hari Ram had been too astounded to express his surprise, but now he said, 'You have slain Narayana? You are a heroine, Saraswati. You have avenged Narayani. You

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out of the prison-ground, out of the Hun encampments, out of the main gateway, and were off on the road without making the least noise. After having proceeded some time along the road they accelerated their speed and were off in dead earnest to reach some place of safety and refuge before the Huns could overtake them. As Hari Ram was the person who chose the horses, they were the very best in the stables; besides, the Huns would be forced to pursue on foot. Moreover, all people of Hari Ram's party (except the three captives) were expert horsemen who had been bred up to horsemanship; without a saddle, without a stirrup, without a spur, these young men could ride as well as the best of the modern day Cossacks, though it must be admitted that the men of Hari Ram would have considered it an indignity to be compared to a barbarous race in the then barbarous west.

All along the way till now Hari Ram had kept quiet. Saraswati was seated before him on the same horse and from time to time he fondly and proudly looked at her. Now he turned to his men and said, 'Comrades, behold your Saviour.'

'We know it already. Long live Hari Ram!' cried all the men.

'No, I mean not myself. I am not your Saviour. It is this angel that hath saved you,' said Hari Ram and he narrated the incidents. 'Long live Saraswati! Long live she!' shouted the robbers.

'Jaya Jaya Saraswati Maharani,' said Hari Ram and all his men echoed this jubilantly. It is very doubtful whether Raghupati or Hari Ram felt prouder on this occasion. Not a man in that whole group but did not admire Saraswati. All gazed stupefied at this tender beautiful maiden who had been capable of such a heroic deed. Bhadrabahu murmured:—

'What sayeth the Jina? "Destroy not any life be it

that of the weakest. And here this beautiful maiden has killed that sinner." But continueth the blessed Jina, "He who in thought attempts the honour of a woman will become a tree in the next birth; if in word, he will become a stone; if in deed, he presently becomes an animal." And this wicked man attempted in deed. He presently became a brute. And so that the words of the Blessed One might come true He infused courage into this virtuous maiden to despatch him to the other world so that he might change the deceptive form of a man and take that of an animal instead.'

'The Jina is wise,' said Hari Ram, 'but if he had condemned this deed I would have wished the Devil to take your Jina.'

Bhadrabahu was thunderstruck at this display of blasphemy and said, 'Nay, nay, brother, you say well that he is wise but as to the Devil taking him it is the Devil which prompts you to say so.'

'Ay, Ay, brother,' replied Hari Ram, 'I only said that if Jina had said otherwise which Jina never will do. And so those who say otherwise are saying the contrary of what he said. What Jina says is truth. The contrary must therefore be a confounded lie. Jina is inspired by God; the other by God's contrary, the Devil. So you see that that man who calls himself Jina and gives just the contrary opinion to what the real Jina said is inspired by the Devil and it is only right that the Devil takes his own.'

'You say true,' said Bhadrabahu. 'I know that you are always a good man at bottom whatsoever the temptations of the world may drive you into.' Now the morning had begun to dawn and they were full thirty miles away from Hunagarh. They urged on their horses to the utmost and towards noon reached a forest where Hari Ram and his comrades, more versed in practical forestry than many of our present forest officials, selected certain fine mango

trees, and, it being the season for ripe mangoes, climbed up the trees and threw down hundreds of excellent ripe mangoes, which the company below picked up. On the ground were strewn numbers of mango fruits which had previously fallen and were fast decaying, infested by insects of all kinds. While the party were engaged in gathering the ripe mangoes, one of the men cried out that he was bitten by a snake. The thick undergrowth of long grass and creepers so common in the luxuriant vegetation of a tropical forest conceals often the deadliest and most poisonous of cobras one bite of which is sufficient to send the unhappy recipient straight to the footstool of the King of the Dead. As soon as the party heard the cry, Hari Ram ran to the spot and found a huge cobra of about six feet length gliding away through the grass. Calling out to his men to kill the serpent, he asked the bitten man to point out the spot where he was bitten. The unhappy man pointed to the little toe of the left leg. Without the least hesitation, Hari Ram drew Narayana's knife which he had fastened to the girdle and cut off the portion. The poor victim cried out in intense pain, the onlookers were horrified, but Hari Ram after looking at the mutilated part exclaimed, 'Thank God he is saved. The poison has not yet spread to the foot.' Meanwhile two of the party had smashed the snake up with sticks and were ready to smash another if they could find it. Saraswati roused by the noise had come up from where she was left on the road with Raghupati and Bhadrabahu and seeing the poor man crying bitterly at the intense pain he experienced said, 'It is best as it is. If the toe had not been cut off, you would have died. O, such a huge deadly cobra!' said she as one of the men brought the dead snake there.

'But how is it, uncle, some people say a mere sucking of plaintain juice is enough to cure a cobra bite?' asked Saraswati.

'Yes, it is enough,' said Hari Ram. 'But it should be done immediately before the poison has spread.' Where are we to go for a plantain here? Before we reach it, the poor man would have died. What I did is the best under the circumstances.'

'Why, here is a poor creature killed,' observed Bhadrabahu who had just come up and seen the snake.

'Why, you rascal, you don't mean to sympathize with the snake? The snake bit me, man, and I lost my toe, my toe, see, see,' roared the poor victim of the cobra.

'Ay! brother, you lost your toe, the snake its life. And life is a greater thing than a toe,' remarked Bhadrabahu.

'Pray, don't madden him, keep quiet, will you?' said Hari Ram observing the robber grow red with anger.

'So be it, son. I wish you would soon recover,' said Bhadrabahu to the robber who was bitten. He then asked for a branch of the Sanjivi tree. It is a tree abounding in forests. A branch was soon brought and he applied its juice to the poor man's bleeding foot. The patient uttered such a roar as even shook Hari Ram, but Bhadrabahu, though he would revolt at cruelty, was not the man to shrink from inflicting pain if he knew that pain to be ultimately beneficial to the man. So he applied the juice in greater quantity while two of his comrades held the robber firmly down and prevented him from getting up and running away. After some five minutes the scalding sensation disappeared, the robber felt considerably relieved, the flow of the blood stopped, and the wound was showing signs of closing up. Having tied up the wound with a piece of cloth, the party took their food of mangoes and some other forest fruits, drank some fresh water from the forest springs and then took to their horses. So they journeyed on for eight days stopping only at nights and for meals. On the morning of the ninth day they reached Hari Ram's own forest of Viswakarani.

CHAPTER XV

THE RIFT IN THE LUTE

SOON after he parted from Baladitya, Yasodharman had galloped for a mile or two in order to make the parting more speedy and less painful. But as soon as he felt sure that Baladitya must be quite out of sight he loosened the reins and allowed the horse to walk at its own pace. The horse would trot for some time, relapse into a walk and come to a full stop when the rider would wake up from his reverie and lazily make it move on by a slight kick on its flank. It was obvious that Yasodharman was plunged in deep meditation. The crowded experiences of the past few days occupied his mind. While the events were taking place, there had been little time for thought, all his energies had been required for action. Now when there was nothing particular to do, naturally he began thinking over each episode.

The first thing that occupied his mind was Baladitya. He thought of this descendant of the Guptas with strangely mingled feelings. He had always had a warm personal attachment for him. He had been brought up as the playmate of Baladitya. Together they had played many and many a game. Those were comparatively happy days. The Gupta empire though shaken and deprived of its western provinces was still so strong that none thought that it would ever go out of existence altogether. Founded by Chandragupta, extended and glorified by Samudragupta, still more enlarged and consolidated by Vikramaditya, kept up in its full power by Kumaragupta, the empire had seemed to bear a charmed existence. The spirit of Kumaradevi seemed to have kept guard over the creation of her son



' YASODHARMA SAT ON THE VERANDAH WATCHING THE
SUN SINK ' (Page 127)

till the evil day when the Huns came pouring in and internal treason and external aggression destroyed the glorious structure. Yasodharman remembered vividly how he had been allowed every privilege equally with Baladitya. As his thoughts wandered to those ever-receding days of his childhood, he remembered the many acts of kindness he had received at the hands of Baladitya. Always he had been kind to him. They had been like two brothers born of one mother, attached to one another more than brothers usually are. Of course, they had quarrelled many times but always it had been over trifles of no importance and the quarrel had lasted only a few days leaving a stronger and steadier attachment behind. Theirs was a friendship which had been tried by many quarrels and so was as solid as the Indian *Gopuras* which have withstood the ravages of the wildest wind and storm and rain for centuries. This was the reason why Yasodharman had rushed to Ujjaini on hearing that Baladitya was visiting the abode of the Huns alone and unattended.

When Yasodharman's thoughts wandered to that night on which he met Bhumaka, his face was lit up with joy as he remembered his rescue by his beloved friend.

But soon his mind wandered on to those subconscious fears of his. Two things he had observed in the course of the last few days which had filled him with grave anxiety. Try as he might to crush those thoughts which disturbed his peace of mind, they kept continually coming back like steel springs when the pressure on them is removed, with a greater intensity. These thoughts were firstly about Saraswati and secondly about Baladitya's supposed partiality towards heretical Buddhism.

Yasodharman had regarded the intimacy of Baladitya with Saraswati with undisguised dislike. He had a great regard for that lady. He was not insensible to her charms, but he kept it as his cardinal principle that people should

marry in their own ranks. He regarded a marriage of a prince like Baladitya with the daughter of a common citizen as derogatory to the dignity of the imperial house of the Guptas. Was the descendant of the daughter of the Lichchavis to wed a common citizen? Moreover, while they were preparing to fight the barbarian Huns by organizing a league of Hindu princes to defend the *Sanatana Dharma*¹ here was Baladitya making love to a commoner with no influence instead of marrying a princess from some royal house and strengthening the good cause by the accession of a loyal ally with a powerful army.

Then, again, the tendencies towards Buddhism shown by Baladitya caused much pain to his friend. Here they were trying to organize the shattered forces of Hinduism against the wild onrush of the barbarian. The new Hinduism which had slowly gathered strength in the days of the imperial Guptas was now in full swing and an antagonism to Buddhism was being exhibited by those affected by it. Yasodharman had been from his early childhood a strong devotee of the new movement and had an almost unreasoning dislike of the great founder of Buddhism. To him it was very disconcerting to find that his dearest friend, the person who was to be the leader of the proposed confederacy, was perhaps a favourer of those very heretical doctrines which he abhorred from the bottom of his heart.

As he brooded over these thoughts, Yasodharman became very sad, but recovering himself with an effort he said, 'What foolish thoughts occur to my mind! Why do I dread those things which might never happen? Did not Baladitya himself deny the fact of his love? But then he was not vehement in his denial. Oh God! What a thing is this mind? Will it never stop troubling me with its cease-

¹ The Ancient Hindu Rule of Life.

less fears? Truly has the poet said, "You may ride the mad elephant, you may tame the roaring lion, you may cross the stormy seas, you may even attain heaven, but you cannot stop your mind from thinking even for half a second. Oh mind, thou wonderful creation of a wonderful God!"'

By this time Yasodharman had approached a wayside choultry. He stopped his horse and got down. It was getting on towards the evening. The horse needed a rest badly. He went inside the choultry and gave his name to the choultry-keeper for meals. Afterwards he tied the horse to a pillar in the *mandapam*¹ outside and then sat on the verandah watching the sun sink down in the western horizon.

While he was immersed in this his attention was suddenly roused by cries of 'Ram! Ram!' He looked round and saw approaching from the south two men dressed in yellow robes and having heavy neck-laces of sacred basil beads and *rudraksha*² round their necks. Each had in his right hand a stick 5 ft. long and in his left a brass pot. One of the two seemed to be about forty years old by his appearance and had such a benevolent smile that anybody would be impressed with his goodness. The other was only about thirty and was far more serious and reserved. As they approached Yasodharman, they said, 'Peace be on you!' Yasodharman perceived by their habits that they were *sanyasis*, but he wanted to be quite sure as to who they really were before he mixed with them. Since the days of the Mauryas and Chanakya spies dressed in *sanyasi's* robes were not at all uncommon, and Yasodharman was not such a fool as to be deceived by outward appearances. Soon reassuring himself that they were only

¹ A stone structure in front of Hindu temples, choultries, etc.

² Some bead necklaces worn by different Hindu sects.

ordinary *sanyasis* of the New Hindu revival he accosted them and said, 'Oh! reverend sirs, where do you come from?'

'That is what I would fain know,' replied the elder one. 'Where do I come from? Where was I before I came into this vale of tears, this abode of sorrow, this ocean of misery? What was my state before I immersed in this sea of *samsara*¹ striving to reach the further shores? How many previous births have I experienced, what was the nature of each, how are they all related to my present birth, how many more weary births and deaths must I suffer before I am finally merged in the Universal soul which is God? Can any one tell me all these or any of these? Wearily have I wandered ever since my eighteenth year to find out the solutions to my doubts. For twenty long years have I wandered from place to place asking man, woman and child whether any of them had any help to offer me. But alas! for me, nowhere have I had a satisfactory reply. We are all passing our existence in the darkness of ignorance. We do not know much that is really worth knowing about the problems of life and death, the mystery of existence. Will we ever know?'

'Oh! brother,' said the younger one, 'you are confusing our friend here by your talks about life and death, God and Eternity. What he wanted to know was where we came from immediately and not where we came from ultimately. Friend, we come from the banks of the Narmada and are on our way to Holy Kasi.'

'Thanks, reverend sir' replied Yasodharman considerably relieved. 'Now, may I know the names of the most holy men to whom I have the honour to talk?'

'Certainly,' replied the younger one. 'My name is Subandhu and my friend's name is Agnanandhakara.'

¹ Existence.

‘Most impressive names,’ remarked Yasodharman. ‘The meaning of one is Good Friend, the meaning of the other is Darkness of Ignorance. What a name! Darkness of Ignorance! Why have you taken this name, O best of holy men?’

‘Friend,’ replied Agnanandhakara, ‘my life, my life’s experiences have been responsible for this. I was a lay man like you, full of the joy of life, careless as a bird on its wings. In those days I was a student at Ujjaini. I married the girl of my choice, the sweetest girl that ever lived. Then one day, I shall never forget that day, my wife gave birth to a child and both mother and child died the same night. All the joy of my life disappeared even as the joyous dew-drops are dried up by the fierce rays of the sun. As I knelt by my dying wife to give her a last kiss, she murmured half audibly, “Dearest, do not weep for me. Who knows about the mysteries of existence? Who can say whence we came and whither we go?” and she passed away. From that time I left hearth and home, put on the robes of a *sanyasin* and have wandered ever since, trying to delve into the mysteries of life and death. I have been all over this Bharatavarsha,¹ this great and noble land. I have spent many nights in the shadow of the snowy peaks of the Himalayas; I have been to the enchanting Manasarowar that most beautiful of all lakes; I have been on the banks of the Sindhu and Ganga and Brahmaputra; I have seen all the holy places from Kasi to Rameswaram; I have spent three years in the majestic solitude of Dandakaranya.² Not only this, I have visited the cities also lest perchance I should be enlightened there. Many times have I been to Pataliputra and Ujjaini, to Takshasila and Ayodhya, to Madura and Kanchi. Nay, I have been to distant lands

¹ India, so called after her emperor Bharata, son of Sakuntala.

² A mighty forest in Central India extending as far south as the Tungabhadra.

across the seas, to Sumatra and to Java, to Kambhoja and to Suvaranabhumi.¹ Many sleepless nights have I spent on the banks of the Indragiri,² the Mekong and the Irrawaddy. I have been on the wide wide seas seeking inspiration from the waves below and the sky above. But nowhere have I found the solution to my problems. Like a soul which is said to wander for ever on being denied its funeral offerings I too have wandered far and wide only to realize the utter fruitlessness of my search. The tragic consciousness that my life has been a failure sometimes oppresses me. This darkness of ignorance stifles me. I cry for light and find it not. With the sages of old I cry, "Lead me from the unreal to the real, lead me from darkness to light, lead me from death to immortality!" So you see I have assumed this name not without cause.'

'Oh! reverend sir,' said Yasodharman, 'you have given me full reasons. I should like to hear the story of your quest for surely the experiences of a man like you in a search like this must be worth knowing. But first let us see about some food.'

¹ Kambhoja—Cambodia ; Suvarnabhumi—Burma

² A river in the Island of Sumatra.

CHAPTER XVI

IN A WAYSIDE CHOULTRY

WITH this, Yasodharman went in and told the choultry keeper in a loud voice, 'Two more.' That worthy came out to verify this fact and with him came four others who had come earlier. The choultry-keeper was a Brahman about forty-five years old. His name was Kamalaksha. The most remarkable thing about him was his belly. This part of his body had so developed at the expense of the remaining members that it would be much more correct to describe Kamalaksha as a belly with the other limbs attached thereto than as a man with a big belly. Kamalaksha had not that benevolent look ascribed so often to pot-bellied men. Nay, this day he had a distinctly misanthropic look about him and it did not disappear even when he saw the two *sanyasis*.

'Salutations, holy men,' he said to them in a half-injured voice.

'Blessings, my son, may you live a hundred years,' said Agnanandhakara and Subandhu. 'I hope I shall not be in this office so long,' muttered Kamalaksha. 'Why?' asked Subhandu. 'Are you unhappy here? Methinks you are rather fortunate to live in this peaceful place with nothing to care about.' 'The cares of the belly exist even in peaceful places,' said Kamalaksha. 'You don't mean to say that your belly is not cared for? Why, man, your belly looks more like a mountain than like a human belly,' said Yasodharman and broke out laughing.

Kamalaksha was furious. He said, 'Oh! reverend sir, at least my belly eats only what I cook. I know some others' bellies which require to be filled by other people's labour.'

At this the four companions of the choultry keeper broke out laughing. Yasodharman also heartily joined in the laughter and said, 'Bravo!' Kamalaksha was mollified at this universal testimony to his genius and so was prepared to be gracious. He said, 'So you are seven. Let me write down all your names, worthy sirs.' With that he took a palm leaf and got ready to write with a stylo. 'One by one, please,' he said, 'first your name, then the place you come from, then the place you go to, lastly the probable duration of your stay here which last should in no case exceed three days. Now begin.' The four who had accompanied Kamalaksha at once broke out all simultaneously, 'Udarananda, Kunapadanta, Vatavyadhi, Sukracharya.' Kamalaksha laid down his stylo in disgust. 'If you go on at this rate I shall never write down your names and no food shall be cooked to-day. If you want your meals, give your names one by one.' Again came the chorus but this time it was 'Sukracharya, Vatavyadhi, Kunapadanta, Udarananda.' 'I say,' roared Kamalaksha, 'you are the people who bring choultry-eaters into such contempt. You at least, Udarananda, are a *sanyasi*. Surely, you can afford to wait a second.'

'Friend Kamalaksha,' returned Udarananda, 'you forget that a *sanyasi* has got a belly as much as any other man. I am not one of those ascetics who torture their body for the fancied benefit of their soul. I believe in the philosophy of Charvaka.' 'What! Of the man who asked people to borrow money and drink ghee!' exclaimed Yasodharman.

'Yes, of that same Charvaka,' returned Udarananda coolly. 'Could there be two such shrewd men in a country like ours? All our so-called sages craved for knowledge of the other world. Few were endowed with knowledge of this world. Charvaka is the only one I can remember.' 'I dispute it,' said Sukracharya. 'What is it worth to proclaim

such a doctrine? The joy of drinking ghee is taken away by the consciousness that it has been bought with borrowed money. Does the trouble end there? O, no. The untold misery consequent upon the pesterings of the creditor is a thing to which only those who have experienced that torture can testify. The head hangs down with shame, the heart is filled with forebodings, and the soul becomes an abject coward at the very sight of the creditor. Nay, the evil does not end even there. The creditor, disappointed at the loss of his money, files a suit in the king's court and straightway our houses and chattels are sold, our wives and children left in the street, and ourselves haled off to gaol where there is not the least hope of sighting ghee. Now let us drop the question of consequences. Let us simply assume a non-moral, non-civic attitude. Even then, I hold that Charvaka's advice was eminently foolish. For once you are known to borrow money only to drink ghee, who is going to lend any more money to you? Considering all this, I regard Visweswara Bhatta, my *guru*, to be a far wiser man than Charvaka.'

'What did Visweswara Bhatta say?' queried Udarananda.

'He said, "Drink the ghee which is given free at *Sraddhas*¹ and other ceremonies and think of nothing more." This eminently wise advice has three advantages over that of Charvaka; the supply of ghee is extended over a far longer time than in the case of the follower of Charvaka, the offering is free and leaves no anxieties behind, and, last but not least, we get many other excellent things besides ghee.' 'But,' retorted Udarananda, 'if you go to *Sraddhas* you must pay lip homage to God.'

'What if?' returned Sukracharya. 'Is it too great a price to pay for getting ghee? Moreover, when you borrow money have you not to swear by God that you will return

¹ Anniversaries of dead people.

it? Nothing is wholly an unmixed good in this world. Even a jack fruit has its thorns.'

Udarananda did not know what to say. So the controversy was closed by a triumphant declaration by Sukracharya that he had yet to know a wiser man than Visweswara Bhatta. The other people in the assembly did not take any part in the interesting controversy between Udarananda and Sukracharya.

After the controversy was closed, Kamalaksha said, 'Now, gentlemen, let me go and cook. I suppose your holinesses will only take milk and bananas,' he said turning to Agnanandhakara and Subandhu. 'Yes,' replied they. 'I shall take a full-dress dinner,' said Udarananda. 'I know it,' said Kamalaksha, 'but I am sorry that no ghee is served at nights.' 'Who is responsible for this superstition? Will our land be never rid of these foolish superstitions?' queried Udarananda indignantly. 'If you come to think of it, night is no worse than day. I should even say that it is much better. We can most of us do without the day. Can any of us do without the night and its soothing sleep? Again, in a hot country like ours, night is the only thing which makes life tolerable. And yet, our philosophers, kings and legislators are all one in ignorantly condemning night. The philosopher compares night to ignorance and sin, the king forbids assemblies and even battles at night, the legislator forbids the giving of loans at night. When will our unfortunate country improve?'

None in the company seemed to share Udarananda's anxiety about the country, so that worthy turned in a last desperate move to Kamalaksha and said, 'Friend Kamalaksha, please treat mine as a special case. I have never been accustomed to eat a meal without ghee.' 'Friend Udarananda,' said Sukracharya, 'you don't mean to say that you enjoyed such unbroken credit?'

'I mean it,' said Udarananda, 'and when they refused

to lend me I used to fast rather than eat a meal without ghee. O! what a meal that would be!' 'True,' said Sukracharya, 'do not our *sastras* say that a meal without ghee is not a pure meal?'

'My dear fellow,' replied Udarananda, 'do we want the *sastras* to tell us that? Are not our homely bellies enough?'

'Fool!' said Sukracharya, 'who does not know that the *sastras* are the results of long experience? The best bellies of those days testified to the necessity for ghee in a proper meal. If our bellies confirm that profoundly wise discovery, does that detract anything from the value of the statement?'

'But why add the superstitious things about purifying the meal?' queried Udarananda. 'The reason is obvious,' retorted Sukracharya. 'For good or for evil, the masses are superstitious. To appeal to them everything must have a cloak of religion. So our ancestors talked about purifying the meal and got as much ghee as they wanted. Mind you, those wise men never talked about their bellies, they always talked about purity and saw their bellies filled. You will only talk about your belly and will get nothing from the people except the reputation of being a glutton.' 'In the present state of society,' said Udarananda, 'I must admit that what you say is true.'

'It will always be true in our country,' replied Sukracharya. 'Our people are essentially religious. Everything must be conveyed to them in a religious garb. If we want them to bathe, we must insist on its religious benefits, if we want them to give alms, we have again to resort to the religious basis. Nay, even prostitution has been clothed in a religious garb in order to satisfy this peculiarity of our race.' 'Gentlemen,' said Kamalaksha, who was getting tired of these long discussions, 'off I go. No ghee for the night, that is settled. Of course, if you are prepared to pay for it,

I shall have it bought from the village,' said he turning to Udarananda.

'I have no objection,' said Udarananda, 'provided that you advance the requisite amount since I have no money at present with me.'

'What!' said Kamalaksba in utter astonishment. 'You want to borrow money from me and drink ghee! I never thought that even the followers of Charvaka would be so impudently bold.' There was general laughter at this. But Udarananda calmly replied, 'It is not the first time I am refused a loan. So I have nothing to be chagrined about.' 'So you will fast to-day?' asked Kamalaksha.

'Why?' queried Udarananda indignantly.

'Because you said that you always fasted rather than take a meal without ghee,' said Kamalaksha.

'Oh, you mean that,' said Udarananda, 'but, as a special case, I shall take my meals to-day without ghee. I am dead tired,' and Udarananda tried to look tired.

'Well, I shall go and begin cooking,' said Kamalaksha and went in.

'I say,' said Udarananda, 'is he going to begin only now? When will our meals be ready?'

'Let us ask the astrologer,' said Kunapadanta.

'Friend magician,' said Sukracharya, 'you don't rate me so low as to think that I am concerned with such low things as when a meal will be ready?'

'Why?' said Vatavyadhi, who was a wandering philosopher, 'logic tells us that if you can correctly predict one thing you can do another with equal ease.'

'Of course, of course,' replied Sukracharya, 'my ability to predict is not in question. I only hold that an astrologer's divine gifts should not be devoted to such essentially low things as finding out when a meal will be ready.'

'Friend,' said Vatavyadhi with great contempt, 'it is rather difficult for a learned man like me to argue with a person who has not been through a University, but I should say that even you might understand that there is nothing too great or too little for a really great man.' 'Vatavyadhi,' said Sukracharya indignantly, 'you insinuate that I have not been to a university. Why, I was at Benares for two years and at Takshasila for fifteen. In fact, I learnt my art at the feet of the celebrated Sankarsana.'

'When were you at these Universities?' asked Vatavyadhi. 'And you have the impudence to say that you learnt astrology at the feet of Sankarsana! Do you not know that Sankarsana teaches medicine and only medicine? Man, do not dare to contradict me. I was at Benares for ten years, at Nalanda for two years and at Takshasila for twelve years.'

Sukracharya was dumbfounded. He feebly attempted to say, 'In my days Sankarsana used to teach astrology.' But Vatavyadhi indignantly said, 'Never. The man who has been teaching astrology for the last thirty years is Krishna Jyotsyar.'

Sukracharya bit his lips in chagrin and remained silent. 'Friend Vatavyadhi,' said Udarananda, who was secretly satisfied at the discomfiture of Sukracharya, 'can you tell me what the name of this place is and who founded this choultry.'

'That I can,' replied Vatavyadhi. 'This place is near a village called Vijayapur and this choultry was founded by a Jain named Santideva.'

'You are wrong,' shouted out Sukracharya, 'the man's name was Santadeva, not Santideva.' Thereupon ensued a terrific discussion in grammar between Sukracharya and Vatavyadhi in which finally the latter got the victory owing to his superior assertiveness.

After this, there was dead silence for a few minutes. It was broken by Yasodharman who began asking Agnanandhakara to relate his experiences. Agnanandhakara replied, 'We may be disturbing the others.' 'Oh, no,' said Yasodharman, 'they have been disturbing us so long. So we have a right to disturb them.'

'Don't say so,' said Agnanandhakara. 'Never will one evil be an excuse for another, nor will ever one evil conquer another. Violence will never conquer violence, anger will never win a victory over anger. Violence is conquered by non-violence, anger by love. Of course, you may say that sometimes force conquers force and anger anger. But these conquests are never permanent. They are as fleeting as the passing wind. Really abiding conquests can only be achieved as I have indicated above. Can any military captive be as effectually conquered as a maiden conquered by love? Again, take this other example. Mihiragula is perhaps the angriest of men. Does he command more obedience than the great Asoka who was seldom angry? The force of Asoka's love wrought more on people's hearts than the anger of the Hun.'

'Pray, do not talk disparagingly of the Hun. His spies are everywhere and his vengeance is terrible and certain,' said Sukracharya.

'True,' said Vatavyadhi, Kunapadanta and Udarananda, 'we would better not listen to anything against the Hun.'

'Then you may retire,' said Yasodharman in wrath. 'Are you such base cowards as to tremble at the very name of the Hun?'

'Friend,' said Sukracharya, 'you seem to be a Kshatriya and so you are not afraid of the Hun. But I am a Brahmin, what can I do but be afraid?'

'Yes, what can we do, we Brahmins?' asked Kunapadanta, Vatavyadhi and Udarananda.

'Why?' asked Yasodharman. 'Are not Agnanandhakara and Subandhu Brahmins? And yet, are they cowards like you? A Brahmin can be as courageous as any other body. In fact, he being not a soldier in the coarse sense, he can fight with a greater courage. He may not be able to wield a sword but he can yet resist the tyrant as heroically as any other human being. Do you remember the proud dignity with which that Brahmin *Sanyasi* refused to go to Alexander, do you remember the way in which twenty-five Brahmins, who had advised the King of Sindh to resist Alexander, met their death heroically at the hands of Alexander? Cowards, if you are determined to be cowards and nothing more, pray do not at least drag your Brahminhood to your aid.'

'Well,' said Vatavyadhi, 'it is not unnatural for a man to think of saving his life, considering that without life no good act can be rendered. Better be a coward and live than be called bold and die!' 'Well said!' exclaimed Sukracharya. 'Besides, the course proposed by our friend here is suicidal. And suicide is considered to be a deadly sin by our holy *sastras*.'

'Not only that,' said Kunapadanta, 'if we die at once, the evil may not be so great. But the Hun may torture us, till we feel all the pains under the sun.'

'Yes,' said Udarananda, 'and perhaps in the other world there may be no ghee. Then what will become of us?' At this all the rest laughed. 'Now for your story,' said Yasodharman to Agnanandhakara. 'Gentlemen,' he said turning to Vatavyadhi, Kunapadanta, Sukracharya and Udarananda, 'those who are anxious for their skins may leave. So also those who are friends of the Hun.' The four left the place without further invitation. As they left, Sukracharya whispered to Vatavyadhi, 'This man here seems to be a Kshatriya of the old type. He has no fear of the Hun.'

‘Yes,’ said Vatavyadhi, ‘I am not surprised at him since he is a soldier as his appearance indicates. But who are these *sanyasis* who, Brahmans like ourselves, are yet unafraid of the Hun?’ ‘I don’t know,’ said Sukracharya. ‘Methinks they are not real *sanyasis* but the spies of Baladitya.’

‘Or of Mihiragula,’ said Kunapadanta. ‘It is very hard in these days to distinguish clearly between the spies of the contending parties.’

‘Quite so,’ said Udarananda, ‘so I am jolly glad that we are rid of these fellows.’

‘What shall we do now?’ queried Sukracharya.

‘We shall go and see how the cooking is proceeding,’ said Sukracharya, and all four went into the kitchen.

‘Why have you all come here?’ asked Kamalaksha.

‘The other three are talking about the Hun. So we came away,’ said Sukracharya. ‘I see,’ said Kamalaksha, ‘will they bring ruin on me by talking their politics in this choultry?’

‘Very likely!’ said Sukracharya, and Kamalaksha was perturbed.

‘I shall straightway go and tell these fellows that they won’t get any food here to-night,’ said Kamalaksha.

‘Friend Kamalaksha,’ said Vatavyadhi, ‘that Kshatriya will soon send you to the other world if you hint about that.’

‘What,’ said Kamalaksha, ‘will a Kshatriya dare to kill a Brahmin and incur deadly sin?’ ‘Why not?’ said Vatavyadhi, ‘the Huns have killed many Brahmans and have not come to any grief. So the Kshatriyas are being disillusioned. Besides, if he performs a *prayaschitta*¹ afterwards, the whole sin is washed away.’

‘Ay,’ said Sukracharya, ‘a feast to a thousand Brahmans

¹ An expiatory ceremony.

and fat *dakshinas*¹ too. It is long since I have been to such a feast.'

'So you wish that I should be killed in order that you might get a feast and *dakshina*! Ay?' roared Kamalaksha.

'Pray, don't get angry without reason,' said Sukracharya. 'I am not particular as to which Brahmin should be killed. I only wished that some fellow might meet with his death at the hands of a rich Kshatriya who might afterwards be induced to perform a feast of the kind I described. I shall go even further. I am not at all even anxious that a Brahmin or any other body should be killed provided I get the feast.'

'Now you have become reasonable,' said Vatavyadhi. Kamalaksha became sullen towards Sukracharya who was now all anxiety to please him.

'Friend Kamalaksha,' he implored, 'pray, do not be angry with me. I never meant that you should be killed. You are too useful to be killed. If you are killed, who will cook our meals?' Instead of mollifying Kamalaksha, as it was intended to do, this last sentence only made that worthy burst out in fury, 'What! Am I born to cook for vagabonds like you? I say, you professional choultry-eater, unless you mend your ways, you will soon rue it.'

'I never meant to offend you,' cringed Sukracharya. 'Kamalaksha, I implore you to forget everything that passed between us to-day.'

'I shall see,' said Kamalaksha somewhat consoled by this abject submission.

After this incident, the four worthies kept their peace and Kamalaksha attended to the cooking oblivious of their presence.

'Vatavyadhi,' whispered Udarananda, 'after all, the Kshatriya is not half so bad as this Brahmin. Shall we go back to them?'

¹ Money gifts.

‘ No,’ said Vatavyadhi, ‘ they will now take us for spies.’

‘ But we can't remain here, that is certain,’ said Sukracharya. ‘ Then we shall sit in a lonely corner by ourselves,’ suggested Kunapadanta. Then all the four went and seated themselves in a dark corner. They dared not talk except in whispers owing to fear of Kamalaksha on the one hand and Yasodharman on the other. So they remained till meal-time.

CHAPTER XVII

AGNANANDHAKARA

MEANWHILE, Agnanandhakara had begun giving an account of his travels to Yasodharman and Subandhu. Subandhu also had not heard the story before and so was as interested as Yasodharman in the recital.

‘I was just past eighteen,’ said Agnanandhakara in a low tone, ‘when the event that changed the whole course of my life took place. As soon as my wife was dead and her ceremonies over, I put on the yellow robes of a *Sanyasi*,¹ took a stick and a bowl and went out into the wide wide world determined to solve the problem of existence, the mysteries of life and death. I was then young and vigorous and, like all young and vigorous people, hopeful. Why, I thought, our ancients have said that Benares is the holiest of all holy cities where religion is the soul of life and philosophy the breath of existence. Why not I go to Holy Kasi?² Surely, in a day or two some one of the great teachers there will solve my problem and I can return to Ujjaini. So thinking, I went to Benares. To my surprise, I found Benares more full of bulls than teachers, and priests than philosophers. Still I did not lose hope. I approached one of the priests and said, “Friend, I want to know the mysteries of existence, the problem of life and death.” “Go, to the burning ghat and ponder,” he replied and went away. Obedient to his behest, I went to the burning ghat and stood there. I saw three corpses being burnt and some fellows warming themselves by the fire. “Have you brought a corpse?” inquired

¹ A monk ; literally, one who has renounced all worldly pleasures, conquered all material desires and is solely engaged in seeking God.

² Another name for Benares.

the keeper of the burning ghat of me. "No," said I. "Perhaps you will soon bring one?" he said. "Not likely," said I. "Then why do you crowd the place? Make way for better men" he shouted and I had to go away. I walked a few steps more and faced the divine Ganges. It was evening. The river was in full flood. I gazed and gazed on the majestic river spread out before me and I said, "Here truly is the real glory of Benares; not its bulls or its priests but its river makes Kasi so famous." I sat down on one of the steps of the ghat and watched and watched the river till dark. I seemed to realize the full import of the problem I had set out to solve. My heart sank within me. "Oh!" I exclaimed. "How can I ever solve this problem?"

'What is your problem?' asked a man who had come and sat near me without my perceiving it. 'My problem is the eternal problem of thinking men, the mysteries of existence, the problem of life and death, the problem of whence we come and whither we go. Have you a solution for it?' I asked.

'I have none,' said he, 'but I know one who has.' 'Who is that?' I eagerly enquired. 'The Lord of Kasi!' he replied. 'You mean the King of Kasi?' I queried. 'There is no such wise King now.' 'I do not mean any earthly King,' he replied. 'I mean the King of Kings, the great God Viswanatha, Lord of the Universe' and he walked away. 'I felt a new energy surging within me. What a fool I had been, I thought, not to have gone at once to Viswanatha's temple? Then I might have been spared so many worries. Better late than never. So I rushed to Viswanatha's temple. A lamp was burning at the gate and there was an inscription which it was meant to illuminate. I looked at the inscription. It read "Sri Viswanath's temple, Kasi. No admission to Panchamas of all denominations." I shrank back. Was the Lord of the Universe

disclaiming the homage of the Panchamas? Was the Great God who had created the Panchamas refusing to admit His children to their Father's presence? My forehead was covered, with beads of perspiration. "Well," said I at last with a laugh, "what a fool I am! This inscription is the work of some presuming mortal swollen with base pride. How is Viswanatha responsible for this diabolical thing? Let me go and ask Him about my problem." And I went in and was about to face the idol in the inner temple when priest came and demanded of me as to who had let me in.' 'I let myself in,' I replied. 'Who is needed to give permission to the weary soul to commune with its creator?'

'Don't talk nonsense,' he replied. 'I am not concerned with your weary soul or its creator. I am concerned with the one-eighth pana which every man, woman and child has to pay me before they enter this temple. Come, give it,' he demanded. I was horrorstruck. Was a person to be forced to pay sordid pelf before he could see Viswanatha? My heart rebelled within me. I said, 'I refuse to pay the dues.' 'Then you can't see Viswanatha,' he said and shut the door of the Holy of Holies. I said, 'I can't see the Viswanatha of the inner temple, but I can see the Viswanatha within me and the Viswanatha around me.' Then I left the temple saying, 'Viswanatha of this temple has to solve numerous problems of his own. He can't aid me in the solution of my problem.'

'As I came again into the street, I saw an old woman coming towards the temple with flowers and a cocoanut in her hand. "Are you the priest?" she asked me, seeing my yellow robes. "No," I said, "I am a humble worshipper like you. It seems everybody has to pay the priest one-eighth pana before he can see Viswanatha," I added with a laugh. "Didn't you know it before?" she asked with a laugh. "No, I said", "I only knew this when I went to the temple." "How sad!" said she, "but don't worry. I shall

pay the money for you too. You should never leave Kasi without seeing Viswanatha." "Madam!", I replied, "I object to making a payment to see God." "How is the poor priest then to live?" she asked.

'With the offerings of the devotees,' I said. 'Is not this one-eighth pana such an offering?' she asked. 'No,' I replied. 'No compulsory payment is an offering.' 'But should not a devotee show that he is ready to sacrifice something in order to see God?' she persisted.

'Certainly,' I replied, 'but the sacrifice is to God and not to the priest. Moreover, we don't see God here. If we really want to see God we should look inside us and around us.'

'Oh, yes,' she replied. 'That is no doubt the best way. But for those who are unable to follow it this idol-worshipping is permitted. Besides, if you say that God is everywhere, He is in that stone image too.' 'Of course,' I replied. 'Look here,' she said. 'Have you bathed in the Holy Ganges? Is that not a magnificent thing? And, mind you, there is neither priest nor payment there unless you want them.' 'I have not yet bathed,' I replied. 'I want to do so to-morrow.' 'So you wanted to enter the temple before bathing in the Ganges?' she said horrified. I said that my crime was out of ignorance. 'You are a *sanyasi*,' she said, 'you ought to know.' 'I am only a *sanyasi* for the last few days,' I replied. 'Tell me one thing, she said.' 'Do you really think that being a *sanyasi* is better than being a householder?' 'No, I don't think so,' I said, 'but since my wife died and I don't want to marry again I have turned *sanyasi* and am wandering about to find out the mysteries of life and death.' 'Your wife is dead?' she inquired, 'poor child! And have you got a mother?' 'She too is dead,' I replied. 'And your father?' 'He too is dead.' 'No wonder, you turned *sanyasi*. What else could you do?' she remarked. 'By the way, have you got a house to live in?' she asked me.

‘No,’ I said. ‘Then come and live in my house. Don’t say nay. There is only myself in that house. I shall make you quite comfortable. You shall be like a son to me as long as you are in Kasi.’ ‘Thank you very much,’ I said considerably relieved at my housing problem being solved, ‘I accept your offer.’ ‘Right O,’ she said. ‘Then please wait a minute while I go into the temple and come. Since you have not bathed, of course, you can’t come in.’ Then she went hurriedly into the temple and I remained in the street idly speculating as to whether her blind faith in the idol was on the whole for good or for evil. Soon my attention was diverted to a man who was standing near the inscription and looking the very picture of sadness. He had bathed and was wearing wet clothes and ashes. I went near him and asked, ‘Why so sad, my friend?’ ‘Oh,’ he said, ‘I am sad at seeing this inscription. I come from Kalinga and am a Panchama by caste. I was told that at Holy Kasi entrance was permitted even to Panchamas. So I came walking to this place and bathed in the Holy Ganges. But now I find that I cannot enter this temple of which I had dreamt so many times. O! the shame of coming to Kasi and going away without seeing Viswanatha!’ ‘Why,’ I said, ‘why can’t you enter? Who is to know that you are a Panchama? You don’t look it.’ His face suddenly had a look of horrified surprise. ‘What,’ he exclaimed, ‘you seem to be a *sanyasi* and yet you give me this advice! What is the use of entering a temple under a false pretence? Not only will no virtue be gained thereby but a great sin also will result.’ I was taken aback. Here was a man considered to be ignorant of *Dharma* and yet his ideal of *Dharma* was higher than that of mine, a Brahmin.’ ‘You are right,’ I told him. ‘Then the only thing you can do will be to cease looking for Viswanatha in this temple and to look for him in your heart and in the world around you.’ He stood thinking for a moment and then said, ‘I

understand ; thank you profoundly for the advice.' Saying this, he went away. Just as he started to go away, the old lady returned from the temple. 'Who was that talking to you?' she asked. 'A Panchama,' I replied. 'Why did the fellow come here?' she queried. 'He did not know that Panchamas were not allowed admission,' I replied. 'What! the wretch had the impudence to think that he would be admitted into the holy temple of Kasi? Well, what next? There is no knowing what would happen under these Huns.' 'Madam,' I replied, 'what have the Huns done for these Panchamas?' 'Well,' she replied, 'in the days of the great Guptas this fellow would have been whipped for his insolence.' 'That is perhaps one of the reasons why the Guptas are unable to resist the Huns,' I replied. The old woman was angry. 'You call yourself a *sanyasi* and say things like this,' she exclaimed. 'Madam,' I replied, 'I speak what I think is the truth.' 'Truth!' she replied scornfully. 'Yes,' I said quietly. 'Well, and what advice did you give him?' she demanded. 'I asked him to leave the Viswanatha of the temple alone and to seek for Viswanatha in his heart and in the world around him.' 'I see,' she said sarcastically. 'And did he find Him?' 'Not yet,' I replied, 'but he has begun to search earnestly and is sure to succeed.' 'I should like to see that,' she replied. 'I am sorry for you. You seem to be bent upon making yourself disliked.' 'I am sorry,' said I, 'I am not going to thrust myself upon anybody. Good-bye, madam.' 'Why good-bye? didn't you promise to come and live with me?' asked she. 'Yes, but I think that the arrangement will be irksome to both of us,' said I. 'You mean because of our difference of opinion about the depressed classes?' she said. 'Not a bit; Have no fear. You are a *sanyasi* and you are not supposed to be tied by the ordinary conventions of the world. So what is heresy in me will be virtue in you.

Come along, don't be sulky. If I have in any way offended you, it is your duty to forget it considering that I am a woman and an old woman too.' I immediately fell in with her request and went to her house. There I took a good meal and slept. I lived in the house of that old woman for many months. Daily I used to go to the river and to the university and talk with all and sundry about the problem that was nearest to my heart. But to no purpose. Scholars and philosophers tried to give a solution but failed. And when I expressed that I was still unsatisfied they grew weary of me. Some of them even grew inimical and said, 'This fellow has assuredly come to hold us up to ridicule because of our inability to solve his seemingly simple problem.' Thereupon one of them told me one day sarcastically, 'The best way to solve your problem would be by trying the experiment yourself. Why not die and see what death really is?' I simply contented myself by telling him that I considered suicide a sin and so could not follow his advice.

'Another day, when I went to take my meals, I was so sad at my inability to find out a solution for my problem,' that the old woman said in a tender voice, 'Child, why worry yourself over this problem? Do we ever worry about what rain gives the river its water or where that water goes when merged in the ocean? So also, it is enough for us to know that our souls were in Heaven before our birth and will go to Heaven after our death.' 'So you don't believe in many births and deaths?' I asked. 'Of course, I do,' replied she. 'What I spoke was about the state before our first birth and after our last death.' 'What happens between the first birth and the last death?' I inquired. 'The soul which came pure from God gets encrusted with impurities which are gradually got rid of in subsequent births till the soul becomes once more pure and merges with God who is the Universal Soul.' I did not

want to make the old lady dissatisfied, because her simple belief in the doctrine which she expounded gave her peace which was, after all, worth many doctrines. Needless to say, I was not satisfied. The burning anguish of my soul was not quenched even in the slightest degree. Gradually, I found that Benares was not the place where I could get the solution for my problem. I decided to leave the city for a more likely place. I had been told by a philosopher in argument, 'If you want solutions for such problems, you should go to the snowy peaks of the Himalayas and not rot in a place like this.' So I left Benares and the old woman with sorrow, and started for the Himalayas. On my starting, the old woman told me, 'Child, I do not know whether you will succeed in your quest. I wish you would but I don't hope for it. I am old and I shall die soon. If my death brings me any new knowledge, I shall try to communicate it to you.' I was too moved to say anything but, 'Mother, I know you would, but I hope that you will live long. Pray, give me your blessings.' She blessed me and I started for Bhadrinath and Rishikul. Those places were said to abound with *rishis* and I hoped to find from some of them a solution for my problem. I had less hopes of solving it than when I started from Ujjaini, but still my hopes were strong.

'I reached Bhadrinath after much painful travelling. I found there many *rishis*¹ and my heart rejoiced within me. Here at least, I thought, I shall get much nearer the solution. But I was sadly disappointed. Nowhere did I find a *rishi* who could give me even a clue to my problem. All alike told me that if they had a solution for my problem they would not have stayed on in Bhadrinath but would have gone out into the country in order to enlighten the people on this all-important point.

¹ Sages.



'ARE YOU THE PRIEST?' SHE ASKED MR. (Page 145.)

So after some days' stay at Bhadrinath I left for Rishiku. Here I met a sage who, as soon as I propounded the question, said, "Oh! this problem has been solved long ago." "By whom? where?" I asked eagerly. "In the *Upanishads* and, more especially, in the *Bhagavad Gita*," he replied. I had not read those books before. So I procured copies of them and read them eagerly. True, the problem had been propounded there and a solution given. But yet it did not quite answer my question. It only showed why people should not grieve over death or think that death was the greatest of all possible evils. So far it is supremely satisfactory, no doubt, and an invaluable consolation to struggling souls. But I found nothing in the *Bhagavad Gita* or the *Upanishads* which gave a satisfactory solution to my problem, namely, as to the state before birth and the state after death. So, while I was greatly benefited by my reading of those sacred books, I still found my immediate problem unsolved. While I was lamenting over this, a sage said to me, "Go to the banks of the Manasarowar lake and do penance under the shadow of Mount Kailasa. There is none who has not got his boon granted on doing severe penance under the throne of Siva." I thought the advice good and went across the Himalayas to that most beautiful of all lakes Manasarowar. Words fail me when I attempt to describe the glory of this pearl among lakes, its magnificent and varied colouring, the colossal peaks of eternal snow surrounding it, the golden swans that swim gaily in the never-failing waters of the lake, the innumerable varieties of birds and beasts that live peacefully on its shores, and the infinite peace and quiet of the place. None who has not seen this lake can imagine its heavenly beauty. It is really surprising that there is such a lovely spot on earth. That is just the place to go to for the weary soul which yearns for peace. I constructed a

crude *asram*¹ there and lived eating the berries in the forest and bathing in the chill waters of the divine lake. I contemplated on God and His might, with this object lesson of His greatness before me. The three years I spent there were years of peace and of happiness. Time never weighed upon me. Days passed on and I forgot to count them, so delightful was the place. But I did not lose sight of the problem nearest to my heart. Morning and evening, day and night, I prayed to God to shed His light on this my problem. I asked the pilgrims who came to the lake. I even listened to the cries of the birds and the beasts, but all in vain. No solution came to me. Perhaps God thinks that it is not good for man to know the mysteries of life and death while he lives. Still, as I had resolved to prosecute my search till the last day of my life, I reluctantly left the happy *asram* and went to the Lumbini garden where the Great Buddha was born. There standing before the pillar erected in Asoka's time, I cried aloud, "O! Greatest of all men, vouchsafe to me my one and only request. Whence does man come before his birth and whither does he go after his death?" No reply came. A few monks who were meditating near by came and asked me, "Who art thou that askest such a question?" I said, "I am Agnanandhakara and want my ignorance to be dispelled by the wisdom of the Tathagatha.² He might have told you when he was alive. How can he tell you now that he is in heaven?" asked a monk. "He knows more now," I replied, "and great prophets can communicate truths even after they are dead."

"Quite so," said another monk, "let me try." He knelt before the image of Buddha close by and repeated

¹ Hermitage.

² A name of Buddha.

solemnly, "I place my trust in the Buddha, I place my trust in the Church, I place my trust in the *Dharma*. O holiest of all holy ones, pray enlighten us as to the state of the soul before birth and its state after death." No reply came. "Read your *Dharma* well and you will find everything there," said a brother monk. "Well said, brother," said the monk who had knelt. "One can never read the *Dharma* enough!" "Are my problems solved in the *Dharma*?" I asked. "Nothing is left unsolved in the *Dharma*," replied the monk who had advised its reading. I borrowed a copy of the *Dharma* from the monastery close by and read and re-read all the sayings of the Buddha regarding the state before birth and after death. I was immensely consoled by the reading, but, alas, my problem was still unsolved. With a heavy heart I confessed this to the kindly monks and set out again on my quest. I went to Pataliputra where the great Asoka had lived. There were many monasteries and schools there but nothing like what they were in the days of the great Emperor. I saw the huge palaces situated in their beautiful gardens and wondered at the mysteries of Providence. The builders of these stately buildings had all gone, but the buildings themselves remained as if to show the impermanency of human tenure here below. While arguing with a learned professor one day, he said, "If you want to probe into the mysteries of birth and death, go to the hospital where children are born and people die very often!" I thought that the idea was not bad and went to the premier hospital in the city. It was a huge thing, this hospital. It did not consist of one massive building but comprised several light and comfortable structures in a big compound. All these buildings were full of light and air and suited to the conditions of our climate. The hospital was very old. People say that it existed before the time of Chandragupta Maurya. It was entirely supported by the charitable.

contributions of the citizens and the management was supervised by a panchayat. There were different wards for people afflicted with different diseases, and competent doctors were in attendance. The huge hospital compound was full of all kinds of rare medical herbs. In one block some doctors were preparing potions and lotions and in another portion a school was being held where practical and theoretical instruction was imparted to the boys.

‘I went to the delivery ward and wanted to see some new-born babes so that I might learn something about the state before birth from these new arrivals. A smiling midwife took me to a place where there were three tender babes. I asked the first one, “O! child, messenger of God, deign to tell me what thy state was before thy birth.” The child smiled at me so much as to say, “I know it all but cannot tell you.” I passed on to the second child and repeated the question. It cried out most inconsolably so much as to say, “Why rake up my griefs? What is this world compared with the place whence I came?” I passed on to the third child and again asked my question. The child simply stared at me with its beautifully expressive eyes as if it too wanted to recollect the state before birth but could not. My heart was sad as I left this ward disappointed. The midwife saw my sadness and said gently, “Whoever you are, you ought to know that this mystery cannot be solved by anyone living. I have seen nearly a thousand babes born and have not been able to find a solution. Yet, here you are trying to solve it by asking three.” I said good-bye and proceeded to see some dying men in the adjoining wards. These wards were a contrast to the delivery ward. Instead of the heavenly smiles and childish cries, there were here painful moans of hardened sinners. I went to the sick-bed of a man who was about to die. I knelt down, caught hold of his hand, and said,

“ Brother, what do you feel like ? ” He replied, “ O, villain, I am leaving my 100,000 panas behind. Who will take this money after I am dead ? I am also leaving my good house and lands in addition to seven cows. Why could not God have given me at least one more year to enjoy these things ? ” I gently remonstrated with him that he should not think of material things at that crisis. “ What else matters ? ” he demanded angrily. There was no use talking with him any longer. So I passed on to another who was also at death’s door. He was crying out in death agony, “ O, my wife, O, my little children, I shall never see you again, never.” I was moved too much to say anything. I passed on to the third man. He was a thin saintly looking person with a serene appearance though death was about to take him to its bosom. I went near him, bowed and asked, “ How do you feel like ? ” “ Oh, alright,” he said, “ I am waiting with eagerness to see what the future is.” “ Do you get any glimpses of the land beyond ? ” I asked. “ None at all,” he replied, “ but my faith in God is unshakable. He cannot but be merciful. I pray to Vasudeva and Siva to take pity on me and I am sure that they will answer my prayer.” With this his voice became lower, he uttered one last half-distinct, half-indistinct cry of “ Siva ! Siva ” and passed away with a smile on his lips. I stood there for a minute deeply meditating as to where this man, who but a minute back was in the land of the living, had gone. It was perfectly wonderful. By the way that this man died, I was convinced that death was after all not such a calamity as people imagine, yet the sudden disappearance of this man from this world reminded me of a falling star, so sudden was the disappearance into space.

‘ After I left the hospital, I thought that there was little use in staying at Pataliputra and went from there first to Nalanda and then to Takshasila. Why trouble you with a wearisome repetition of my disappointments ? Neither of

these universities contained a professor who could solve my problem. One of the greatest professors of Takshasila told me, "We possess but human wisdom. A man is not a man before he is born and after he is dead. Those states are not within human experience. They belong to the realm of the superhuman. So there is no use asking us and getting disappointed." I saw the justice of his remarks and left. Before I could leave, he came very close to me and said, "I have one request to make and that is that in case you succeed in finding a solution to your problem you would kindly communicate it to our university so that the future generations may also benefit." I gave the promise readily and left. In the street I met an aged man. He asked me why I looked so sorrowful. I explained to him my problem. He smiled and said, "Why search in these depraved cities where luxury and vices abound? You had better go to the deserts to the east of the Sindhu¹ where the inhabitants lead chaste and simple lives." Off I went to the desert. It was a weary journey, but I had resolved to leave no stone unturned. I reached the dreary sands of the desert. O, what a contrast it was to the smiling plains of the Ganges! For miles and miles there was nothing but sand. The monotony of it was oppressive. And to add to the monotony, there was the infinite solitude of the place. People were not to be found unless a man set out in search of them. The heat was appalling. Walking some one mile in the blazing sun is enough to make any one wish that he were dead. The only animal that braves the situation is the camel. This most patient of all creatures trudges along the sandy wastes with philosophic composure. God has created it simply to make life in a desert endurable. Without it, the deserts would have been completely deserted long ago. In this desert east of the Sindhu wells

¹ The Indus.

are some of them two hundred feet deep and some four or five have to co-operate for drawing water. I went to a group engaged in this task and asked them, "Can you tell me of the state before birth or of the state after it?" "No," they said, "but we can tell you the state between birth and death and this state appears to us to be more intolerable than either birth or death." I asked them, "Is there any sage in these parts engaged in deep meditation on these problems?" "None," they replied, "because such idlers will not get food or water here since these problems are greater here than any problems such a sage is likely to solve." I laughed in spite of myself, "Ah, this is not an idle place like your Gangetic plain," retorted one.

I trudged on to Somnath but to no purpose. From there I went to Kanchi¹ and Korkai and Kayal but it was of equal failure. At Kayal I took ship to Sumatra. In the mid ocean I prayed to God that I might find a solution to my problem but to no avail. In the island of Sumatra I found a sage doing penance on the banks of the Indragiri river. I approached him and asked him for a solution of my problem. He replied, "I do not possess a solution for it, nor does any living man. I think it is a good thing that we are not in possession of this secret." "Why?" I asked. "Because," he replied, "we may grow so sick of this life that we may all commit suicide. So long as what precedes and what succeeds are a mystery to us we are not likely to take this step lest a worse fate should befall us." From Sumatra I passed on to Java, Madura² and Bali but to no purpose. From Bali I went to Kambhoja and Siam but fared no better. Then I returned to Tamralipti and went to the banks of the Narmada by way of Jagannath. At Nasik I met Subandhu and we have come together to this

¹ Conjeevaram in Chingleput District.

² An island near Java.

place. How many weary years have I spent in vain in search of this truth ! How many more weary years am I going to spend on it ? Whenever this thought comes on me, the consciousness of failure oppresses me. But I take courage in the divine words of the *Bhagavad Gita* which says, " Effort alone matters ; look not to the result ; your business is with action, not with its fruit." Just when Agnanandhakara had finished saying this, the sound of a horse's hoofs was heard. All eyes were turned to that quarter. In the moonlight a man was seen coming on horseback. As soon as he reached the choultry, the man stopped, got down from his horse and led it into the choultry precincts. What was his surprise when he saw another horse there ? " Hollo ! Whose is this horse ? " he demanded of those in the choultry. " Mine," replied Yasodharman. " Take it away so that I may tie my horse there," he said peremptorily. " Fellow," said Yasodharman, beside himself with anger, " You tie your wretched horse wherever you like, don't interfere with my horse if you set any value on your life." " Peace, peace," said Agnanandhakara and Subandhu. " Why quarrel so vehemently ? Friend," they said, turning to the new comer, " you can hardly expect a previous person to make way for you." The new arrival's arrogance had already abated somewhat at Yasodharman's fierce words. He was already thinking of a way to retreat. He now pretended to be persuaded by the two *sanyasis'* words and advancing graciously and bowing said, " Far be it from me to disobey the advice of two holy men like you. I only thought that, being of higher status, I had a right to ask the other to vacate in my favour." " How are you of higher status ? " asked Yasodharman. The two men's eyes met. Instantly the new comer said, " Alright, I shall not press my right. I shall go and tie my horse and then arrange for my meals," he added turning to the two *sanyasis.'*

CHAPTER XVIII

A HELLISH PLOT

WHEN he had left, Subandhu asked Yasodharman who the new-comer might be. Yasodharman replied, 'I do not know but I should think this man is a Kshatriya by caste. His appearance rouses grave suspicions in me.' 'Don't suspect a man hastily,' said Agnanandhakara. 'This world is already miserable. Why make it a Hell with these unreasonable mutual suspicions?'

'True,' replied Yasodharman, 'but we live in dangerous times when to trust too much means certain ruin.'

'Yes,' said Agnanandhakara. 'To trust too much in these days may mean physical ruin. But to mistrust too much is at all times ruinous not only physically but also morally and intellectually. Besides, what have we to fear even in these times? We are not fighting or conspiring against the Hun though we may detest his rule. Of course, individual Huns may take the law into their own hands and do what they like.'

'Besides these individual Huns,' said Subandhu, 'there are hosts and hosts of spies who take all conceivable disguises. Any deed or word or even thought against the Hun is promptly reported to him and is visited with the most barbarous punishments. I am ashamed to say that some of these spies put on *sanyasis*' disguises!'

'Well, you know that all *sanyasis* are not real *sanyasis*,' said Agnanandhakara. 'I should say that of the innumerable *sanyasis* in our land out of every thousand about one is a real *sanyasi* actuated by religious fervour, about nine hundred are disguised beggars who have taken a *sanyasi*'s robes in order to make their begging more successful;

about fifty are learned men but devoid of religious faith or ideal; about forty are people who took to *sanyasa* in a religious impulse which has long ago been exhausted but stick to a *sanyasi's* life out of fear of public opinion should they return to a lay life; about eight are actuated by a desire for glory or for good food or for women; and the remaining one is a spy or an assassin or a criminal or a flying debtor who has taken this disguise from motives of personal safety.'

'Well—,' said Yasodharman, 'but being a *sanyasi* yourself I hardly expected this impartial analysis from you.'

'That shows,' said Agnanandhakara, 'what low opinion you have of even those *sanyasis* whom you consider holy. A *sanyasi's* first duty is to speak the truth whether about himself or about others. If he neglects that sacred duty, he has ceased to be a *sanyasi*.'

Yasodharman felt the justice of the remark and kept silent.

Meanwhile, the new-comer had tied his horse. He came back and was just going into the choultry when Subandhu asked him, 'Friend, what is your name and where do you come from?'

At this simple question the new-comer seemed to be put out. He looked at all the three for some time and then said, 'My name is Vasudeva and I come from the Yaudheya country.'¹

There was some silence after this in the course of which the stranger passed into the choultry. On the way, he saw Vatavyadhi, Kaunapadanta, Sukracharya and Udarananda sitting in a dark corner and whispering to one another in indistinct tones.

'Who are you?' asked Vasudeva in a half-trembling voice, surprised at seeing four persons in that situation and fearing a surprise attack. 'Vatavyadhi, Kaunapadanta,

¹ The present North-Western Rajputana.

Sukracharya, Udarananda,' came the chorus. 'And what may be your occupations?' asked Vasudeva. 'Professor, Magician, Astrologer-priest and *sanyasi*' came the answers. 'Ah,' said Vasudeva somewhat relieved, 'I see, you are also wayfarers like me.' 'What's your name and where do you come from?' asked all the four in one voice. 'My name is Vasudeva and I come from the Yaudheya country,' replied Vasudeva. 'The Yaudheyas are a fierce race,' remarked Vatavyadhi. 'Yes,' returned Vasudeva, 'but only towards their enemies.' 'In which category I do not come, thank God,' said Vatavyadhi. 'Nor I' shouted Kaunapadanta, Sukracharya and Udarananda at the same time. 'I am glad to hear that,' said Vasudeva. Then taking the four aside, he asked them in a very low voice, 'Friends, who are the three sitting in the verandah and especially the one with the horse? If you tell me, I shall give you handsome rewards; if you don't, you may rue it too late.' 'We do not know who they are' said Vatavyadhi but I think that two of them are *sanyasis* and one a warrior. In any case, all are ill-disposed towards the Hun and dangerous to deal with.'

'How do you mean?' asked Vasudeva. 'Well, to take one instance, there they were disparaging Mihiragula and when we protested, the warrior spoke such fierce words that we were glad to be out of his presence.' said Vatavyadhi. 'That we were,' remarked his three companions. 'I see,' said Vasudeva, 'what kind of man is the keeper of this choultry?' 'Oh, he is a queer man,' said Vatavyadhi. 'He is an elderly Brahmin by name Kamalaksha who is very much discontented with his present role. He is so sensitive about this that he quarrels with anybody whom he regards as taking delight in humiliating him. Why, he even went so far as to brave the wrath of the young warrior over there. And what is even more wonderful, Kamalaksha had the last fling.'

‘That is interesting,’ said Vasudeva. ‘Now, friends, good-bye for a minute. Let me just go and arrange for my meals.’ Saying this, he went straight in.

‘I say, who could this man be?’ said Udarananda of Vatavyadhi. ‘Can’t say for certain,’ replied that worthy ‘but I shouldn’t be surprised if he were one of those proud Kshatriyas who have been dispossessed by the Hun.’ ‘How do you know that he is not a spy of the Hun?’ asked Kaunapadanta. ‘That is also equally possible,’ replied Vatavyadhi. ‘In these days it is so hard to distinguish between the two species we are speaking about.’ ‘Quite so,’ added Sukracharya, ‘especially since some dispossessed Kshatriyas have turned their coats and become spies of the Hun.’ All the four laughed at this, but the laughter was in such a low key that it was hardly heard outside. The fear of the Hun was so great that even such harmless statements would not pass unpunished if reported. Hence the caution of the four worthies whose first axiom was ‘Skin before everything else.’

Meanwhile, Vasudeva went in. Kamalaksha had three-fourths completed the cooking when Vasudeva opened the kitchen door and entered the kitchen. The kitchen was a long room about 30 ft. by 10 ft. It was dimly lighted by a small lamp with one wick. At one end of the kitchen was a roaring fire over which something was boiling making a gurgling noise. The firewood was half outside the oven and was burning very well. The lurid light emitted by the fire played upon the wall behind the oven which was jet black because of the smoke coatings it had received for years together. In front of this fire, with his back towards the door, stood a stout muscular figure with a narrow loin-cloth round its waist, and a ladle in its right hand. That figure was Kamalaksha. He was perspiring profusely. The kitchen had only one small window and a door both of which the worthy cook had shut carefully. He

had shut the window in order that the wind might not affect the fire and he had shut the door when the four worthies had departed. When Vasudeva entered, Kamalaksha was about to stir the dish on the fire and was reciting some extremely erotic verses from Kalidasa by way of recreation.

When he heard the noise of the door being opened, Kamalaksha thought that it must be one of the eternal four; so he said without turning round, 'Who the devil is it that enters this room without my permission?' Vasudeva took four gold coins out of his pocket and going to Kamalaksha said, 'Friend, Kamalaksha, it is I, here take this' and put the coins into his hands. The cook's eyes glistened at the jingling of the coins and the glitter of the gold. He looked at the stranger who was calmly watching him as if fully aware of the workings of gold on persons like Kamalaksha. Kamalaksha did not know who this man was and was astonished and pleased at being addressed by him as 'Friend.' Vasudeva was a tall graceful man with a calm stagnant expression on his face. He looked just the kind of man who could marry without a smile and die without a sigh. But to Kamalaksha, Vasudeva appeared to be greater even than God Vasudeva, since the latter, in spite of His boasted goodness, had never given so much as a single pie to him whereas the former had given him four gold coins on their very first meeting. The cook's hilarity knew no bounds. His heart was touched. He did not know how to address this marvel of magnanimity. Finally, making an effort lest silence should cool the stranger's generosity, Kamalaksha said 'Maharaj! Maharaj, words fail me when I want to express my heartfelt thanks for your divine kindness and generosity. How can I ever return your kindness? What is there that I can do for you?' 'Much,' said Vasudeva. Kamalaksha had asked his question in rictic squeamish courtesy. He never

expected the answer he got. He got frankly afraid. 'What!' he exclaimed, 'so you gave me this money for doing some service?' 'Be calm yourself,' said Vasudeva, 'this money was only a mere gift to you. For the services I require, I shall pay you handsomely.' Kamalaksha became reassured to some extent though not completely. 'Friend Kamalaksha,' said Vasudeva, 'please add me to the list of guests to-day.' 'That is already done,' returned Kamalaksha, 'when your fortune-bringing face was seen by me, that moment had I registered you as a guest.' 'Thanks,' said Vasudeva. 'Are the meals ready?' 'Getting ready; they will take half an hour more. Why, are you getting hungry?' 'No, not much. Will the dishes require your attention for some time?' asked Vasudeva. 'Oh, no; everything that I have to do is done. Now the dishes must cook themselves. That is all. After they are well-boiled, I have to put the finishing touch,' replied Kamalaksha. 'I see' said Vasudeva. 'In that case, we can have some ten minutes' talk together.' 'About what?' asked Kamalaksha. 'Come, I shall tell you,' saying which, Vasudeva bolted the kitchen door and wanted to secure the window as well. 'Why all these precautions?' asked Kamalaksha getting a bit afraid. 'Don't fear,' said Vasudeva and completed securing the window. Then calling Kamalaksha aside, he asked 'Are you getting afraid?' 'Oh, no,' returned that worthy, 'I am not so foolish as to think that such a generous and noble person as you would do me any injury,' but the tone in which he said it clearly revealed his inner anxiety. 'That is good,' returned Vasudeva. 'Now to the point. Kamalaksha, tell me true, are you a friend or an enemy of the Hun?' Saying this Vasudeva fixed his eyes steadily on the cook. Kamalaksha's whole frame trembled, he perspired even more profusely than before because how was he to give a reply to this dangerous question without

first knowing the party to which the other belonged? Kamalaksha had not got even the barest inkling of the political complexion of his questioner, and he was not the man to endanger his skin by giving an answer which might turn out to be disastrous. Thinking for a second, Kamalaksha answered deliberately 'I am no politician. I merely look after my humble business. I am not concerned with Maharajas.' 'Well said,' answered Vasudeva, 'but yet, you can surely say whether you are for or against Maharaja Toramana.' This gave Kamalaksha the hint which he was fishing for and which Vasudeva had deliberately given. 'Well,' said Kamalaksha, 'what doubt is there? I am, of course, for Maharaja Toramana and Prince Mihiragula. I am their humble servant ever.'

'I am glad to hear it,' returned Vasudeva. 'Do you know that there is a deadly enemy of our gracious King in this choultry?' Kamalaksha started back. Was this man going to charge him with abetting conspiracy against the Hun? Utter fear seized the poor cook in its firm grip and the miserable creature trembled like an aspen leaf. 'Good sir, great sir,' he whined, 'I am not responsible for his being here. Nay, I wanted to ask him to go out but I feared that he might cut me to pieces. So I was forced to keep silent. I am innocent. God knows I am innocent. Do not report against me. Do not ruin me for ever.' Vasudeva smiled, the smile of a strong man at a weakling's cries, 'Don't be afraid,' he said, 'you shall not suffer in the least, nay you shall even profit a great deal if you will only agree to do one small thing. But if you refuse to do that, not God in the Heavens can save you from the wrath of the Hun.'

'What is it you want me to do?' asked Kamalaksha. 'Promise me that you will do it,' said Vasudeva. 'How can I promise a thing without knowing what it is?' queried Kamalaksha. 'Well, I can't waste my time arguing with

you,' said Vasudeva. 'If you are willing to do what I ask you, give your promise to that effect; otherwise, do what you like and take the consequences. Only, it is but fair that I should tell you what treatment traitors get from the hands of the Hun.' 'I suppose the Hun kills them?' asked Kamalaksha trembling all over. 'Not so easy as all that,' returned Vasudeva. 'Of course, the wretches die, but after undergoing unmentionable tortures. First, the distances between their shoulders are measured and the skins on their backs peeled off beginning with the centre. Then a mixture of chilli powder and salt is spread all over the flayed portion. When this is done, water comes oozing out. Then red hot iron bars are rolled over the portions, in order to take away the water.'

'My God,' exclaimed Kamalaksha, 'I do not want to hear all these horrible details.' 'That is not all,' returned Vasudeva coolly, taking a devilish delight in relating the whole horrid details. 'After the iron bars are applied, red hot iron pincers are brought and applied to every limb after it has had its skin removed. Then the right hand is sawn off and then the left. After this both the legs up to the knee are sawn off and then the thighs up to the loins.'

'I promise to do anything you like,' whined Kamalaksha 'O save me, save me from these horrible tortures.' 'Wait,' said Vasudeva. 'Let me finish. After the thighs are sawn off, the ears are sawn off. Then the nose is cut with a blunt knife. After this is over, chilli powder is thrown into one of the eyes and when it is fully paining, the powder is thrown into the other eye. Then—' 'Oh, save me all these harrowing details, I shall do whatever you command me,' whined Kamalaksha. 'Then,' resumed Vasudeva mercilessly, 'red hot pincers are brought and first one eye is put out and then the other. After this what remains of the wretch's body is put into a frying pan and put over a fire till life is completely extinct.' Even

Kamalaksha, though he was not unaccustomed to such stories, had collapsed at this appalling account. Vasudeva sprinkled some cold water on him and brought him round. 'I shall do whatever you order me to do,' whined Kamalaksha catching hold of Vasudeva's feet and prostrating before him. 'Only, spare me the Hell you described.'

'Well, now to the point,' said Vasudeva, 'that young man who came on horseback is Yasodharman, the so-called King of Malwa.'

'What!' said Kamalaksha in utter astonishment. 'Yes, that man is none other than the pretender Yasodharman. I am a messenger of Toramana and I have orders to kill Yasodharman or Baladitya wherever they are to be found. Now I am not in a position to kill him in a fight as he is a better swordsman than myself, nor can I murder him at night since the wretch is as watchful as a dog and will be besides in the company of two *sanyasis* who never sleep,' said Vasudeva. 'What is to be done then?' asked Kamalaksha. 'Well, that is what I am going to tell you,' said Vasudeva. 'In brief, I want you to poison Yasodharman, and am prepared to give you a reward of 100 gold coins, a reward which will enable you to retire from this hard profession.' Kamalaksha's eyes shone at these last words though his heart sank at the former part of the proposal. 'The work is most repulsive' he remarked after thinking for some time 'and the reward is not nearly so handsome as you think. Besides, I have no poison with me.'

'But I have, don't worry about it' said Vasudeva and produced a small packet which he opened disclosing a white powder. 'This is a highly efficacious powder,' he said. 'The quantity is enough to kill twenty people.' 'Ah,' said Kamalaksha, 'but it is a vile thing that you ask me to do.' 'You have already promised to do it,' returned Vasudeva.

'Well, I promised before I knew what it was,' said

Kamalaksha. 'Alright, then, go back on your promise and take the consequences,' said Vasudeva, and made a gesture as if to depart. 'Oh, don't go,' implored Kamalaksha. 'I shall do what you say but please pay me something more than a hundred gold pieces.' 'Well, I shall not grudge you your blood money,' said Vasudeva, 'I shall give you one hundred and fifty.' 'Give me two hundred,' cringed Kamalaksha. 'Not a pie more than 150,' said Vasudeva in a decisive tone, 'you do it for 150 or back out and take the consequences.' 'Where is the money?' demanded Kamalaksha, 'give it to me.' 'I shall give it to you after the deed is done,' said Vasudeva 'but you can see it.' Saying this, he unfastened his purse and revealed about two or three hundred gold coins. Kamalaksha's eyes glistened as he saw the almighty gold, and all his old scruples vanished into thin air. 'Give me 175 and I shall do what you ask,' he said. 'Not a pie more than 150,' returned Vasudeva who knew that 150 would be a sufficient inducement, and did not want to waste more money than necessary. 'Alright, give me the money,' said Kamalaksha. 'After the business is finished,' said Vasudeva. 'All the dishes are taken into the dining room and all the guests are served there' said Kamalaksha. 'How can the poison be put so as to kill Yasodharman alone? How to avoid poisoning the other four who take regular meals like him?' 'Well, I don't care if you poison them also' returned Vasudeva. 'You will give 150 apiece for these?' asked Kamalaksha. 'Good Heavens, no' replied Vasudeva 'I am not particular on killing them at all. If they can't be separated and saved, I have no objection to your poisoning them as well, that's all. I am not going to pay anything for them.' 'Well' said Kamalaksha 'I am not going to kill five people for the money you already offered for one man. Unless you give me something more, I refuse to do the work and am willing to take the

risks.' Vasudeva saw that Kamalaksha was really meaning business and so he climbed down a little and offered 200 gold pieces. 'Give me 250 at least' said Kamalaksha. 'Not a pie more' insisted Vasudeva. So Kamalaksha accepted the offer of 200 and wanted an advance of fifty gold pieces. Finally, he accepted an advance of twenty and consented to receive the remaining 180 after the job was finished. 'May I know who you are?' asked Kamalaksha. 'I am Vasudeva from the Yaudheya country and a trusted counsellor of the Hun,' said Vasudeva. 'Yes, yes, I see' said the cook as if he had known all this before. 'Had not the *sanyasis* also better be done away with?' asked Kamalaksha. 'Because the fellows may go abroad and relate the story of the poisoning.' 'What if?' asked Vasudeva 'the Hun has done many such transactions before. But if you want to dispose of these two also I have not the least objection.' 'What will you give me for these additional jobs?' 'Nothing' said Vasudeva 'You may please yourself about murdering them or letting them live.' 'Well, in that case I rather prefer to let them live' said Kamalaksha. 'As you please' returned Vasudeva. 'Then I shall go and join the rest. You better do the thing you have promised' said Vasudeva and went out of the kitchen.

CHAPTER XIX

VASANTA

'Good God,' said Kamalaksha as soon as he had bolted the door after Vasudeva's departure, 'what am I to do now? I have promised to murder five people, I a Brahmin born. Horrible! None of my ancestors ever murdered a single man and here I am trying to murder five. Nay, to speak the truth, my great grandfather's brother did murder a man but that was under different circumstances. He murdered a prince at the instigation of his uncle who wanted to get the throne. This was in the kingdom of Kan-yakubja¹ and the murdered man's name was Vighraha Raja. But he got five hundred gold coins for that single murder whereas I get only 200 for five murders. Is it worth while to become a murderer for 200 gold coins? I don't know. I can't say. Well, it is a horrible thing to be called a murderer. But who will call me so? Who will know about this? Ah, the two *sanyasis* may know. What if? I shall go to the Chola, Pandya or Kerala country and settle there permanently. Oh, then I shall have to leave the country where I was born. It is a far cry from the land of the Malavas to the land of the Cholas and Pandyas. How hard it is to shake the dust off a place where a man is born! Even crocodiles which leave a lake because of drought, like to return to it after the drought is over. Am I worse than a crocodile? Again, who will regard me with affection in the land of the Cholas and Pandyas? Everything is different there, the manners, the customs, the castes and even the Gods and the Devils which ought to be

¹ Kanauj.

eternal and unchangeable. How can I live there? But then I shall have 200 gold pieces. Much can be done with gold. But can gold buy affection? Why not? Oh, but bought affection is not the genuine article. Wait, there is dear old Vasanta here. Why not I propose to her that we should together leave this land for the south? She is a shepherdess and I a Brahmin but that does not matter. Over there in the south, people are not very particular about caste. And Vasanta, she is a darling. She has few relations here and her life is hard. She will surely come with me. She loves Kamalaksha. I shall ask her when she comes with the milk. Well, let me take the dishes from the oven now.' Saying this, Kamalaksha took the dishes from the fire and put the finishing touches.

After this he again began thinking. 'In what shall I put the poison? If I put it in a solid or semi-solid dish, the poison may not mix well with the thing and so the wrong man may die. I must mix it in some liquid. In what liquid? Why, there is the water. What a fool I am! It is the easiest thing to do. Let me set about it in right earnest.' With this, the cook mixed the poison given by Vasudeva in the drinking water intended for the guests. 'How beautifully the thing dissolves!' remarked Kamalaksha as the powder quickly became dissolved in water without affecting the colour. 'I wonder if it has affected the taste' said Kamalaksha to himself, but was not bold enough to taste it.

When the deadly lotion was ready in the shining water pot, the cook sat down looking at the pot and thought within himself, 'Am I really going to be sent to Hell for this promise of mine? Manu has said so, and the sastras support him. But those are idealists. Let us take a practical man. Why, Chanakya is with me in thinking that poisoning is a very legitimate thing in politics. Of course, lots of things are different in politics. We can never apply

the standards of social morality to "la haute politique." If we do so, most Kings of to-day deserve to be hanged. No royal dynasty is ever free from the stain of murder. Only, with some, you have to go further back than with others. Why, even the great Asoka was seated on a blood-stained throne. For, did not Chandragupta kill the last of the Nandas? In common life we would regard that as murder, but in politics the successful murderer is ever a hero. So let me cast scruples to the winds. Besides, who is going to give me 200 gold coins without some dirty work? A century of work as a cook will not enable me to earn that sum. Truth is not a generous mistress. To follow her is ever an ungrateful job. If somebody offers me even a hundred gold coins, I am content to side with Truth and Virtue. But who will offer me a hundred gold coins or even fifty or even twenty-five for that? Kamalaksha, I tell you, following truth never pays, never. Again, I am compelled by threats of Hunnish torture to perform these murders. So my sins are not the results of my volition. They say that unconscious sins are not recorded in Heaven. Why not apply this excellent theory to unwilling sins as well? Why not? Now that I think of it, there are two compelling factors, the fear of the Hunnish torture and my Hunnish poverty. If I were rich, I would never have dreamt of these murders. Yesterday, a Buddhist monk had been here and the fellow told me that the great atheist, Buddha, was of opinion that to think an evil was as bad as doing it. Well, I have already thought of committing the murders. No greater sin is committed by actually committing them. And I gain 200 gold coins to boot. That settles me; I shall fulfil my promise to Vasudeva.'

Just as he had finished this, Kamalaksha heard a knock at the door. 'Who is that?' he demanded in a trembling tone. 'Nobody,' replied a female voice. Kamalaksha was relieved. 'Oh, it is Vasanta,' he said with some pleasure.

'Yes, it is Vasanta,' replied the voice. 'Who else will it be?' 'None else, of course,' said Kamalaksha. 'Open the door then,' demanded Vasanta peremptorily. 'Why do you shut the kitchen door? Are there any great paiaice transactions going on there?' 'No,' replied Kamalaksha getting confused 'cannot doors be shut for transacting other business?' 'Oh, yes,' she replied, 'but not for cooking. Now, open the door. Otherwise, I shall go away with the milk.' Kamalaksha opened the door. He also brought the small lamp with one wick. The dim light showed the frail and graceful form of a shepherdess. She was about twenty years old and was in the full bloom of youth. A perpetual smile was playing on her lips. One smile ended only to begin another. Like the waves of the sea, Vasanta's smiles knew no end. They were always beginning, always ending. Like the forces of nature, the destruction of one smile was only for the creation of another. And this girl was appropriately named Vasanta, Spring. All the beauties of the Indian spring were illustrated in her. There was the freshness of Youth. Combined with it was a frankness which was very agreeable. The tall graceful Vasanta with the milk pot on her head, with bunches of sweet-smelling country flowers in her hair, with her fresh complexion and never-dying smile looked like one of the Gopis¹ of Sri Krishna's days. She was the very picture of health and her appearance suggested an entire lack of care.

Even the hardened Kamalaksha was always moved whenever he saw Vasanta. He did not love her, for he never could bring himself to love any one woman. He was the type of man whose heart would throb at the sight of any woman but would never stay with one woman. But Vasanta was about the only woman whom Kamalaksha

¹ Divine Shepherdesses.

used to see usually. Hence his heart was more with Vasanta than with others.

When Kamalaksha had taken delivery of the milk, Vasanta said 'There seems to be a crowd to-day.' 'Yes,' replied Kamalaksha getting uneasy. 'There are two horses tied up at the front. Whose are they?' asked Vasanta. 'I don't know,' said Kamalaksha. 'Well, you must know' said Vasanta, 'There is nothing that passes here without your knowledge.' Kamalaksha was a bit flattered and he said, 'Well, I know whose they are but I cannot tell you.' 'You mean you will not tell me?' asked Vasanta getting rather offended. 'If so, I shall go back at once and from to-morrow forwards I shall not come with the milk but shall send my brother. Oh, that I should be slighted like this!' said Vasanta and tears began to trickle down her cheeks with the unexpectedness and luxuriance of spring showers. As she prepared to depart, Kamalaksha said 'Vasanta, don't go, I shall tell you everything.' In a moment Vasanta's tears had given place to a smile like the sun shining after a spring shower. 'I knew you would tell me,' she said. 'Now begin.' 'Well, so far as I know,' began Kamalaksha 'one horse belongs to one Vasudeva from the Yaudheya country, a faithful councillor of Maharaja Toramana.' 'And the other?' asked Vasanta. 'Vasanta, I cannot tell you unless you promise absolute secrecy and swear by the seven sacred rivers and the three great gods,' said Kamalaksha. 'I swear,' said Vasanta, 'by the seven sacred rivers and the three great gods and by the One Unknown that I shall keep this as a secret for ever.' 'Well,' said Kamalaksha in a very trembling voice bringing his mouth close to Vasanta's ears, 'The other horse is that of Yasodharman of Malwa and Maha Kosala.' 'What!' exclaimed Vasanta astounded. 'Of Yasodharman of Malwa! And how is Yasodharman putting up in the same choultry as the trusted councillor of his deadly foe?' 'Yasodhar-

man does not know about the identity of Vasudeva,' said Kamalaksha. 'Does Vasudeva know the identity of Yasodharman?' asked Vasanta. 'Of course, he does,' replied Kamalaksha hastily but soon corrected himself and said 'I think he does.' 'You know he does,' replied Vasanta 'Why do you want to fool me?' Kamalaksha was terribly confused. He did not know what to say. 'Vasanta,' he implored, 'pray do not ruin me.' 'What do you mean?' asked Vasanta 'I do not understand you to-day. And yet I have known you for the last ten years.' 'Vasanta, I am leaving this place in a short time if everything goes well' said Kamalaksha. 'What! leaving us all?' asked Vasanta. 'No' replied Kamalaksha. 'I mean to take you along with me if you will only come.' 'I come! Whereto? What absurd things are you talking?' 'I am really serious' insisted Kamalaksha. 'Where's the money for you to go roaming about the country?' asked Vasanta. 'Don't you worry about that. I shall have 200 gold coins. Will that not be enough?' asked Kamalaksha. 'Enough!' exclaimed Vasanta 'I should say so. Where have you hidden all this money? You have never spoken a word about this to me till now. Well, I know now what confidence to place in you. And yet you have the audacity to ask me to come with you,' and Vasanta pretended to have lost all trust in Kamalaksha. 'Don't get angry with me. I never hid anything from you. I shall get the money only to-morrow morning,' said Kamalaksha. 'How will you manage to get such a lot of money to-morrow morning?' demanded Vasanta. Kamalaksha was loath to answer, but Vasanta's eyes were fixed on him with a steady gaze. Kamalaksha dared not utter a falsehood to her. He grew ashamed of his infatuation for the girl, he cursed himself a thousand times for having undertaken the dirty job of Vasudeva, but all these were of no use. He had to face the difficulty like a man. So he gathered up what little courage he had and

said, 'Vasanta, I really can't tell you this. This relates to politics.' 'Alright,' said Vasanta, 'if you will not tell me, you know the consequences,' and prepared to depart. Kamalaksha was in a desperate situation. Finally, his desire to be in the good grace of Vasanta overcame his prudence and he said, 'Vasanta, come back, I shall tell you everything.' 'Well,' said Vasanta, 'no more humbugging. Tell me everything.' 'The fact is,' said Kamalaksha in a very low and tremulous voice, 'that Vasudeva has offered me 200 gold pieces if I put a certain white powder in anything which Yasodharman eats or drinks.' 'And did you agree?' asked Vasanta in a horrified voice. 'What could I do but agree?' asked Kamalaksha. 'I was threatened with Hunnish torture if I did not agree.' 'And with 200 gold pieces if you agreed,' added Vasanta.

'Yes,' replied Kamalaksha, 'Vasanta, swear by the seven sacred rivers and the three gods not to reveal this secret.' 'I really cannot,' replied Vasanta. 'It is such an atrocious deed that you are going to commit and I don't think it right to swear.' 'Then,' said Kamalaksha, 'you are a faithless wretch. It is on the distinct understanding that you will keep it an eternal secret that I divulged the news to you. If you spread it abroad, you become a person devoid of honour. Moreover, you will be publicly raped by the Huns when they come to know how you frustrated their plans.' Vasanta became staggered at this threat because she knew how truly it would be fulfilled. So she made no more ado and gave the requisite oaths. 'Now, tell me in what you have put the poison,' she demanded. 'Swear first,' said Kamalaksha. Vasanta swore as desired. 'The poison is dissolved in the drinking water' said Kamalaksha. 'It has not even changed the colour of the water,' he added. Vasanta looked at the vessel and the water in it and exclaimed, 'How many things in this world look as harmless as this water and yet are really as poisonous as

this !' ' It will kill twenty people without the least difficulty according to Vasudeva,' said Kamalaksha. ' And it will give 200 gold pieces to Kamalaksha ' added Vasanta. ' Yes,' replied Kamalaksha and tried to smile, but the smile was still-born, his innate fear being too much for it. ' I shall leave now. It is already getting too late,' said Vasanta. ' Good-bye,' ' Good-bye,' said Kamalaksha. ' Remember your oaths and the consequences, earthly and heavenly, of breaking them.' ' I never break my oaths,' replied Vasanta proudly, and taking the empty milk-pot left the choultry and vanished into the outer darkness.

CHAPTER XX

A NARROW ESCAPE

When Vasanta had gone a few yards away, she began to think furiously as to what she should do. Here was a hellish plot to murder Yasodharman, the former king of Malwa, and four innocent Brahmins. All that was good in Vasanta rebelled against this diabolical scheme. She had very little interest in politics, but she did not regard this as a political question. For her, it was simply a question of five men being murdered in the most treacherous fashion imaginable. As she thought of the horrible conspiracy her body began to perspire. Here she was returning home with the milk-pot as if nothing was happening while the fate of five people was hanging in the balance. Vasanta felt ashamed of herself. She repented that she had given Kamalaksha the oaths which he wanted. She gnashed her teeth and bit her lips but realized the utter folly of all these vain exhibitions of wasted energy. What was wanted at the moment was a working plan for saving the five men who were the destined victims of the devilish conspirators. She had given her solemn oath to Kamalaksha not to reveal the secrets, and Vasanta felt an invincible reluctance to break her plighted word. No doubt, she would be doing greater good than evil by breaking the oath and revealing the secret. Vasanta was quite prepared to incur the sin of breaking an oath if it was absolutely necessary for saving five lives. But she did not want to break her oath unless that course was absolutely necessary. And she was not convinced as to its necessity now. She thought for some

minutes deeply. She was under a peepul tree. Finally, her face beamed and she said, 'Ah, I have it now. This is my Bodhi tree.' She hastily retraced her steps towards the choultry. Her gait showed that she was about to do something quickly and that she was fully determined to do it at all costs. She reached the kitchen door. Kamalaksha had finished boiling the milk and was about to take the poisoned water to the hall in order to serve the guests who had all assembled there to take their meals.

On seeing Vasanta, Kamalaksha was rather put out. 'Why have you returned?' he asked in anything but a pleasant tone. 'I feel awfully thirsty, please give me some water,' she said. 'Oh, that is all?' said Kamalaksha a bit relieved. 'I shall give you some water at once.' Saying this, he went with a tumbler to a mud pot full of water which was at one end of the kitchen. As Kamalaksha was bending to pour the water from the big pot into the small one, Vasanta took a determined step forward, took the vessel with the poisoned water in the twinkling of an eye, and, rushing outside the door, emptied the whole vile contents into the backyard before Kamalaksha could realize what was happening. Kamalaksha was for the moment flabbergasted at the audacity and determination of the girl before him. She had always appeared to him to be a gentle, timid creature and he had never dreamt that she would be capable of such deliberately courageous acts. But it was only for a moment that Kamalaksha was flabbergasted. The next moment he was thinking about the Hunnish torture and above all about the loss of the promised 180 gold coins and possibly of the 24 gold coins which he had already received as well. His anger knew no bounds. 'Wretch,' he shouted forgetting himself completely 'What have you done? The Huns shall kill you for this after first dishonouring you.' The tone of Kamalaksha was so loud that all the people in the hall rushed into the

kitchen to see what the matter was. Yasodharman too, who was about to sit down for his meals, drew his sword from its sheath at the mention of the Huns by Kamalaksha. His first act was not to rush into the kitchen but to secure Vasudeva from the Yaudheya country. That worthy was quite unprepared for the emergency and so was easily caught by Yasodharman who tied both his hands together and then led him into the kitchen.

The scene in the kitchen when Yasodharman and Vasudeva reached there, was most impressive. There was Kamalaksha who, after his first outburst of wrath, was now trembling with fear at the consequences of his words. The miserable fellow was now trying to minimize the incident to all questioners. There was Vasanta with her face glowing with excitement and with her eyes flashing fire standing with the stateliness and dignity of a person who knows that he has done his duty, but not condescending to enlighten her questioners about the incident which had taken place. There were Vatavyadhi, Sukracharya, Kuna-padanta, Udarananda, Agnanandhakara and Subandhu, all standing in the dim light and watching Kamalaksha and Vasanta without being able to make out what the dispute was about.

When Yasodharman went into the kitchen with Vasudeva, all the people there were surprised but none more than Kamalaksha whose fear now knew no bounds. The very sight of Vasudeva's bonds combined with the naked sword in Yasodharman's hand was enough to make Kamalaksha tremble to his very bones. Yasodharman did not wait long. He went straight to Kamalaksha and, holding his sword over the trembling creature, said in a stern voice, 'Fellow, tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, or die at once.' Kamalaksha was not a fool. He knew that Yasodharman meant what he said. He knew full well that the alternative before him was certain death or revelation

of the whole horrible details. Disclosure of these would be inviting the Huns' wrath, but non-disclosure was inviting certain death. Kamalaksha was no idealist. He had fully grasped the truth that a present evil is far more real than a future one. He was not going to die merely to escape a future possibility of torture; moreover, all his hopes of gold had been dashed to pieces, and these hopes had operated with Kamalaksha far more than any fear of the Hun. The sight of Vasudeva in bonds had settled whatever lingering doubts the cook might have had. Kamalaksha looked at Vasudeva for a moment. That worthy was striving to influence Kamalaksha not to reveal the dread secrets. Thereupon, Vatavyadhi shouted out, 'This man Vasudeva is trying to dissuade Kamalaksha.' Yasodharman instructed Vatavyadhi to tie the feet of Vasudeva as well. Vatavyadhi did so from fear of Yasodharman. Meanwhile, Yasodharman again said to Kamalaksha, 'Say what it was or die.' Kamalaksha was finally coerced by this threat as well as by the sight of Vasudeva's feet being tied. He related the whole story from the time when Vasudeva solicited him to put poison in the food of Yasodharman to the time when Vasanta threw the poisoned water out. All in the kitchen were shocked at the gruesome details. Yasodharman at once ordered the cook to be bound hand and foot. This was done by the indignant Vatavyadhi, Sukracharya, Kunapadanta and Udarananda who were furious with Kamalaksha for his nefarious designs against them. Just then, a dying groan of a dog was heard outside the kitchen door in the backyard. Vatavyadhi ran to the place and yelled out, 'Here is a dog which is rolling in the ground in death-pangs.' Vasanta ran to the spot and said, 'Poor creature, it must have been horribly thirsty and it drank the poisoned water which I had poured out.' Yasodharman went with the lamp and found the wretched creature rolling in writhing pain and near it a pool of water. 'This is the

poisoned water which you threw out, is it, Vasanta?' asked Yasodharman. 'Yes,' replied Vasanta. 'Why did you not tell us about this, Vasanta?' asked Yasodharman. 'Because,' replied Vasanta, 'I was made to swear by the most solemn oaths not to reveal these designs by Kamalaksha. And you know the sanctity of oaths by the seven sacred rivers and the three great Gods and the One Unknown.' 'I quite understand it,' said Yasodharman, 'but what made you take such an interest in us as to risk yourself like this?' 'Nothing but common humanity,' replied Vasanta proudly: 'I may be but a shepherdess but human feelings are just as present in me as in those higher placed in life.' 'True, true,' replied Yasodharman. 'What is Agnanandhakara doing?' That holy man was watching the dying dog. It rolled about for a minute more and then, after a last lingering look, closed its eyes and expired. 'How sudden and mysterious was the exit from this world to the next!' exclaimed Agnanandhakara. 'As sudden and mysterious would have been our exits also, had the diabolical design of Kamalaksha succeeded,' exclaimed Vatavyadhi. 'Quite so,' replied Sukracharya. 'Our debt to Vasanta is immeasurable.' 'Yet you, with all your astrology never found out this nefarious conspiracy,' suggested Kunapadanta maliciously. 'Friend Kunapadanta,' replied Sukracharya, 'who consulted me about this? When did I cast my cowries and consult the planets? How can any event be foreseen without application? Is it enough that a man has eyes, should he not try to see objects before he can describe them? This thing is clear to my mind. Vasanta's common sense has done far more to avert the evil threatened to us than all your magic.' 'Friend Sukracharya,' retorted Kunapadanta, 'you run counter to your own argument. When was I called upon to use my magical skill against these nefarious conspirators? How can the efficacy of my magic be tested when I have not

used it? It was your duty to have foreseen the evil and asked me to take timely steps against it.' 'Even if I had foreseen the evil, I would never have asked you to take timely steps against it,' said Sukracharya. 'These devils,' pointing to Kamalaksha and Vasudeva, 'would have been too much for you.' All except Kamalaksha, Vasudeva and Kunapadanta laughed. Kunapadanta got furious, 'What! you slight my art, do you?', he said fiercely to Sukracharya. 'Any day my art is superior to yours. What do you do but eat good feasts and tell lying tales? I have, on the contrary, to gather all kinds of thorny plants from most uncongenial places at great risk to myself and repeat unpronounceable *mantras*¹ before hysterical and devil-possessed patients. Why, sometimes these patients attack me even. Once I was bitten by a woman possessed of the devil. You laugh, but see the scar and be convinced that I am not a liar like you. Another time, I was going through a most successful driving of the devil from the body of a girl when her husband, a non-believer in my art, came armed with a stick and gave me the soundest drubbing that ever man got. What risks are there in your trade comparable to these? And yet I am not inclined to desert my noble art. It is well known that people can learn to become invisible only by a close study of my art.' 'Friend Kunapadanta,' exclaimed Vatavyadhi, 'pray become invisible and prove your statement. Throughout my life I have often heard such claims made but never have seen them made good.' 'Friend Vatavyadhi,' returned Kunapadanta, 'you are perhaps not unaware of how many rare implements are required for carrying out the operation. Marvellous actions requite marvellous tools. There is no use asking a man to become invisible with the same ease as asking him to run or to sit down.' 'True,' replied Vatavyadhi, 'but

¹ Psalms, prayers, incantations

can you ever show it to me? I am willing to follow you for years together and assist in collecting the requisite materials.' This was too much for Kunapadanta. He replied, 'Friend Vatavyadhi, you do not seem to have understood me well. I only said that magic alone can enable a man to become invisible. So far as I am aware, I did not say that I had become adept enough to become invisible.' 'I see,' returned Vatavyadhi, 'but have you seen anybody in your profession who can become invisible? If so I am willing to come with you and see the wonder.' 'Friend Vatavyadhi,' replied Kunapadanta, 'I do not remember having said so either. In fact, I believe that the last man who knew how to become invisible was Chanakya.' 'And yet the same Chanakya was uncomfortably visible to his opponents for a long number of years,' returned Yasodharman. 'Let us now leave this wrangle and turn to the business in hand. First, what to do with these two villains?' 'Kill them,' shouted Vatavyadhi. 'These wretches wanted to rob us of our life in secret. They deserve nothing but death. They should be made to drink the same poison which they wanted to administer to us and this humble advice is in full agreement with the observations of Kautilya in his *Arthashastra*. Since the poison is not available now, let us kill them.' 'Kill them, that is also my advice,' said Sukracharya. 'These people, if not killed, will spread the tale and bring down the wrath of the Hun on our devoted heads.'

'Kill them, that is my opinion also,' said Kunapadanta. 'Once they are dead, they can no longer poison us. Moreover, I am afraid of them only while they live. As soon as they die and become spirits my art will enable me to control them.' 'Kill them, that is also my opinion,' said Udarananda. 'They tried to put the poison in a thing which we drink. The sin would have been much more heinous, no doubt, if the poison had been put into the ghee but even the

present crime is sufficiently heinous. In the interests of the purity of our meals, and meals are undoubtedly the most important events in human lives, these two deserve to be killed.'

'Set them free,' said Agnanandhakara 'Evil is conquered by good, untruth by truth, that is the eternal law of nature. All else is vengeance. The conquest, to be real, must be such as I have indicated. All else is unreal and illusory. To return evil for evil is the elementary instinct of the brute man. It is not worthy of a moral man. Even from the point of view of expediency, I shall advise you to set these free. Such a magnanimous act will have a wider repercussion in the land than their slaughter. By slaughtering them, a few may be led to fear your power. By releasing them, all good men's hearts will be enlisted in your favour.'

'Set them free,' said Subandhu, 'that is also my opinion. Vasudeva once belonged to a noble clan renowned for warlike feats and has now descended to this low depth from fear of the Hun and avarice of power and wealth. We ought to pity his fall from such a high estate rather than take revenge on him by killing him. His is a generous nature which will respond to generosity shown to him. Besides, if he is won over by generosity, one powerful supporter will be less for the Hun and more for you. As for Kamalaksha, he is a cook. We never expect any great morality from such creatures. Fear of the Hun and lust for gold made him agree to this vile enterprise. He is too low to be treated as an enemy. Better leave the fellow free after administering a stern warning to him.'

Yasodharman heard all these remarks in silence and turning to Vasanta, asked her, 'What is your opinion, Vasanta?'

Vasanta blushed and said, 'My lord, I am but a poor rustic shepherd girl. What is my opinion worth in comparison with the weighty opinions which you have heard?'

↳ Perhaps so, but we never can say for certain with whom

wisdom lies on any particular question. So I insist on your giving your opinion.'

'My lord,' said Vasanta, 'since you insist, I shall give my opinion. Take it for what it is worth. I am for neither of the two courses proposed before. To kill the two people may be legally just, but politically inexpedient and morally inglorious. It will create an insatiable thirst in the Hun for revenge and will spread a foolish idea of your undue severity among the people. You know how many of them regard poisoning for political ends not immoral. That idea is wrong, very wrong, but yet there it is and we have got to face it. We cannot punish such poisoning with the same severity as the poisoning of a husband by a wife. Nor do I agree with the advice of the holy men. Their ideas are very true but in my opinion impracticable in politics. They presuppose that every man, however evil, will at some stage respond to continuous good being showered upon him in exchange for the evil done by him, see the error of his ways and reform. This may be true in private life though even here there are some brutes who will never respond to good but will always regard good being returned for evil as a sure sign of weakness in their enemies. But, as I say, the doctrine may perhaps succeed in private life, but never in politics. The events in politics move with greater haste and there is no time for the slow action of the better moral forces on the coarser. When a saint and a ruffian fight, then is not the time to practise this doctrine. So I think that the best course for you will be to steer a middle course between the two opposite advices. In short, I want you to neither kill them nor set them free but to keep them as captives till such time as you think fit to release them either conditionally or unconditionally.'

'Well-said,' said Yasodharman. Then turning to the two conspirators, he asked, 'Have you anything to say?' 'I have,' replied Vasudeva, 'I belong to the proud Yaudheya

clan which had to be given its autonomy even by the great Samudragupta. Our fortunes declined and I had to join the Hun in order to retrieve them. I regard poisoning an enemy prince as a sound political doctrine and so I acted as I did. I have done nothing wrong. So you had better release me at once. Otherwise, the wrath of the Hun will fall on you and you know what that means. You dare not kill me or keep me captive. You must perforce set me free. I demand of you to set me free. Otherwise, let the blood be upon your own head.'

'I want to say only two or three words,' whined Kamalaksha. 'Your Highness is so great, so mighty, so generous, so wise and so humane that you will never dream of killing me or keeping me captive. I am sure you will set me free. I promise to go away to the Chola or Pandya country and never return. Vasanta also will come with me. . . .' 'Not I, you villain,' replied Vasanta indignantly.

'I shall go alone, I am quite content to go alone,' cried Kamalaksha. 'I am but a poor cook, the lowest of the low, hardly worth Your Highness's notice. Oh, set me free, set me free,' and the wretch prostrated before Yasodharman catching hold of his feet, 'I am a Brahmin,' he moaned, 'and you are a Kshatriya. Your duty is to protect me and not to kill me. At least, promise me not to kill me, at least do that,' and tears gushed out of his eyes.

Yasodharman raised the fellow up and promised him his life. 'You are Brahma himself,' shouted Kamalaksha. 'He gave me life at first, you have again given it to me.'

Yasodharman said after some deliberation, 'I have finally decided to accept Vasanta's advice and take both the fellows captives.' 'In that case, take me also with you,' said Vasanta. 'I cannot live here after to-day's incidents. I shall come with you and serve the ladies of your family.' 'They shall only be too pleased to have such a faithful and intelligent servant,' said Yasodharman. 'Now let us look to

our meals.' 'Be careful,' said Vatavyadhi, 'it is by no means certain that the dishes also are not poisoned.' 'They are not, I swear they are not,' said Kamalaksha. 'Only, the water was poisoned.' 'I can't believe this villain,' returned Vatavyadhi. 'For my part, starving as I am, I prefer to go without meals to-day. A lost meal can be made up the next day, but a lost life never returns.' 'Quite so,' remarked Kunapadanta and Sukracharya, 'We also prefer to go without meals this night.'

'Friends,' said Udarananda, 'there is much truth in what you say, but I should think that you regard the going without a meal as too light an affair. I can understand Vatavyadhi and Kunapadanta saying so, but I am surprised that you Sukracharya should agree with them.'

'Friend Udarananda,' replied Sukracharya, 'I feel the loss of a meal as keenly as you do; only, I feel the loss of my life more keenly than you seem to do.' 'Friends,' said Agnanandhakara, 'are you quite sure that a lost life never returns?'

'Venerable sir,' replied Vatavyadhi, 'a lost life may return, but never in the same form. When I die, Vatavyadhi is dead. The life that departs from me may be reborn as something else but never as Vatavyadhi. Since I am concerned only with my own individuality as Vatavyadhi, I may say that a lost life never returns. In short, I shall put it like this:—Vatavyadhi, once dead, never returns.' All laughed at this.

'How to solve the problem of our meals?' asked Yasodharman. 'I feel beastly hungry, having ridden all these miles and having to ride so many more.'

'How to solve it?' asked Udarananda.

'Trust in God and take your meals,' said Agnanandhakara.

'Take a bit and see whether it affects you,' said Subandhu. 'Make Kamalaksha take the meal first,' suggested Vasanta, 'and after half an hour, if nothing happens, you can also safely take the meals.'

‘Excellent,’ said Yasodharman, and the others also shouted approval. Kamalaksha’s bonds were untied and he was made to eat small quantities from every dish. The cook was glad enough to eat the morsels. When he had eaten, the others waited for half an hour to see whether Kamalaksha would die like the dog. Failing to see any such effect, Yasodharman announced his intention of taking his meals, and Vatavyadhi and his three companions readily agreed to follow him. The five sat down to their meals and so hungry were they that they ate up most of the dishes completely and would have eaten up the rest had it not been for the imperative necessity of leaving something for Vasanta. Vasudeva was given nothing as Yasodharman wanted to keep him weak lest he should try to escape from custody. Even Kamalaksha was but half-fed with the same object in view. The two genuine *sanyasis* drank their milk. ‘Make the cook drink a bit first,’ suggested Yasodharman. ‘No,’ replied Agnanandhakara, ‘his word is enough; besides, if he is really uttering a falsehood, I am not loath to have a peep into the hereafter. Only, I do not want to commit suicide, that is all.’ Nothing happened to Agnanandhakara and Subandhu or any of the rest.

When Vasanta also had taken her meals, Yasodharman tied the two captives securely on the back of Vasudeva’s horse. Then he took leave of the two *sanyasis* who blessed him. Afterwards, he pledged Vatavyadhi, Sukracharya, Kunapadanta and Udarananda to eternal secrecy on the events of the day. Then, turning to Vasanta, he asked her, ‘Vasanta, are you still desirous of coming with me?’ ‘Yes,’ she replied. ‘My life is none too happy here and will become intolerable hereafter if I remain here.’ ‘In that case, come along,’ said Yasodharman. He put her in front on his own horse, got up behind her, and, holding the other horse with his other hand, rode on along a path which he seemed to know very well.

CHAPTER XXI

THE VOYAGE TO KERALA

It was a very fine dawn at Bharukachha. The whole sky was suffused with a rich red colour. Aruna, the charioteer of the sun, had begun his never-ending drive. Pious people were bathing in crowds on the beach for it was New Moon day. In one corner of the wharf were to be seen the crew of the *Vikrama* getting ready for the long voyage to Kerala. Ramachandra was supervising all the operations with the eye of an experienced mariner. All the prospective passengers were also watching with mixed feelings the preparations for sailing. There were some families from Saurashtra intending to migrate wholesale to Sumatra or Java. There were many merchants whose only concern was trade and profit. There were also some whose business was neither trade nor colonization but who were simply seeking an asylum from the Hun in far-off lands. None of these people ever avowed their real object openly for they were terribly afraid of the spies in various disguises. Ever since the days of Chanakya the shadow of the spy had become a veritable night-mare in India, a terrible inhibitor of the spontaneous hospitality of India's millions. But, do what they will, any careful observer could see the refugees from the fear which was clearly painted on their faces. Only one face there was which depicted no fear whatsoever. It was the face of Baladitya. He was standing with Paramartha engaged in conversation when Ramachandra approached him and said :

'Sir, the ship sails to-morrow. What about your three comrades?' 'There are no signs of them yet,' replied Baladitya, 'but I am expecting them every moment.'

'We can't wait a day more than the tabled time,' said Ramachandra. 'The sea is like a glass now and we take thirty days to reach Kerala. We want to avoid the dreadful monsoons.'

'What shall I do?' asked Baladitya. 'I cannot go without them. I have plighted my word and I never break a plighted pledge. Besides, I do not like to leave them behind to the tender mercy of the Hun.' The Captain looked at Baladitya with a penetrating look and then asked in a low voice, 'Sir, are you an enemy of the Hun? And are these your friends the foes of Toramana?'

'Friend,' said Paramarathi to Ramachandra, 'what questions you ask! Don't you know that questions should never be asked of people who take to ships?'

'Oh, I meant no offence,' remarked Ramachandra.

'Captain' said Baladitya, 'are you afraid of the wrath of the Hun?'

'I!' replied Ramachandra indignantly 'I, afraid of the Hun! Boy, I have weathered the storms of the mighty ocean too many years to be afraid of the Hun. What are the worst ravings of Mihiragula compared with the ravings of the sea in storm? My life has been one long fight with the elements and I know how paltry is man's might compared with nature's. No, no, I am not afraid of Mihiragula. I only asked the question because it struck me that you might be an enemy of the Hun.'

'I am glad to hear that you are not afraid of the Hun,' replied Baladitya. 'It is true that I am an enemy of the Hun. So I am rather anxious for my friends.'

'Hullo!' shouted Paramarathi, 'is not that yonder man Hari Ram?' At the sound of Hari Ram's name, the whole assembly was visibly moved. The merchants caught hold of their wares with panic-stricken eagerness. Baladitya's face beamed with joy. Paramarathi was quite jolly to meet his old acquaintance, and even Ramachandra was visibly

affected. All looked in the direction indicated by Paramartha and saw four persons approaching. Sure enough, it was Hari Ram the dacoit with Raghupati, Bhadrabahu and Saraswati all mounted on forest ponies. The three last looked weary though the weary expression only added to the enchanting beauty of Saraswati. Ramachandra was so occupied with wondering who this heavenly nymph was that, he forgot to see Hari Ram and his movements. Hari Ram rushed forward and said to Baladitya, 'So here we are after numberless hair-breadth escapes.' Then he looked around and exclaimed with the greatest wonder, 'What! Paramartha and Ramachandra here!' Both those worthies received this greeting with mixed feelings. Ramachandra recovered his presence of mind first and said, 'Yes, Hari Ram, I am here. Oh, how many years have elapsed since we met each other! You were shut up in your forest and I in my ocean for the last eight years. I have almost forgotten the look of Ujjaini.' 'No wonder,' said Paramartha, 'now, let us know who these three friends are.' 'This is Bhadrabahu, a worthy Jain from Ujjaini,' replied Hari Ram pointing to Bhadrabahu. 'This other is Raghupati, an honest citizen, and the third is his daughter and my niece Saraswati.' 'Your niece!' exclaimed Paramartha. 'Yes,' replied Hari Ram, 'by adoption she is my niece, she is my Narayani now.' At the mention of Narayani the eyes of Baladitya, Paramartha, Ramachandra, Saraswati, Bhadrabahu and Raghupati filled with tears and gave a heart-felt response to the unspoken tears of Hari Ram. The dacoit's heart melted at this universal sympathy. For years he had not had a word of sympathy from any. His heart melted and found its vent through his eyes. Hari Ram sobbed like a child while tears flowed in torrents down his cheeks. Everybody was amazed. None had seen Hari Ram weep, very few had thought it possible for this dacoit to weep. Even the merchants who had been panic-stricken at his

arrival found enough common humanity in themselves to approach nearer to offer their sympathy by the expression of their faces. Saraswati went up to the dacoit and said, 'Uncle, you must not weep like this. Have I not told you that I shall be your Narayani in future?' Hari Ram only sobbed the louder and said, 'Dear child, dear girl, let me weep. It is a long time since I wept. I had almost forgotten to weep. The fountain of tears I thought had been dried at the source. Through your grace I have recovered the lost treasure. Oh, what is man's life here below without smiles and tears?'

'What saith the Jina?' said Bhadrabahu. 'Smiles and tears are weaknesses which man should strive to conquer. He who is without smiles and without tears, he alone is on the road to salvation.'

'The Jina may have said anything,' said Ramachandra, 'but what will we think of a man who will not smile at a child's caresses or shed a tear over a death like Narayani's?'

'Very low indeed,' remarked Paramartha. 'What is life without tears and smiles? What is life without day and night?'

'Friends,' replied Bhadrabahu, 'I grant that men will look down on a man who never smiles or sheds a tear, but a prophet will never do so. Besides, your man who never smiles or sheds a tear is a much rarer species than you think. When people know that a man *never* smiles or sheds a tear they will not quarrel with him or scorn him. They only scorn those who smile and shed tears when it suits them and refrain from doing so on far more worthy occasions. Let a man always do what he can to help humanity in distress, he will never be found fault with for not smiling and shedding tears.'

'True,' said Hari Ram who had wiped his tears with an effort, 'but such men are far rarer than your Jina thought.'

'What!' exclaimed Bhadrabahu in astonishment. 'Don't you know that the Jina has said that not one in a thousand million is capable of refraining from smiles and tears?'

'Well, well, drop the controversy,' urged Paramartha. 'Let us now attend to this young lady here'; saying this, he went up to Saraswati who was rapt in meditation and wholly unconscious of the ethical discussion about tears and smiles.

'Daughter,' said Paramartha, 'what are you thinking about? About these worthless discussions? Come, don't worry. Let us go and see about some meals for you all. You will perhaps like to see my wife and daughter.'

'With the greatest pleasure,' said Saraswati at last recovering from her absorption about Baladitya.

'Mind you,' replied Paramartha, 'my daughter Parvati will be soon jealous of your beauty. She considers herself so beautiful that the sight of a more beautiful woman will soon enrage her.'

'Well,' said Saraswati, 'I can see to that.'

'Then come along,' shouted Paramartha and took Raghupati, Bhadrabahu, Baladitya, Hari Ram and Saraswati to the house of his friend and relative Dhanabhushan where his wife and daughter were putting up.

In a few minutes the palatial mansion of Dhanabhushan was reached. Paramartha led his guests in straight to the place where his wife and daughter were. 'Parvati,' he shouted out, 'here is a companion for you. Her name is Saraswati. Pray, don't be jealous of her.' 'How dare you say that?' asked Parvati in assumed wrath. Then she welcomed Saraswati and made the customary enquiries after her health. After this was over, she introduced Saraswati to her mother Lakshmi and said, 'Mother, father is getting a bit too intolerable these days. He considerably lowered me in the public eye by asking me openly not to be

jealous of Saraswati. As if I would be jealous of this dear little girl, whom I regard as my sister !'

'Child,' replied Lakshmi, 'I cannot interfere in your little quarrels with your father. Whenever I join you, your father coaxes you to his side and leaves me in the lurch.' And Lakshmi laughed. Parvati and Paramarathi joined in the laughter. 'What saith the Jina?' remarked Bhadrabahu. 'Never take sides in a fight. If you interfere at all do it as an impartial arbitrator.'

'Well said,' said Paramarathi. 'This is meant for you Lakshmi.' 'I am thankful to Jina for saying that,' replied Lakshmi. After this, Paramarathi took Baladitya, Hari Ram, Bhadrabahu and Raghupati to Dhanabhushan who treated them with the honour due to his friend's friends. In the evening a musical party was about to be held in honour of the guests at which the celebrated musicians of the city were to be called in when Paramarathi realizing the awkwardness to his guests of such a procedure dissuaded Dhanabhushan from his idea. The guests merely regaled themselves by wandering about in the magnificent gardens attached to Dhanabhushan's house. There was such a lot of flowering plants and fruit-trees and such a bewildering variety of mazes and pathways that the garden presented a most inviting appearance. Baladitya was roaming along one of these paths in the interior of the garden musing deeply when on raising his eyes casually he met the lovely form of Saraswati sitting on a slab of stone opposite and gazing at him with tender affectionate eyes. 'Saraswati! Is it a dream or a reality?' asked Baladitya.

'An unfortunate reality, my lord,' said Saraswati. 'The most fortunate reality I have had for many years,' replied Baladitya, and gazed at Saraswati so long and so tenderly that that maiden coloured frequently and finally ended by returning his heart-gaze with a similar heart-gaze. It was



HE MET THE LOVELY FORM OF SARASWATI

the meeting of two souls. There was no exchange of kisses or embraces, not even a shaking of hands. Simply, there was that long and tender look penetrating to the innermost recesses of the other's heart. Each understood the other perfectly. There was a significant silence more eloquent than the most eloquent love-lyric. A minute passed in this silent communion of hearts. Then Baladitya broke the silence and said, 'Saraswati, dearest, my life will be empty without you.' At these words Saraswati was overcome by emotion and giving her right hand to Baladitya, who eagerly grasped it, said in a low sweet voice, 'Dearest, I am yours.' At that very moment a laughing voice asked, 'Hullo! whatever is all this?' Both the lovers turned in the direction of the voice and saw Parvati standing with a mischievous smile on her lips. Both stood speechless with shame.

'Oh, I am very sorry if I have intruded on your privacy. I shall go away,' said Parvati.

'Parvati, stop! stop! don't go,' exclaimed Saraswati at last recovering herself. 'If you have any love for me, don't go.'

'Then I shan't go,' said Parvati. 'I say, I tell you it was beautiful. He saying "Saraswati, dearest, my life will be an empty void without you" and you saying "Dearest, I am yours." Splendid, wasn't it?' And Parvati laughed.

'Parvati, you won't spread this news, will you?' asked Saraswati. 'Oh, no, dear,' replied Parvati. 'After all, what is there in this? Every married person must have had some such experience at some stage in his or her life. With some it lasts long, with others it is shortlived.' Then turning to Baladitya, Parvati said solemnly, 'Friend, you have got to-day the rarest treasure that man is ever destined to get, the pure and unsullied love of a confiding and beautiful virgin. Prove yourself worthy of the gift, and do not, like

some of our men, prove yourself an unworthy recipient of such a rare gift.' Baladitya replied, 'Sister, I am deeply grateful to you for your advice. I shall try my best not to give you the least cause for anxiety.'

'Thanks,' said Parvati. 'So the incident is closed.'

Then all the three returned to the house. In spite of Saraswati's entreaties and Parvati's promises the whole house came to know of these incidents in an astonishingly short time. Many were the trials of Saraswati that day. Even the servant-maids smiled at her significantly. Lakshmi was the most considerate but even she uttered at an unconscious moment the remark that she wished Parvati would get such a good husband as Saraswati.

So it was with considerable relief that Saraswati saw the night approach. The next day she would be rid of these friendly torments. Then the thought came to her that Parvati and Lakshmi were also going in the same ship. She foresaw a long persecution on board the ship. How she wished that Parvati had not seen the scene! How she wished that Parvati and Lakshmi were not going with her to Kerala! But the strange thing is that she never for a moment wished that the incident had not taken place.

The next morning a huge crowd assembled at the wharf to see the *Vikrama* and its passengers off. There were painful scenes of separation. There was not the least joy anywhere among that crowd of passengers and those who had come to see them off. The romance of a sea-voyage was much less prominent in those days than the dangers of the deep. No one could say with any certainty whether any of those who crossed the black water would ever return. Hence the terrible anxiety of those who came to see the passengers off and of the passengers themselves. The only person who was not affected by all this morbid thought was Parvati. She looked forward to the sea-voyage with the enthusiasm of a school-girl. She was roaming all over the

ship dragging the less forward Saraswati with her. At last, the time for sailing arrived. The order to sail was given. At that moment all those who had come to see the passengers off were possessed with a terrible anxiety to unburden their souls of some most important piece of news which they could not remember till then. A confused babel of voices was the result. There was much waving of hands and breaking of cocoanuts when the *Vikrama* finally left Bharukachcha for the open sea. Dhanabhushan was one of the last to leave the wharf. When he was wholly out of sight, Parvati, Saraswati and Lakshmi seated themselves together. So did Hari Ram, Baladitya, Paramartha, Bhadrabahu and Raghupati. Hari Ram had originally intended to return to his forest but on later consideration he had found it impossible to part with Saraswati and so had determined to proceed with her to Kerala. This hardened dacoit was now so tame that Parvati and Saraswati used to command him and always meet with an exemplary obedience.

The first few hours of the sea-voyage were very pleasant. The sea was very calm and the change of scenery was very agreeable. Soon however the monotony of the sea considerably cooled Parvati's enthusiasm. 'Father,' she said to Paramartha, 'I thought that there would be many islands in the sea. What a dreary sea is this with so few islands! I wish we would get some trees.' 'Daughter,' replied Paramartha, 'When you were on land you wished for lakes and seas. Now that you are on the sea you wish for land and trees.'

'Of course, what is wrong there? We want both. God created both,' said Parvati. Paramartha could not catch the meaning of this novel innuendo. Gradually, Parvati and the other ladies got accustomed to their new environment and found the sea-voyage less irksome. Nay, they even found it positively delightful once they had made the

necessary adjustments to the incessant tossing and heaving of the ship. In the day-time they found themselves between the two blues, the sky and the sea, and at night there were the eternal stars with the background of the sea. Whenever they felt bored, there was always some relief in mutual conversation and in teasing Saraswati. Lakshmi, Parvati and Saraswati became so intimate that they were like one family. Saraswati separated from Parvati only for half an hour per day. In this half-hour she used to talk to Baladitya. Whenever others came, the conversation was always about the sea or the stars or Kerala. When they two were alone, the talk was purely and simply lovers' talk, something far higher and rarer than the sea or the stars or Kerala. Baladitya was at his best when talking to Saraswati. At other moments he hardly knew any peace of mind. His thoughts were about his lost Kingdom, the plight of the miserable inhabitants under the Hun, the sacking of innumerable treasures of art by the barbarians, the growing cowardice of the conquered population and the increasing insecurity of the country. Do what he will, he could not regard Hari Ram with perfect equanimity. For, was he not a robber and were not the Guptas stern foes of criminals? In Vikramaditya's time there were no robbers in the land. Hari Ram's presence seemed to Baladitya to be a standing reminder of the decline of the Guptas. Poor Hari Ram also was never at his ease when he talked to Baladitya. Times out of number he had sworn that he would never again take to his nefarious profession. Often had he protested vehemently that he had been driven to it from necessity. But always he felt it impossible to efface the past. His old sins had cast permanent shadows on his reputation. Paramartha also could never look upon Hari Ram in the same light as before he took to the forests. There was a natural barrier between the wealthy merchant and the hardy robber, a barrier which was quite visible to

both the parties. Raghupati was somewhat friendly to Hari Ram but regarded him with the natural horror of an honest citizen for a robber. Saraswati and Parvati were the greatest consolers of the robber chief by their free and unconstrained talk. During these talks Hari Ram forgot that he ever was a robber, he found himself talked to like any other human being, and his eyes used to fill with tears of joy in thanksgiving to God who had vouchsafed these favours to him. As for Bhadrabahu, he always behaved politely to Hari Ram but his constant sermons about what the Jina said were a prolific source of irritation to the robber chief who was as far from Jina's ideal as could be imagined. None the less, Hari Ram was not miserable on board the ship. The whole voyage was pleasant. Now and then, the *Vikrama* would stop at some insignificant coastal port and take in provisions and water. The merchants used to take the opportunity to sell off some of their wares. Often the passengers and the major portion of the crew would go on shore and enjoy themselves. These constant landings broke the monotony of the sea-voyage. Finally, after thirty days, the ship went to Cranganore, the great port of Kerala in those days. There was a huge crowd on the shore as soon as the news got abroad that a ship had come. There were all kinds of boats and catamarans ready to carry the passengers and wares on shore. The Raja of Cranganore had sent his palace manager to invite the prominent merchants to the palace. Several local merchants had come in person to have the first chance of buying the best articles. Of course, there was no lack of coolies. A crowd of them was shouting out, 'Cooly! Cooly!'. In the general bustle the genuine passengers found it rather difficult to go on shore since the way was blocked by merchants and coolies. Paramartha was one of the busiest bargainers. He had asked Hari Ram, Baladitya, Raghupati, Bhadrabahu and

Saraswati to wait with Lakshmi and Parvati till he had finished his pressing business. In an hour, Paramartha had settled the major portion of his bargains and come to where the others were waiting.

'Well,' said Paramartha, 'now, off we go. All of you are my guests till I leave you.' No amount of protest was of any avail. To Baladitya's repeated remonstrances Parvati gave the one decisive answer 'You may go if you like; but if you go you shall go without Saraswati and that means that you will never go'. All the party laughed at this and Baladitya coloured. 'Don't be ashamed,' said Parvati, 'What is there to be ashamed? Stay with us and get married in one of these holy temples in which Kerala abounds.' At this mention of marriage both Baladitya and Saraswati were blushing like anything. 'Why blush?' asked Parvati. 'Is not marriage the heavenly-ordained institution of the world? What will the world be without marriage?' So saying, she laughingly caught hold of Saraswati's hand and walked behind Paramartha who led the way. All the others followed. Paramartha took all of them to a vacant house of one of his merchant friends. Then he took Baladitya with him and went to the King's palace with some choice presents. He had by this time known who Baladitya really was. Baladitya protested that he would never bow his head before a king whose ancestors had been conquered by Samudragupta. 'Who asked you to bow your head?' asked Paramartha. 'Surely you have no objection to salute him as an equal?' 'No,' replied Baladitya.

When they reached the splendid palace of the Raja, Paramartha asked Baladitya to sit down in the antechamber and himself went to the Raja, Mahasena. Raja Mahasena was a tall graceful man of about thirty, dressed in costly robes presented for the most part by the many merchants who flocked to his capital. When he saw Paramartha the big merchant, he smiled and said, 'So Paramartha, you have come

again?' 'Jaya jaya Maharaja!' said Paramartha and gave the Raja the beautiful Dacca muslins and Benares silks which he had brought as presents. The Raja looked at them with delighted eyes and said, 'Paramartha, I am delighted to see you at Cranganore. I am very pleased with your presents. Welcome to the City of Cranganore, the mistress of the western ocean. I create you hereby a Sreshti (noble, chetti) of my country.' 'Your Highness's favour knows no bounds,' said Paramartha. 'May I request one more favour though it is rather unbecoming of me to do so?' 'Ask without fear,' replied Mahasena. 'If it is anything which I can do, I shall do it.' 'I am thankful to Your Highness,' said Paramartha. 'Sire, a most distinguished guest has come to seek your hospitality.'

'Who is he? Where is he?' asked Mahasena.

'Sire, he is none other than the descendant of the Imperial Guptas, the scion of Samudragupta the son of the daughter of the Lichchavis.' 'What!' exclaimed Mahasena, 'the descendant of the man who defeated and humiliated my ancestor Ugrasena of Palakka?'

'The same, my lord,' said Paramartha. 'But hospitality is never refused even to a foe, much less to the descendant of a generous foe.' 'Never shall it be said that Mahasena sent a guest from his doors,' said Mahasena. 'I was only surprised that a descendant of such a mighty monarch should have come to this low estate. Far be it from me to cry down Samudragupta. He was a true warrior of the Kshatriya caste. He never took any mean advantage. He defeated Ugrasena in open war and treated him right royally after his defeat. Why should I be angry with such a man or his descendants? Now, where is this descendant? What is his name?'

'Narasimha Baladitya is his name, sire, and he is waiting in your antechamber,' said Paramartha. 'Shall I call him?'

'No,' said Mahasena, 'a guest is never called in, he is escorted into the house by his host. Such at least is the

*Dharma*¹ of Kerala!' Saying which, Mahasena rose from his throne, went into the antechamber and taking Baladitya by the hand, said, 'Come, brother, welcome to the land of Kerala.'

'Thanks, brother,' said Baladitya. Then Mahasena led Baladitya into the throne-chamber and seated him on his right side on the throne. All the people present applauded the act of their king.

Having seated the illustrious stranger by his side, Mahasena asked him, 'What can we do to restore you to your former throne? Anything within my power shall be readily placed at your disposal. The Hunnish barbarians are fighting against the eternal *Dharma* ordained by our glorious ancestors. *Dharma* must be upheld at all costs. My brother kings of Kanchi and Vengi had sent ambassadors asking me the other day as to what we should do to drive the barbarian out. We have not yet arrived at any decision. Now that you are here we may be able to arrive at something definite. Of course, you know as well as we do that we are too few to drive the Huns out. But I am definitely of opinion that we could deliver at least one province from the yoke of the Hun. Afterwards we can proceed with the conquest of the other provinces piecemeal. What province do you think is the easiest to recapture? What help other than ours can you count upon?'

'Prince,' replied Baladitya, 'I am very thankful to you for your generous offer. Of all the lost provinces Magadha is the easiest to recapture. The reasons are five. It was the very last province to be lost and has got a strong tradition of loyalty to my family. Secondly, the Huns have not yet consolidated their hold on it. Thirdly, that is the province farthest away from Ujjaini, the capital of the Huns. Fourthly, the Huns do not keep their health for long in the

¹ Rules of moral conduct.

climate of Magadha. And fifthly, there we can count upon the powerful support of the Lichchavis, my kinsmen.'

'Well said,' replied Mahasena. 'Then that is settled. An expedition shall be sent to Magadha with the least practicable delay. Meanwhile, Your Highness will remain as my guest in a palace which I shall cause to be vacated for you.'

'Thank Your Highness very much for your hospitality,' said Baladitya. 'I shall just go and see my friends.'

Then Baladitya and Paramartha went back to the house where Saraswati and the rest were. Soon the glad news of Mahasena's help was communicated to all the persons there. After this Baladitya announced that his marriage with Saraswati would take place on the next day. All the persons present were amazed at this sudden decision but their request to allow some more time for preparation were of no avail. 'A kingdomless prince's marriage does not require much preparation,' said Baladitya. So it was definitely fixed for the next day. The news was communicated to Mahasena and all other well-wishers. Parvati was busy with selecting presents for Saraswati. Paramartha was all stir and bustle. Brahmin priests were arranged and preparations for the next day's marriage went on briskly. Mahasena sent his palace priest to make the proper arrangements for the next day's *hom*¹ at the palace assigned to Baladitya. The next day began very auspiciously. The Raja's own musicians played the marriage tunes. Innumerable priests began chanting Vedic *mantras*. Baladitya and Saraswati were taken in tow by Lakshmi and Parvati and were allowed no freedom whatsoever. Both were made to bathe early and dressed in costly clothes given as presents by Parvati and Paramartha. Then both were made to sit side by side before the Holy Fire. Then at the auspicious moment, amidst the blare of trum-

¹ A Hindu religious ceremony when oblations are offered to the fire.

pets and the blowing of conches and *nagaswarams*¹ the holy ceremony of the *Saptapati*² was gone through. Baladitya caught hold of the foot of Saraswati and gently made her walk seven steps. As the seventh step was over, the marriage was complete and irrevocable for all time to come. Saraswati had become part and parcel of Baladitya's soul, his helpmate and comrade for all time. Raghupati who gave away his daughter was immensely pleased with the marriage. So were all those present including Mahasena, Ramachandra and the rest. Countless poor were fed that day at Mahasena's expense. The assembled Brahmins were fed sumptuously by Paramarthi. The whole day was one long round of merriment and rejoicing. In the evening there was again another *hom* and further feasting. After this, Baladitya and Saraswati retired into the bridal apartment made ready for them under the direct supervision of Lakshmi and Parvati. As the doors of the private chamber closed on the happy pair, a feeling of inexpressible joy overpowered them both. After the first burning kisses and rapturous embraces were over, Saraswati asked her husband in a low voice, 'Dearest, you don't regard me as in any way evil because of that incident at Hunagarh?' Baladitya, who had heard about the whole incident in detail from Hari Ram, replied, 'How ever can I regard your action in any other light than as what was right and proper? Dearest, did not Damayanti burn to ashes the savage who wanted to outrage her modesty?' And he embraced her with redoubled fervour. 'Dearest,' said Saraswati in a low sweet voice, 'I am your Damayanti and you my Nala.' So saying, she pressed Baladitya close to her virgin bosom and kissed him. 'Yes,' replied Baladitya, 'only, I shall never desert you as Nala did—never.' Then they again and again kissed and embraced one another as only true lovers can.

¹ Hindu musical instruments.

² The most important ritual in a Hindu marriage.

CHAPTER XXII

KALAGNI, SARVASAMMATA AND SUMATI

WHEN Mihiragula was taken back by the Huns to Ujjaini, that prince had given strict injunctions to his attendants not to reveal his plight to Toramana for whom he had some love. Moreover, Mihiragula felt somewhat ashamed that he should have been wounded in a scuffle with robbers. But the cavaliers who accompanied the prince were asked by Maharani Tushashpa about the result of the expedition. They told her about the recapture of the captives but added that the prince had been slightly wounded because of his recklessly going into the very thick of the fight. Tushashpa at once rushed to her son's room and found him in a terribly weak state. 'My son,' bewailed Tushashpa, 'you are reckless. Your father, the Maharaja, is already prostrate with grief over Bhumaka's death. And now you are wounded. What will the Maharaja say if he hears of this?'

'He need not know this,' said Mihiragula.

'But then he will,' replied Tushashpa. 'He is so wary and shrewd that he knows about everything which happens in his wide domains.' 'Mother,' said Mihiragula, 'you know what to do. Pretend that I have gone to Hunagarh and father will not suspect anything.' 'Son,' replied Tushashpa, 'I shall do so. But methinks, we are committing a great sin by sending that girl to Hunagarh. Poor lovely creature, what will become of her at Hunagarh!'

'Mother,' said Mihiragula, 'is this the first time that such a thing has happened in the history of the Hun? Do

you call yourself a Hun mother?' and Mihiragula's face had a look of profound contempt. 'Son,' replied Tushashpa, 'even a Hun mother is a mother.'

'Methinks, in you the mother prevails over the Hun,' retorted Mihiragula.

'Perhaps so, child,' replied Tushashpa. 'I don't know whether it is not for the best. What would I have felt if my own daughter, and I have not the fortune of having one, had been transported to such alien surroundings? Child, at times I feel great misgivings. We have deserted our old gods and taken to the Gods of Bharatavarsha, our adopted home. With your father and you this change of religion has been but for the sake of policy. With me also it began like that but has not stopped like that. For good or for evil I feel strangely attracted to this religion of the Hindus. How to cross this ocean of misery and go to the land beyond has become my life problem. My fellow-queens and co-wives Vajheshpa and Hujheshpa are ridiculing me for it but I cannot help it.'

'Mother,' said Mihiragula, 'I feel a bit dizzy.'

Tushashpa put her son to bed tenderly, washed his wounds, which were mere flesh wounds, bandaged them and gave her son some gruel. The weary prince soon went to sleep. Long and soundly did Mihiragula sleep. When he woke up, he found himself considerably refreshed. Owing to the unwearied attentions of Tushashpa, Vajheshpa and Hujheshpa who never allowed any servant to interfere, the prince was almost completely cured in fifteen days. Toramana was also to outward appearance alright, but he was never the same man as before Bhumaka's death. The grief had become internal, gnawing at his heart. Slowly but surely, the old man was hastening to his end. Now that his brother was dead, the old king clung with redoubled affection to his only son. He became also more susceptible to the influence of Tushashpa.

One day, while Mihiragula was still in his convalescent state, Toramana and his son were talking about various state affairs. Tushashpa was also present. Suddenly, a messenger came rushing in and said, 'My liege, my liege, sad news from Hunagarh.'

'What news?' asked Toramana and Mihiragula in one voice.

'The captives escaped after killing Narayana.'

'Narayana killed!' exclaimed Mihiragula. 'Who killed him?'

'That girl Saraswati,' replied the messenger.

'What! Saraswati! that girl!' exclaimed Tushashpa. 'Oh, I am very proud of that girl. She ought to have been born a Hun.'

'Surely, mother, you don't rejoice at Narayana's death?' asked Mihiragula.

'I do, I do,' replied Tushashpa. 'I never liked the sneaking wretch. He had neither the natural courage of the Hun nor the finer virtues of the Indians. Besides, this Narayana must have tried to outrage that poor girl. We had no right to shut up that poor girl, none at all. If it had been our daughter, would you wish her to be unlike Saraswati?' she asked turning to her husband. 'Tushashpa,' replied Toramana, 'I would have welcomed a daughter like Saraswati. She should have been born a Hun. What an ideal wife she would have been for a Hunnish prince, say for our Mihiragula. As for that devil's son Narayana, I agree with you in condemning the fellow. There is nothing more inherently contemptible than the sight of a member of a subject race dancing attendance on and pandering to the whims of the conquerors. My man,' said he turning to the messenger, 'how did Narayana come by his death? What has become of the faithful Huns who went with the captives? Did they turn cowards?'

'No, sire,' replied the messenger, 'the thirty Huns who escorted the captives to Hunagarh and who were responsible for their safe custody committed suicide, one and all of them, as soon as they learnt of the escape of their charges during the night. Kadpheisos, the captain has left an open letter to your Highness. It reads, "We have atoned for our neglect. Please forgive us. We have died like Huns." ' 'So they have,' exclaimed Toramana and Mihiragula.

'Where was Narayana killed?' asked Toramana, 'and how?'

'He was found dead in the cell where Saraswati had been confined,' said the messenger. 'A deep wound in his throat was the cause of his death and a used tender cocoanut was found on the floor. The villains, after escaping, had carefully locked all the cells in order to postpone the discovery of the escape. They had also killed all the horses except those which they took with them.'

'How did they get the keys?' asked Toramana.

'Narayana had the keys with him when he entered the cell. He asked the Hun attendant to give the keys and go to bed which that man did very gladly as he was feeling very drowsy. In the morning Kadpheisos woke as usual at 7 a.m. and attended to his routine work. The servant in charge of the cells went to Narayana's room for the keys in order to open the cells and administer the usual whipping ordered by our most gracious prince for all prisoners in order to make them feel the power of the Hun. In this case, Kadpheisos had ordered that twice the whipping should be administered since the villains had wounded our prince. The servant found Narayana missing in his room and so went to the cells which he found locked. He came to Kadpheisos running and asked him where Narayana was. "I don't know," said Kadpheisos.

"Is he not in his room?" "No, sir," replied the Hunnish warder. Immediately a vigorous search was instituted but all to no avail. The doors of the cells were burst open with crowbars and cell after cell was found empty. "Ah, the wretched scoundrel Narayana must have let out his fellow-slaves owing to the enticements of that daughter of Hell," said Kadpheisos. With that he ordered the cell where Saraswati had been confined to be forced open. Kadpheisos himself rushed into the dismal hole and in the light of the morning sun saw the hulky form of Narayana lie stark dead with streams of clotted blood on the floor. He picked up the tender cocoanut and said, "So this man has fallen a victim to a woman's viles. How black is his blood! But blacker, far blacker, must have been his heart. That girl, why, she deserved to be born a Hun! Friends," said he, turning to the other members of the escort, "we thirty are responsible for this escape. If the Royal Hun comes to know of this he will surely kill us all and most righteously too. A Hun's rule can only be sustained by a reign of terror. Why not we commit suicide like men instead of waiting to be killed like dogs?" "We are all ready," shouted the other twenty-nine. Then Kadpheisos wrote the letter to your Highness and calling me, his cook, asked me to take it to your Highnesses and relate the story. After that, all the thirty partook of some strong poison prepared for the purpose and died.'

'Who is in charge of Hunagarh now?' asked Mihiragula.

'Chastana's father Nahapana,' replied the messenger.

'Where are these captives now?' asked Toramana.

'Not known, my lord,' replied the messenger.

Toramana and Mihiragula at once sent spies all round to ascertain the movements of the captives and also of Baladitya and Yasodharman. The spies of the Huns were carefully chosen from among the Indians and included

some of the cleverest and most unscrupulous Hindus of the day and included both sexes. The foremost among these spies were Brahmins and Kayasths. The most celebrated among them were Kalagni, Sarvasammata and Sumati, the last being a woman. These three had joined service under the Guptas. They were sent by Toramana to Hari Ram's forest, the western ports and Maha Kosala respectively.

Kalagni returned earliest from his mission and reported as follows to Toramana :—

'Sire, disguising myself as a pious *sanyasi* I went into Hari Ram's forest. At first the robbers avoided me thinking that I was a spy. But my constant chanting of the Vedas, the *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*, my stern austerities and punctual observance of ceremonial rites soon had their desired effect. The fellows were soon gulled into confidence and I was able to pump out all the information I wanted from them. I learnt that Baladitya and Yasodharman and another high noble of the Gupta times whose name I have not been able to find out aided in the first rescue of the captives and that these three returned soon afterwards.'

'So Chastana's story was true,' exclaimed Toramana. 'Yes, my lord. I learnt also everything about the recapture, the confinement in Hunagarh, the murder of Narayana by Saraswati, the escape of all the captives, their return to the forest and the setting out of Saraswati, Bhadrabahu, Raghupati and Hari Ram for Bharukachcha whence they hoped to sail for Kerala in a ship called the *Vikrama*,' said Kalagni. 'Send a man at once to Bharukachcha,' roared Toramana. 'Useless, my lord,' said Kalagni. 'The ship *Vikrama* has set sail a fortnight ago from Bharukachcha. I have sent word to Sarvasammata about the movements of Baladitya and he is sure to go to Kerala and give us correct information.' 'How is it that

you, Kalagni, were ignorant of all these movements?' asked Toramana. 'Perhaps, he accepted a higher sum from the opposite party,' said Mihiragula.

'Your Highness does injustice to me,' replied Kalagni. 'If the robbers had known that I was a spy of the Huns, not all the gods could have saved me from instant death. I was always on the edge of a razor when I was with those brigands. I had to be extremely careful. One unguarded word, one indiscreet expression, one evidence of undue interest in the events would have sent me at once to the foot-stool of my creator. After all this risk undergone for your Highness, I am accused of treachery.'

'Don't mind my son's words, Kalagni,' said Toramana, 'he is young and does not know the world as well as he should. He believes in always speaking the blunt truth which is not always wise.'

'Quite so,' replied Kalagni. 'Can we not exterminate these brigands,' asked Toramana.

'Rather difficult, my lord,' said Kalagni, 'but nothing impossible for a king of your prowess. The difficulty is that they won't give open battle. The wretches will take shelter in the forests which are as well known to them as a mother's breast to a child.' 'But they are now without a leader,' remarked Toramana. 'True,' replied Kalagni, 'but then, my lord, among these brigands all are leaders.' 'But that applies also to the Huns,' replied Toramana. 'True, my lord,' said Kalagni, 'the Huns are in no respect behind the brigands.'

Toramana winced, but the Brahmin spy was as collected, as a stagnant pool. Toramana resumed the conversation, 'What is the best way of destroying these robbers? I shall give you one thousand gold coins if you suggest a good method.' 'I am always at your Highness's disposal,' said Kalagni. 'Methinks, Chanakya, that great teacher of statecraft, was quite right when he preferred diplo-

macy to war. A single clever man can entirely ruin the brigands, a thousand soldiers may find it impossible.'

'Will you promise to destroy them for a thousand gold coins?' asked Toramana. 'The risk is great,' said Kalagni. 'I shall make it three thousand, then,' said Toramana. 'As your Highness pleases,' said Kalagni. 'In three months the robbers shall either leave the forest or leave their bones behind.' 'Bravo,' said Toramana. 'Then start at once. Here are your three thousand gold coins waiting for you,' he said jingling a bag. Kalagni lingered behind. 'What is it you want?' asked Toramana.

'Nothing,' replied Kalagni. 'My house is without any articles of cooking, my wife's clothes are all torn. . . .'

'I see, you want five hundred gold coins for giving the information about Baladitya,' said Toramana. Kalagni remained silent. Toramana took out five hundred gold coins and gave them to the spy remarking:—'You Brahmins, you have a way of getting your things done. Now go and see to the other job.'

'As your Highness pleases,' said Kalagni and left the place. At the entrance of the palace Bhanugupta joined Kalagni and walked along with him to a safe distance. Then Kalagni said, 'I have carefully screened you and thus saved you. Pay me now the remaining five hundred gold coins.' 'Here they are,' said Bhanugupta and handed over a bag. 'I ascertained from my spy that you pretended not to have known the name of the third noble who effected the first rescue.' 'Yes, yes,' replied Kalagni, 'I saw your spy Sumukha.' 'So, Kalagni, you are going to undertake the extermination of Hari Ram's band for three thousand gold coins?' asked Bhanugupta. 'Yes,' said Kalagni, 'don't you think I can do it?' 'Is there anything you can't do?' asked Bhanugupta. 'My friend,' said Kalagni, 'take it from me, a spy's life is never happy. He is never trusted by anybody, not even by his employers. The

smallest indiscretion will deprive him of his life. Of love, faith, charity and religion, a spy, if he is to be successful, has to take a final farewell. A poor Brahmin's life on the banks of the Ganges or the Narmada is far more happy than the most opulent spy's. For a long time I have been yearning for such a kind of retired life but something or the other stands in my way. But now my resolution is made. As soon as this mission is accomplished, I shall retire with my wife to the banks of the Narmada and lead a quiet life.'

'Man proposes, God disposes,' said Bhanugupta. 'Quite so,' returned Kalagni. 'Who can probe successfully into the womb of futurity? Well, good-bye, I am off to Hari Ram's forest.'

'Good-bye,' said Bhanugupta.

Then they both separated. After some ten minutes Sumukha came and joined Bhanugupta and told him about the interview between Kalagni and Toramana. When this was over, Bhanugupta paid Sumukha off and went to his palace in Ujjaini. He was in very high spirits about the death of Narayana. He was also mightily relieved at the lack of suspicion regarding himself. He was however never sure of Kalagni. Any time that spy might betray him. Kalagni's very life seemed to be a constant menace to Bhanugupta. 'I must get rid of this troublesome fellow somehow,' said he to himself. He thought for a long time. Then he took up one of the current treatises on statecraft and read the chapter on princes. The very first sentence that caught his eye was this:—'If a man holds a secret which if revealed would ruin the prince, the prince should adopt all means, fair or foul, to send the man to the other world. While a man lives, there is no knowing what he might reveal or not reveal. A dead tongue alone can be relied upon with perfect safety.' 'The very thing I thought,' said Bhanugupta. His mind was made up. He called

his trustworthy soldier Viswanath and told him in great secrecy, 'Viswanath, go at once to Hari Ram's forest and inform the robbers that Kalagni the spy is going to their forest under Toramana's orders in order to destroy them by his guiles. Tell them that the *sanyasi* who did penance in their forest was no other than Kalagni. Don't tell anybody about your mission.'

'As your Highness pleases,' said Viswanath and left the palace.

'The spy Kalagni will be a faded memory three days hence,' said Bhanugupta. 'He will be near the banks of the Vydharini¹ instead of the Narmada. Ha! Ha! Ha! Man proposes, God disposes!' The next day Bhanugupta took leave of Toramana and Mihiragula and left for his own country of Western Malwa.

Toramana was all impatience as to the arrival of Sarvasammata and Sumati. On the fifth day after Bhanugupta's departure some messenger arrived at the palace of the Hun. Toramana was bristling with impatience thinking that it was a messenger from either Sarvasammata or Sumati. So he asked the messenger to walk in at once. 'Jaya, Jaya, Maharaja,' said the messenger, 'I bring your Highness tidings about Kalagni.' 'What of him? Has he destroyed all the robbers?' 'No, sire,' replied the messenger. 'The robbers have murdered him. Somehow or other they got news of his mission. They pretended to confide in him as before and taking him by surprise hacked him to pieces. His tongue was branded, his eyes put out and the fellow was torn limb by limb till he died.' 'What!' said Toramana. 'Where are these miscreants now?'

'Sire, they have gone east.'

'When was this murder committed?' asked Toramana.

'Two days back, sire,' replied the messenger. 'Kalagni's

¹ The river between the next world and this.

head was thrown into the palace of Bhanugupta yesterday night and a letter was found there which read, "The traitor Bhanugupta's agent the spy Kalagni has been hacked limb by limb by us the faithful subjects of Baladitya and the devoted followers of Hari Ram. The traitor's tongue was branded and his eyes put out. Let all traitors beware." 'I see,' said Toramana. 'So the miscreants aim at Bhanugupta's life also, is it? My own suspicion was that that noble might be secretly aiding the robbers. I am glad to see that I was mistaken.'

The messenger withdrew after this. Toramana and Mihiragula began to be feverishly impatient about Sarvasammata and Sumati. They were afraid that these two also might have been murdered like Kalagni. But in this their fears were groundless. For, after nearly thirty days more, both Sarvasammata and Sumati turned up at the palace. Sarvasammata came in the morning and Sumati in the evening.

Toramana and Mihiragula were in the audience chamber when Sarvasammata was ushered in.

'What news?' asked Toramana as soon as the spy had made his customary profound obeisance. 'Sire, Baladitya went to Bharukachcha and left for Kerala with Saraswati, Raghupati, Hari Ram and Bhadrabahu by the ship *Vikrama*.' 'We know that already,' said Toramana, 'Kalagni told us that. Is this all you found out?'

'No, sire,' replied Sarvasammata, 'a lot more. Baladitya was married to Saraswati under the auspices of Mahasena, King of Kerala.'

'What, dare that prince support a rebel of ours?' asked Toramana.

'Sire,' replied the spy, 'the insolence of these petty monarchs of the south-west knows no bounds. This Mahasena is very pleased that a descendant of Samudragupta, who defeated his ancestor Ugrasena, should be a suppliant

at his court. Then your Highness knows what extravagant ideas of hospitality these Indian princes have. In fine, my lord, Mahasena has promised to help Baladitya to regain a portion of his ancestral dominions.'

'Ah! So the fellow is presumptuous enough to measure his sword with the Hun, is it?' asked Toramana. 'We will soon show him what is to fight the Hun,' roared Mihiragula. 'Sire,' said Sarvasammata, 'the lord of Kerala is only rushing to his own ruin even as a moth flying at a lamp.'

'Has he any support from other Hindu princes?' asked Toramana.

'The open support of very few but the underhand support of a good many, my lord,' said Sarvasammata.

'These native princes, will they dare to support the rash prince of Kerala? If so, who are the most likely to support him?' asked Toramana. 'Those who are farthest away from your Highness's power,' replied the spy. 'Who are they?' asked Toramana.

'Mahendravarman of Vengi, Avantivarman of Kanchi, Kakavarna of Simhala and the petty kings of the Pandyas and Cholas,' replied the spy. 'But there are a great many more who would give secret support. The King of Kerala is going to the *swayamvara* of the princess Charumati of Kalinga in order to gauge the state of affairs and to canvass support. In fact, that prince has a definite idea of obtaining the active support of Gunasagara and Vyaghra Raja.'

'When is this *swayamvara*?' asked Toramana.

'Next month, my lord,' replied Sarvasammata. 'Grand preparations are going on. One thousand and eight Brahmins are to be feasted for forty days and given costly gifts. The princess Charumati is the most accomplished princess in India and perhaps in the world. The competition for her hand will be very keen indeed.'

'Is she such a famous princess?' asked Toramana.

'Words will fail me, sire, if I were to attempt to describe the qualities of that princess. She is fit to be an empress,' said Sarvasammata.

'Why not then make her an empress? Why not get her married to Mihiragula?' asked the King of the Huns.

'Sire,' replied Sarvasammata who was rather embarrassed at this suggestion. 'A princess of the Kalingas is no match for the heir of a vast empire.'

'I don't see why she should not be,' said Toramana. 'If my dynasty is to take root in India, as I wish, Mihiragula must marry an Indian princess. By marrying a princess of the famous Kalinga royal family the Huns will gain a fixed status in India. Mihiragula's son will be no longer a foreigner. Besides, our rule in Magadha is now admittedly weak. If Kalinga is won over to our side, Magadha will be safe and Maha Kosala completely encircled. Oh, this Kalinga match is the best idea I have had for these many years. Son,' he said turning to Mihiragula, 'what do you say to it?' 'I have no will but your Highness's,' said Mihiragula.

Toramana sent for Tushashpa, Hujheshpa and Vajheshpa at once and talked the plan over with them. Tushashpa was elated with the idea. But not so Vajheshpa and Hujheshpa. They were of opinion that intermarriage with the Indians would lead to degeneration. 'A Hun must marry a Hun,' declared Vajheshpa, 'just as an elephant must marry an elephant. Your Highness talks of the increase of strength owing to the alliance with the Kalingas. Think of the decrease of strength by intermarriage with a weaker race. The prince's example will be followed by all the lesser fry. Soon, within a hundred years, the Huns will be merged in the Indians.'

'I see no harm in it,' said Toramana. 'That is as it should be.'

Of course, Vajheshpa and Hujheshpa had to give way. This they did in a Hunnish way. 'What the Maharaja says will be done. Why should we gainsay his will?' said Hujheshpa.

'My objections have vanished,' said Vajheshpa.

'Now, the question is as to how this match is to be brought about,' said Toramana.

'Send me at the head of a formidable army and I shall soon bring the princess captive,' said Mihiragula.

'There spoke a true Hun,' said Vajheshpa.

'But,' said Toramana, 'let us first try peaceful means. It is unwise to provoke the Kalingas into war especially at this juncture.'

'What care we for the anger of the Kalingas?' asked Mihiragula.

'Perhaps not much,' replied Toramana, 'but then it will mean some unnecessary waste of men and money. Let us first try diplomacy. If it fails, there will always be the mailed fist behind it. At your time of life I also thought that war would settle everything. With the weight of years I am learning to revise my opinion. What is won by force will be lost by force. Not so the fruits of diplomacy. Sarvasammata, what shall we do to gain our objects as regards this marriage?'

'Sire,' replied Sarvasammata, 'in my humble opinion the best way is to send an Indian representative on behalf of the prince. If the princess refuses the prince, the shame will be less than if the prince were present there in person. If she accepts him, then we can go there in state.'

'Do you think the princess will dare to refuse him?' asked Toramana.

'I cannot say, my lord,' replied Sarvasammata, 'there is no knowing what these headstrong princesses will do. They exercise their right of free choice to the breaking point.'

'Well,' said Toramana, 'in that case we had better send Bhanugupta.'

'No choice could be better, my lord,' replied Sarvasammata. 'Happily, he is also in town now. I saw him waiting in the ante-chamber as I came along.'

'Call him, call him,' said Toramana. An attender at once went and brought Bhanugupta to the royal presence.

'What is your Majesty's pleasure?' asked Bhanugupta.

'Bhanugupta, I want you to go to Kalingapatnam and attend the *swayamvara* of princess Charumati on behalf of Mihiragula. If the princess were to reject the magnanimous offer of the prince, tell the Kalingas that they should be prepared for war with us,' said Toramana.

'As your Highness pleases,' said Bhanugupta. 'But methinks a match with a princess of the Kalingas is beneath the dignity of the heir-apparent to the Royal Hun.'

'Not at all,' replied Toramana. 'The Huns do not care for prestige as much as you people do. Our strength has always been in our stern opposition to caste distinctions. Let there arise caste distinctions among us, we would soon be no more powerful than the Indians.'

'Besides,' added Bhanugupta, 'there is another difficulty. The Kalingas are a conceited race. They regard themselves alone as Aryans. They may, I am afraid, be averse to any alliance with the Huns.'

'If they are so foolish, we will teach them a lesson,' said Toramana.

'As your Highness pleases,' said Bhanugupta and left the audience chamber. Sarvasammata also took leave of Toramana after receiving his promised reward. When they had gone some distance from the palace, Sarvasammata told Bhanugupta, 'What times are we living in! A Mlechcha¹ Hun wants to marry a princess of the bluest

¹ An infidel.

blood in India! A mountain torrent wants to unite with the Divine Ganges!' 'The fun of it is that I am to be the agent for bringing this about,' returned Bhanugupta. 'I who would rather die than give my daughter in marriage to a Hun am asked to go and ask for the hand of a maiden of the bluest Kshatriya blood for a coarse barbarian.'

'Why should you undertake the mission then?' asked Sarvasammata.

'Don't you see?' said Bhanugupta. 'My kingdom lies too near the Huns for me to safely defy them. Oh, how I wish I were the ruler of Magadha instead of Western Malwa!' 'We can't help it,' said Sarvasammata. 'A wise man adapts himself to the circumstances in which he is inevitably placed by an unkind providence. Herein lies wisdom.'

'Well, good-bye,' said Bhanugupta, 'but, stay, what do you think of the prospects of the Mahasena coalition you talked about? Can they shake the Hun?'

'Can't say. It all depends on whether the Kalingas side with Baladitya. If they do, there will be some chance of success. Else, black ruin for the Sanatanists,¹ nothing else,' said Sarvasammata.

'If they succeed in defeating the Huns both of us will be ruined,' said Bhanugupta.

'You may be ruined, but not I,' said Sarvasammata. 'Spies are wanted by all monarchs and a clever spy like me cannot be had for the asking. Besides, we always turn with the wind. We have no pride to swallow. We are too powerless to be feared. Your case is different.'

'True,' said Bhanugupta, 'but you know what happened to Kalagni.'

'I heard it to-day as I was going to the palace. I cannot believe that such a clever spy would have come to grief without some other man's active intervention. Some spy

¹ Orthodox Hindus; here, Baladitya's allies.

who envied Kalagni or some man whose secrets Kalagni found out must have told the bandits about Kalagni's mission. Otherwise, Kalagni would never have been suspected by the bandits,' said Sarvasammata. 'You know that the robbers have sent a threatening letter to me also,' said Bhanugupta. 'I heard about that letter. What a magnificent device on your part to curry favour with the Hun!' said Sarvasammata. 'What! You mean to suggest that the letter was got written by me,' said Bhanugupta indignantly. 'No, no. Don't get excited. What I suggested was that the letter must have been written at your instigation,' returned the spy.

'How dare you say that?' asked Bhanugupta.

'Because,' said Sarvasammata, 'because your man Viswanath was found returning from the forest of Hari Ram the day before the head of Kalagni was thrown into your palace. Perhaps your Highness forgets that I am a spy and a good one according to all people.'

Bhanugupta bit his lips and remained silent.

'I hope you won't relate all these suspicions to the Hun,' said Bhanugupta at last.

'Why should I?' asked Sarvasammata. 'You have done no harm to me and I don't see any reason why I should do any harm to you. We are creatures who want to displease as few as possible. We count on nobody. We may be done away with by the powerful. So we must be as unaggressive as possible. Besides, with the fate of Kalagni before me I am not likely to set myself against your Highness. Only, now and then when I am ground down by poverty, I hope you will give me something. No Gupta ever denied alms to a beggar.'

'Oh, you are free to come and take whatever you want,' returned Bhanugupta. 'Now, good-bye.'

'Good-bye,' said Sarvasammata and both went their several ways.

In the evening Toramana and Mihiragula received Sumati who had just arrived from her mission. This woman was a courtesan and an expert spy. She belonged to the dancing-girl caste. She had received her first training in spying under Skandagupta when that monarch was forced to employ spies for watching the movements of the petty Indian princes who were intriguing with the Huns. Her favourite device was to ingratiate herself with the women of enemy princes by her exquisite singing, dancing, combing and garland-making and then to pump out information from them bit by bit without rousing the least suspicion. Then when all that she wanted was got she would pretend that some near relation had died and bid tearful farewells to the ladies confiding in her. In fact, she was such an adept at spying that even Kalagni and Sarvasammata feared her rivalry. She was now about forty-five years old and in the full possession of all her faculties. As soon as she was ushered in, Toramana asked her, 'What news?' 'May it please your Majesty,' she said, 'this expedition of mine was the most difficult I ever had.'

'Did you fail in your mission?' asked Toramana. 'It is impossible.'

'I was very near failing, my lord,' returned Sumati, 'though I did not actually fail.'

'Where is Yasodharman?' asked Toramana.

'In the fortress of Kalanjar in the most loyal portion of his Kingdom of Maha Kosala,' returned Sumati. 'How did you find that out?' asked Toramana.

'By going to Kalanjar and seeing him there,' said Sumati.

'Capital! Capital!' shouted Toramana, 'so you actually entered the fortress of Kalanjar, a feat which none of my soldiers or spies have ever accomplished. Here, take five hundred gold coins' and he threw a bag at Sumati.

That woman took the bag fondly and said:—‘Your Majesty is over-kind.’

‘Not at all,’ said Toramana, ‘you deserve a lot more. Now, to business. How did Yasodharman manage to escape from Ujjaini undetected? Who killed Bhumaka?’ ‘My lord,’ said Sumati, ‘Yasodharman was about to be killed by Bhumaka when Baladitya went to his help and in single combat killed Bhumaka the Lion.’

‘What, so it was that audacious youth who slew Bhumaka the Lion!’ said Toramana. ‘Yes, my lord. Afterwards, Baladitya and Yasodharman took refuge in a house in Ujjaini,’ said Sumati.

‘Which house?’ asked Toramana.

‘In the outcaste Madhavi’s house, my lord,’ replied Sumati.

‘God of our ancestors!’ shouted Toramana. ‘The very house we failed to search! That devil of a Narayana was the cause of it. God blast that fellow’s soul! Go, bring this wretch of a Madhavi before us so that our righteous wrath may be appeased,’ he roared to his attendants.

‘Pardon, my liege,’ said Sumati. ‘The wretched outcaste departed this life day before yesterday. I heard about this when I was coming to your Royal Presence.’

‘Let us at least give her corpse to dogs. Go, bring her corpse from its burial place,’ shouted Toramana.

‘My lord, she was burnt,’ said Sumati, ‘and her bones were scattered to the four winds.’

‘So she is beyond my reach, is it?’ said Toramana. ‘Can’t we at least take revenge on her children?’

‘Sire, she has no children left,’ replied Sumati.

‘Let us at least burn down her wretched hovel and dig a pond there,’ said Toramana. ‘Send at once a hundred soldiers to burn the outcaste Madhavi’s place. Never more shall that place be a refuge for rebels and enemies.’ A

hundred soldiers were at once despatched by Mihiragula for this purpose. 'Well,' said Toramana when his excitement had subsided a bit. 'Did you find out what became of Vasudeva the Yaudheya whom I sent to find out Baladitya and Yasodharman? I have had no news of him as yet. Did the fellow turn traitor to his salt?'

'No, my lord,' returned Sumati, 'he was true to his salt to his dying moment. He met Yasodharman at a choultry. There were many others with Yasodharman. So Vasudeva thought it best to administer poison. He induced the choultry-keeper Kamalaksha by heavy bribes to put strong poison into the hot water. The plan would have succeeded excellently but for the interference of a clever and resourceful country girl called Vasanta. This Vasanta spoiled everything. Vasudeva was at once taken by surprise, disarmed, and tied along with Kamalaksha to his own horse. Yasodharman and Vasanta were on one horse and the horse carrying Kamalaksha and Vasudeva was led along by Yasodharman. On the way, there was a mountain stream in full flood. The bridge was a frail thing. The passage was narrow and difficult. Yasodharman made Vasudeva's horse go in front and came behind. "I shall never be a captive," shouted Vasudeva and gave a sudden bite to the horse. The animal suddenly swerved and fell into the stream. "Save me, save me, I am content to be a slave," shouted Kamalaksha; but all to no purpose. Yasodharman and Vasanta went to the other side and watched the dark stream in the indistinct light. For about ten minutes there were splashes in the whirlpool near the bridge. But the thongs were too strong to be untied or broken. The poor horse was dragged down by the weight of two men. Vasudeva did not shout at all. But Kamalaksha was groaning, "Save me, save me, I am content to be a slave." The cruel whirlpool sucked the horse and its burden into its bosom and all was silence.'

'So the brave warrior died an obscure death, is it?' asked Toramana. 'Sire, you don't know the spirit of these Yaudheyas,' said Sumati. 'They love liberty and detest a slave's life. The prospect of being a slave in Kalanjar was too much for the proud spirit of Vasudeva. Even Yasodharman was very much struck at the courage of the Yaudheya. He said to Vasanta, "Girl, if the man had had half the courage in his life as he had in his death, I would never have been able to take him captive. He died a death worthy of a true Kshatriya."'

'How did you gather all these details?' asked Toramana. 'Sire, I got them from Vasanta,' replied the spy. 'What, so you ingratiated yourself with Vasanta? What is she doing at Kalanjar?' asked Toramana.

'She is the lady in waiting of the princess Mahamaya, the mother of Yasodharman. She is also the right hand of Yasodharman in all things,' replied Sumati.

'So you must have learnt all about Yasodharman's secrets. What is the exact strength of Kalanjar? Describe the celebrated fortress,' said Toramana with great eagerness.

'Sire,' replied the spy, 'I shall have to disappoint your Majesty in this respect. The wretched Vasanta was too clever for me. Yasodharman was very willing. Even Mahamaya was consenting. Vasanta, Vasanta alone, used to say, "Why should we meddle with men's matters? What is there in a fortress? Don't we feel more comfortable in an unfortified place?" I told her that it was from mere curiosity to see the celebrated fortress which even Samudragupta had once failed to take. "Oh, it is mere feminine curiosity, is it?" she used to say. "Then there is no hurry about it." Some three days afterwards when I again opened the topic she said, "Why such a hurry? You are not going to run away from us, are you?" I had to laugh with her. Some days after, I again ventured to revert

to this topic, "Why are you so desirous of seeing this fortress? No person should be shown this fortress unless he or she has stayed at least a year here," said Vasanta. "Why, Vasanta, you have seen the fortress several times. Still, you have not been here many months," said I laughingly. "But then I am not you," came the laughing retort, "I saved Yasodharma Maharaja and thus won the eternal confidence of himself and Maharani Mahamaya." At this both Yasodharman and Mahamaya laughed. I thought that my constantly pressing the question would lead them to suspect me. So I never asked Vasanta again. I approached Mahamaya and even Yasodharman once or twice after this. They said laughingly that Vasanta was the overlord of Maha Kosala and that nothing could be done without her informal approval. What is more, the wretched girl also came to know about my request to Yasodharman and Mahamaya and all my prospects of seeing the secrets of Kalanjar disappeared for ever. "That old woman is alright so far as she goes," I heard her telling Yasodharman, "but, then, old women have always garrulous tongues and may sometimes have itching palms too." Such a horribly cunning girl was Vasanta.'

'But you must have at least seen the way to the celebrated fortress,' said Toramana. 'That is something.'

'Sire,' replied Sumati, 'here also I must disappoint you. When I reached Amalapuri, a petty town in Maha Kosala, I saw Yasodharman there. I offered my services as singer, dancer, garland-maker and comber to the princess Mahamaya. After seeing my performances, the princess Mahamaya and Vasanta agreed to take me into the palace as extraordinary lady-in-waiting. Just then, news came of a threatened invasion of Maha Kosala by the Huns. Immediately we prepared to retreat into the impregnable fortress of Kalanjar. I was all expectation. My joy at being able to find out the route to this redoubtable fortress

knew no bounds. All at once I heard that our journey was to be in the night. I asked Mahamaya why we should not go in the day-time since this would save her Highness from many hours of waking. The old lady, she is about fifty, said drily, "My dear, this is not the first time that I have kept waking. Ever since the defeat of the good king Skandagupta my life has been one of constant sorrow. The shadows deepened at the death of Prakasaditya. They have become even more deep at the expulsion of Baladitya from Magadha and his flight to Kerala. My poor son and I, we are always in flight. No hardship is too great for us provided we keep our honour, and independence. The risk of travelling by day is too great. Hence the journies we undertake are almost always by night." Still I had some lingering hopes of charting the route from the open palanquin though the nights were dark. Even these hopes were blasted by that cunning Vasanta who arranged for thick curtains all round the palanquin and insisted that the curtains should be pulled right down. When I ventured to plead that the ventilation would not be adequate, the wretch said, "When life is in question, ventilation is a very minor consideration." I asked her whether she feared for our lives. She said that she always feared so long as the Mlechchas were in Bharatavarsha. I told her that our action in pulling down the curtains and travelling by night would be construed as cowardice, a slur which we ought not to cast on Yasodharman.' 'Excellent!' said Toramana, 'what did she say to this?'

'Oh, she simply said, "Caution is not cowardice,"' replied Sumati. 'At last, I told her that I was not accustomed to travelling in closed palanquins and that I at least might be permitted to travel in an open palanquin. The cunning girl replied, "Then it is high time you learn our ways if you wish to remain with us. I am very glad that the first initiation is to begin so soon." I could say nothing. I

consented to go in the closed palanquin for fear of being turned out altogether. I flattered myself that I would worm myself into their confidence while in the fortress and thus prevail upon them not only to show me the fortress but also the ways, leading to it and from it, the secret passages, etc. With this object in view I catered to every whim and caprice of Vasanta and Mahamaya. Vasanta was enchanted with my singing, dancing, garland-making and combing. She wanted me to teach her these arts. I tried to put her off by saying "Why do you want to learn all this, O Vasanta? Am I not here to do these things whenever required?" The girl is a very devil in cunning. She replied, "Oh, Karuna, (that was my name in Maha Kosala), "you are sure to do service so long as you are alive. But who will do it after you die? You are old and must have a successor. It is a pity to allow such fine skill as you possess to die with you. Maharaja Yasodharman's queen must have somebody to do these services to her. I am young and willing to learn at your feet. Please teach me all these arts." Mahamaya also asked me to comply with this request. There was nothing left but to obey, and obey I did in order to achieve my mission. To my utter horror I found the wretched girl an adept learner. In a month she had learnt all that I knew in dancing, garland-making and combing. Only in singing did I retain the superiority at the end of this period. Even here it was a questionable superiority. Her age was in her favour. While, therefore, I was much the superior in technique, the girl became at the end decidedly my superior in voice and in effect. She used to learn night and day.' 'What was her object in devoting so much attention to these arts?' asked Toramana.

'God alone knows,' said Sumati, 'I never saw such assiduity in my life. The wretched girl must have had some deep design, I am sure of it. She extorted from me un-

willing lessons at all unnatural hours. I had to please her because she was the leading spirit there. I managed, however, to get the story of Bhumaka and Vasudeva from her.'

'Did you learn anything else?' asked Toramana.

'Yes,' said Sumati, 'I learnt that Yasodharman was going to Kalinga to princess Charumati's *Swayamvara*¹ in order to woo that princess for his lord and master, Baladitya.'

'I see,' said Toramana. 'Do you know that I intend sending Bhanugupta to Kalingapatnam in order to woo the princess for our Mihiragula?'

'Really?' said Sumati, 'but perhaps your Majesty may be disappointed. These petty princesses have a way of being insolent without even their being aware of it. They may be terribly afraid of the Hun but will all the same look with unutterable contempt at a suggested matrimonial alliance with the most powerful Hun prince.'

'That is very strange,' said Toramana.

'Sire, it is nothing strange for a country like this. This is a land of very strange things. Your Highness will find that even those who are none but your abject creatures have still strange ideas of superiority in some respects. For instance, that fellow Narayana, he refused to go to Madhavi's house in spite of the express orders of His Royal Highness. The idea of being polluted by an outcaste was so strong with him that it for a moment overshadowed even his fear of the Hun and hopes of favours from him. So also, this Bhanugupta, he will never condescend to wed a Hun or to give any of his daughters in marriage to a Hun.'

'All this is very strange,' said Toramana.

'Yes, my lord,' said Sumati, 'I shall not be surprised if

¹ Self-choice ; a function at which a maiden chooses her husband.

Charumati were to reject Mihiragula and to select some landless beggar boasting of the so-called blue Kshatriya blood and the endless independence which is born of having nothing to defend and hence nothing to fear.'

'So you think that Charumati may choose Baladitya or some other of the same type?' asked Toramana.

'I shall not be surprised, my lord,' replied Sumati, 'especially since Vasanta has gone to Kalingapatnam in advance.'

'Has that girl also gone there?' asked Toramana, 'with what object?'

'Her objects are known to the Devil alone, my lord,' replied Sumati. 'The wretched creature came with me down to Amalapuri when I wanted to return on account of the pretended death of my niece. We came in the same way as we went, in covered palanquins at night. I once attempted to lift the curtains midway in order to look at the route. I had purposely chosen the bright fortnight for the return journey. But here again the cunning wretch was more than a match for me. As soon as I went to lift the curtain, Vasanta asked me, "What is it you want?" I replied that I just wanted a breath of fresh air. "Oh, no, don't lift the curtain, the Maharani will catch a cold," said Vasanta. "It is pretty hot now, I don't think the Maharani will catch a cold," returned I. "I won't catch a cold, my dear," remarked Mahamaya to my infinite joy. "Her Highness does not know what is good for her. I am her appointed guardian, am I not?" said Vasanta turning to Mahamaya. "Do as you like, my dear," said the Maharani. This finally blasted all my hopes. I had to be content with sitting in that wretched palanquin passing through the very road my heart yearned to see but which an unkind Providence had ordained that I should not see. That moment I saw my match in Vasanta and hated her from the very bottom of my heart.'

'Well,' said Toramana, 'what will be the probable device adopted by Vasanta at Kalingapatnam?'

'Can't say,' replied Sumati, 'but I should think that she would be trying to curry favour with princess Charumati by the use of the very arts I taught her.'

'Well, then,' said Toramana, 'the best thing would be to send you to Gunasagara's¹ court to oust Vasanta by means of your superior accomplishments.'

'I shall certainly like to have another duel with that girl,' returned Sumati, 'and this time the duel will be more equal since Gunasagara, Dakshayani and Charumati will not be the slaves of Vasanta like Yasodharman and Mahamaya.'

'Alright, then,' replied Toramana, 'start to-day. Here are a thousand gold coins for you. Go to Gunasagara's court, ingratiate yourself into Charumati's favour, influence that princess to marry Mihiragula and try if possible to get rid of that Vasanta and to find out all about Mahasena's league against the Hun.' With this Toramana handed over a bag of gold coins to the spy.

'Sire,' said Sumati, 'the bribing of the courtiers and others will require a good deal of money.' 'True, I forgot,' replied Toramana. 'I am glad you reminded me. Here, take three thousand gold coins,' and he handed her a big bag. Sumati took the three bags containing 4,500 gold coins and said, 'Your Majesty, now it has become a regular duel between me and Vasanta. I am going to put all my personal zest into this work.'

'I am very glad to hear that,' said Toramana.

Then Sumati took leave of the Royal Hun and left.

Twenty days afterwards, two people were seen at Kalingapatnam boarding a small ship bound for Java. One was a man of forty-five and the other a woman of about

¹ King of Kalinga.

the same age. When the ship was in the wide ocean, these two stood on deck in the brilliant moonlight, gazing at the mysterious blue above, set with innumerable gems. 'Oh, Sumati,' said the man, 'what a contrast this to the turbid life of a spy! Is there a greater peace than this? Will any man return to the dirty pool of politics after seeing the majesty of nature in solitude in the mid ocean?'

'Oh, Sarvasammata,' said Sumati, for it was she, 'God who knows everything meant this to be our life's end. What a good thing that we leave this wretched Bharatavarsha with its thousand squabbles and sorrows behind and go to a new land where we can begin a new life.'

'Dearest,' said Sarvasammata, 'I agree with you. In Bharatavarsha we could never have hoped to marry and settle down, the difference in caste being so great. But over there in Java, people will not know this difference and even if they do they will not have so strong a feeling about it as these fellows in Bharatavarsha.'

'Still, it is really sad to think that we should have had this idea so late,' said Sumati. 'Better late than never,' said Sarvasammata. 'Darling, you gave the idea to me.'

'Darling, without you the idea would never have borne fruition,' returned Sumati, 'now, we have five thousand five hundred gold coins with which to begin our married life.'

'Meanwhile, Toramana will be thinking that you are busy working at Kalingapatnam. Ha! Ha! Ha!' said Sarvasammata. 'We shall soon be beyond his reach,' replied Sumati. 'Still, his idea has been the cause of our salvation.'

'Quite,' said Sarvasammata. 'Look,' he continued pointing to the western horizon, 'there is Bharatavarsha. The old life is gone, the new life is begun.'

'Farewell, land of my birth and land of my sorrows!' said Sumati.

'Farewell, land of the Bharatas!' said Sarvasammata.

Then, turning to Sumati, he said 'Darling'. Sumati did not speak. She simply clasped Sarvasammata in her arms and gave him a burning kiss. 'Darling,' said she when this was over. 'We are no longer spies, we are lovers. What a transformation for the better! May the old evil life never return!'

'Amen,' said Sarvasammata.

CHAPTER XXIII

A 'SWAYAMVARA'

It was ten o'clock in the morning at Kalingapatnam. The whole city presented an appearance of festivity. All the streets were crowded with princes from the four corners of India and their retinues. Crowds of citizens were to be seen in all the streets. It was impossible to move about freely. One had to plunge into the surging mass of humanity and make what progress one could. It was like climbing up the climbing waves. But not a single face was grave or solemn. All were making merry as at some great festival. There were many sights to be seen. Each Raja and Maharaja had attired himself in his most gorgeous robes and had brought the proudest nobles of his land with him. For the citizens of Kalingapatnam this was the day of days which they had looked up to. All the balconies of the tall houses on either side of the streets were crowded with women and children. Some of the buildings threatened even to fall under such an unexpected weight. The great council-hall of the kings of Kalinga, which was also the throne-chamber, was the centre towards which the crowds from all sides were surging. For centuries, the kings of Kalinga had used all their superfluous wealth on decorating and embellishing this chamber whose only rivals in their affection were the great temples of Vishnu and Siva. In richness of ornament, beauty of execution and magnificence of design there were few buildings in India which could compare with the throne-chamber. And on that day the throne-chamber surpassed itself. All

the kings of India of any repute were to be the guests of the king of Kalinga on the occasion of the *Swayamvara* of Princess Charumati, the pride of the Kalingas. The citizens rose to the occasion. Night and day for forty days, batches of them flocked to the throne-chamber and helped the palace servants in getting the place ready for the great event. For, dear was Charumati to the hearts of the Kalingas. Many were the dowerless maids who had received suitable dowries to enable them to get married from the Princess Charumati and her mother Queen Dakshayani, countless were the poor who received food and clothing from the princess and her mother, and innumerable were the learned men who had been honoured by King Gunasagara, Queen Dakshayani and Princess Charumati. The princess was beautiful as all the princesses of her exalted line were. What endeared her most to the Kalingas was her great learning, immense piety, boundless charity and natural grace. Never did the Kalingas feel so proud as when they challenged the people of other states to name one princess equal to Charumati in all respects. They always looked forward to those ever-recurring learned assemblies convened by Gunasagara where the greatest scholars of India found difficulty in escaping undefeated by Charumati. They remembered also the 'Poor Man's Homes' started by the good princess whereby deserving poor couples got the minimum funds for starting a home and becoming self-sufficing.

In the great throne-chamber were arranged fifty-six little thrones for the customary number of independent monarchs of Bharatavarsha. This hoary number had been provided for though the actual figure of independent Hindu kings then was much smaller. Nothing changes soon in the land of the Vedas. Besides, King Gunasagara and Queen Dakshayani would have scorned the idea of abandoning ancient custom simply because it was contradicted by the

vulgar logic of facts. Thus it happened that the ancient kingdoms of Avanti, Kosala, Mahachedi, Matsya, Panchala, Mahapanchala, Saurashtra, Ayodhya and Mithila, though extinct long ago, still figured in the list of extant kingdoms.

The eventful *swayamvara* was to take place at 11 a.m. Long before that time many kings and princes had taken their seats in the throne-chamber. By eleven, all the seats were occupied and the hall was crowded on all sides by an anxiously expectant crowd. On the dais were seated on a high throne King Gunasagara and Queen Dakshayani. To their right was the High Priest, Vidyasamudra. At eleven the auspicious conchs and *nagaswarams* blew their exquisite notes, a side door opened, and in came Princess Charumati with a garland in her hand. As she bowed to her parents and stood smiling before the vast concourse of kings and princes, she appeared to be more like a goddess from above than like any earthly princess, so beautiful, so graceful, so airy and unreal was she. The assembled princes were electrified and anxiously scrutinized their carefully arranged dresses to see whether any slight defect existed which might diminish their chances of wedding this heavenly nymph. A solemn and tense silence reigned in the hall when King Gunasagara rose and addressed the assembly like this :—'Brother kings, and princes from the four corners of Aryavarta, welcome, welcome to the land of the Kalingas. Following the time-honoured usage of our ancestors, the glorious Kshatriyas of old, we have to-day summoned you all to attend the *swayamvara* of our daughter Charumati. Ceremonies like these lead often to wars between monarchs. So I request you all to give me beforehand your word of honour that none of you will ever war with the happy man chosen to-day. Those who refuse to give this undertaking will be debarred from being candidates for Charumati's hand. Do you all agree to give your word

of honour?' 'Readily, readily,' shouted the assembled potentates. Then rose Vidyasamudra and, addressing Charumati in a serious voice, said:—'Daughter, following the hallowed usage of the Aryan princesses of old, of Sita and Draupadi, this *swayamvara* is held. The whole world knows about your wisdom, beauty and high birth. The choice has to be made by yourself. Sita had the help of the Great God's bow; Draupadi had the wonderful parrot target to help her; you, you alone have nothing to help you but your unaided mind. Child, marriage is the holiest of all holy institutions approved in Heaven; nothing that we do should contravene what is ordained by Him above. No father has the right to force a marriage on his daughter, for that spoils the unbounded freedom of marriage and makes wedded life a life-long misery instead of the Heaven on Earth that it should be. The best thing, of course, would have been for God to arrange these marriages, but, then, He wants to work through us, through the divine particles put into each one of us by His Infinite Grace. Daughter, therefore go thou amongst these Aryan rulers and choose him whom your conscience and heart desire. Let the larger than the largest, the smaller than the smallest, the One in the All, the All in the One help you in making the right choice!'

After this Charumati got down into the hall with her friend Subhashini. First they went to the nearest prince. As soon as the princess approached him, he stood up and his herald spoke out in loud tones the praises of his master. 'Here stands, O princess, the mighty King Kumarapala of Kamarupa, lord of land and sea, unconquerable warrior, friend of the oppressed, king of kings, Kumarapala the Brave of the ever-glorious Lunar dynasty, thirtieth in succession from the Moon.' Charumati cast a glance at the subject of these praises and said smilingly to Subhashini, 'Pass on.' These two words blasted the hopes of

one and raised the hopes of the rest. The next prince approached was the king of Devarashtra and Maharashtra. The herald shouted out, 'Here stands, O princess, the mighty Lord of Devarashtra and Maharashtra, Aparajita, king of kings, lord of the four corners of the world, master of innumerable hosts, the glory of the Solar dynasties, fiftieth in descent from the Sun.' Charumati looked at the prince and told Subhashini softly, 'Pass on.'

Next came the turn of Mahendra Varman of Vengi. His herald shouted out, 'Here stands, O princess, the mighty lord of Vengi, Mahendrarman the Invincible, the patron of learning, the abode of *Dharma*, the refuge of the helpless.' The smiling words 'Pass on' were heard again. The next herald cried out, 'Here, O princess, stands Vyaghraraja, the lord of Gondwana and Mahakanthara, a lion in battle, an adept in learning, the unwavering follower of *Dharma*, the ally of the Kalingas, master of all the fine arts.' Again the words 'Pass on' nipped the rising hopes of the ally of the Kalingas. Next was the turn of Kanchi. 'Here stands Avantivarman, the lord of Kanchi,' shouted out the herald. 'Where is a city in the world to compare with Kanchi, the abode of the Gods, where is a man in the world fit to be compared with Avantivarman, lord of lords, king of kings, master of the Southern Ocean, overlord of the Cholas?' Charumati said again, 'Pass on.'

The next herald shouted out, 'Here, O princess, stands Bhanugupta, prince of Malwa, the representative of Mihiragula the Hun, the son and heir of Toramana, king of kings, lord of lords, conqueror of the Guptas and overlord of all Bharatavarsha and the lands beyond the Oxus.' 'He is not an Aryan prince. He has no right to be represented here,' shouted out a member from amidst the assembled kings. All the people were struck aghast at the audacity of the man who dared to insult the Hun. 'Who dares say

that?' asked Bhanugupta with his hand on his hilt. 'I, I, Yasodharman of Malwa and Maha Kosala,' said Yasodharman, 'I, the representative of Narasimha Baladitya, our lawful emperor, lord of lords, king of kings, the friend of the poor and the foe of the Hun.'

The whole audience was electrified at this. What, was it really Yasodharman, and had the fugitive the courage to defy the Hun in so public a place? Soon all were satisfied that it was really Yasodharman of Malwa and Maha Kosala. No one was more disconcerted than Bhanugupta. Finally, Bhanugupta recovered from the shock. He realized that it was too public a place and too gross an insult to his master to coolly put up with. So he assumed a contemptuous tone and said, 'I thought it must be you. Who else could be so insolent and cowardly? You who dare not show your face in Ujjaini now grow insolent under the hospitable protection of the king of Kalinga. Where is this Narasimha Baladitya your lawful emperor, the lord of lords, king of kings, the friend of the poor and the foe of the Hun? Is he not a wandering fugitive in far-off Kerala with none too poor to be his friend? What kings are under him except the king of hares and the prince of rats? Whom is he lord of except of himself?'

'Traitor!' shouted Yasodharman drawing his sword out, 'this day shall be your last. Never more shall you betray the hands that fed you, never more shall your foul words in praise of the barbarian be heard on this earth.' With this, he rushed upon Bhanugupta who was taken wholly unawares and who shouted to Gunasagara helplessly. 'King, I am your guest! Brothers, you are my protectors!' At once Mahasena of Kerala, Mahendravarman of Vengi and Kumarapala of Kamarupa stepped in between Yasodharman and the object of his wrath. 'Leave me alone, let me finish with that friend of the Mlechcha, the foe of humanity, the betrayer of betrayers,' shouted Yasodhar-

man, 'life is of no worth to me if honour is gone. Is it not the duty of an Aryan prince to fight in the cause of truth against untruth in any form?'

'Brother,' said Vyaghra Raja clasping Yasodharman in his hands, 'This day you have got a life-long friend by your manly words. Whoever else deserts you, be sure that Vyaghra Raja of Gondwana and Maha Kanthara is your steadfast friend till death. But you must now sit down in peace. It is the *swayamvara* of the lady of Kalinga and there should be no disturbance here. All our quarrels should be fought out elsewhere; whoever is chosen by the princess should be allowed to wed her in peace. We have no right whatsoever to fetter her choice.' This sentiment met with universal approbation. Yasodharman was with difficulty made to sheath his sword and to resume his seat. Charumati and Subhashini had watched all this hubbub with surprise but not with least trace of fear. When peace was restored, Charumati asked Subhashini to enquire of Bhanugupta whether Mihiragula, being not an Aryan prince, had a right to be represented there.

'Gracious lady,' said Bhanugupta, 'tell the princess that Mihiragula is of the Solar dynasty and that he is an Aryan prince of the bluest blood worshipping Mahadeva, the God of Gods.'

'How can a Hun be an Aryan prince, Subhashini?' asked Charumati. 'O, princess, he has become a full-blooded Aryan since he came to Bharatavarsha,' returned Bhanugupta. 'How can a Hun become an Aryan, O prince? An Aryan is born, not made. Not ten thousand kingdoms nor a hundred thousand troops can make anyone an Aryan who is not an Aryan. Birth in a royal family in the land of the Aryas is the only passport to Aryandom. So at least say our *Puranas*,' said Charumati. 'Princess,' replied Bhanugupta, 'I must bow to your learning but I must say that Mihiragula is at least as much an Aryan prince

as Vyaghra Raja of Gondwana and Maha Kanthara who has been allowed to sit for this *swayamvara*.' 'What says the traitor and the Mlechcha?' asked Vyaghra Raja. 'At this rate, my friend, you seem to be destined to end your days in Mahakanthara.'

'Not while the Hun is alive,' replied Bhanugupta.

'Let the Hun be alive or dead,' retorted Vyaghra Raja, 'it matters mighty little to me. But, fellow, if you dare to repeat your insolence outside this holy *swayamvara* you will repent it as surely as I am Vyaghra Raja of Gondwana and Maha Kanthara and the ally of the Kalingas.'

'Peace, peace,' said Gunasagara, and all was quiet again.

'Princess,' resumed Bhanugupta, 'think well of the advantages of marrying the noble son of the Royal Hun. By this marriage a grandson of the kings of Kalinga will be on the throne of the Guptas.'

'Prince,' replied Charumati, 'I have no desire whatsoever to see my son on an usurped throne. I would much rather see him beg from door to door than see him on a blood-stained throne wearing a crown dripping with the blood of some of the noblest Aryan princes who ever lived. And, besides, the Kalingas do not want a borrowed glory.'

'Then, princess,' replied Bhanugupta, 'it is my painful duty to warn you about the consequences of your refusing to accept Mihiragula as your lord and husband. The Hun has empowered me to tell you Gunasagara and you Charumati that if the princess will not choose Mihiragula, my royal master will over-run the land of the Kalingas with his myriad hosts and carry away the princess Charumati by force after carrying fire and sword throughout Kalinga and annexing this kingdom.'

All the assembled kings were thunderstruck at this announcement. Charumati alone was unmoved. She said, 'Fellow, dare you threaten an Aryan princess who knows no fear? Go, tell your Mihiragula that he may come any

day with his myriads of Mlechchas. He shall always find the Kalingas ready to meet them.'

'Bravo! Bravo!' shouted the assembled Kalingas. 'There spoke the princess of the Kalingas, the darling of her people.'

'And the Kalingas shall never lack proper allies,' shouted Vyaghra Raja. 'The ally of the Kalingas shall be, as always, in their front ranks.'

'Bravo!' shouted the assembled Kalingas.

'And the hosts of Devarashtra and Maharashtra will back up the Kalingas,' shouted Aparajita.

'Bravo!' shouted the Kalingas.

'The troops of Maha Kosala shall not lag behind,' added Yasodharman.

'Kerala will contribute her mite in this righteous war,' said Mahasena.

'Vengi and Kanchi are behind you,' shouted Mahendra-varman and Avantivarman.

'Kumarapala of Kamarupa will never leave Kalinga to the tender mercies of Mihiragula,' said Kumarapala.

'Bravo! Bravo!' shouted the Kalingas again and again.

'What cares Mihiragula for all your combined hosts?' asked Bhanugupta. 'He who overthrew the army of Skandagupta and Prakasaditya, he who is the overlord of all the lands between the Euphrates and the Brahmaputra, is he going to be afraid of the puny hosts of a few princelings? A man may as well be afraid of an army of ants as be afraid of your ridiculous hosts. These boasted Aryan princes will have to flee before the sturdy Huns as hares before lions.'

'Kill the insolent fellow,' shouted Vyaghra Raja. 'He has insulted the Kalingas and their princess and all the assembled princes.'

'Kill him! Kill him!' shouted Aparajita, Mahendra Varman, Avantivarman, Kumarapala and Yasodharman.

A dozen swords were soon directed at Bhanugupta. That prince was now fully prepared. He said, 'Come, kill an ambassador and prove yourselves to be Aryan princes.'

'Princes,' said Gunasagara, 'what Bhanugupta says is true. He is an ambassador, and his person is sacred. However insolent his words, he cannot be punished according to the laws of war and peace prevalent among the Aryans. Moreover, he is my guest and you know how sacred a guest's life is to an Aryan prince. So, pray control your feelings and resume your seats.' All the excited princes did as desired.

Charumati said to Subhashini, 'Pass on.' But before they could pass on, Bhanugupta said, 'Princess, beware before you take the fatal step to ruin and disgrace. Place no reliance on the words of these princes. They will change their minds every minute. At the very sight of the Huns these princes will swallow all their brave words and fight with the Huns against you to save themselves from utter ruin. Only Vyaghra Raja of Gondwana and Maha Kanthara will stick to his word since he is too much of a savage to understand diplomacy.'

'Fellow,' said Vyaghra Raja, 'if to be loyal to one's plighted word is to be a savage and a novice to diplomacy I am content to be a savage. I am glad that even such a scoundrel like you agrees that I will never prove a traitor to my word.'

'Well,' said Bhanugupta turning again to the princess, 'that is the position. Is it dutiful on your part to ruin your old father at this time of his life? You know for certain that he will be utterly ruined in this unequal contest with the Royal Hun. The beautiful cities of Kalinga will be razed to the ground. You little know the might of the Huns.'

'I know it very well,' replied Charumati, 'but I know also that the mighty king of Magadha, Pushyamitra, was

humbled by my ancestor Kharavela and that Susarman, the last of the Kanvas, had to yield the imperial city of Patali-putra to the Andhras. God will give power to the Kalinga King in a righteous fight. Well, if the worst comes to the worst, let Kalinga go to her ruin in this glorious fight against the barbarian and the foreigner. Even if all the mountains of the world were determined to crush me and all the waters of the world conspired to drown me, my immortal soul will triumph over the limitations of the body and refuse to acknowledge defeat. I scorn Mihiragula now more than I ever did. Go and tell him that no Aryan princess will even look at him. Let the barbarian and the foreigner seek for a bride among his own fellow-barbarians! Subhashini, pass on.'

'Then it means war,' said Bhanugupta as he resumed his seat.

'So be it,' said Dakshayani, 'my daughter shall never be given in marriage to a barbarian and a foreigner.'

'Never!' added Gunasagara.

'Never!' shouted the assembled Kalingas.

The next prince approached was Kakavarna of Simhala (Ceylon). The herald shouted, 'Here, O princess, stands Kakavarna of famous Simhala, lord of lords, king of kings, the follower of *Dharma*, the conqueror of the Pandya and Chola Kingdoms, the disciple of Buddha, the lord of innumerable lands and seas, the hope of the Faith and the jewel among kings.'

'Pass on,' said Charumat: to Subhashini, and Kakavarna's hopes were dashed to pieces.

Next was the turn of Simhabhupati, king of Nepal. The herald shouted out, 'Here stands, O princess, Simhabhupati, king of Nepal, king of kings, lord of lords, disciple of Ne Muni and admirer of the ever-admirable Manjusri. A lion in battle, a cow in generosity, a fox in diplomacy, Simhabhupati has no equal among the Aryas for wisdom

or statesmanship or virtue.' The two words 'Pass on' proved to Simhabhupati and his herald that their diplomacy had failed to achieve its object.

Next rose Yasodharman. Charumati was evidently somewhat confused when she stood before him. Yasodharman had brought no herald. He himself began like this, 'O princess of the Kalingas, here stands Yasodharman of Malwa and Maha Kosala, the representative of Narasimha Baladitya, the lawful emperor of Aryavarta, the descendant of Samudragupta, the son of the daughter of the Lichchhavis, the never-failing friend of the poor and the persistent foe of the Hun. That prince of the lordly Gupta line is the noblest Aryan prince now alive and the fittest to be your lord and husband.'

'Yasodharman of Malwa and Maha Kosala!' called out Mahasena of Kerala rising up at once, 'are you aware that Narasimha Baladitya has lately married?'

'Married!' exclaimed Yasodharman thunderstruck.

'Married!' echoed Subhashini and several others.

'Yes, married,' replied Mahasena. 'Married to the beautiful maiden Saraswati, daughter of Raghupati. The marriage took place in my kingdom.'

'What! The descendant of Samudragupta has married a plebeian!' exclaimed Yasodharman in surprised anguish.

'Yasodharman of Malwa and Maha Kosala,' said Mahasena, 'you are very much mistaken if you think that any princess on earth will surpass Saraswati for charm or beauty or mental equipment barring always the princess whose *swayamvara* we have the honour to attend.'

'So the object for which I came here has ceased to exist,' said Yasodharman in a melancholy voice.

'Why can't you plead on your own behalf now that Baladitya is already wedded?' asked Subhashini, and her eyes mischievously sparkled at Charumati.

'What comparison between me and the descendant of

Samudragupta!' said Yasodharman, 'still, if the princess graciously allows me to plead my own case I shall do so.'

'The permission asked for is granted,' said Subhashini. 'The proof of it is the princess's silence.'

'Well then, I shall proceed,' replied Yasodharman. 'Here stands, O princess, Yasodharman of Malwa and Maha Kosala, a prince unworthy of the line in which he was born. His ancestors were wise and powerful monarchs wielding great power and influence which they always used for the good of their people as they conceived it. Many were the temples built, tanks constructed, roads made and trees grown by my worthy forefathers. Great was their fame, dreaded their name, powerful their armies, prosperous their citizens. Even the Gupta emperors could but command the obedience which springs out of respect and admiration, never that which comes out of fear. But after the hated Mlechchas overthrew the powerful Gupta emperors, all went ill with Malwa and Maha Kosala. Ruined cities, breached tanks, fallen temples and neglected roads became the commonest of all sights. I, the representative of the powerful monarchs of Malwa and Maha Kosala, was unable to save my overlord from defeat; nay, I was unable even to save my own country from conquest and pillage. All that I have got now are a few miserable forts in the interior parts of my land. There, among jungle tribes, lives the descendant of the mighty monarchs of old. My only consolation is that I am still free and that I have never even in my dreams thought of surrender unlike many seemingly prosperous monarchs. I have been faithful unto my friend and overlord; I have been faithful to my faith and country. This at least I have preserved out of the proud heritage I got from my ancestors. Princess, if you wed me you will have an anxious and dangerous life. You should say farewell to all luxury and ease. My mission in life is war with the Hun and the rescue of this ancient land

from the rule of the barbarian and the foreigner. In this one thing I am indomitable and my resolution is as fixed as the Himalayas. Had I been different, I could also have been prosperous like Bhanugupta, but I should have also sold my soul like him. Princess, I am convinced that you are a fit partner for one who is engaged in this righteous war for the independence of our country. It is because of that belief that I wanted Baladitya to marry you. Now that that is impossible I ask you to marry me and be the sharer in my joys and sorrows for all time to come. My heart and my sword, which are about all I can call my own, I offer to you. Will you accept them?’

With a sweet and sad smile Charumati lifted the garland which was in her hand and put it round the neck of Yasodharman amidst thundering applause from the assembled Kalingas and the beating of drums and playing of music by the state musicians. The king and queen of Kalinga got down from the platform and went to where the princess and Yasodharman were standing. The whole assembly had risen. Gunasagara and Dakshayani invited all the assembled princes to the marriage festivities. Most of them accepted the invitation. After this was over, Bhanugupta rose and spoke thus: ‘Sorry am I for you, O Gunasagara, and all your allies and subjects, for the fate which is awaiting you is terrible. The foolish action of the princess to-day has resulted in grossly insulting the Hun. Toramana and Mihiragula are by no means slow of revenge. Soon the cities of the Kalingas shall be reduced to dust, and silence shall prevail in the busy ports of this maritime kingdom. An invasion more terrible than that of Asoka will come and there will be no atonement as in the case of that tender-hearted monarch. Kalingapatnam and Amara-vati will become names surviving from a dead past. As soon as I reach Ujjaini, the Hunnish hosts will be put in motion and will sweep the Kalingas into the sea. Any king

who dares to assist the Kalingas will also come to ruin. Likewise, all who attend these marriage festivities. The Hun will regard all such as his enemies and will demand satisfaction with a vengeance. So, kings, beware of what you do.'

There was a great silence for about five minutes. Then spoke Vajrayudha of Kashmir, 'King Gunasagara, my country is too near the Hun for me to safely defy him. Besides, I have some urgent work at home. I am sorry I cannot attend the marriage festivities.'

'So be it, O king,' said Gunasagara.

Then said Indradyumna of Kasi, 'Gunasagara, I too must go at once.' 'Be it so,' said Gunasagara. A dozen more princes from Northern India excused themselves in this way to the great indignation of Vyaghra Raja who kept on shouting 'Coward! Coward!' as soon as each new request came.

'King Gunasagara,' said Mahasena after this, 'I shall stay throughout the festivities, and, as soon as I go back to Kerala, I shall send you any help I can.'

'Thanks,' said Gunasagara. 'Remember, you will be ruined,' said Bhanugupta.

'Ruined!' said Mahasena and laughed. 'All your Huns put together will not be able to coerce the lord of Kerala. Before they reach the land of Parasurama, most of those creatures would have gone to the other world. Besides, our soldiers are quite able to fight the Huns.'

'I shall also help you to the best of my ability, Gunasagara,' said Mahendravarman.

'So also myself,' said Kakavarna, 'the holy lands of the Blessed One must be freed from the yoke of the barbarian and the foreigner.'

'Gunasagara, you can count on my help,' said Avantivarman.

'The ally of the Kalingas need not promise any help,'

said Vyaghra Raja. 'He will always be with the Kalingas in any war righteous or unrighteous.'

'Bravo!' roared the assembled Kalingas.

'Kumarapala of Kamarupa will send his troops across the Brahmaputra whenever the call comes,' said Kumara-pala.

Then all these princes began slowly to proceed to the palace where the priests had made all arrangements for performing the ceremonies incidental to marriage.

'Remember, all this means war,' said Bhanugupta.

'I know it full well,' said Gunasagara and left Bhanugupta to himself to reflect on the events of the day and to concert plans for the crushing of the recalcitrant princes.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN THE FORTRESS OF KALANJAR

IT was a brilliant day in spring. All around the fortress of Kalanjar there was the most luxuriant vegetation imaginable. Flowers of all possible colours were to be seen in abundance. Birds of innumerable varieties were crying themselves hoarse from amongst the thick clusters of leaves. Now the cries seemed to be the funeral dirges of their enemy, the rainy season; a moment after, it was like the welcome to Spring. All notes, all melodies were there to soothe the sensitive ear. Now and then some birds, not content with the exhibition of their vocal powers, used to come into the open spreading their wonderfully beautiful wings. The gorgeous five-coloured parrots used to fly from one tree to another exhibiting for one moment during their flight a vision of beauty all too welcome in this workaday world. Then there was the shy Kokil singing its most exquisite notes and becoming visible to the rapt listeners now and then like a singer looking for applause. Some peacocks were dancing their wonderful dance showing to the best advantage the feathers an All-Merciful God had given them. In the ditch just below the fortress swans of snow-white colour were swimming merrily in their stately way forgetting for a moment their cherished Himalayan home, Manasarowar. Some deer were also roaming about the slopes of the hill quite fearless of man and his cruelty. Nature herself seemed to be fully awake on that opening day of spring, spring which indicated in the India of those days the call of Love and the call of War, these two strangely different and yet strangely similar opposites. Spring was the time when Indian princes loved to get

ready their war chariots and take them out from their stands where they were sleeping for the six months of the rainy season. The harvest would have been gathered and the ryots would be ready to go on these warlike expeditions which meant to them some excitement and involved little risk since they were only camp-followers, the real fighting force being composed of the regular armies and auxiliary levies of the king.

On this particular day, at about four o'clock in the evening, three women were sitting on the velvety grass in the gorgeous flower garden inside the fortress of Kalanjar and enjoying the beautiful breeze, the exquisite smell, the birdly melody and the fine scenery. The garden was on the highest part of the fortress, and miles and miles of the distant plains could be seen from the spot where the three ladies sat. They were evidently engaged in deep conversation.

'Charumati,' said Mahamaya, 'when our soldiers left fifteen days ago for the great campaign, I very much admired their bearing but I had nevertheless serious misgivings. If the kings of Kerala, Vengi, Kanchi, Simhala and Kamarupa fail us, the brave soldiers of Kalinga, Mahakosala and Gondwana which went yesterday will be like so many sacrificial sheep.'

'Mother,' said Charumati, 'why these misgivings? Mahasena, Avantivarman, Mahendravarman, Kakavarna and Kumarapala are not likely to go back on their pledged words.'

'I hope not,' replied Mahamaya, 'but, then, there may be other unexpected misfortunes. Suppose a storm scattered the ships of Kakavarna, what are we to do?'

'There are still Mahasena, Mahendravarman, Avantivarman and Kumarapala,' said Charumati.

'My dear, the existing arrangement is that Mahasena, Mahendravarman and Avantivarman should march their

troops up to Kalingapatnam and there join some more troops from Kalinga and march along the coast to Magadha. Will these soldiers reach our men before battle is joined with the Huns?' asked Mahamaya.

'Let us hope they will,' replied Charumati, 'God will help our good cause.'

'What is the strength of the Huns?' asked Charumati of Vasanta who was the third woman of the party.

'The army which has now marched under Mihiragula is three hundred thousand strong. There are forty thousand excellent horsemen. The Hun has also a formidable contingent of elephants,' said Vasanta.

'What is the strength of our forces?' asked Charumati.

'One hundred thousand men from Kalinga, twenty thousand from Maha Kosala and ten thousand from Gondwana,' replied Vasanta.

'But, then, you don't count Vyaghra Raja as one, do you?' asked Charumati.

'I did injustice to the valiant ally of the Kalingas. He is an army in himself,' replied Vasanta.

'What you say is true, Subhashini,' said Charumati.

'Your Highness forgets that I was Subhashini only at Kalingapatnam and that too for a definite purpose and that my present and true name is Vasanta' said Vasanta and laughed. Mahamaya and Charumati also joined in the laughter.

'Really and truly?' asked Charumati. 'Oh, Subhashini, what a cunning thing you are.'

'Vasanta, if you please,' replied Vasanta. 'I think you are decidedly the cunningest creature I ever saw,' said Charumati laughing. 'Your name was Vasanta, you gave it out as Subhashini. You were commissioned to plead the cause of Baladitya, you made me head over ears in love with Yasodharman, thus betraying the trust reposed in you.'

'There was an abettor to this breach of trust, my lady,' retorted Vasanta.

'Oh, yes,' replied Charumati blushing, 'but I am now only concerned with the principal.'

'Who is this abettor you refer to, Vasanta?' asked Mahamaya.

'None but the young Maharani,' replied Vasanta bursting into laughter.

'This is too much,' said Charumati, 'I shall not tolerate this any longer. Come, let us talk of more pressing things. The king, my father, has an army of two hundred and fifty thousand. Why were only a hundred thousand soldiers sent?'

'Because,' said Vasanta, 'some are required to defend Kalinga against an unexpected invasion and some are to march with the allied armies from the south.'

'Why did Vyaghra Raja bring only ten thousand men?' asked Charumati.

'Because,' replied Vasanta, 'the dear little man only wanted to bring his choicest troops. He had also to leave some for home defence. The poor fellow has made his brother Yuvaraj¹ and made every preparation for the administration of his country during his absence.'

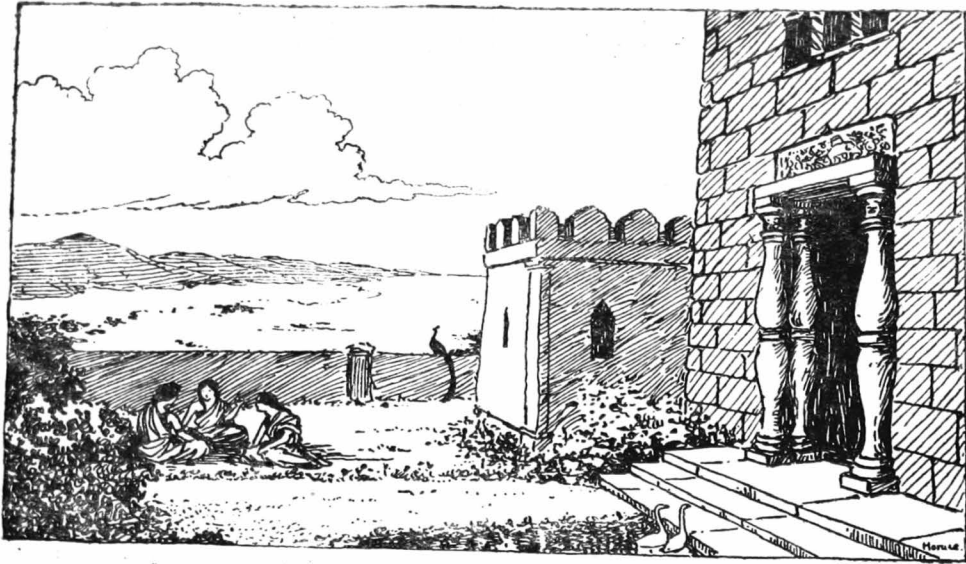
'Why were only twenty thousand soldiers available in Maha Kosala?' asked Mahamaya.

'Think of the heavy losses in the previous wars for independence,' replied Charumati. 'The poor soldiers of Maha Kosala had to bear the brunt of the wrath of the Hun.'

'Always excepting the Emperor Baladitya,' said Mahamaya. Charumati did not like to contradict this. So she simply contented herself with saying, 'Oh, yes, of course.'

'See,' said Vasanta looking over the plains, 'see, some Spring was the time when Indian princes loved to get

¹ Crown-prince and regent.



ENGAGED IN DEEP CONVERSATION.

'undoubtedly our man because he is spurring his horse on directly to the fort.' All the three ladies at once hastened to the inner fort gate in order to know at once what message had been brought. They reached the gate earlier than the weary horseman. As soon as he reached the gate, Vasanta asked him, 'What news?'

'The Emperor Baladitya and one thousand soldiers from Kerala together with four thousand soldiers from Simhala arrived at Tamralipti by ship and effected a junction with Yasodharma Maharaja, Vyaghra Raja and their troops,' said the messenger.

'Has Saraswati Maharani come?' asked Charumati.

'Yes, Your Highness,' said the messenger. 'The Empress is going to stop at Kalanjar till the fighting is over.'

'When is she coming?' asked Mahamaya, Charumati and Vasanta in one voice.

'To-morrow,' replied the messenger.

'You worthless fellow,' said Charumati with indignation, 'why didn't you then at once inform us? What do you men know about the preparations which have to be made for receiving a guest!'

'Your ladyship must excuse me,' replied the messenger. 'The Maharani asked me to tell Maharani Mahamaya that no preparations were needed for receiving a daughter, and your ladyship that none were needed for receiving a sister. She further wanted to make her visit here a surprise visit. She added, "My mother and sister must have a pleasant surprise." But Yasodharma Maharaja wanted me to tell Your Highnesses.'

'I am very glad that Saraswati Maharani is coming,' said Mahamaya.

'So am I,' said Charumati.

'I am also so very glad,' said Vasanta. Turning to Charumati, she said, 'I expect the Maharani is like you, quite unassuming though fully aware of her dignity.'

'I expect so,' replied Charumati.

'What wonder?' asked Mahamaya. 'The daughter of the Lichchhavis was like that. I don't see why Saraswati should be different. Now, come, daughter, let us make some preparations to receive our Empress in the ancient fortress of Kalanjar which the Emperor Samudragupta once failed to capture.'

'Come along, then,' said Charumati to Vasanta.

'Wait a minute,' said Vasanta. 'Let us ask of the messenger what the opposite armies are doing.'

'Quite so,' said Charumati. 'My man, where is the Maharaja's army now?'

'Our army is right in the heart of Magadha opposite the ancient city of Pataliputra which is in our hands.'

'How did we capture it?' asked Charumati and Mahamaya.

'Mihiragula's army was at Benares when our army was just on the frontier of Magadha. Yasodharman was for a forced march to Pataliputra. Vyaghra Raja agreed. They together made their armies move so fast that before Mihiragula could come within striking distance the Imperial City had been captured and the garrison of 5,000 Huns and renegades put to the sword. Three days after this, the Emperor Baladitya came from Tamluk and was crowned at Pataliputra in the palace of the great Asoka Maharaja amidst the thundering applause of the people of Magadha.'

'Have the people of Magadha given any substantial help to the allies?' asked Charumati.

'Yes,' replied the messenger. 'Money has been poured into the allied treasury by the Magadhans who have also mobilized an army of one hundred thousand. The Angas and Vangas, who were long ago absorbed in Magadha, have supplied many elephants though their men recruits are not of good quality. What is more, Kumarapala of Kamarupa who was hesitating for some time whether to

join the allies or not, since the southern princes had not come, decided to join Baladitya after the exhibition of the loyalty of Magadha. That means an addition of fifty thousand seasoned troops.'

'Good, good,' replied Charumati. 'So we have now two hundred and eighty-five thousand troops. What about the lords of Vengi, Kanchi and Kerala?'

'The rumour is that at the last moment these princes decided not to keep their promise since it would mean much trouble and would involve many risks. Besides, the kings of Vengi and Kanchi, who are relations, fear that if the Huns were defeated Kalinga would become so powerful as to be a menace to them. This was another reason for their decision.'

'Oh, unfortunate country of eternal jealousies and unnatural fears!' exclaimed Charumati.

'It was always like that, my dear,' said Mahamaya. 'When the barbarian invaded the land in the time of Paurava,¹ Ambhi of Takshasila turned traitor to his country and ideals; when the barbarian king's general² crossed the Sindhu,³ the petty kings of Avanti and Malwa aided him against the Emperor Chandragupta; when the Sakas and the Yuehchis came, it was the same story all over; again, when Milinda the Yavana came to attack Pushyamitra Sunga, Kalinga aided the barbarian; lastly, when the blood-thirsty Huns came to this country, the ungrateful princelings deserted the banner of the great Skandagupta and Prakasaditya and took sides with the barbarian and the foreigner. See, for instance, Bhanugupta and Budhagupta. These hell-hounds were given preferments by the Gupta Emperors, and what is the return they made? They sold themselves to the Hun as soon as they were promised secure tenure of the provinces which they now hold and betrayed their master and country. Such betrayals

¹ Porus.

² Seleucos.

³ The Indus.

and treacheries will occur as long as there is Bharata-varsha. The future history of our motherland will show these evils in even an increasing degree since the Kali Age¹ is steadily advancing, undermining the little morality that remains.' 'Mother,' said Charumati, 'who taught you so much history of our mother country? You seem to be better read than I expected.'

'Oh,' said Mahamaya, 'there was a learned Brahman pandit called Susarman in the court of Skandagupta. When that Emperor was prostrate with grief over the desertion of Budhagupta and Bhanugupta, that Brahman consoled the Emperor with these and some other examples and said, "Prince, build not on the frail bark of human hopes and achievements, especially in our country. Live your life here below as well as you can, do your duty regardless of results and regardless of consequences, and, when the time comes for you to leave, shake the dust from your feet and depart to that land which no barbarian invades and no false friend betrays." The tears of Skandagupta ceased that day, and till his death he acted up to the ideal set up by Susarman.'

'Where is Mihiragula's army now?' asked Charumati of the messenger.

'When I left the Maharaja's camp, the barbarian army was twenty miles from Pataliputra,' replied the messenger. 'A great battle must have taken place now between the two armies.'

'Our army is the weaker in numbers, isn't it?' asked Charumati.

'Yes,' replied the messenger, 'unless the fifty thousand troops from Kalinga despatched recently reach our army in time.'

'Daughter,' said Mahamaya, 'even now the two contending armies might be engaged in deadly conflict. Let us

¹ The iron age; the times we live in.

pray for our success. My only son and your husband is now championing the cause of Right along with Baladitya and Vyaghra Raja. May the God in Heaven help the right cause! I don't care for results. If my son returns victorious, I shall be very proud of him. If he dies in the battle, I shall be still more proud of him, for it is given to few to die in a righteous war in defence of one's country and ideals. Only in one case will I have to hang down my head in shame, and that contingency will never occur; I mean if Yasodharman . . .' and here Mahamaya's voice broke, and tears dimmed her eyes.

'If Yasodharman flees like a coward from the field of battle,' said Mahamaya at last with an effort which seemed to wring her whole soul.

'That my husband will never do, never!' said Charumati.

'Never!' said Vasanta.

'Never!' said Mahamaya, 'so far as I know the character of the child I delivered and reared up. But if the impossible ever happens, if Yasodharman turns tail, that day Mahamaya will shake the dust off her feet and enter the ever-hospitable palace of Agni¹ without seeing the face of her son.'

'Mother,' said Charumati, 'why think of impossible things? Now, to more concrete points. Do you think that the help from Kalinga will reach in time?'

'Child,' said Mahamaya, 'I do not count on the help from Kalinga. I am thinking and counting on the help from One far greater than Kalinga or its troops, greater than the greatest, smaller than the smallest, all in one and one in all, the Lord who created us all and who would never see *Dharma*² conquered by *Adharma*.³ 'Mother,' asked Charumati, 'do you really think that divine help can be counted on in these days? Will God ever take sides in a battle?'

¹ The God of Fire.

² Right.

³ Unright.

'Of course, he will,' replied Mahamaya. 'He is bound to. Did not Sri Krishna fight the Kauravas in the Mahabharata War?'

'Oh, yes,' said Charumati, 'but, then, those were days of the Dwapura Yuga, and, moreover, we have no evidence to show that the Mahabharata represents real events.'

'Child,' said Mahamaya surprised, 'would a sage like Vyasa have written lies? And, then, even assuming that Sri Krishna might not have helped the Pandavas but for Arjuna, think of His express promise in the *Bhagavad Gita* that He would come from age to age to destroy wickedness and to uphold *Dharma*. He is bound to help us now.'

'I hope He will help us,' replied Charumati. 'But no sane man calls upon God to help him without trying his best to help himself.' 'My man,' she said turning to the messenger, 'what is the spirit of our troops?'

'The troops of the Maharaja and Vyaghra Raja are in high spirits,' replied the messenger. 'The Kalingas are somewhat dejected owing to the absence of their king, but still they are determined. The Keralas and Simhalas who came with Baladitya are moody and depressed owing to the strangeness of the country and the absence of their usual food articles, etc., in Magadha. The Simhalas are eager to go back. Shame alone holds them back from this course. The Keralas are busy with complaints about the unsuitable nature of the water, the alien speech, the lack of hills, etc. These fellows are brave and will fight hard when they meet the Hun. But my fear is lest they should pine away because of home sickness.'

'How are the Magadhans?' asked Charumati.

'They are rallying unexpectedly,' said the messenger. 'They declare that the short experience of Hunnish rule is enough for them to prefer death to such bondage. Men, women, and children are most enthusiastic. One old

woman went to Baladitya and said, "King, swear never to desert us and we will never desert you." Baladitya swore to that effect, and the vast assemblage of Magadhans declared that so long as one of them was alive the Huns would never reconquer Pataliputra.'

'That is quite encouraging,' said Charumati. Then, turning to Vasanta and Mahamaya, she said, 'Now let us go and prepare for Maharani Saraswati's arrival.'

All that evening and next morning there was nothing doing at Kalanjar except eternal preparation for the coming of Saraswati. Ever since the break of day, Charumati, Mahamaya and Vasanta were looking across the plains to catch a glimpse of the expected visitor. All their eagerness was doomed to disappointment. The setting sun sunk over the western hills without the least sign of Saraswati. All was anxiety at Kalanjar. Charumati sent out messenger after messenger in the dusk to find out any traces of Saraswati, but with no effect. The twilight deepened into darkness. Still not the least trace of Saraswati. The three ladies became greatly alarmed. 'Daughter,' said Mahamaya, 'Saraswati Maharani has not yet turned up. I am getting anxious. The times are dangerous.'

Charumati's fears were equally great but she wanted to console her mother-in-law. So she said, 'The Maharaja would never have sent Saraswati Maharani to Kalanjar except in the care of some trustworthy warriors. There is absolutely nothing to fear. Let us go to bed peacefully.'

'Child,' said Mahamaya, 'sleep will never come to me till I see Maharani Saraswati safe in this fortress. Why go to bed? Why pretend to be free from care? I shall watch. You and Vasanta, you better go to bed.'

'Never,' said Charumati, 'while you are waking. Vasanta, you can go to bed if you like.'

'I go to bed!' exclaimed Vasanta indignantly. 'Never!'

So all the three kept waking all through the dread hours of the night. Few words were uttered by any of them; the cares oppressing them were so great. At about 2 a.m. the sentry at the gate of the inner fort whistled in a low key. Vasanta ran up to him and asked, 'What news?'

'I see dimly four people approaching the inner fort,' replied the sentry. They seem to be friends since they have already got access to the outer fort.'

'Perhaps Maharani Saraswati's party,' exclaimed Vasanta, and hurried to Charumati and Mahamaya with the news.

'These people are walking, Saraswati's escort must be on horse. So this party is not Saraswati's,' said Charumati.

'Still we had better go and see who these are,' replied Vasanta.

'I see no harm in that,' returned Charumati. Then all the three went to the gate of the inner fort. The four strangers had by this time arrived at the gate.

'Who are these?' asked Vasanta of the sentry.

'They say that they will reveal their identity only to Maharani Mahamaya,' replied the sentry. 'I mean the three since the fourth one is one of our soldiers.' Thereupon, Mahamaya took a lamp and looked at the three strangers. All three of them had their eyes bandaged tightly. Mahamaya ordered them all to be brought to the palace and there undid their eye bandages. Charumati was holding a lamp in order to scrutinize the faces of the three strangers. The first two whose bandages were undone were ordinary Brahmins. One of them was a man of about fifty and the other was a woman of thirty. When the eye bandage of the third stranger was undone, Charumati uttered a cry of pleased surprise.

'Who are you of so radiant a beauty and so royal an appearance?' she asked the third stranger. 'Surely, you

are no Brahmin as your clothes are intended to indicate. A Kshatriya countenance shines from underneath the paraphernalia of a Brahmin maiden. Speak, who are you?’

‘I am Saraswati, the wife of Baladitva,’ said the third stranger.

‘Oh, I thought so!’ said Mahamaya embracing her fervently. ‘Daughter, I shall quarrel with you if you do like this again. No representative of the daughter of the Lichchhavis should enter a fort with so little ostentation. Who are these two Brahmins? Are they really Brahmins?’

‘We are, your Highness,’ replied the Brahmin lady. ‘Arundhathi is my name and this is my father Gnanapriya.’

‘Mother,’ said Saraswati, ‘honour these two people for they are fit to be honoured. Nobler and more self-sacrificing people I have never met. They saved me from capture and disgrace.’

Mahamaya and Charumati at once went and fervently embraced Arundhathi. ‘This day you have earned a right to my affections next only to Vasanta,’ said Mahamaya.

‘I have found a sister,’ said Charumati, ‘through your good action. Pray, sister,’ she said embracing Saraswati, ‘teli me all about the dangers you went through.’

‘Most willingly,’ replied Saraswati. ‘My lord Baladitya and Yasodharman thought that I had better stay at Kalanjar till the fighting was over. I also agreed since I wanted to meet you and Maharani Mahamaya.’

‘My joy knows no bounds at this expression of your sentiment,’ returned Mahamaya.

‘Well,’ said Saraswati resuming her story, ‘I was given an escort of twelve chosen soldiers headed by Bhattarka, a soldier of great repute and a scholar of no mean ability. Last noon, we came to the town of Amalapuri, escaping the vigilant attempts of the Huns to capture us. But just then our party met unexpectedly a body of 100 troopers of the Huns. These were mostly renegades from our own

country, about ninety-five of them being from the Yaudheya country. As soon as they saw our party at a distance, they raised a loud shout and wanted to attack us and the palanquin in which I was. My protectors were ready to die but not to hand me over as captive to the Huns as would most certainly be the case if they fought against eight times their number. So, while the Hun's soldiers were at a distance, Bhattarka asked me to rush into a Brahmin's house he showed me, and then himself got into the palanquin. The Brahmin's house I went into was Gnanapriya's. He asked me who I was. I told him that I was Baladitya's wife. He said, "I am in a fix. If I harbour you, the Huns will burn the house over my head and even outrage my widowed daughter. But to refuse you shelter is cruel and unmanly. What am I to do?" I said that I would not drag his family into utter ruin and disgrace and would rather go away and face any fate that awaited me. Then spoke Arundhathi, the Brahmin's daughter, "Never shall a maiden be turned out by us from our roof to ruin and dishonour, least of all the legitimate empress of all these lands. Father, as a woman, I implore you to ask this maiden to stay. If you do not ask her to do so, I shall also go out with her and face all the dangers she does. I have been a widow for twenty years, I have never known the affection of a husband or the joy of a son. I live on the memory of my dead husband and the consolations of philosophy and religion. If you want your daughter to live with you, if you want her not to leave her ancestral house, you should implore this lady to stay with us. He who upholds *Dharma* is protected by *Dharma* and he who seeks to destroy *Dharma* is destroyed by it. Today it is given to us to protect the honour of a maiden and we must prove ourselves worthy of our sacred trust. Life is not everything." Thereupon, the Brahmin implored me to stay and stay I did. This lady soon changed my

clothes into those of a Brahmin maiden and began to treat me as if I were a Brahmin born. In an hour the partisans of the Hun had slain my devoted escort of twelve and were roaming about Amalapuri in search of further enemies. They were expecting to see me in the palanquin but instead of me they found Bhattarka getting down from it with a flashing sword. Fifteen men of the Hunnish faction were killed before the last of the faithful twelve went to the Warrior's Heaven. But eighty-five more remained to scour the petty town. Every nook and corner in every house was searched. At last the villains came to the house where I was. They asked Gnanapriya who Arundhathi and I were. He replied that Arundhathi was his daughter and I her sister-in-law. "Is this lady too a Brahmin?" asked the leader of the troops looking at me. "Good Heavens!" replied Arundhathi, "what insults are you hurling at us! Question my Brahmin caste if you like, but not that of my sister-in-law." "How long has she been here?" asked the leader. "Twenty days," replied Arundhathi. The captain of the Huns at once called some neighbours and asked them for how long I had been in the house. These neighbours were all devoted adherents of Yasodharma Maharaja. Still, they were taken by surprise and did not know what Arundhathi had said. One of the old men among them however said like this—"Being a close relation of Arundhathi, this lady comes frequently to this place to console the poor lady in the misery of her widowhood. Arundhathi is a model widow. She rarely mixes with us ever since the day when her husband departed from this world of transitory joys and perennial sorrow." Tears came into Arundhathi's eyes at this, tears of gratitude for the old man's support, tears for her dead husband. The Yaudheya captain was moved. He said to his soldiers, "Men, we have also been brought up in the old traditions. Let us no longer intrude on the privacy of these lonely ladies. Thank God, we are not yet

dead to human feelings. My own mother became a widow at eighteen." With that, the party went to the next house for search. That night, as dusk fell, a soldier of Maharaja Yasodharman came to the Brahmin's house where we were and wanted to see me. Arundhathi was nervous lest he should be a foe. He said that he would convince me that he was a friend. I consented. He came to me and whispered the three key pass words. I knew that he must be a friend and so offered to accompany him to the fortress of Kalanjar if Arundhathi and her father also would come. These two agreed very generously to come with me and take the inevitable deadly risks. The soldier insisted that the eyes of my two friends should be tightly bandaged so that they might not see the secret passage to Kalanjar. I said that my eyes also should in that case be bandaged since I would never consent to preferential treatment. So all of us three had our eyes bandaged and we were taken to the outer and inner fortresses. The soldier guide uttered the three magic words aside with the sentry at each gate and we were allowed free entry, and here we are.'

'Well, you must be weary now,' said Mahamaya. 'It is time you had some hot milk first,' and she led the three into the dining hall of the fortress palace.

CHAPTER XXV

THE FIRST VICTORY

THREE days after the arrival of Saraswati and her two friends, Arundhathi and Gnanapriya took leave of Saraswati, Mahamaya, Charumati and Vasanta and prepared to go back to Amalapuri. Mahamaya took Charumati, Saraswati and Vasanta aside and said to them, 'These are people who have done us the greatest service imaginable. It is impossible for us ever to return the heavy debt we owe them. Still, it will be unseemly on our part not to return some portion of the favours we have received. I think of giving five hundred gold coins to these two poor Brahmins.'

'I very much doubt whether they will accept the money,' said Saraswati. 'I think that the old man will accept it alright. It is the young woman who may cause trouble,' remarked Charumati.

'My own opinion is,' said Vasanta, 'that the young woman will not only not receive the money herself but will also prevent the old man from taking it.'

'In that case, let us call the old man aside and give the money,' suggested Charumati.

'I can persuade the young woman,' said Mahamaya.

Saying this, the old queen called Arundhathi and Gnanapriya and said to Arundhathi, 'My dear, I am very sorry you are going away. The services you have rendered us are so very great that we can never hope to make any suitable return to you. Still, it is not good that we should keep quiet without doing anything. Here are five hundred gold coins for you, please accept them and keep them for future use.'

Arundhathi's face darkened at the last words and tears rushed into her eyes as she replied: 'Your Highness, I am really sorry that your opinion of me should be so low as to think that I am so fond of money. What is money, after all? What will it fetch? When I did what little I could for Maharani Saraswati, I had no idea of any monetary reward. I did for a fellow-woman what I was bound to do. I would never have done it for any amount of money. We are not so poor as to require any pecuniary help. And even if we were so poor, I would never have accepted any money for doing the service I did.'

'Child,' said Mahamaya with tears in her eyes, 'your words have moved me very much. I never intended to offend you. I am also not a slave of money. Still, it is good to have some money with you. Is it not so, Gnanapriya?'

'Quite so,' replied Gnanapriya. 'My daughter does not know the value of money, that is all. What cannot five hundred gold coins do? I never saw such a heap of money before. Your Highness is generous beyond my expectations.'

'Then take the money,' said Mahamaya holding the bag towards Gnanapriya. Gnanapriya stretched out his hand in order to grasp the proffered money. Then spoke Arundhathi:—

'Father, if you accept that money, you will lose your daughter, for I shall leave your house for ever after this iniquitous deed of yours. You think of making me happy by taking this money and using it for me. In fact, nothing can make me more miserable. I took the risk not from love of money but from regard for my dead husband's memory and from affection for the sweet little creature who sought an asylum in our house.'

Gnanapriya drew back his outstretched hand to the great indignation of Mahamaya who said Arundhathi, 'If

you will not take the money yourself, allow your father to take it. I never saw such a woman in my life. She will neither take money herself nor allow another to take it.'

'You must excuse me,' said Arundhathi, 'but my resolution is steadfast. I do not prevent my father from taking the money. I only said that I would leave him for good if he took it.'

'Child, take the money for my sake,' implored Mahamaya.

'No, no, I cannot take it for anybody's sake. Even if my dead husband were to order me to take it, I shall be forced to refuse to do so.'

Upon this, Saraswati went and embraced Arundhathi:— 'Sister,' she said, 'I am proud of my sex to-day when I see you uttering such noble words. Your figure will always be found engraven in my heart. Whenever you are in trouble, come to me if I am alive and you shall always find a comforter. Meanwhile, keep this as a token of my affection for you,' and she slipped a pearl necklace from her neck and gave it to Arundhathi. Arundhathi embraced Saraswati in return but refused the necklace saying, 'What is the use of a pearl necklace for a widow? My real necklace is gone, why have these sham substitutes? As for your affection, it needs no token in addition to your sweet face and guileless smile.'

'You are a gem, Arundhathi,' said Charumati and embraced her. 'Oh, how I wish I could resist gold like you! Why don't you stay with us for ever? Why don't you leave your dangerous home in Amalपुरi and take up permanent residence in Kalanjār?'

'Do so, I implore you,' said Saraswati.

'Do so, I entreat you,' said Vasanta.

'No,' replied Arundhathi, 'a widow like me does not require a palace to live in. I must live in our little house *uṣā* Amalपुरi and look after my father. Whenever your

ladyships come to Amalपुरi, please send word to Arundhati.' With this she prostrated to Mahamaya, embraced Saraswati and Charumati and took leave of Vasanta. After this, the eyes of the two were bandaged and both of them led out of the fortress by a trusted soldier.

'What an ideal Brahmin widow!' exclaimed Mahamaya.

'What an ideal woman!' said Charumati.

'What dignity and independence!' said Saraswati.

'What depth of affection in her!' exclaimed Vasanta.

'What a pity that such a gem is destined to so hard a fate!' remarked Charumati. 'Barely thirty years old and a widow for the last twenty years!'

'It is such widows that raise the prestige of our women,' said Mahamaya.

Two more days passed at Kalanjar. No news had come from Yasodharman after the arrival of Saraswati. The whole fortress was getting anxious about it. On the morning of the third day there was a great hubbub at the outer gate. Mahamaya, Saraswati, Charumati and Vasanta came out of the palace to find out what it was. Before they had time to go to the gate of the inner fort a soldier came rushing and shouted frantically, 'Victory! Victory! Long live the king! Down with the Hun!' A crowd of men, women and children was at his heels shouting likewise, 'Victory! Long live the king! Down with the Hun!'

Mahamaya was overpowered with joy and could not speak for a few minutes. Saraswati and Charumati asked in one voice, 'Where was the battle? How many Huns were slain?'

'The battle was just outside Pataliputra,' replied the messenger. 'It was fiercely contested. The Huns had three hundred thousand select soldiers and we had two hundred and fifty thousand, thirty-five thousand having been deputed for garrison duty. For five hours we had a most anxious time. The Sinhalas fled at the first onset of

the Hun, the Keralas fought bravely but were soon dispersed, the Magadhas were desperate but not sufficiently disciplined, the Kamarupas were pressed hard, and even the Kalingas were slowly giving way before the fierce attack of the barbarian. At this stage it almost looked as if the day would be lost. The garrison stationed at Pataliputra was called in by Baladitya. This created a panic amongst the citizens who were in darkest despair and flying in all directions. Even after the thirty-five thousand soldiers came, the balance did not turn in our favour. Baladitya, Yasodharman and Vyaghra Raja fought most heroically, but all to no avail. The fierce onrush of the Huns was too much for the less disciplined Hindus. Soon, even the hardy band of Yasodharman's war-worn veterans began to retreat. Alone of all the allied soldiers, Vyaghra Raja's troops held firm in spite of repeated attacks by overwhelming numbers. "He who goes back one step to-day," Vyaghra Raja was shouting, "he goes to Hell straight. My men, advance and be slain rather than retreat and be saved. The Kalingas may retreat, but never the ally of the Kalingas." With this, the indomitable forest chieftain rushed into the very thick of the fight with drawn sword in hand and followed by his devoted band of hardy foresters. Even the Huns were amazed at this unheard-of bravery. The Kalingas were fired by his example and made a rally. Yasodharman succeeded in infusing the same spirit of courage into the Maha Kosalas. Baladitya tried with the same success to rally the Magadhas. The Hunnish advance was stemmed for the moment. But Vyaghra Raja was not content with this. He continued advancing with his men regardless of consequences, "Let the proud people of the plains see to-day the mettle of which mountaineers and foresters are made," he was saying to his men, "let their contempt for us give place to respect and let us win the esteem of all good men by fighting for the sacred cause."

The thrust made by the Gondwanas was persisted in in spite of the obvious danger of being cut off from the rest of the army. Vyaghra Raja's one ambition seemed to be to create a name for himself and the Gondwanas. He seemed to care mighty little for victory by itself. Yasodharma Maharaja and Baladitya Maharaja found out the danger of advancing with Vyaghra Raja. Being better generals, they instinctively felt that Vyaghra Raja was rushing to his ruin. They did not wish to risk a defeat simply in order to create an impression. Word was sent to Vyaghra Raja to stop his advance and to fall back. The forest chieftain's reply was, "My feet have never been taught to walk back. Forward, my men. On, on, to victory or death!" Again, the Gondwanas were advancing though thinned in numbers at every forward step. Their leader and themselves appeared to have gone mad, "I want to hit that ruffian Mihiragula," Vyaghra Raja was roaring. "He insulted Maharani Charumati through that traitor Bhanugupta. Come on, my men, let us sever the head of this Hunnish prince who dared to insult Maharani Charumati. Where is the detested barbarian? Where is the diabolical Bhanugupta?" "There, there is Bhanugupta," shouted one of his men. In a moment Vyaghra Raja had pierced through the masses of Huns and come to where Bhanugupta was. "Wretch," roared Vyaghra Raja, "you are the traitor who insulted our princess Charumati. Double-dyed traitor, pay for it with your head." With this, the chieftain gave a terrific blow with his sword which clove the head of Bhanugupta.

'So Bhanugupta is dead, is he?' asked Saraswati.

'Yes, the traitor is no more,' replied the messenger. 'But, alas, poor Vyaghra Raja also was near his end. Mihiragula, who was close to Bhanugupta, gave a staggering blow to Vyaghra Raja just as he was releasing his sword from the head of Bhanugupta. The blow went home, and

Vyaghra Raja was soon hewn to pieces by a dozen Huns.'

'Oh, what a pity!' exclaimed Saraswati.

'What a heroic death he had,' said Charumati. 'Many a brave warrior might envy him his death.'

'Well, what happened after the death of poor Vyaghra Raja?' asked Saraswati.

'The Huns cut off the Gondwana warriors from the remaining allied soldiers and slew them to a man. Then a general advance was ordered by Mihiragula. Just at that time the trumpets of the Kalingas were heard and in ten minutes Gunasagara was on the battle-field with fifty thousand fresh Kalingas. This put spirit into our soldiers who were about to retreat. It also dispirited the Huns who were expecting a victory. Our army was now stronger in numbers than Mihiragula's and in an hour the whole Hun army was utterly defeated and Mihiragula forced to flee from the field.'

'God be praised!' said Charumati. 'Where are the victors and the vanquished now?'

'The Huns are falling back on Benares,' replied the messenger. 'Our armies are pursuing them hotly.'

'Good,' said Mahamaya. 'Was Yasodharman wounded?'

'No,' replied the messenger.

'What about the other leaders on our side?' asked Saraswati.

'You mean Baladitya, isn't it?' asked Charumati smiling. 'How is the Emperor?'

'Safe,' replied the messenger, 'His Majesty is now busy consolidating the conquests in Magadha. He has a little trouble with the King of Kamarupa and also with the Kalingas.'

'What is the trouble with Kalinga?' asked Charumati.

'The Kalingas want the strip conquered by Samudragupta from them. Baladitya is unwilling to give it back

since he says that the strip was conquered long ago and that the Kalingas cannot revive all these claims now since they acquiesced in the conquest. Gunasagara contended that Kalinga was deprived of the strip by force and that justice required that it should be restored. Finally, the two monarchs have appointed Yasodharman as arbitrator and have agreed to abide by his decision.'

'Why should the Emperor be so particular about that strip?' asked Saraswati.

'It is a matter of prestige, don't you see?' said Charumati.

'What about the dispute with Kamarupa?' asked Saraswati.

'There, the dispute is,' replied the messenger, 'with regard to the kingdoms of Anga and Vanga. Kumarapala wants these two to be given up to him leaving the ancient Magadha alone to the Emperor Baladitya. This arrangement not being approved of by the Emperor, the king of Kamarupa has withdrawn his troops across the Brahmaputra and has seceded from the camp of the allies. It is even said that he is negotiating with the Huns. But this is only rumour.'

'Oh, cursed differences!' exclaimed Charumati. 'These may perhaps ruin the cause of the allies. When will the Aryan princes learn to unite and not play into the hands of the common foe?'

'Never,' replied Mahamaya, 'never. As long as there is Bharatavarsha, so long there will be these disunities and betrayals. Land of the Bharatas, when will you change?'

'Any other news?' asked Mahamaya. 'Nothing much except that the Emperor Baladitya has become a Buddhist publicly and has proclaimed that fact widely,' said the messenger.

'What!' exclaimed Charumati. 'The Emperor has become a Buddhist! Who is then to look after the alliance of the Hindu princes? The war against the Huns was undertaken to defend the four castes against the onslaught of

the foreigner and the barbarian. The alliance was a purely Hindu one to defend Hindu tenets against the Huns. Now that Baladitya has become a Buddhist, what is to become of the alliance?’

‘That was exactly the problem,’ replied the messenger. ‘Yasodharma Maharaja tried to dissuade Baladitya from the fatal step but the Emperor would not listen. Finally Yasodharma Maharaja got offended and refused to attend the second coronation of the Emperor. He also formally repudiated the leadership of the Emperor and persuaded the king of Kalinga also to do likewise.’

‘This is very bad news,’ said Charumati. Then, going to Saraswati, she said, ‘My dear, be not offended. My husband has evidently done all this in a huff and may most probably make ample amends within a fortnight. In any case, let not the quarrel between our husbands strain our relations, I implore you.’

‘I am sure,’ said Saraswati, ‘that you have no ill-will towards me. I don’t see why we shouldn’t be friends.’

‘We are nearing troublous times,’ said Charumati, ‘I scent trouble ahead.’

‘May God avert the threatened troubles and send peace to this land!’ said Saraswati.

‘May God avert feuds between my husband and yours,’ said Charumati.

‘May He prevent enmity between the Emperor and my beloved son!’ said Mahamaya. ‘They were brought up together and were like brothers. The news of their differences has robbed me of almost all the joy of the victory.’

‘Why should Baladitya have become a Buddhist now?’ said Charumati.

‘Why indeed!’ asked Mahamaya. ‘The evil goddess of dissension has put this bad idea into the head of the Emperor.’

‘Madam,’ said Saraswati, ‘man cannot forecast the future

with certainty. But, still, I cannot see why you should say that my husband's becoming a Buddhist was a bad idea.'

'My dear,' said Mahamaya, 'don't you think that it is bad to become a Buddhist? Fancy a Gupta becoming a Buddhist!'

'Conscience before everything else,' said Saraswati.

'Quite so, my dear sister,' replied Charumati, 'but some consequences of following the dictates of conscience are disastrously unpleasant, and I think the Emperor's turning Buddhist is an instance in point.'

'Now let us celebrate the victory,' said Mahamaya, 'I expect the quarrel between Yasodharman and Baladitya will not develop to any dangerous extent. I can mediate between the two and bring about peace. Now, come along, let us celebrate the victory' and all went into the palace court-yard where a huge crowd had assembled.

CHAPTER XXVI

DHARMADATTA'S SHOP

THE great city of Pataliputra was famous for its unrivalled bazaar. No other place in India could boast of such wonderful shops for any kind of article imaginable. But the speciality of the imperial city of Magadha was its cloth shops. The celebrated muslins and shawls for which India was justly famous were never seen in such rare varieties and excellence as at Pataliputra. Of all the cloth shops in that town, that of Dharmadatta was easily the first. This shop had been started nearly three generations back and had continued to flourish in spite of changes of regime. The Guptas had gone, the Huns had come, but that had made no difference to Dharmadatta's shop except the loss of ten thousand gold coins which had been extorted from it by Bhanugupta as the price for being left alone. On this day Dharmadatta's shop was just beginning its transactions. Two customers had come in. One was an ancient acquaintance of Dharmadatta. As soon as he saw the shop-keeper, he burst out, 'I say, Dharmadatta, did you hear the news? Toramana is dead!'

'What!' exclaimed Dharmadatta and the other customer. 'Is it really so?'

'Yes,' replied the customer, 'I heard about it from the most reliable persons in Pataliputra. An express messenger came to Maharaja Baladitya last night and conveyed this news.'

'Oh, I am so very glad,' replied Dharmadatta, 'Ananda, it is decidedly the best piece of news we have had since the late victory.'

'Yes,' replied Ananda. 'How many sad events have

taken place since that victory! The crushing defeat suffered by our king at Benares when he rashly fought the Hun unaided well-nigh undid the effect of the victory of Pataliputra. Mihiragula was just advancing with his Huns again on this city when God sent Toramana to Hell and so forced the ferocious prince to return to Ujjaini. Our king has now got a breathing space to recover from the effects of the defeat.'

'It is astonishing to see to what depths of degradation princes will go when their political interests are concerned,' said Dharmadatta. 'Look at this Kumarapala who attacked Magadha just at the time when our army was mainly engaged with the Huns.'

'The fellow got his deserts though,' replied Ananda, 'he is not likely to forget soon the crushing defeat he got at Vaisali.'

'That defeat was most marvellous, wasn't it?' asked Dharmadatta.

'Yes,' said Ananda, 'it was mostly due to the hearty co-operation of Paramartha, the merchant-prince, who hired twenty thousand men and gave their services to Baladitya.'

'Why is Paramartha so much interested in Baladitya now?' asked Dharmadatta. 'When the poor prince was hunted out of Magadha, this very Paramartha did not lift a little finger to help him.'

'Well,' said Ananda. 'They say that even now Paramartha would have done the same thing but for his wife Lakshmi and, above all, his daughter Parvati. This girl seems to have refused to take a morsel of food till Paramartha did something tangible to help our king.'

'Why is she so enthusiastic about Baladitya?' asked Dharmadatta.

'It is not Baladitya the girl cares for,' returned Ananda. 'It is Saraswati, our queen, who has such a marvellous hold on her.'

'Anyway, the result is good,' remarked Dharmadatta.

'No merchant was so much interested in politics before as Paramartha now.'

'How sad it is that the Emperor and Yasodharman have fallen out,' said Ananda.

'What are the real reasons for the split?' asked Dharmadatta.

'Well, there are five reasons—the first is the Emperor's turning Buddhist, the second is this dispute about the Kalinga strip, the third is the marriage of our Emperor with Maharani Saraswati, the fourth is the personal ambition of Yasodharman, and the last reason is Yasodharman's being the prospective heir to Kalinga and thus the prospective hereditary foe of the king of Magadha,' replied Ananda.

'Most unfortunate is it,' said Dharmadatta, 'that these petty jealousies stand in the way of our showing a united front in the face of the barbarian and the foreigner. Even such a bosom friend of our Emperor like Yasodharman did not give proper support against the Huns though it must be said to his credit that he never turned traitor to his country.'

'Even his enemies must admit that,' said Ananda. 'He was offered the whole of Malwa in addition to his own present kingdom of Maha-Kosala if only he would nominally perform allegiance to the Hun. Any other man would have accepted the offer. The prosperous and rich cities of Malwa, the hoarded wealth of Bhanugupta, the life of perpetual ease, all these would have tempted any other man but Yasodharman. Nay, rumour has it that even Gunasagara and Dakshayani asked Yasodharman to close with the offer of the Hun but the king of Maha-Kosala refused proudly saying that he would die rather than compromise with evil and bend his knee to the hated foreigner and barbarian. In this extreme view he was supported by his mother Mahamaya and his Queen Charumati.'

'Ananda, is there any truth in the rumour that Queen Charumati came on a visit to the Empress Saraswati in spite of the disapproval of her husband?' asked Dharmadatta.

'The rumour is quite true,' replied Ananda. 'The queen stayed at the palace for five days and then went back to Amalapuri. There is a romantic attachment between the Queens Charumati and Saraswati which withstands the coldness existing between their husbands. It is whispered that but for Queen Charumati Yasodharman would not have protected the Magadha army rear when it retreated after the disastrous battle of Benares. At first Yasodharman seems to have said that he would not shed the blood of the four castes for defending Buddhists who were opposed to the Vedas and *Sastras*. On this, Queen Charumati seems to have declared that even according to the Hindu *Sastras* a righteous king should aid the weak and that therefore Yasodharman, as a Hindu king, was bound to protect the weak and dispirited Magadha army. Yasodharman yielded to his wife and did what she wanted. So Magadha was saved from utter ruin and disgrace because of this remarkable lady and her friendship with Maharani Saraswati.'

'God bless Queen Charumati!' said Dharmadatta. 'You know, Ananda, I think that women realize common interests better than men and are more prone to generous emotions.'

'I agree,' replied Ananda. 'Another example of this is the recent action of Maharani Saraswati. She has prevailed upon the Emperor to give up the slice conquered from Kalinga and thus has healed up an old sore. What is more, she dissuaded Baladitya from annexing some portion of Kamarupa by pleading for the unfortunate Kumarapala and representing to her husband that generous treatment would win a valuable ally in time of need whereas cruel terms would create an everlasting enmity betwee

Magadha and Kamarupa. The Emperor listened to her advice, and Kumarapala was so moved by the generosity with which he was treated that he swore eternal friendship with Baladitya and promised substantial aid in times of war.'

'Let that be,' said Dharmadatta. 'Why are the Lichchavis so powerless now, they who even so late as Chandragupta's reign were so celebrated for wealth and power?'

'They say,' replied Ananda, 'that an astrologer of great celebrity had predicted that with the son of the daughter of the Lichchavis the glory of the Lichchavis would rapidly wane.'

'What is the real reason for this rapid decline in their power?' asked Dharmadatta.

'Feuds between families, enfeeblement by constant use of luxuries, intermarriage with Gupta nobles, these have sapped the power of the oligarchs of Vaisali. If the decline continues at the present pace, soon Vaisali will be a name of the past,' replied Ananda.

'It will be a very sad day when a city of the standing of Vaisali will cease to exist,' said Dharmadatta.

'True,' said Ananda, 'but how many such cities have ceased to exist? Where is the glory of Dwaraka now or of Indraprastha or of Hastinapura, all great and famous cities of old? The owl screeches where Yudhistira held his court, the jackal yells where Duryodhana sat on his throne, and the ocean waves lash where the divine city of Dwaraka existed. Who can say that any city can remain for ever after having seen the fate of these three?'

'That is so,' replied Dharmadatta. 'But I do hope that Vaisali will not go the way of Hastinapura or Indraprastha. By the very nature of things it cannot share the fate of Dwaraka.'

'Don't be too sure,' said Ananda. 'Oceans even have been known to change their courses in the course of ages.'

'Well, be that as it may, what do you think will happen at Ujjaini now?' asked Dharmadatta. 'There was recently a talk that Mihiragula intended to shift his capital to Srinagar.'

'But Srinagar is not in his dominions,' said Ananda. 'Don't you think that Vajrayudha will put up a stout resistance?'

'Perhaps he may, but of what avail will it be against the innumerable hordes of the Huns?' replied Dharmadatta.

'That is true,' said Ananda. 'It is strange that I never heard of this rumour though I am generally the first to know such things. When is this shifting of capital supposed to take place?'

'After the Huns have subdued Baladitya and Yasodharman,' replied Dharmadatta.

'Well, then, it will be a pretty long time before it takes place,' said Ananda.

'Do you think that it will be hard for Mihiragula to defeat Baladitya and Yasodharman who are hopelessly divided now?' asked Dharmadatta.

'No, I don't,' said Ananda. 'There is no doubt whatsoever that the Huns will easily defeat Baladitya or Yasodharman but the question is whether they will ever be able to subdue either of these monarchs. These monarchs will, in my opinion, never submit, and so long as they continue to live will be thorns on the side of the Huns. In the days of Toramana many Hindu princes were bribed to side with the Huns and were tactfully kept under control. But under Mihiragula all this will change. His overbearing manners will alienate the traitorous princes. What is more, his unrestrained lust and thirst for blood will soon drive the citizens to despair.'

'We are blessed that we are now freed from the hated yoke,' said Dharmadatta. 'What horrible knaves and cowards were we when we tamely allowed Baladitya to †

driven out of Magadha last time! We were led away by that arch-traitor Bhanugupta who promised us absolute immunity if we kept quiet. Afterwards the fellow extorted from me ten thousand gold coins.'

'Yes, yes, all of us know that,' said Ananda. 'Are you sure that to-day there will be greater support by the Magadhans?'

'I am sure there will be,' replied Dharmadatta. 'For one thing, I shall myself hire out five thousand soldiers for our king.'

'Good,' said Ananda, 'I congratulate you on your change of mentality. The fault of our merchants has so often been that they care only for their trade and the safety of their merchandise and have been too ready to sacrifice persons and principles provided the safety of their own goods is guaranteed.'

'I agree,' replied Dharmadatta, 'but with one reservation. I protest against the accusation as it stands now since it implies that other classes of our country have acted more patriotically. What about the government servants? Don't you know that 99 per cent of the servants who had grown grey in the service of the Gupta Emperors eagerly offered to continue to serve under the Huns provided they were paid the same or even half the salaries? Then, the schoolmasters, those who ought to lead the country, almost all of them continued to serve the Huns as if nothing had happened. What is even more damning, the priests and mahants of even the temples built and endowed by the great Gupta Emperors were the first to welcome the barbarian and the foreigner as soon as they heard about the defeat of Baladitya. Why should you then accuse the poor merchants alone?'

'I see your point and confess my error,' said Ananda. 'None of us wanted to sacrifice a little for that dynasty which had given us nearly two centuries of continuous

good government of the very best type. All of us are made to be slaves. We have not the grit in us to be free men. It was not always so with us. During the reign of Chandragupta and Asoka we were among the proudest of free men and were respected by all the world. Then we were ready to sacrifice everything for the country and for upholding *Dharma*. Now we are not willing to sacrifice even a little of our selfish comforts. Hence we are at present despised by our enemies. Why, the other day, even the Kamarupa soldiers were heard taunting us by saying that the times of Chandragupta, Asoka and Samudragupta had gone for ever and would never return. Even the traitors among the Angas and Vangas had the impudence to tell us that Vikramadityas will no more be forthcoming to conquer them. Magadha will soon decay unless we take good care.'

'God save Magadha from such a dire fate,' said Dharmadatta.

'See,' said Ananda, 'the palace of Asoka is left uninhabited and uncared for. Even the great hospital is said to be not so flourishing as before. Pataliputra as a centre of learning has long ago been surpassed by Nalanda.'

'By the way,' said Dharmadatta, 'is it a fact that Baladitya is going to construct a magnificent tower 300 feet high at Nalanda?'

'Yes,' replied Ananda, 'what is more, our Queen Saraswati is going to have a spacious Saraswati Vidyalaya at Nalanda for the education of women in all the arts and sciences.'

'The education of women did not receive such special attention before. Why this separate institution now? Formerly, those who could afford it engaged tutors for their daughters, and there the matter ended. Nowadays strange notions are prevailing about women,' said Dharmadatta.

'Quite so,' said Ananda, 'I agree with you in everyth'

you said. Strange to say, Queen Charumati has also started a similar institution on a smaller scale in the fortress of Kalanjar. There she is the teacher for every subject and a competent teacher too.'

'Do you think so highly of her learning, Ananda?' asked Dharmadatta. 'I always put down her reputation for learning as a by-product of her beauty.'

'Well, in that case Queen Saraswati ought also to have had a reputation for learning which she has not. What do you say to that?' asked Ananda.

'I confess I am defeated,' said Dharmadatta. 'Why is it that Saraswati Maharani is not as educated as Queen Charumati?'

'Because she was not born a princess like Queen Charumati and so had not the special advantages of having a tutor for every subject. Still, she is not what we would call uneducated. She knows to read and write very well, has an extensive knowledge of the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*, and is an expert songstress,' said Ananda.

'What more does Queen Charumati know?' asked Dharmadatta.

'She is an adept in all the six systems of philosophy, she is a past master in dialectics, and she has read *Panini* and *Patanjali* so well that few pandits can beat her in grammar. With all this, she is not a bit pedantic. She moves freely with all without trying to impress them with her learning,' said Ananda.

'She seems to have been born with a true princess's mind,' said Dharmadatta.

'So she is,' said Ananda. 'The following incident will interest you. When Queen Charumati had come to Pataliputra on her visit to Queen Saraswati, they both went out one day for a drive in the town. A little girl of five belonging to the Chandala caste was weeping bitter-

ly in the streets as the chariot passed by. The royal attendants tried to push the girl out of view but Queen Saraswati insisted on stopping the chariot and consoling the poor girl. She semi-apologetically excused herself to Queen Charumati for her fondling a Chandala girl and said, "I have turned a Buddhist like my husband, I don't observe any caste." Queen Charumati kissed the small girl and said, "Saraswati, it is not necessary to become a Buddhist in order to fondle children, it is enough to be a woman!"

'A very true remark that,' said Dharmadatta. 'This Queen Charumati seems to be quite a quick-witted woman.'

'Oh, yes,' said Ananda. 'Listen to this. The day after she arrived at Pataliputra, the palace high priest paid her a visit and explained that though he had become a Buddhist he still believed in the righteousness of the caste system and in the efficacy of animal sacrifice. The poor fellow intended by this to please Queen Charumati and was astounded when she remarked, "I see, so you have not got the really life-giving doctrines of Buddhism and have given up the revitalizing doctrines of Hinduism." The high priest was put to shame and had to return without the reward for which he was fishing all the time.'

'Ananda,' said Dharmadatta. 'Tell me one thing, is our Queen Saraswati sincerely a follower of Buddhism?'

'That depends on what you mean by Buddhism,' said Ananda. 'She has now fully come to believe in the doctrines of *ahimsa* and caste equality preached by the Buddha. So far she is a Buddhist. But she has a passionate attachment to the stories of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*, an attachment far stronger than that which she has for the *Jataka* stories. Unlike her husband, she has still a living faith in the innumerable gods and goddesses of Hinduism whom she regards as so many different manifestations of the One God^{sed} who came as Rama, Krishna and Buddha. What is st'

more curious, she has a fervent faith in the approaching *Avatar* of Kalki, a faith much stronger than that in the coming Maitreya.'

'How is it then that she pulls on with Baladitya?' asked Dharmadatta.

'Oh, our king is not a fanatic. He tolerates differences to an extent which cannot be dreamt of in other people. To oblige her he even listens to the daily reading of the *Ramayana* which custom has been existing from the time of the great Kumara Devi,' said Ananda.

'Well, now let us proceed to business. The shop is getting crowded,' said Dharmadatta. 'What is it that you want?'

'Two shawls, three cubits of Benares silk and one piece of fine muslin,' said Ananda.

'Come along, then, let us go to the shawl room,' said Dharmadatta and both went into the shawl room where were stocked all kinds of shawls of the most divergent colours and prices.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE PASSING AWAY OF TORAMANA

THE fierce sun of India was beating its pitiless rays on the palace of the Hun in Ujjaini. The sentries at the gates were sweating profusely, and the drawn swords in their hands were far from being in the perpendicular position in which they were expected to be. Outside the palace was a huge crowd anxiously waiting for something to happen. In the inner apartments of the palace there was loud moaning and wailing round a dead body which had been placed on a country coffin. The most frantic wails were those of Hujheshpa and Vajheshpa. Tushashpa was standing in a corner without much loud demonstration, but tears were freely trickling down her cheeks. Mihiragula was also there crying himself hoarse. The only man whom he loved was no more. This sense of desolation, the loss of the only man whom he loved, overpowered even Mihiragula and melted to some degree his stony heart. Instinctively, also, the prince was standing near his mother Tushashpa and not near his step-mothers whom he resembled in so many respects.

Vajheshpa rushed to the corpse, embraced it frantically, called it by a thousand endearing names and shouted aloud, 'My lord is no more, the Hun is dead leaving his slaves behind. Hujheshpa, come, let us accompany the Hun beyond the grave according to the time-honoured custom of our ancestors.' Hujheshpa went to the corpse and embraced it. Then she cried out, 'Husband, lord, unlike true Hun you have deserted us in the midst of Life's B^{ut} that
But this was the only un-Hunnish thing you ever di^{passed}

the glory of the Huns. Vajheshpa and Hujheshpa will accompany you to the world beyond the grave and chide you for your leaving them behind. Why could you not have, like the great King Surasura, killed us before you died so that we might be waiting to receive you in the world to come? Tushashpa, you look after our son while we go to look after our husband.' Tushashpa said, 'Oh, no, sister, I also shall accompany you to our dead lord beyond the grave. He loved me dearly when he was here below, he will miss me sorely in the world beyond. Sisters, I shall also follow you.'

Vajheshpa embraced Tushashpa and said, 'Sister, I thought that you had lost all the Hunnish beliefs, I am relieved to see that you are at bottom still a Hun. But, if all of us three go to our lord, who will look after our son? You know that the Huns forbid a mother with a tender son from following her husband beyond the grave.'

'Mihiragula is not so tender in years,' replied Tushashpa. 'He will take care of himself.' Then she also embraced Toramana's corpse and said, 'Lord, you loved me best here below, I loved you best also. Still you tried to leave me behind. This shall not be. Tushashpa will never live apart from thee. Myself and my sisters Vajheshpa and Hujheshpa are determined to follow you beyond the grave.'

Then all the three queens embraced Mihiragula one after the other. Hujheshpa embraced him first and said, 'Son, though born of Tushashpa's womb you have ever treated me as if you were the son of my own womb. Sorely grieved am I to part from you, to see your sweet face no more. But when duty calls, everything else must yield. My husband is waiting for me beyond the grave. I should not keep him waiting for long. The Huns, our ancestors, would scorn me if I did so. Farewell, my boy, farewell!'

'Farewell, mother,' said Mihiragula tearfully.

Tushashpa embraced him next and said, 'Son, though

born by accident to Tushashpa you have really inherited more of my nature than hers. A Hun to the very backbone, you were to me more than a son. I was always treated by you more respectfully than you treated your own mother. To speak the truth, I love you far more than I did my husband because you represent our ancestors more truly. But everything else must yield before the call of custom. All the Huns, our ancestors, had this custom of wives accompanying their dead husbands unless they had tender sons. Custom must be obeyed if the Hunnish race is not to become decadent. So, farewell.'

'Farewell, mother,' said Mihiragula tearfully.

Lastly, Tushashpa embraced her son and said, 'Son, I am sorely grieved that I am going away from you to attend on my husband in the other world. This solemn moment of parting is not one for empty words. I want to speak out the truth. Son, I never like your Hunnish cruelty or rank irreligion or bestial immorality. By God's grace we are now in a land with better ideas of humanity, religion and morality. Why can you not like your dead father adapt yourself to the land of your adoption and cast off your old evil ways? Even now it is not too late. Marry an Indian princess, stick to her, call the best men of India to advise you in government and go by their advice. Thus you will prosper and be loved and respected. If you go on in your present strain, you will soon become odious and be driven out of the country by a people exasperated by your evil acts.'

'What words are these, sister?' asked Vajheshpa. 'In so many words, you ask our son to desert the habits and customs of his ancestors and to become like the decader^{ot} races of this country. We won because we were H^{rds} and not because we were Hindus! Marry an Indian^{at} princess! What next! Adopt Indian ideas of relig^o passed morality! Why, this is sheer nonsense. But

can we expect of Tushashpa who is saturated with the barbarous ideas of this country? Even if we say that these ideas are better, even then I say that they should not be adopted. We are Huns. We are not Hindus. The Hindus can beat us always in their own ideas. Once we accept them we are courting ruin. We will be merged in the Hindus and become slaves in the hands of their Brahmins whose subtle cunning and acute intellect we shall never be able to outmatch. My son, remain true to the Hunnish ideal and do not follow the foolish advice of your mother.'

'Son,' said Tushashpa, 'I must entreat you not to be carried away by the seeming words of wisdom uttered by my sister. The Kshatriyas of India are as brave as any Huns, and no serious danger of physical degeneracy threatens the Huns by intermarriage with them. Mentally, there will be a great improvement in us by following such a course. Harness the high chivalry of the Kshatriyas to the fierce courage of the Hun and you will get a type of warrior whom it will be hard to beat in this world. By the course I suggest, the Huns will become rooted in this country and will be honoured and respected in course of time. Vajheshpa's advice will lead the Huns to isolation and ultimate but inevitable defeat. What do you say, Hujheshpa?'

'Sister, I agree with what you say now,' said Hujheshpa. 'I see the wisdom of your plan and strongly recommend it to our son.'

'Sister,' said Vajheshpa, 'how suddenly you have changed your views. I thought you were a true Hun to the very marrow. I am disappointed.' 'Sister,' replied Hujheshpa, 'Tushashpa's reasoning has convinced me. I see no good in the Huns' remaining as wandering tribes without a religion, a code of morality and a law of their own. The lands of the Oxus valley are not half so good

as the lands here. The people here also are much more advanced in the sciences and in religion and morality. At this solemn moment I see the wisdom of our dear, dear husband's policy. I regret that I was not converted before. That was largely because Tushashpa never deigned to argue with me. Now my opinion is made.'

'Whoever deserts the customs and manners of the Huns, I shall never depart from them. To turn a traitor to the Hunnish tradition is alien to my nature. I don't know what ideas of morality the Hindus have. But, to my mind, to desert the institutions in which you were born and bred is nothing short of treachery. Son, I exhort you to remain true to the Hunnish tradition as far as you can,' said Vajheshpa.

'I shall do so, mother,' replied Mihiragula, 'I shall follow the advice of all of you three as far as I can.' Thus Mihiragula satisfied to some extent all the three.

'What is the state of the army now?' asked Vajheshpa, 'The poor king died broken-hearted over a defeat just at the time when his ever-glorious son was teaching the Hindus a lesson at Benares. What a pity that he did not live to hear of this resplendent victory!'

'The true causes of the king's death were Bhumaka's death and Mihiragula's tactless nature,' replied Tushashpa. 'The king was a born warrior and attached little weight to defeats. Defeats he knew could be redeemed by victories. Two things baffled him. Death was a thing which could not be cancelled by any human means yet devised. Bhumaka's death left the seeds of death in the king. Again, the king did not know how to alter human nature. He was sorely grieved with his son's nature and did not know how to remedy it. You know what his dying words were, "After me I see but darkness. Where is my son that I may show him this darkness?". With that, he passed away.'

All the four wept. Then spoke Vajheshpa, 'Come, sisters, let us go to the graveyard and bury ourselves with the king according to the time-honoured custom of the Huns.

'The Maharaja had ordered that he should be burnt like the Hindus,' said Tushashpa.

'What! Is it not enough that he should have departed from Hunnish custom while he was alive? Should he flout those customs even after he is dead?' asked Vajheshpa.

'The Maharaja's wishes must be obeyed,' said Mihiragula, 'whatever the wishes. Such has been the time-honoured custom of the Huns.'

'I obey,' said Vajheshpa. 'Then let us start. I suppose that we should then burn ourselves with the corpse.' 'Yes, if you wish to follow your dead husband beyond the grave like true Huns,' replied Mihiragula.

'Son, you will see at the burning place whether I am a true Hun or not,' said Vajheshpa.

The Brahmin priest employed by Toramana ordered the ladies to put on yellow robes, to smear their foreheads with *Kumkum*¹ and to bedeck themselves as for a marriage. This pleased even Vajheshpa who said that even the Huns could not have imposed better regulations to display an utter indifference to the pangs of death. Then the procession started. The corpse was in front followed by the three queens and Mihiragula with drawn sword in hand. Ten thousand soldiers fully armed were marching in military order with drawn swords. A huge assemblage of Huns and Hindus was following behind. All were grave and serious. The courage of the three queens touched even the hearts of the oppressed Hindus.

When the burning ghat used by the Gupta Emperors was reached, people found a huge pile of sandalwood heaped up ready for serving as a funeral pyre. The three

¹ A red powder used by Hindu ladies.

queens sat cross-legged on the pyre, and Toramana's corpse was placed lengthwise on their laps. Then some hymns were chanted by the Brahmans and *puja* was done to the three ladies who were to become *satis*. A cocoanut was broken and its kernel distributed to thousands of women waiting to receive some portions. Then the three ladies were made to distribute *Kumkum* to the assembled Hindu and Hunnish ladies who received it eagerly. After this, the pyre was set fire to by Mihiragula amidst the blare of trumpets. The three queens showed the bravery characteristic of their race. Not a cry of distress or of pain escaped the lips of any of the three. The assembled Hindus were astonished. When the four bodies had been reduced to ashes, the whole party returned towards the town.

{'Oh, it was grand,' said one Hindu citizen to another. 'I never thought that Hunnish women had so much devotion towards their husbands.'

'It is not so much devotion towards their husband that made these queens commit *sati* so heroically,' said another. 'It is simply pride of race, and ancestral custom. Of course, nobody ever disputed the courage of the Huns.'

'Well, let that be,' said the first citizen. 'Now that Toramana is dead, what kind of times are we going to have?'

'God alone knows,' replied the second citizen. 'The dead king was by no means a good ruler, but his successor is likely to be ten thousand times worse.'

'I don't know,' remarked the first citizen 'whether we the people of Ujjaini do not deserve it on account of our faithless conduct towards the Gupta Emperors.'

'Perhaps we deserve this and more,' remarked the second. 'But still it is a dismal prospect we are having. The skies, which were cloudy before, have become pitch dark now and God alone knows what will happen. Have you any inkling of what will happen.'

'Yes, rains of blood,' returned the other.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MOMENTOUS DECISION

It was raining hard in the fortress of Kalanjar. The ground was soaking wet in spite of its gravelly nature. Great big sheets of water were to be found on every side. Small streams were flowing down the slopes like regular torrents. The streets were flooded knee-deep. Very few people were stirring out except some little children who were trying to float paper boats down the miniature brooks.

In front of the palace, there were some six children racing down the open gutter to watch the movements of their respective boats.

'See, see, my boat goes first,' shouted a big brawny lad of fourteen in triumph.

'Brother,' cried out a little girl of seven, 'do float this boat of mine, it has got stuck up among some weeds.'

'I can't,' replied the big boy. 'I must race with my boat, else Chandrabhanu will beat me.' Upon this the little girl began to cry. 'Fie!' said Chandrabhanu. 'Narasimha, I never thought that you cared so much for mere victory. What is victory worth if it is going to cause misery to our dearest and spoil our own nature? Come, Lalita, I shall float your boat. Let Narasimha float his boat first, there is no glory in that.'

'Well, if you stop racing, I also stop,' said Narasimha. 'I thought that you would meanly take advantage if I stopped to help Lalita. Now that you mean to help her, I can't see why I should go on racing my own boat. There is no glory in that. The glory lies in beating you and the others.' Saying this, Narasimha also came back after

having stranded his paper boat on the bank and released Lalita's boat from its obstructing weeds to the great joy of that little girl and set it afloat again. Then Narasimha and Chandrabhanu again floated their boats and the children went past racing. Lalita was laughing through her tears as she shouted out to Narasimha, 'Brother, see, my boat is also going!'

Inside the palace were seated, watching the children, Mahamaya, Yasodharman, Charumati and Vasanta. Mahamaya was now nearly seventy-eight years old and rather dim of sight though otherwise hale and hearty. Charumati was now forty-six really, but nobody would put her age, as above thirty, so fresh, so beautiful was she still. Yasodharman was forty-eight but still in the full possession of all his energies. Vasanta, she was also more than forty-five, but her girlish appearance had not changed. 'Look at the little dears,' said Mahamaya, 'they are running about in the pouring rain. They will catch cold. Daughter, why did you allow them to go out?' 'I didn't allow them,' replied Charumati, 'the little imps went by themselves. Still I don't see any harm in their going out in the rain. They must get used to a hard life. There is no use bringing them up luxuriously. They will have plenty of sufferings in their after-life. It is good to train them to endure hardships.'

'Quite so,' said Yasodharman. 'At first, I was a bit anxious,' said Vasanta, 'and so I kept Narasimha, Chandrabhanu and Lalita indoors, but the little wretches looked so miserable and woe-begone that I thought it was better to risk a cold than have this permanent damping of spirits. Oh, your Highness should have seen them when they were let out. Such jubilant faces I never saw before. See how merrily they are racing in the rain. Why, one day, Narasimha was so enraged at my keeping him indoors that he declared that I must have a Hun's mind to deny



CHILDREN RACING THE BOATS

him his freedom and to imprison him like that. That was the limit. I set him free, and there he was racing in pouring rain.'

'Talking of the Huns,' said Mahamaya. 'How many years is it since these barbarians have borne sway in Aryavarta!¹ Alas, all our efforts to drive them out have been so far in vain. At one time, after the battle of Pataliputra, the prospects looked very bright, but there came this accursed misunderstanding between my son and Baladitya. I thought then that the misunderstanding would pass away in a few months. But, alas, I was sadly disappointed. The differences have only steadily become greater and greater. Twenty-eight years have passed since the battle of Pataliputra, but the relations between the two would-be saviours of Aryavarta have only worsened till to-day when it has become a conflict of ideals almost as great as that between the Huns and each of these two contending parties,' and tears came into Mahamaya's eyes. 'Mother,' said Charumati, 'don't weep. You are only making us also miserable without achieving any good. You know how imperceptibly the differences arose and how naturally they deepened. It was nothing short of a calamity that Baladitya became a Buddhist and declared that fact openly. Else, he would have been now sitting on the throne of his ancestors instead of occupying the petty throne of Magadha. Who can avert the dictates of Providence?'

'True,' said Mahamaya, 'still, it is a very real cause for regret. My heart bleeds when I think of how near we were to defeating the Hun and expelling him from this land and how miserably we failed. To see our ship sink when it has arrived within sight of the promised land, it is always a bitter experience. Year after year, I had been

¹ The land of the Aryans, India.

fondly hoping that something would turn up to heal the differences between Baladitya and Yasodharman, but all in vain. Then, finally, I made a supreme effort. Fifteen years ago, I persuaded my boy to drop his differences with Baladitya for the cause of India, our murdered motherland, and, poor boy, he most unwillingly consented to place all his forces at the disposal of Baladitya, whom he solemnly promised to seat on the throne at Ujjaini after defeating the Hun. A most generous offer this, but what was the response? The Emperor coldly replied that his first concern was his own kingdom of Magadha, that he had not been able to administer even that kingdom to his entire satisfaction, that there was no use merely extending his territories, that he had no faith in the proposed alliance of Indian princes, that he did not believe that Mihiragula could be easily defeated, that he saw no reason why he should put the Magadhans to unnecessary suffering and that he would place at Yasodharman's disposal not even a single soldier unless he was satisfied that there was a reasonable chance of success. That reply threw cold water on my son's schemes and drove the poor boy into a frenzy of fury.'

'It did;' replied Yasodharman, 'at the moment I made this offer to Baladitya I was much the stronger of the two in point of strength because I had just succeeded to the kingdom of Kalinga on the death of Gunasagara. The combined armies of Kalinga and Maha Kosala were any day stronger than the army of Magadha consisting as it mostly did of raw recruits whose equipment left much to be desired. Still, bowing to my mother's desire and putting the interests of Aryavarta above those of Hinduism and of my own dynasty, I offered to place Baladitya, a Buddhist heretic, on the throne of his ancestors without any conditions whatsoever, and oh, the reply I received! Till then I had had my differences with Baladitya but I never

regarded him as a coward. His reply made me form even this low opinion of my former comrade in arms.' 'You are mistaken, my lord,' replied Charumati. 'Baladitya is no coward. He has all his old courage still; only, his ideas of the duties of a king have changed considerably. War, the principal item in the programme of most Hindu kings, has become with him an exceptional thing to be resorted to only in times of greatest need and then too only for self-defence.'

'Well, that itself is cowardice,' replied Yasodharman. 'No Kshatriya warrior should desist from war simply because victory is not certain. Again, an offensive war is as much the duty of a Kshatriya as a defensive one. To fight against the barbarian and the foreigner to rid the motherland of a horrible tyranny is as much the duty of a righteous king as digging tanks and promoting education. Baladitya's reply that he did not want to shed the blood of Magadhans unnecessarily is unworthy of a true king. A true king's duty is as much to preserve the manly spirit among his subjects as to promote their material prosperity and mental equipment. I tell you, poor Baladitya has become a coward after embracing Buddhism. I fail to see my comrade of old in the present king of Magadha.'

'My lord,' said Charumati, 'I am very sorry to have to contradict you, but I must insist that Baladitya is no coward. You heard the other day how the Emperor plunged into the swollen Ganges and rescued a poor woman who was about to drown. Was it the action of a coward? Will any coward have courage enough to plunge into the raging ocean-like Ganga at the time of full flood?'

'Dearest,' said Yasodharman, 'I did not mean that Baladitya was personally a coward. I think that he is now individually as brave as when he slew Bhumaka and rescued me. But I do insist that as a king he has become a

coward. He cares too much for the lives of his subjects, he hates wars in general, and has so far departed from the principles of a true Kshatriya that when Mihiragula sent him a challenge to fight him again he simply replied that he had no desire to fight then unless his territories were invaded and that in this latter contingency he would defend them to the best of his ability. Poor Baladitya has now become the slave of Buddhist monks and nuns. He is now mostly engaged in visiting universities like Nalanda, constructing canals, coaching missionaries for going to distant lands, building houses for the poor, and associating with the lowest of the low. Hardly does he review his army or honour Brahmins. As to sacrifices, he has forbidden them entirely in his dominions. The chants of the Vedas are not heard in the palace of the Guptas at Pataliputra, the clatter of horses' hoofs is alien to that place now. Oh, that Baladitya should have become so chicken-hearted !

'Your Highness will pardon me,' said Vasanta, 'if I ask why you have not made a strenuous attempt on your own behalf to drive the Huns from this land.'

'The reason is obvious,' said Yasodharman. 'At first, I did not want to usurp the place legitimately due to Baladitya. Even when that monarch's defection from the alliance made me reconcile myself to the idea of leading the Aryas in a holy fight against the Huns, the difficulties before me were too great for me to make a great attempt. I have not got the prestige of the Gupta Baladitya. Many princes will be very willing to follow the lead of the descendant of Samudragupta and Vikramaditya but will refuse to follow the lead of the king of Malwa and Maha Kosala. Again, many kings will be ready enough to help the descendant of Kumara Devi to recover his lost heritage, but few will consent to aid the king of Maha Kosala in the conquest of Ujjaini and Northern India which never be-

longed to him. What is even more serious, the king of Maha Kosala and Kalinga will have many jealous rivals who will be unwilling to aggrandize his power, but few will seriously consider themselves as rivals in dignity to the representative of the Gupta Emperors. Lastly, there is a large element of personal loyalty to Baladitya among the people of Malwa and the other provinces now under the Huns. Needless to say, there is no such loyalty for my person. Hence it is that though possessed of the kingdoms of Maha Kosala and Kalinga, I have not yet been able to make a really serious attempt to overthrow the Huns. But I must make a very real attempt now. I am growing older every day, and unless I try now I may never be strong enough to try again. All these twenty-eight years we have been having a most disastrous stalemate. Magadha and Maha Kosala have been free from Hunnish conquest, but, then, all the other provinces of Northern India have been under the heel of the Hun. A terrible cry of anguish is going from Ujjaini and other places to the skies, the cry of the murdered innocents, the outraged virgins and the oppressed poor.'

'Even yesterday the messenger brought us news that one poor old man called Udarananda was torn limb by limb under Mihiragula's orders, and the man's only offence was witnessing the binding of Kamalaksha and Vasudeva,' said Charumati.

'Udarananda dead!' exclaimed Vasanta. 'I hope the dear old thing will find plenty of ghee in the other world.' All the four laughed at this.

'Well,' said Yasodharman, 'my resolution is made. I am getting old. I have no time to waste. I have to make a desperate and last attempt to drive the barbarians from this holy land. If I succeed, well and good. If I fail, that shall be the end of me. I shall never return to Kalanjar, but shall die a true Kshatriya on the field of battle,

By God's grace, I have got two goodly sons to carry on the holy struggle after me. Mother, what say you to my idea?'

'Son,' said Mahamaya, 'my heart is brimming with joy on hearing your manly words. I have often wept in silence at the tragedy of seeing your energies wasted in petty skirmishes with the Huns about Amalपुरi and the surrounding country. You were perilously near sinking to the level of a petty prince trying to defend his petty realm from a powerful neighbour. Now I see that you have not sunk to the level I dreaded. Why I never spurred you on to war with the Hun to the finish was because I knew that you were sure to be unaided by the other princes and so sure to be crushed and ruined. And, poor boy, I, your mother, was unwilling to ask you to go to your ruin open-eyed. But now I see that you are made of the stuff that heroes are made of, and I rejoice. Yes, Mahamaya rejoices that she has given birth to her son Yasodharman. It matters not to her whether her son wins or loses in this fight for principle, it is enough for her that one born of her womb has had the courage to take in hand a righteous war against an enemy many, many times stronger than he. Oh, I feel now the vigour of youth, of the days when I was full of young blood.'

'What say you, dearest?' asked Yasodharman of Charumati. 'I fully agree with mother,' said Charumati. 'In fact, I have always been feeling sorrowful at the pitiful state of our motherland. A land of gifted poets, renowned astronomers, profound philosophers, skilled architects, born sculptors and brave soldiers is under the heel of the barbarian and the foreigner for such a number of years simply because of the lack of the spirit of sacrifice in us. All that we care for is money and inglorious ease to indulge in our petty desires. The land of the Rishis has become degenerate apparently beyond recovery. My heart was very sad. One day, Chandrabhanu asked me, "Mother,

why does not father attack Ujjaini, the capital of the Mlechchha Mihiragula who attacks Amalapuri so often?" I told him, "My child, the Mlechchha is very powerful." "What if?" replied the boy, "wait till Narasimha and I grow older and then we will go to Ujjaini and kill this wretched Mihiragula as Krishna killed Kamsa.¹ Father seems to be afraid of this Mihiragula and his Huns. We are not." These words of the innocent brat made me sad for many days. The manly words uttered by you, my husband, have gladdened me beyond all words. I am blessed in being the wife of a born hero as mother is for being the mother of such a hero. The enterprise you have to-day taken in hand, dearest, is fraught with dangers innumerable, but it is one of the holiest enterprises ever undertaken by man. Be the result of it what it may, the decision of to-day shall never be regretted by me.'

'What do you say, Vasanta?' asked Yasodharman.

'My lord,' replied Vasanta, 'What have I to say worthy of your hearing? What queens Mahamaya and Charumati have spoken I have listened to in wonder and admiration. I was not born in a warrior home, I do not find my spirits exalted as they do. I feel appalled at the enormous difficulty of the task you have undertaken to-day. Sure am I that most of the Aryan princes will desert you at the critical juncture. Jealousy and treachery will play havoc in a single day with allies whom you recruit after many months of hard toil. If you want to fight the Hun seriously and to the finish, I have only one advice for you. Count as little as possible on the help of others for they may fail you at any time. Muster your resources to the utmost, inspire your people with the same enthusiasm for the war as you yourself have got, call the silent masses to your armies and preach to them the significance of this struggle

¹ A cruel and bloodthirsty king killed by Sri Krishna.

for culture, civilization and religion. Rely not solely on priests or Kshatriyas, for in these degenerate days both can be bought easily with gold. Call all the four castes equally to your armies, there is no shame in that. You claim to fight for the upholding of the four castes. Why can't you call the four castes to your aid? Teach your people to rely on themselves. They should be taught to fight without leaders even. The pilot may drop, but the ship must go on. Only with this spirit will this gigantic endeavour succeed. For my own part, I am willing, as always, to do whatever I can to help in the accomplishment of your schemes.'

'Well, then, since all of you are unanimous I shall begin to put my resolution into effect from to-morrow. Mother, don't you think it worth while to send emissaries all round?' said Yasodharman.

'Yes, it is quite necessary,' replied Mahamaya, 'even if no king comes to help you substantially with men and money, still such an action on your part will demonstrate to all the princes that you undertake this enterprise not for the purpose of personal aggrandizement and dynastic glory but in the interests of our bleeding motherland. It is also quite likely that some at least of the numerous princes of this land will help you.'

'Well,' said Yasodharman, 'I count mainly on my own troops. I am also going to make an appeal to the people acting on the advice of Vasanta. The appeal to the Kalingas will be most effectively made by their own Queen Charumati. As for the Maha Kosalas, Mahamaya and myself will appeal to them.'

'After my business in Kalinga is over,' said Charumati, 'I shall go to my friend Saraswati and see whether I cannot persuade her to compel her husband to send some help to us.'

'We don't want his help,' said Yasodharman.

'Any help offered in this cause you should not refuse,' said Charumati. 'You are now acting as the trustee of the Aryan civilization. The pride of the king of Maha Kosala should not be allowed to injure the cause of the Aryas. Magadha is one of the premier Aryan kingdoms and should not be neglected. It is your duty to approach one and all and accept whatever help they offer.'

'True,' said Yasodharman, 'but Baladitya has already refused to help. What is the use of asking him again?'

'Let him again refuse,' said Charumati. 'Who knows but that fifteen years have not changed his former attitude? Anyway, let me try. You should swallow your pride when Aryan interests are concerned. The cause is so sacred that personal opinions and prejudices must give way.'

'I agree with what Charumati says,' remarked Mahamaya. 'Perhaps, Baladitya has changed his former opinion now. In any case, a victory over the Huns will be doubly welcome to me if the descendant of the Guptas also took part in it. Besides, Kamarupa will follow Magadha now in all things. Son, one soldier more in our ranks now means some more chance of victory. We cannot afford to refuse any aid whatsoever. Nay, we should not refuse any aid. There is no shame in approaching all princes. Even enemy princes should be given a chance of joining the alliance. The issues are so momentous for our motherland.'

'Who is to be the leader of the alliance?' asked Yasodharman.

'The man who takes the most risk should be the leader,' said Charumati. 'Moreover, you are the first to start this movement. Yours is most unquestionably the honoured place of leadership.' 'Supposing Baladitya objects to my being the leader?' asked Yasodharman.

'He can never object,' said Charumati, 'unless he too puts his fullest energies into the conflict. In this latter case, he has a right to be co-leader with you and to share

half the responsibilities. I see no reason why you should object to that.'

'None at all,' said Yasodharman, 'but unless he helps to the best of his ability and comes to the battlefield himself he cannot very well claim to be co-leader with me.'

'Well, let that be,' said Charumati, 'have you got enough qualified ambassadors in Maha Kosala to send to the various princes?'

'No,' replied Yasodharman, 'I have one or two, that is all.'

'Well, then,' said Charumati, 'I shall select some thirty of the best ambassadors we have in Kalinga. And, Subhashini,' she said laughingly to Vasanta, 'you go to Pataliputra and keep Saraswati engaged till I come.'

'Alright,' said Vasanta.

'To-morrow I start for Kalinga,' said Charumati, 'and you for Pataliputra. Shall I take one of the children with me?' she asked Mahamaya.

'Yes,' said Mahamaya, 'take Chandrabhanu. Narasimha will be useful here for his father. The Kalingas you say are very fond of Chandrabhanu. Oh, here come the darlings, dripping wet.'

'Grandmother,' said Chandrabhanu falling upon the poor lady and wetting her clothes, 'what is it you are saying?'

'Child, you are going to Kalinga to-morrow,' said Mahamaya, 'with your mother.'

'To Kalinga! Hurrah!' said Chandrabhanu rising, 'Lalita, I am going to Kalinga to-morrow. Narasimha, I am going to Kalinga to-morrow.'

'What of me, you wretched grandmother,' said Narasimha assaulting Mahamaya, 'am I not going to Kalinga too?'

'No, child,' said Mahamaya, 'you are to remain with father in order to rouse our people to fight Mihiragula and the Huns.' 'Hurrah!' said Narasimha, 'then I am very glad that I remain in Maha Kosala.'

'Grandmother,' said Chandrabhanu, 'I too want to fight the Hun. I shan't go to Kalinga and run away from the Hun.'

'Child,' said Mahamaya with pride, 'you too are going to fight the Hun. You and your mother are going to rouse the Kalingas.' 'Hurrah,' said Chandrabhanu, 'then I shall go.'

Meanwhile, Lalita had fallen in a heap on Charumati's lap and was crying and sobbing bitterly. 'What is it you want Lalita?' asked Charumati. 'I too want to come to Kalinga. Why did grandmother say that you would take Chandrabhanu alone?'

'I shall take you also,' said Charumati.

'Father,' said Lalita laughing through her tears and going and embracing Yasodharman, 'I too am coming to Kalinga with you and mother.'

'Child,' said Yasodharman, 'I am going to remain here. Mother alone is going to Kalinga.'

'Oh, I want to remain with you and I want to go with mother. What shall I do? Tell me, you wicked father.'

'Come,' said Yasodharman, 'I shall tell you Lalita.' So saying, he took the child in his arms and proceeded to the inner apartments being followed by the rest, Narasimha clinging to his grandmother and Chandrabhanu to his mother.

'The children are dripping wet,' said Vasanta, 'I shall bring some dry clothes for them.'

'Father,' said Lalita, 'where is Vasanta going to?'

'To Pataliputra,' said Yasodharman.

'I want to go to Pataliputra also,' said Lalita. 'Tell me, you wicked father, how I am to go to Kalinga with mother, to Pataliputra with Vasanta and remain at Kalanjar with you.'

'I shall tell you; come along,' said Vasanta and snatched the dripping child from Yasodharman's hands. Then all went into the inner apartments.

CHAPTER XXIX

PREPARATIONS FOR WAR IN KALINGA AND MAGADHA

THE citizens of Amaravati were assembled in the great courtyard before the palace. Great excitement prevailed. Word had gone from the royal heralds to summon all the people of the town in order to hear their princess Charumati. The appointed hour was seven in the morning. Long before that time an eagerly expectant crowd had gathered.

'Why are we sent for, do you know?' asked one citizen of another.

'I heard that at Kalingapatnam the queen spoke to the people about a great war with the Huns for the sake of our country, civilization and religion. Our Maharaja Yasodharman is going to head a formidable league of Hindu princes. The Maharani has come expressly to exhort us to do our utmost for the holy cause and help with our men and money liberally,' said the second citizen.

'Why should the Maharani require our aid?' asked the first. 'She has got the army and navy of Kalinga at her disposal and also the money in the royal exchequer. She has only to win over the council of ministers to her side and all these will be placed at her disposal.'

'Well,' replied the second, 'our Maharani is not satisfied with the things you mentioned. What she wants is to rouse the people of Kalinga to take an active interest in this holy war of liberation.'

'How are the citizens of Kalinga interested in fighting the Hun?' asked the first. 'Our country is not seriously

threatened with invasion. It will be time enough for us to muster our resources when the Huns do come to invade our land. Till then why should we bestir ourselves?’

‘How do you know that the Huns will not invade our country to-morrow?’ asked a third.

‘They will have to cross Maha Kosala before they can come to Kalinga,’ replied the first citizen. ‘My own belief is that but for the constant schemes of our King Yasodharman the Huns will not at all be disposed to attack us or Maha Kosala. The dynastic ambition of Yasodharman is the cause of all this trouble and hubbub. Kalinga is being made the tool of Maha Kosala.’

‘Friend,’ said a fourth, ‘since Yasodharman protects your country by fighting the Huns in Maha Kosala, you talk lightly about an invasion of Kalinga. Let the Maharaja be defeated by the Hun, you will soon see what Kalinga comes to.’

‘We shall then muster our forces in right earnest,’ replied the first citizen.

‘Yes, yes,’ replied the fourth laughing. ‘You are one of those who would seriously begin to dig a well when a house is burning.’ ‘Silence!’ shouted the second citizen. ‘The Maharani has come! The Maharani has come!’ All eyes were at once turned towards the balcony where Charumati was standing with Chandrabhanu on one side and Lalita on the other. Her face was serious but sweet. All the citizens bowed to their Maharani. A great big shout of ‘Jaya Jaya Maharani!’ rent the skies asunder. Charumati graciously acknowledged the salutes with a becoming bow to the assembled citizens. Then she spoke in a low but clear voice. As soon as she began to speak, an immense silence reigned among that mob which was a moment before creating such a hubbub. Charumati’s speech was repeated sentence by sentence by the palace herald who had a stentorian voice. This was for the benefit of those who

were at a distance. Charumati said: 'My beloved subjects, it is quite a treat to me to be once more among my faithful Kalingas (cries of "Jaya Jaya Maharani!"). I am glad to see that you are also pleased to see me amongst you all. I have expressly come to you to-day with a specific object in view, an object which I know will be as dear to all your hearts as it is to mine, I mean the liberation of this land of the Aryas from the oppression of the Hun (cries of "Jaya Jaya Maharani!"). My heart rejoices to see such enthusiasm in you. But this was what I expected. I know my Kalingas (cries of "Jaya Jaya Maharani!"). Being born and bred in this holy land of Kalinga I feel my blood boiling when I think of the horrible oppression of Aryavarta by the Huns.' 'Our blood also boils,' said a citizen. 'That is as it should be,' said Charumati. 'Are you not also Kalingas? Were you too not born and bred in this holy land? What wonder then if you feel your blood boil as mine does? Even your prince Chandrabhanu's blood boils when he thinks of the wrongs of Aryavarta, boy though he is.' 'My blood boils,' shouted Chandrabhanu. 'It will boil till I kill that Mihiragula' (cries of "Long live Chandrabhanu the Kalinga!" "Long live our beloved prince!"). 'Even Lalita's blood will boil,' resumed Charumati. 'Such is the atrocious oppression of the Hun. We Kalingas have always regarded ourselves as the premier Aryans and the principal custodians of Aryan culture, religion and Dharma. Now for these forty years and more our dear Aryadharma has been very near to extinction at the hands of the Mlechchha while you and I and all the other Aryas slept unmindful of the death which was overtaking us. The great Gupta Empire fell before the Hun without Kalinga's raising a finger in its aid. Then came the turn of the petty princes. Day after day, my rising hopes have been dashed to pieces by some crushing news of the Hun's success and the Aryan's defeat. I am

ashamed to see the morning sun (she here pointed to the rising sun opposite her) because he seems to reproach me for the state of this country. Every morning the sun and every evening the moon look eagerly to see whether the dynasties boasting of descent from them have at least learnt to unite against the common foe of both. Every time, alas, the sun and moon have been disappointed so far. Instead of seeing the glories of Aryavarta and Aryadharmā in their pure form, these Gods have had the pain of seeing the barbarian and the foreigner seemingly secure on his throne at Ujjaini and trampling over the fast dying body of Aryamata.¹ If this continues for some time longer, both the sun and the moon will refuse to come to this land and will plunge this Bharatavarsha in utter darkness. However easily men reconcile themselves to evil, the Gods cannot and will not do so. We cannot wait for an Avatar now, for the next Avatar is so very far ahead. In this Kali Age² God has left man to remedy his own evils and gives him only the strength which comes from faith and not active physical co-operation as in the Krita, Treta and Dwapura Yugas. Men in those ages were pure, and gave the Gods due respect though they lived and moved among them. In this Kali Age people will soon slander and dishonour Gods if they appeared in human forms. We have to put our own shoulders to the wheel, but of course with full faith in God and invoking His unseen aid. So far, we Kalingas have not done much against the Hun for the sake of Aryamata and Aryadharmā. No doubt, we aided Baladitya and our king in defeating the Huns at Pataliputra but there it stopped. Petty jealousies and rivalries, the bane of the Aryas, have ruined our cause. The enemy rejoices from his throne of blood, and Aryamata groans in despair while the Gods look on in wonder at the degeneracy

¹ Mother India.

² The Iron Age, the Evil Age.

of the Aryas. Our king has done much for the good cause, but, after all, what can one man do? We have now resolved to make a supreme effort against the Hun and have sent emissaries all round. We could have easily used the Kalinga army and navy and the money in the treasury without consulting you. That course too was suggested to me. I rejected it as it would imply a lack of faith in my faithful Kalingas and would be unjustly denying them an opportunity of offering themselves and their wealth at the altar of Aryamata (cries of "Long live the Maharani"). Citizens, your Maharaja Yasodharman has sent me here to appeal to you to do your utmost for the holy cause and to assure you of his constant affection for his beloved Kalingas (cries of "Long live the king!"). He is now engaged body and soul in preparations for this great and holy war. I want every one of you to permit me to convey to him your loyalty and offers of sincere co-operation in this war for civilization.'

'You have our permission, you have our permission,' shouted the assembled citizens, 'Long live the king! Long live the queen! Down with the Hun!'

'Can I take it that my Kalingas have taken up this war as their own?' asked Charumati.

'You may, you may,' shouted the crowd.

'That is what I expected of my beloved Kalingas. Dear subjects, good-bye for the time being.'

'Jaya, Jaya, Maharani!' shouted the citizens. Then Charumati, Chandrabhanu and Lalita bowed to the assembly and went into the inner apartments. The crowd broke up and people returned in small batches to their houses.

'I say,' said one, 'this queen of ours is no mean orator. She knows how to move us.'

'What wonder!' said another. 'She was born and bred a Kalinga. She knows her Kalingas. Besides, there are few men or women who can beat her in learning. Why,

Vidyasamudra, learned as he was, could not hold his own with Queen Charumati.' 'I don't know how the war with the Hun will end,' said a third.

'What doubt is there?' asked a fourth. 'The Huns will surely be crushed by the Kalingas. The Kalingas are hard to beat when they are fully roused as they have been to-day.'

Then these four had to separate and go their several ways.

At Pataliputra there was a hard tussle between Saraswati and Baladitya. Vasanta had gone to the imperial city and won over Saraswati to her cause by relating the miserable plight of the poor men, women and children of unfortunate Ujjaini. The sorrows of her native city made Saraswati sad and moved her very much. She told Vasanta that her heart bled for the poor people of Ujjaini. The people of Magadha must be ready to bleed before the people of Ujjaini could be saved from further bleeding, was Vasanta's reply. Saraswati saw the truth of the remark and set herself body and soul to win over Baladitya to the holy cause. It was a hard task. The old knight-errant had become a peculiar type of idealist. He was immersed in ameliorating the condition of the people of Magadha in various ways. Magadha had become the seat of culture in the whole of northern India and the most prosperous spot in Bharatavarsha. But her enlightened king had lost his old enthusiasm for war. He held that only defensive war was wholly justifiable. Even an offensive war was allowable if undertaken at the request of the oppressed peoples provided it was solely with a view to deliver them from oppression and not with any idea of dynastic aggrandizement. Once Saraswati had suggested to him that he should reconquer all the lands of his ancestors.

'What lands do you mean?' asked Baladitya.

'All Aryavarta,' replied Saraswati.

'That was the possession of only my late ancestors Samudragupta to Skandagupta,' replied Baladitya. 'My remoter ancestor Chandragupta had only three small provinces and his father had nothing at all. And all the ancestors of this father of Chandragupta had, of course, no territories. Hence you cannot say that I have any infeasible moral right to the whole of Aryavarta. Magadha I rule over and defend because the Magadhans want me to do so. The people of the other provinces have not so far asked me to deliver them nor had they made any active effort to defend my family against the Huns. I do not see why I should sacrifice the lives of poor Magadhans for delivering people who have not expressed any desire to be delivered.' Saraswati had put in a last remark that Gupta rule was Heaven itself compared with that of the Hunnish tyranny to which Baladitya had replied that Heaven was never compelled upon unwilling people.

Ever since this discussion Sarāswati had ceased to argue about this subject often. The lapse of years had made her also more or less a convert to her husband's views. She had gradually begun to feel Magadha as the real Kingdom and was gradually forgetting the projected conquest of the Huns in her absorption in promoting the welfare of the Magadhans. But Vasanta's story of the woes of the people of Ujjaini had moved her so much that she felt once more her blood boiling against the Huns. A war for the conquest of the Huns again became dear to her, but this time there was no dynastic ambition connected with that war in her mind. It was not the prospect of additional provinces which moved her now but the idea of liberating the poor people of Ujjaini and the other provinces from the heel of the Hun.

She approached her husband with a determined face and said, 'Dearest, Vasanta has come with a message from Queen Charumati and King Yasodharman that a great

attempt is about to be made to drive the ferocious Huns from Ujjaini and to liberate the unhappy people from the terrible oppression to which they are being subjected. King Yasodharman and Queen Charumati want your help and co-operation in the matter.'

'You know my views,' said Baladitya. 'I have now freed myself from dynastic ambitions, thank God.'

'I too am now free from those ambitions,' said Saraswati. 'It is the people of the oppressed provinces that I feel for. The stories told by Vasanta would make anybody's blood boil.'

'True,' said Baladitya. 'Have the people appealed for the help of Yasodharman or myself?'

'No,' said Saraswati. 'The poor creatures have not got even the power to appeal. Shame at their former indifference and ingratitude prevents the people of Ujjaini and the other provinces from appealing to you or Yasodharman. But pray don't make that a reason for not helping them. They have repented for their past sins, God knows. It is your duty as a king to help the oppressed even though the oppressed do not appeal to you.'

'True,' replied Baladitya, 'but I have no right to sacrifice the blood of the Magadhans for the sake of other people.'

'The Magadhans will become degenerate cowards if they are not occasionally exercised in war,' said Saraswati.

'A truly courageous man needs no exercise to keep up his courage,' said Baladitya. 'For a brave man to resist a thief it does not require to send a thief every night to his house.'

'But unless there is discipline how can our armies be up to the mark? They may be the bravest of men and the most enthusiastic, but unless they have discipline they will fail before better disciplined troops,' said Saraswati.

'Discipline can be had without the horrors of a war. Let my subjects be disciplined in a variety of little things. Let

them learn the discipline of the mind, and the discipline of the body will follow,' replied Baladitya. 'As a matter of fact, I do think that the Magadhans will be able to defend their country if the call comes.'

'They ought to be able to defend their greater country,' said Saraswati. 'It is a narrow ideal to confine their attention to Magadha alone. What is Magadha in this wide world? Are not the Magadhans as much interested in defending Aryavarta as the Maha Kosalas or Kalingas? It is a dangerous thing to teach Magadhans to hold themselves aloof from the vital conflicts of India. If the Huns win, they will surely come and swallow us up afterwards. If perchance the Aryan princes win, they will out of sheer indignation attack the Magadhans afterwards and lay waste their country.'

'The Magadhans know how to defend themselves against such wanton attacks,' said Baladitya.

'However brave the Magadhans may be, they are sure to be defeated by the victorious Huns or the indignant coalition of Hindu princes,' said Saraswati. 'And I cannot honestly say that the Magadhans won't deserve that fate if they acted like that. Dearest, you seem to forget that the Maha Kosalas are now indirectly helping the Magadhans. Is it not our duty to help them against the Huns? Yasodharman is determined to fight the Hun to the finish. If Magadha does not go to his aid, he will be crushed as surely as I am Saraswati. Will you coolly see your old comrade at arms fall a prey to the enemies of civilization? Yasodharman may have done you many an injustice but he is a brave and impetuous warrior who does nothing base or mean. He was brought up with you in the old days of comparative prosperity, he stood by you in the days of adversity, is it right for you to leave him to his fate now at the fag end of both your lives?'

'Saraswati,' said Baladitya, 'do you know that

Yasodharman was dead opposed to my marriage with you and that that was one of the misunderstandings between us? Still, you plead for Yasodharman.'

'Yes, I do,' said Saraswati. 'When Yasodharman objected to your marriage with me he had only your good in view. He said what he thought was good for you and I like him for it. I am not at all sure that his advice was not good. Be that as it may, how can I find fault with a sincere friend who gave honest advice to my husband?'

'Dearest,' said Baladitya, kissing and embracing her, 'I was never prouder of you than to-day. I have yielded to your persuasion. This very day I shall issue a proclamation to my Magadhans calling on them to fight for the holy cause of oppressed peoples.' 'Thanks, dearest,' said Saraswati and kissed her husband and left the private room of Baladitya.

Vasanta was impatiently waiting outside. As soon as she saw Saraswati come out she rushed to her and asked, 'What news? Is the king going to help the good cause?'

'Yes,' said Saraswati. Vasanta would allow her to say no more. She ran out into the courtyard where a courier was waiting and told him, 'Go, tell our Maharaja that Baladitya Maharaja is going to help the good cause. Halt not at any place. Draw no reins till you reach Amalapuri.' And the courier set out at once.

CHAPTER XXX

MIHIRAGULA'S COUNCIL OF WAR

THERE was great bustle in the city of Sagala. All the Hun chieftains and their retainers had come to the capital at the bidding of their king. The Indian princes subordinate to the Hun and also those Indian kings who were friends and allies of Mihiragula had likewise come in order to help in the great war which was impending. Among these Indian princes were Vajrayudha of Kashmir, Indradyumna of Kasi and Rudrasimha of Sourashtra. Nahapana the father of Chastana was now dead. His son Chastana and his son Nahapana had also come to aid their master with their arms and advice.

Mihiragula held a council in the palace consisting of select Indians and Huns in order to consider the situation. To this council were invited Chastana, Nahapana, Vajrayudha, Indradyumna and Rudrasimha. When these five had assembled in the council chamber, Mihiragula began the deliberations thus:—

‘I have called you all in order to consider the situation arising from the insolent activities of Yasodharman and Baladitya. It seems that a messenger from Yasodharman is waiting to have an audience. Shall we call him in?’

‘As your Majesty pleases,’ said Vajrayudha.

So the messenger was called in. He was a stately soldier of about thirty with a superb military appearance. His name was Yuddhakesari and he prided himself on being descended from the bluest-blooded Kshatriyas of Maha Kosala. For eighteen generations his ancestors had loyally served Yasodharman’s dynasty. When Yuddhakesari heard of the impending war with the Hun, he went to Yasodharman and said, ‘Sire, my family has faithfully

served your royal house for eighteen generations in prosperity and in adversity without asking for any favours or rewards. Now, to-day, sire, it is my painful duty to ask for a favour.'

'Ask for anything you like and you shall have it if it is within my power to give,' said Yasodharman.

'Your Highness is always gracious,' said Yuddhakesari. 'I want to be sent as the herald to Mihiragula in order to deliver to him the ultimatum of Aryavarta.'

'This is no favour,' said Yasodharman astounded. 'It is a position of great danger. Why, Mihiragula may even kill you, forgetting all laws of war.'

'Sire,' said Yuddhakesari smiling, 'has my house served your house for eighteen generations without making your Highness know that no Kesari is ever afraid of death?'

'If I had a hundred soldiers like you, the Huns would never have come to India' said Yasodharman. Then he embraced his trustworthy noble and entrusted him with the mission he had sought for. Such was Yuddhakesari.

On entering the council chamber, Yuddhakesari bowed to the assembly and said, 'Mihiragula, king of the Huns, Yasodharman of Maha Kosala, Baladitya of Magadha, Kumarapala of Kamarupa, Charumati of Kalinga and other Aryan princes and princesses have deputed me as their herald in order to deliver to you the following message of theirs: "Either leave the land of the Aryas, which you have usurped, within forty days or be prepared to be driven out."'

'Pull out the tongue of this insolent scoundrel,' roared out Mihiragula.

'Sire,' said Indradyumna, 'the person of a herald is sacred. No Aryan prince will injure a herald, for he speaks but what he has been ordered to speak.'

'I am no Aryan prince,' said Mihiragula, 'and am not bound to follow your ridiculous rules. Chastana, ask some

soldiers to bring blazing hot tongs and pincers. We shall soon teach this son of a devil what respect is due to the Hun.'

'Oh, foolish King,' said Yuddhakesari, 'don't you know that I come of the famous Kesari family which knows no fear? Why pull out my tongue alone? Tear me limb by limb, take out my blood drop by drop, glut your Hunnish eyes with inhuman pleasure, still Yuddhakesari will display not the slightest fear. I had a great contempt and consuming hatred for you, O Mlechchha, but to-day my contempt and hatred have increased a hundred-fold. I am glad that you are going to sacrifice me at the altar of my country but my sorrow knows no bounds on seeing these degenerate hell-hounds here,' he said pointing to Vajrayudha and Indradyumna both of whom blushed with shame.

'Silence, fellow,' said Mihiragula, 'or I shall be forced to knock you down myself.'

'Come along, if you are a man,' said Yuddhakesari, 'and behave like a soldier if you can.'

Mhiragula rose for the combat but Nahapana and Vajrayudha held him down.

'It ill beseems your Majesty to fight such low creatures,' said Vajrayudha.

'Hell-hound, what is it you spoke?' asked Yuddhakesari. 'Is there a single Kshatriya family in all Arayavarta which can claim a better lineage than mine? Pardon me, what do low-born fellows like you know of Kshatriya families?'

Meanwhile, Chastana had come with the tongs and pincers. 'Put his eyes out first,' said Mihiragula. As the eyes were put out with red hot pincers, Yuddhakesari said proudly, 'Oh, I am very glad that my eyes are now relieved of the pain of seeing my country under the heel of the barbarian and the foreigner.'

'Pull his tongue out,' yelled Mihiragula. This was done, but still Yuddhakesari was exhibiting no sign of pain. He

pointed to his right arm and made a sign to the Hunnish soldiers to cut it off. This was done. Then the brave Kshatriya pointed to the right leg and asked the Huns by signs to cut it off. This also was done and Yuddhakesari fell down. He pointed to his left leg with his left hand and signed to the Huns to cut it off also. This being done, he pointed to the left arm itself. This also was cut off and only a bare stump was left of what was Yuddhakesari. 'This fellow has given no pleasure to me,' said Mihiragula. 'He neither cried out nor implored for mercy. There is no more pleasure in killing him than in cutting vegetables.'

'With your Majesty's permission, I shall despatch him then,' said Indradyumna and relieved the sufferings of Yuddhakesari by plunging his sword into the stump till life was extinct.

'I never saw a truer Kshatriya,' said Indradyumna after Yuddhakesari was fully dead.

'No Hun could have been braver,' said Chastana. 'Still, the fellow deserved what he got.'

'Remove the corpse,' said Mihiragula, 'and let us attend to our deliberations.' The corpse was removed and the deliberations resumed to all outward appearances though the three Hindu princes were too much moved by the horrid spectacle to take an active part in the proceedings.

'Well,' said Mihiragula, 'this then is the situation. War is certain with the contumacious rebels. This act of ours has brought the war nearer. We have now to see what forces the enemy will be able to muster and what forces we will have to meet them. This is a war to the finish and will settle once for all whether this land will remain under the Huns or not.'

'Who are the princes likely to join the rebels and what are their resources in men and money?' asked Nahapana. 'Doubtless, your Majesty must have known about this from the spies.'

'Since Kalagni died and Sarvasammata and Sumati have been missing, our secret service is not so up-to-date as before,' said Mihiragula. 'Still, I have got almost all the information you want. The chief princes on the side of the rebels are Baladitya of Magadha who will be able to put into the field 1,00,000 indifferently trained troops, Charumati of Kalinga with 1,50,000 seasoned soldiers, Kumarapala of Kamarupa with 50,000 savages, the arch-rebel Yasodharman with 60,000 desperadoes, Kakavarna of Sinhala with 10,000 men, 8,000 auxiliaries lent by Avanti Varman of Kanchi, 2,000 sent by Mahendravarman of Vengi, 1,500 sent by Mahasena of Kerala and 1,000 sent by Vyaghra Raja's brother, or 3,82,500 soldiers in all. Then there is the unconfirmed rumour that Aparajita of Devarashtra and Maharashtra is going to join the rebels with 2,00,000 troops on condition that he is promised Sourashtra.'

'Aparajita is a much more formidable foe than either Baladitya or Yasodharman,' said Rudrasimha.

'What are the forces we have at our disposal?' asked Nahapana.

'There are the 2,50,000 troops we got down from Bam-yin recently, there are the 2,00,000 Huns stationed at Ujjaini and elsewhere in India, there are 1,50,000 tribesmen from Gandhara ready to help us and to share in the loot, and there are 1,80,000 Gurjaras, Yaudheyas and other auxiliaries from this country. Besides these, we have the soldiers of Vajrayudha and Indradyumna which make another 1,50,000. Thus we have in all 9,30,000 men and among them 4,50,000 Huns,' said Mihiragula.

'There is then not the slightest cause for anxiety,' said Nahapana. 'A single Hun will any day beat two other men as the Persians found to their cost.'

'The Gurjaras and Yaudheyas are fast approximating to the standard of the Hun,' said Chastana.

'The tribesmen of Gandhara are no whit behind,' said Nahapana.

'The Kashmiris are also brave soldiers,' said Vajrayudha.

'Yes, compared with other Indians,' said Mihiragula.

Indradyumna and Rudrasimha smiled at the discomfiture of Vajrayudha. 'Well,' said Vajrayudha, 'why can't we do like this? We can offer Aparajita Sourashtra and when we have kept him neutral with this offer we can defeat the rebels with much greater ease. After the defeat of the rebels we can go back on our offer and leave it to Aparajita to fight us or not.'

'It is unbecoming of the Huns to offer Sourashtra to Aparajita as if they fear him and his troops,' said Rudrasimha becoming anxious about his province.

'Let a dozen Aparajitas come to aid the rebels. They shall always find the Huns ready,' said Mihiragula.

'If Aparajita fights against us, we can conquer Maharashtra also,' said Nahapana.

'Quite so,' said Mihiragula.

'What gain will I or Indradyumna get after the successful termination of this war?' asked Vajrayudha.

'Is it not enough that you are allowed to keep your own kingdoms?' retorted Mihiragula, and Vajrayudha was effectually silenced.

'Well then, we shall now go to the next item,' said Mihiragula. 'Where shall we meet the rebels? Shall we meet them at the frontier of Maha Kosala or Magadha? Or shall we meet them at Benares?' 'The best course would be to meet them on the frontier of Maha Kosala,' said Nahapana. 'This will have three advantages. It will enable us to keep a close watch on Ujjaini where the citizens are reported to be restive. It will be nearer our base of operations and more distant from that of the enemy. Thirdly, it will not be a country very well known to the rebels.'

'Suppose the rebels never advance west of Maha Kosala?' asked Chastana.

'In that case we shall have to invade Maha Kosala, that is all,' said Nahapana. 'But I should think that that fool of a Yasodharman is not likely to adopt guerilla tactics. He is so eager to drive the Huns out that he will not be able to curb his impatience or the impatience of his soldiers either.'

'You are quite right,' said Rudrasimha. 'I know Yasodharman. He is just another man of the type of Yuddha-kesari. These men are like moths more ready to die than to think out the necessity for their deaths or the benefits arising from them.'

'Alright, then,' said Mihiragula. 'There is only one more thing we have to consider. Is there any likelihood of risings on the part of the subject population in the provinces under the Hun?'

'My lord,' said Rudrasimha, 'I can answer for Sourashtra. The people are too much cowed down there to attempt any revolt.'

'What about the Yaudheyas?' asked Mihiragula.

'My lord, they are rather restive,' said Chastana, 'but I don't think they will create any trouble. We have a good many of them in our armies and these will see to it that their comrades don't join the rebels.'

'What about Ujjaini?' asked Mihiragula.

'The people of Ujjaini are most discontented, my lord,' replied Chastana, 'but they are of a type very common in this country. They will talk much but do little. They will swallow their brave words at the very least threat to their material possessions or personal liberties. The most influential of the citizens are Brahmins and merchants, and these classes will never risk their skins or purses. Consequently, I don't fear any revolt in Ujjaini or the other big towns unless our armies sustain heavy defeats.'

'What about the other provinces,' asked Mihiragula.

'The provinces, my lord, will not revolt unless they see us defeated in pitched battle. The former rule has many adherents among the upper classes, no doubt, but these classes will risk nothing unless they are sure of victory. They have not the spirit in them, my lord, to fight leaving all thought of their possessions and relations behind,' said Chastana.

'I think that we may now disperse,' said Mihiragula. 'We have discussed all the points.'

Then the assembly broke up and the five went out of the council chamber. Chastana and Nahapana went to the cantonment where the Hunnish troops were quartered. Vajrayudha, Indradyumna and Rudrasimha went together for some time.

'What do you think of the death of Yuddhakesari?' asked Indradyumna. 'Was it not splendid? He reminded me of the Kshatriya warriors of old.'

'He died a very brave death, no doubt,' said Rudrasimha and secretly cautioned by signs the lord of Kasi against indiscretions in the presence of Vajrayudha.

'I say, Indradyumna,' said Vajrayudha, 'don't you think we should get something at least for our helping the Hun against Yasodharman and his crew?'

'I shall be mighty glad if the Hun will at least leave us our present territories,' said Indradyumna.

'What do you think are the prospects of the rebels?' asked Vajrayudha of Rudrasimha. 'Don't you think we shall easily crush them?'

'Of course, we will,' said Rudrasimha. 'What doubt is there?' 'You know I hate this Yasodharman,' said Vajrayudha. 'The fellow succeeded in winning the hand of Charumati. You know I was a suitor for her hand and was most summarily dismissed by that haughty princess. Now she will learn what it is to scorn Vajrayudha. The whole of

Maha Kosala and Kalinga will blaze before she sees the end of me.'

'She rejected me also,' said Indradyumna. 'But then I don't take it as you do. After all, a maiden can only choose one out of many who attend a Swayamvara. How can we blame her for not choosing all?'

'Well, I am off,' said Vajrayudha, 'to the palace assigned to me. I suppose you are going to be the guest of Rudrasimha,' he said turning to Indradyumna.

'Yes,' said Indradyumna. 'Goodbye.'

'Goodbye to both of you,' said Vajrayudha.

'Goodbye,' said Rudrasimha.

After the departure of Vajrayudha, Indradyumna asked Rudrasimha :—

'Don't you think that it was most barbarous to do to death a herald like Yuddhakesari? I felt ashamed of myself.'

'So did I,' said Rudrasimha. 'We can't help it. These Huns have no laws of war.'

'As if they have any laws of peace!' said Indradyumna, 'you seem to be a favourite of the Huns.'

'Not at all over-favourite,' said Rudrasimha. 'My tenure is shaky. Bhanugupta in spite of his cunning did not make much headway with the Huns. As soon as the poor fellow died, his province was annexed and his hoarded wealth confiscated. The eldest daughter of Bhanugupta was married forcibly to Nahapana junior, the son of Chastana. 'Oh, I am quite sick of the horrors prevailing here.'

'Did you attend the marriage?' asked Indradyumna.

'No,' said Rudrasimha, 'I pretended that I had a headache and fever and so got off.'

'What will happen if Yasodharman fails?' asked the king of Kasi.

'More of this unfortunate country will come under the heel of the Hun,' said Rudrasimha.

'What do you think are the prospects of the Aryan princes?' asked Indradyumna.

'They are sure to be defeated,' said Rudrasimha. 'A great organized empire like that of the Guptas fell before the Huns. Can a loose alliance of jealous and treacherous princes prevail over the conquerors of the Guptas? The idea is ludicrous. The funeral ceremonies of Skandagupta marked the end of all hope of successful resistance to the Hun. I have no hope of deliverance from the yoke of the Hun. If I had, I should have long ago sided with the other princes.'

'To be frank with you,' said Indradyumna, 'I am going to join the allied princes. I am sick of Mihiragula's atrocities. The cruel murder of Yuddhakesari has decided me once and for all.'

'Well, may you not be totally ruined!' said Rudrasimha. 'I should advise you to be neutral.'

'Neutrality will not satisfy my conscience,' said Indradyumna. 'Besides, a neutral in these days stands more chances of being ruined than an active belligerent.'

'Quite so,' said Rudrasimha. Then they both went to the palace of the Satrap of Sourashtra.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE GATHERING AT AMALAPURI

AT Amalapuri Yasodharman had called a meeting of his nobles and subjects. A great assembly had collected and tense excitement prevailed. The people of Maha Kosala were very proud of the part their king was playing in the war against the Hun and had gathered in their thousands. Yasodharman addressed them all thus:—

'Aryas,¹ this is a supreme crisis in the history of our country and that of Aryavarta. To-day we are on the eve of the most momentous conflict ever nation engaged in, the conflict for civilization, culture and religion against the barbarian and the foreigner, who has tyrannized over us for well-nigh forty-five years. The Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras, these four divinely ordained castes, these have seen the country go to ruin without making all possible efforts to avert the catastrophe. The Hun has ruled at the imperial city of Ujjaini all these years and no Aryan warrior has ousted him from there. Even now he sits on the throne of the Guptas spurning at the four Vedas, the six sastras and the four castes. Still Aryavarta is silent. What is even more, the Brahmins help the Mlechchha with their advice, the Kshatriyas help him with their arms, the Vaisyas with their money and the Sudras with their toil. The four castes whom Mihiragula wants to mingle into one hybrid mass of impotence, these very four castes help him to bring this change about. The Aryan princes had looked on helplessly while the Aryan castes were threatened in Ujjaini. Fools that we were, we did not realize that what happened in Ujjaini one day would happen the next day in our own country. With every new success

¹ Oh, Aryans.

the Hun will get stronger and stronger. If Ujjaini, a centre of Aryan culture, is lost to civilization, barbarism will gain such an impetus that it will flood not only Maha Kosala and Holy Kasi but even distant Magadha, Kalinga and Kamarupa and in course of time even Gondwana, Kanchi, Kerala and Maharashtra. Fortunately for Aryan culture, some Aryan princes have woken up at least at this last stage to a sense of the imminent peril and are at present making a supreme effort to drive the barbarian and the foreigner out of this sacred land which he has polluted. Your king has been the first to move in this direction but was soon seconded in his efforts by your beloved Queen Charumati (cries of "Long live our King!" "Long live our Queen!"). Your queen has roused Kalinga so thoroughly that we are soon likely to have two hundred thousand troops from that country, an army larger than that which even Kharavela¹ had. Then there is Magadha. King Baladitya has thrown himself body and soul into the conflict. Magadhans are busy arming and training. In that Buddhist land caste is very loose and all castes are flocking to the armies. Shall we lag behind this Buddhist country in defending Aryan Dharma? This is not time for paying meaningless compliments. It is a time for plain speaking. I am a believer in the four castes, O Aryas, but not in the sense in which these castes exist at present. I want to restore the four castes in their original purity and deal a death-blow to the excrescences which have grown up in years of degeneracy. Too often, O Brahmins, you have used your boasted learning only for supporting evil superstitions and advancing the cause of your bellies, sometimes even at the expense of your country. I have seen with sorrow the search after Brahma, the Supreme, the Eternal, the Unknowable, becoming less and less popular among the Brahmins and the

¹ A famous king of Kalinga.

search after honours, privileges, power and wealth becoming a consuming passion among them. Oh, ye Brahmins of Aryavarta, so long as this degeneracy continues among you, I see little hope of regeneration. The real Brahmins I honour and even worship, the degenerate Brahmins I class as lower than Mlechchhas, for, having known what is best, these are choosing the worst whereas the Mlechchhas have never known anything other than the worst. To those Brahmins who still retain something of the old Brahmin spirit, I say, come, join the armies as your ancestors Drona, Aswathama and Chanakya¹ did and help in the holy cause with your divine weapons and prayers. Be not ashamed if you have no divine weapons; come, adopt the weapons of the other soldiers and use them as best you can. Your country wants every help you can give it.

'Too often, O Kshatriyas, your valour has been sold for money to your country's enemies, too often you have frittered away your valour in fratricidal wars and meaningless factions. Pride of bravery has been stronger with you than sense of duty. Forget all your eternal quarrels and jealousies and fight as one man in the cause of our country and culture.

'Too often, O Vaisyas, your wealth has been devoted to luxuries and debauchery instead of to the betterment of the condition of the poor and the needy. Pursuit of money for money's sake has become such a passion with you that truth, honour and art have little hold on you. Wake up from this moral lethargy and aid your country with your arms and wealth. Your country needs both. It is no use your depending on Kshatriyas alone for the defence of your hoarded wealth and your boasted culture. Arm yourself with weapons befitting your status and in fighting your country's enemies learn to be a little courageous and wipe off the evil reputation for cowardice you have got at present.

¹ Famous Brahmin warriors.

'Oh ye Sudras, boast not to me of your endless toil, for most of it has been rendered unwillingly. Only that labour counts which is rendered with a free will. Too often, O Sudras, you have been apathetic when your country's fate was in question, and have thus forfeited your claim to an honourable place in the state. After all, an oppressor oppresses you more than he does the remaining classes, for the Brahmin will escape by his flattery, adaptability and indispensability, the Kshatriya will escape by enlisting in the tyrant's army, the Vaisya will escape by bribing the oppressor, you, you alone will come in for the tyrant's wrath. You have no money to give, no arms to lend, no advice worth giving. Your toils will increase two-fold and three-fold without a single soul complaining of it. The silent sufferings of the toiling masses go unheard in the council-hall of tyrants and sometimes even kings. There is only one remedy for you to escape from this unbearable situation. Enlist in your thousands in the armies which are to fight the Hun and let your blood shed on a righteous battlefield be your claim to a share in the administration (cries of "We shall enlist"! "We shall enlist"). Go, go to the villages far and near and spread the message I have given you to your suffering brethren at the plough and in the city.'

Then Yasodharman turned to a group of people standing apart from the rest and said, 'Oh, ye outcastes, boast not to me of your endless sufferings for you have suffered unwillingly. Only that suffering elevates which is undergone with full consent. Unwilling suffering but degrades the body and debases the soul. All through the centuries, O Svapakas, you have been oppressed by the upper classes. The Vedas and the Sastras know no outcastes (cries of "Long live the King!" "Long live the King!"). You have yourselves been in part the cause of your degradation. You are even more helpless than the Sudras, for none of you have

any property worth the name. You are looked upon as the lowest of the low and all kinds of indignities are heaped upon you. There is only one way in which you can elevate your status. Form your own battalions and attack the Huns in the forthcoming war. You are as much a part of the country as the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras.'

Then, addressing again the whole assembly, Yasodharman said :—

'It is from no motive of personal aggrandizement that I undertake this enterprise. Neither I nor Charumati nor Baladitya nor Kumarapala want any accession of territory if it is to be at the expense of some righteous claimant. Baladitya Maharaja has even said that if the descendant of any prince whom Samudragupta dethroned were to establish his title to any part of the Hunnish provinces, Baladitya will yield to his superior dynastic claims if the people of the territory concerned consent to the rule of the scion of the old family. I have also explicitly agreed to this. Aparajita of Devarashtra and Maharashtra wanted Sourashtra. We refused the claim since he has no sort of claim to it. But we assured Aparajita that we applied the same test to ourselves as we did to him. My beloved subjects, you little realize the gravity of the situation. On this war depends the future of Aryavarta, whether the whole of this ancient land is to be submerged in barbarism or whether it is to be saved for Aryan culture, civilization and religion. By your action at this crisis you will be deciding the fate of Aryavarta. The southern princes have most of them sent some help, but, with all that, our resources are most limited and nothing approaching to those of the Hun. I want all of you to go and muster in your thousands and hundreds of thousands to the armies. The cry of the oppressed calls you, the widow and the orphan appeal to you, the family women look to you for succour against the barbarian and the foreigner. Is there a single

one among you who can resist such appeals? I hope not' (cries of 'There are none!' 'There are none!'). 'For me,' said Yasodharman, 'there is only one course left. Either I must see the Huns driven out of this holy land or I must shed my last drop of blood in the defence of Aryan culture. If perchance I fail and die, I ask of you all to render unto your prince Narasimha that loyalty which you so freely gave me. Now I shall disperse the assembly.' (Cries of 'Long live the King!')

Yasodharman hastened to Kalanjar where he expected to meet Charumati. As soon as he met her, he asked, 'How are things progressing at Kalingapatnam and Amaravati?' 'Splendidly,' she replied. 'The whole of Kalinga has taken it up as its war. Enthusiasm prevails among the soldiers and sailors but it is nothing compared to the enthusiasm among the common people. A most unique feature is the flocking of the Sudras to the armies and the voluntary offering of large sums by the Vaisyas. There has never been half so popular a war in Kalinga. How did things go on at Amalapuri?'

'Oh, splendidly,' said Yasodharman. 'I had always full confidence in my Maha Kosalas and they have amply justified it. You ought to have seen their enthusiasm. How are things at Pataliputra?'

'Things are equally encouraging over there,' replied Charumati. 'Baladitya is gathering a huge army, and Parvati, the daughter of Paramarathi, has offered a hundred thousand gold coins. Besides this, Bhadrabahu's son has rallied the Jains to the good cause and they have contributed heavily to the Magadha war chest. All this is mostly due to Queen Saraswati whom you advised Baladitya not to marry.'

'Queen Saraswati seems to have turned out much more promising than I thought,' said Yasodharman.

'What about Aparajita?' asked Charumati.

'That monarch has finally decided not to join us,' said Yasodharman. 'When he learnt our decision about Sourashtra, he seems to have said that even the Huns were better than we.'

'Well, that settles it,' said Charumati. 'We must fight the Hun ourselves. It is a very risky thing, but, then, nothing important is gained without taking risks.'

'What is the approximate force which will come from Kalinga?' asked Yasodharman.

'Two hundred and fifty thousand troops,' said Charumati, 'besides one hundred thousand raw recruits.'

'Capital,' said Mahamaya. 'I never thought that Kalinga would be able to send such a large army.'

'What is the help we can expect from Magadha?' asked Yasodharman.

'One hundred and fifty thousand troops,' said Charumati, 'with Baladitya and Prince Murari at their head.'

'Prince Murari is coming, is he?' asked Mahamaya. 'He is only twenty now, isn't he?'

'Yes,' said Charumati, 'but Queen Saraswati is particular that her eldest son should take the field in defence of his religion and culture.'

'Mother,' said Narasimha, 'I must also go to the front since Murari is going.'

'Child,' said Mahamaya, 'you are only fourteen, you must not go.' 'I must, I must, don't prevent me. I shall run away without your knowledge. What will Murari say if he knew that I was staying behind? Won't he take me for a coward?' said Narasimha.

'Narasimha,' said Yasodharman, 'I am going to place you in charge of the fortress of Kalanjar. Do not yield the fort to the Hun even if you have to die for it.'

'Father,' said Narasimha taken in by this simple trick, 'I shall die a hundred times rather than yield a single stone of this fortress to the Hun.'

'Son,' said Mahamaya, 'is it true that poor Yuddhakesari was butchered by the Hun in such a brutal fashion?'

'Yes,' said Yasodharman.

'Father,' said Chandrabhanu, 'why don't you butcher that Mihiragula? He seems to be a very bad man. I think that I should also like to fight him.'

'Child,' said Charumati swelling with pride, 'you remain at Kalanjar with Narasimha and see that the Hun does not enter the fortress.'

'If he enters this fortress, he will be butchered by me as he did Yuddhakesari,' said Chandrabhanu.

'Well,' said Lalita, 'is this Mihiragula such a bad man, father?' 'Yes,' replied Yasodharman.

'Then, father, why don't you kill him? Why do you hesitate?' asked Lalita.

'I shall not hesitate any longer, Lalita,' said Yasodharman.

'Then go and kill the wicked man who killed Yuddhakesari,' said Lalita.

'Father,' said Chandrabhanu, 'why don't you ask Murari also to come to Kalanjar?'

'Fie!' said Yasodharman, 'do you need Murari's help?'

'No, no,' said Chandrabhanu, 'let Murari go to the battle. We shall defend Kalanjar.'

'Son,' said Mahamaya, 'what help have the southern princes sent?'

'Very little,' said Yasodharman. 'Kakavarna has come with ten thousand troops, and the others have sent a few thousands, without coming themselves.'

'What do you think are our prospects?' asked Charumati.

'Excellent,' replied Yasodharman. 'We have got as good a chance of winning as we ever had. So far as I can see, we have every prospect of victory, but who can say what is hidden in the wombs of futurity?'

'It will be a case of victory or death, is it not?' asked Mahamaya.

'Yes,' said Yasodharman.

'No,' said Chandrabhanu, 'it will be a case of victory alone. Why should father think of death?'

'You fool,' said Narasimha, 'don't you see that no man who is not prepared to die will gain a victory? If you are not willing to die, I shall have Murari to help me and not you.'

'Oh, I shall be prepared to die even to-day if necessary,' said Chandrabhanu. 'My blood boils when I think of the atrocities committed by the Huns. Ask mother whether it boiled or not at Amaravati.'

'Did his blood boil, mother?' asked Narasimha.

'Did it not, mother?' asked Chandrabhanu.

'It did,' said Charumati to Chandrabhanu's infinite joy.

CHAPTER XXXII

VARAHAMIHIRA¹

It was 10 p.m. on full moon day in the month of Chaitra.² The luxuriant rays of the moon had bathed all Ujjaini including its lonely suburb of Vikrampur in a fairy-white halo of splendour. Thousands of stars were, like coy Indian maidens, peeping out of the spotless blue as if to see the enchanting beauty of the earth below and to add to it by their own incomparable lustre. The moon, the central figure in the whole heavenly picture and fully conscious of it, was wandering among the stars like a trained voluptuary feasting his eyes on the stars above and the earth below, taking a special delight in seeing the earthly things which he had lit up with his eternal searchlight.

In Ujjaini proper, children were playing in the streets in the glorious moonlight, and their mothers, afraid to venture into the streets for fear of the roving Huns, were coaxing them through the windows to return home and go to bed since it was getting late, but their half-hearted pleadings fell flat on the little beggars who persisted in their recreations urging that it was not full moon every day and that they would go to bed very early on the next new moon day as a compensation. Ladies had consequently not yet broken up their informal moonlight chit-chat clubs which had since the advent of the Huns been transferred from the front verandahs to the back verandahs for greater safety.

¹ A celebrated Hindu astronomer and astrologer of the sixth century A.D.

² A Hindu month falling partly in April and partly in May.

But in Vikrampur the moon saw only desolate ruins of temples, palaces and houses all round except one tall tower which was still intact and standing. Vikrampur had been the scene of the heaviest fighting between the Huns and the Guptas at the time of the momentous attack on the capital by the Huns. For seven months it had resisted all the attacks of the Huns but had at last fallen owing to treason from within. The Huns had in their fury destroyed all the temples and palaces, breaking to pieces priceless statues, defacing invaluable sculptures and paintings, and effacing all traces of masterpieces of architecture. In their vandalism the barbarians destroyed the most marvellous works of art of the most glorious period of Gupta rule and robbed future generations of these best heirlooms of the most artistic period of India's long history. One tower alone was spared from the general destruction thanks to the whim of Toramana who thought that the destruction would be more impressive with one undestroyed building in the centre and so had ordered its preservation. None was gladder at this decision than Varahamihira the young astronomer who was now standing on the terrace on the top of the tower alternately gazing at the moon and the stars and talking to his friend Dandi,¹ the great poet.

'How did you enjoy the acting of the Sakuntala² yesterday, Varahamihira?' asked Dandi.

'Oh, it was excellent though not quite on the highest level. But we can hardly blame the poor actors. They get no encouragement now. The Huns do not care for our plays. The great Gupta emperors were encouraging actors like anything. Naturally, actors and actresses then reached a level unheard of before or since,' replied Varahamihira.

'You say true,' said Dandi, 'My old father used to tell

¹ A famous poet of the sixth century A.D.

² A celebrated play by Kalidasa.

me wonderful tales of the acting of those days. So lifelike was it that when actors depicted the unrobing of Draupadi¹ by the wicked Kauravas² and the poor lady's frantic appeals for help went unheeded by her husbands and the great teachers Bhishma and Drona, who were all held fast in a false idea of Dharma, the emperor Skandagupta, forgetting that it was mere acting, rushed with his sword on the actor who was playing the part of Dussasana³ and would have killed the poor fellow but for the timely intervention of his generals who threw themselves between the actor and the emperor and pointed out to His Majesty that it was all mere acting. The emperor then gave a diamond ring each to the actor and actress who played the parts of Dussasana and Draupadi.'

'Such were the days our ancestors lived in,' remarked Varahamihira in a yearning tone.

'Who ever gives such costly presents to our actors now?' asked Dandi. 'Still the fellows acted well enough, considering the circumstances.'

'That they did,' agreed Varahamihira. 'It requires a great deal of skill to act Kalidasa's plays, and yet they acquitted themselves fairly well.' 'The eagerness of Dushyanta in hunting was simply marvellous,' said Dandi, 'and though you are on sentiment opposed to hunting, even you must agree that it is a very desirable accomplishment in kings.'

'No,' said Varahamihira, 'shooting with unerring precision is, of course, an accomplishment which kings should have, but I hate from the very bottom of my heart the hunting and killing of harmless deer. I hold that even going into the forest to shoot tigers and lions in what is after all their homes is sinful and iniquitous. No doubt, when tigers

¹ A famous scene in the Mahabharata.

² The opponents of the Pandavas.

³ The Kaurava prince who tried to unrobe Draupadi.

and lions come into the villages and prey on men and cattle it is not only permissible but even obligatory on the king and his officers to kill them. I may even allow as a necessary evil the going into the forest for hunting them and other carnivorous animals in order to get the training in shooting them down should they come into the towns or villages. But to shoot down the helpless and harmless deer is simply abominable.'

'You don't get lions and tigers in every village. Then how can the king get exercise if he is not to hunt deer which are found everywhere?' asked Dandi.

'Let him ride in his chariot or on his horse as long as he likes. Let him go out into the villages seeking out the poor, the afflicted and the unfortunate, the widow, the orphan and the sick, and render them what help he can. He will get plenty of exercise that way, for though lions and tigers may be rare in the villages, the poor, the afflicted and the unfortunate are innumerable,' replied Varahamihira. 'Did not our kings do this also?' asked Dandi. 'Humanitarian as this work is, it will never give the king that training in courage and presence of mind which hunting gives. Your king will be a soft-hearted weakling who will fall a prey to the first cruel marauder. Well, be that as it may, don't you think that the cold turning-back of the virtuous Sakuntala by Dushyanta was cruel in the extreme? It drew tears into my eyes.'

'Into mine too,' replied Varahamihira. 'It shows that people should not yield to their passions however noble. Even the spotless Sakuntala had to undergo infinite suffering and disgrace because she yielded to her passion for Dushyanta without consulting her aged foster-father and without obtaining the sanction of religion for her union with the king. Still, perhaps, it is what an unsuspecting, trusting young woman will do under such circumstances.'

'Of course, it is,' replied Dandi, 'and, after all, the

'Gandharva¹ marriage is one recognized in law though regarded as an unapproved form. Were you not struck by the closing lines of the *Sakuntala* wherein Kalidasa prays to Siva to spare him from future births? Did it not strike you as strange that even the greatest of our poets, living in all conceivable luxury in the court of one of the greatest of kings, should not have wished to be born again?'

'No,' said Varahamihira, 'it struck me as natural.'

'It might have been natural in a poet of our age,' said Dandi. 'The sad times we live in are not such as to make any man wish to be born again. But in the glorious days of Vikramaditya, to wish not to be born again was methinks strange.'

'No,' replied Varahamihira, 'to the wise man, whatever the accidental state of the country may be in his day, the fundamental fact of the sadness of life here below cannot escape notice. The joy of life was, no doubt, great under Vikramaditya as the songs and dramas, and, above all, the thousand joyous images of that time show. But, then, what is this joy compared with the infinite joy of merging with the Universal Soul? A great mind like Kalidasa's must have, even while fully partaking of the joys of mundane life, valued them at their proper worth and yearned for that joy which leaves no regrets behind and which is everlasting, that *Anandam*² of which our sages of old speak.'

'Varahamihira,' said Dandi, 'you are always praising the other world's joys perhaps because you are ever engaged in contemplating the worlds beyond.'

'Dandi,' said Varahamihira, 'while I look at the moon, the stars and the clear blue sky, I am vividly reminded of your wonderful simile comparing the moon to a royal swan gaily swimming in a blue lake full of white lotuses. You

¹ A love marriage without any religious ceremonies. Sakuntala's marriage with Dushyanta was of this kind.

² Divine bliss.

poets have truly a wonderful imagination and a still more wonderful capacity for expression.'

'I am glad you like the simile,' said Dandi, 'I was afraid whether you would find fault with it as comparing the great with the small, the heavens with earthly things.'

'In point of beauty the things compared are equal, and so the simile is artistically perfect,' replied Varahamihira.

'By the way, you would have hardly dreamt that the idea of the lotuses came from you,' said Dandi.

'How so?' asked Varahamihira in surprise.

'I was under the impression that stars were also moving since they rise and set. When you told me that Aryabhatta¹ had said, "The starry vault is fixed. It is the earth which moving round its axis again and again causes the rising and setting of the sun and the stars. As a person in a vessel, while moving forwards sees an immovable object moving backwards, in the same manner do the sun and the stars, however immovable, seem to move daily." I was convinced and so compared the stars to fixed lotuses. But, tell me seriously, Varahamihira, is it proved beyond all doubt that the sun and the stars do not move at all?'

'No,' replied Varahamihira. 'It may be that the sun and the stars do move round some bigger stars, but we do not know anything about this. Aryabhatta, my revered teacher, was concerned with the foolish belief that the sun and the stars move round the earth, and, in denying this perhaps denied too much. All that we can definitely say is that the sun and the stars most certainly do not move round the earth. On the contrary, it is the earth which moves round the sun.'

'You astronomers are wonderful people,' said Dandi, 'I wonder how Aryabhatta found out that the earth is

¹ A celebrated astronomer of the fifth century A.D.

spherical in shape, that its diameter is 1,581 yojanas¹ and its circumference 4,967 yojanas.'

'The earth was declared to be spherical even in the Aitariya Brahmana² where it is called a sphere. That Brahmana also declared that the sun neither sets nor rises but that when the earth, owing to the rotation on its axis, is lighted up it is called day and so on. The size of the earth was found out by Aryabhatta himself. So also, Aryabhatta found out that the moon, the planets and the comets all receive their light from the sun, that half towards the sun being always bright, the colour varying with the peculiarity of the substance of each,' replied Varahamihira.

'Are the sun and the stars composed of material substances like the earth?' asked Dandi.

'Of course, they are,' replied Varahamihira, 'but the substances may differ.'

'If the moon receives its light from the sun, why are not both its halves lighted up?' asked Dandi.

'One half of the moon, whose orbit lies between the sun and the earth, is always bright by the sun's rays; the other half is dark by its own shadows like the two sides of a pot standing in the sunshine,' replied Varahamihira.

'Then again,' said Dandi, 'Aryabhatta's theory of the causes of the eclipses baffles me. He says that when the earth in its rotation comes between the sun and the moon and the shadow of the earth falls on the moon, the phenomenon is called a lunar eclipse and when the moon comes between the sun and the earth the sun seems as if it is being cut off causing what is called a solar eclipse. Glibly said, but what proof is there?'

'The proof is this,' said Varahamihira. 'The commencement of a lunar eclipse does not take place from the western

¹ One yojana is equal to five miles.

² A prose appendix to the Vedas.

side nor that of the solar eclipse from the eastern. This is exactly what we should expect if Aryabhata's theory were true, namely that in a lunar eclipse the moon enters into the earth's shadow and that in a solar eclipse the sun enters into the moon's shadow. Conversely, no other theory will explain this peculiar phenomenon. This proves conclusively that his theory is true.'

'If you are convinced of this and if you believe that Raghu and Khetu¹ have nothing to do with eclipses, why do you not dissuade the priests and the masses from superstitiously bathing at the commencement and end of eclipses, explaining to them the real causes of eclipses and the foolishness of their ideas regarding them?'

{As if they would listen !' said Varahamihira. 'The masses are superstitious to the core and will stick to puranic legends at any cost. The priests will never disillusion them, for that will hit their bellies. So if I do what you advise I shall only be laughed at by the ignorant masses and hated by the shrewd priests who will hold me up as a confounded atheist and thus bring unnecessary odium on me. If, however, I expound my views only in books, the priests will not quarrel with me for they know that science is concerned with truth and that the masses are not likely to read and understand astronomical treatises.'

'Well, let that go. Do you believe in Aryabhata's theory of the solstices and equinoxes, the polar days and nights lasting for six months each and his assertion that when it is sunrise in Lanka² it is midnight in Roma?'³ asked Dandi.

'All that is exactly true,' replied Varahamihira. 'My teacher was so conscientious that he would not give out

¹ Two demons supposed to cause the eclipses by swallowing the sun or the moon.

² Ceylon.

³ Rome.

discoveries till he was fully satisfied of their truth. He would make us, his pupils, explain his own theories to him and will adopt a most sceptical attitude, putting to us a thousand crucial questions and never resting till he was satisfied that we had rediscovered the truths for ourselves. After this he would make us put as many questions to him about his theories as we possibly could and if any of us shook one of his theories he would thank him and say, "I am grateful to you for having saved me from proclaiming an error to the world and deluding mankind into a false belief." His principle was that existing knowledge should never be disturbed or replaced except by well-tested superior knowledge.'

'How did he test the statement regarding sunrise in Lanka and Roma?' asked Dandi.

'Nothing is simpler,' said Varahamihira. 'A pupil of his was put on board a ship going from Lanka to Roma and was asked to carefully note the number of hours taken by the voyage with the aid of an hour glass specially prepared by Aryabhatta himself. When the ship reached Roma, it was six hours less than it should have been by the hour glass. So also on the return journey a careful account was kept and it was found that it was six hours more than it should have been by the hour glass. This confirmed the theoretical finding that since it required one-fourth rotation from Lanka to Roma there would be a delay of six hours for the sun to rise at Roma.'

'Now I am convinced,' said Dandi. 'Your profession requires careful observation, experimenting and also much money.'

'That last commodity is not to be had in plenty now,' said Varahamihira, 'So my experiments suffer to some extent. Aryabhatta had to spend two thousand panas for the experiment I quoted above, being the fare and boarding charges of the pupil. He could afford to do all this since

Vikramaditya's initial donation of ten thousand panas had not yet been exhausted. I get only five hundred panas per year now, and that too from the unfortunate prince Baladitya who, whatever his misfortunes and calamities, has not made default in the payment of this sum which was first sanctioned by Vikramaditya for this astronomical institute ever since its establishment at Ujjaini.'

'How can you manage with five hundred panas?' asked Dandi.

'I use in addition my earnings as an astrologer for this purpose,' replied Varahamihira.

'Tell me, Varahamihira,' said Dandi, 'do you really believe that the stars and the planets have any influence on our destinies? In short, do you think that astrology is any good?'

'Nothing happens without a cause,' replied Varahamihira. 'Every event in human life is determined by some cause or other: We astrologers believe that the position of the planets at birth has something to do with the person born, can in short indicate the fortunes of that person. A better course will undoubtedly be to note their position at conception which moment however can never be known with precision except in very rare cases. Again, the father's moment of birth, or rather conception, has also a great deal to do with the quality of his children and their fortunes. So also his father's and so on. In practice, astrology, like alchemy, is a failure, but that is not saying that it is a false art any more than alchemy.'

'Why do you follow astrology, then, seeing that it is so barren of practical results?' asked Dandi. 'Why not concentrate on astronomy alone?'

'My inclination also is mostly towards astronomy,' replied the other, 'but, then, astronomy will not pay. It will not even enable me to eke out my livelihood, let alone supply the funds for carrying on astronomical researches.'

So I follow astrology, a fairly profitable trade as you know, and devote the proceeds to astronomical researches.'

'What is the line of your researches now? Have you found out any new truths yourself?' asked Dandi.

'No, not yet,' replied Varahamihira, 'I was till now thoroughly testing again the theories of Parasara Muni¹ and Aryabhatta by my own observations and experiments. Now this work is nearly over and I am trying to work in untraversed fields like finding out the weight of the earth, the distance of the sun and the stars from us, etc. I am only twenty-five now. Before I die I hope to add my own quota to the world's knowledge and thus discharge my debt to my ancestors, my teacher, and my country.'

'Talking of the country,' said Dandi, approaching closer to Varahamihira and lowering his tone, 'You have doubtless heard about the preparations for war in Magadha, Kalinga and Mahakosala and the fiery soul-stirring speeches of Yasodharman and Charumati. You must also have heard of Mihiragula's council of war at Sagala and the dreadful torture of Yuddhakesari. Do you intend to enrol yourself as a volunteer in Yasodharman's or Baladitya's army?'

'I have thought about it deeply and have finally decided not to join,' said Varahamihira.

'Will it not be betraying our king and country in their hour of greatest need?' asked Dandi.

'No,' said Varahamihira, 'I have consulted His Majesty the emperor Baladitya also. He was gracious enough to write to me that I should on no account take part in the actual fighting and risk my life, adding graciously that a soldier, if he died, could be replaced by thousands of equally eligible persons whereas if an astrologer and astronomer of my eminence and promise were to die all India could not replace him. Moreover I myself feel that I am not

¹ A great Hindu astronomer of remote antiquity.

fit to be a soldier. As a soldier, I shall be of little use to Yasodharman or Baladitya. As an astronomer and astrologer I may not only raise the prestige of our country by my researches but may also be of some help to the allied forces.'

'How so?' asked Dandi.

'You must have heard of my secretly predicting to the leading citizens of Ujjaini who consulted me yesterday victory for the allies in this war, thus encouraging them to revolt at the critical moment and thereby distract the attention of the Huns,' said Varahamihira.

'Suppose the allies are crushed, then the fate of the people of Ujjaini will be terrible. The city will be sacked as mercilessly as Vikrampur, and men, women and children killed,' said Dandi.

'Let it be so,' said Varahamihira calmly. 'If the allies fail and the whole of Bharatavarsha lies prostrate under the feet of the Huns, let Ujjaini also fall to ruins. At Bharatavarsha's supreme crisis Ujjaini must do her bit too.'

Dandi gazed at Varahamihira in admiration and said, 'I thought you were an opponent of war.'

'Yes, so I am,' said Varahamihira. 'I am an enemy of all wars undertaken for mere gain, be it of lands or of loot. To me, accustomed as I am to gaze at endless universes, it has always appeared stupid and brutal for men to shed blood for gaining a tiny portion of a tiny planet. But when it is a question of preserving one's civilization from death, when it is the question of saving the soul of a nation, when men feel that death is better than life under such conditions, then it is not only righteous but even obligatory for them to fight and fight regardless of consequences. Instead of a tiny bit of a planet being compared to the worlds beyond, then the comparison will be between the immortal soul and the worlds beyond which can never be greater than the soul which is God.'

'Well-said!' exclaimed Dandi, 'Still, gazing at these shining stars, this resplendent moon, and this blue sky in this infinite peace one can hardly believe that a great war is on foot. Varahamihira, I wanted to go to the front, but, now, after hearing your views, I think of staying behind and writing my poems. As a soldier I shall be contemptible, as a poet I am not altogether unworthy of my great country. At the critical moment I shall excite the citizens of Ujjaini into revolt by my burning war-songs. Now, it is getting late. Good-bye for the present.' 'Good-bye!' said Varahamihira, and Dandi went down the steps.

Varahamihira closed the door leading out and began gazing fixedly at the stars when a door opened noiselessly from behind and a handsome young woman of eighteen with a merry twinkle in her eyes came behind him stealthily on tip-toe and suddenly embracing him said, 'Still gazing at the stars, dearest?'

'Dearest Chandramati,' said Varahamihira, turning round and kissing her, 'You know that I gaze at the stars all night on nights like this.'

'I know it only too well,' said Chandramati sadly, 'That is why I wish the whole year were one long monsoon and all nights cloudy and dark.'

'How will it help you?' asked Varahamihira.

'My beloved will then be always with me,' said Chandramati kissing him, 'no star-gazing will be possible then.'

'Dearest, don't you like to gaze at the stars?' asked Varahamihira.

'I do,' said Chandramati, 'But I don't want to do so always. Sometimes I wish I were a star.'

'Why?' asked Varahamihira.

'So that you may gaze at me for long hours together and I return your gaze equally yearningly,' replied Chandramati looking straight into her husband's eyes and revealing in her gaze the depth of her affection for him.

'Beloved,' said Varahamihira, 'I see your eyes in the stars.'

'I wish you saw the stars in my eyes instead,' said she smiling.

'Dandi had been here to-day,' said Varahamihira.

'I saw him come and go and heard all that you talked,' said Chandramati.

'You eaves-dropper!' said Varahamihira.

'What secrets have you from me or I from you?' asked Chandramati, 'So I listened. I am glad to hear that both of you are going to help the good cause in your own way.'

'Now, beloved, go to bed,' said Varahamihira kissing her.

'No,' said Chandramati, 'I shall sit here with you, and, while you gaze at the stars, shall gaze at you.'

'You will catch a cold,' said Varahamihira.

'How many times have I caught a cold before? Is this the first night that I sit up with you?' she asked.

'Dearest,' said Varahamihira, 'Listen to reason.'

'Your reasons will not convince me. So there is no use your attempting to reason with me. Sita went with her lord to unknown forests infested by demons, and here you are prohibiting me from sitting up with you in our own house!' replied Chandramati.

'Have your way since you are so obstinate,' said Varahamihira.

'A thousand prostrations for your kind permission,' said Chandramati and sat down close to her husband. Varahamihira concentrated his whole attention on the moon, the planets and the stars, and she her whole attention on him. Thus they sat till the night wore on and became day.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE BATTLE OF KARUR

THE sun rose on the plains of Karur. In its golden rays were seen the countless troops which had gathered on both sides. The Huns and their allies were by far the most numerous and numbered nearly nine hundred thousand. The Hindu princes opposed to them had mustered about six hundred and fifty thousand troops.

The leaders on the sides of the allied princes opposed to the Huns were Yasodharman, prince Murari, Kumarapala and Kakavarna. Baladitya had at the last moment been afflicted by fever and had been unable to proceed in person to the front. Prince Murari had therefore been put at the head of the whole one hundred and fifty thousand troops coming from Magadha. Yasodharman had under him three hundred thousand Kalingas and one hundred thousand Maha Kosalas. Kumarapala had his fifty thousand soldiers and Kakavarna had his ten thousand troops. There were also forty thousand southerners in miscellaneous contingents sent by different princes under their own captains. The whole allied army was under the supreme command of Yasodharman who was the generalissimo.

The Huns were under the supreme command of Mihiragula who had under him minor leaders like Chastana, Nahapana and Rudrasimha. Vajrayudha was allowed to lead his own army under the control of Mihiragula. Indradyumna had finally decided not to join the Huns. But at the last moment his decision to join Yasodharman gave way to fear of what might happen to him in case Mihiragula won.

Both the armies were in very high spirits; the Huns were absolutely certain of victory and regarded it as child's play. Their opponents were also hopeful of victory though they regarded the conflict as by no means a joke. The Hindus and Buddhists in Yasodharman's army were fully resolved to conquer or to die. Yasodharman himself had vowed not to depart from the field except as a victor or as a corpse. Prince Murari had come with the sternest of all resolves to conquer or to die. When he had set out, Saraswati had called him and said, 'My son, you are going to engage in one of the deadliest conflicts ever heard of. Oh, Murari, I named you purposely Murari. Murari is much the same as Mihira-ari or the foe and slayer of this tyrant Mihiragula. Like the God Murari you have also a mission in life. Only, this Asura¹ is far more evil than ever Mura was. Child, I am loath to send you to so risky a battle-field at so early an age. But when duty calls everything else must go. I expect you to keep the reputation of the Guptas, your ancestors. Never turn your back upon the enemy. Fight to conquer. If defeat is inevitable make the enemy pay dearly for the victory. Your brother Dharmagupta and sister Narayani are very eager to come with you but I can't allow them.'

Murari had promised to conquer or to die. On which Saraswati had blessed him saying, 'Child, you are engaging in a righteous war. God will lend your frail arm the strength required for conquering these demons who are sucking the very lifeblood of the unfortunate people of Aryavarta.'

Murari's demeanour in the battle-field on the eve of the eventful battle showed that he kept his promise to his mother.

Kakavarna was fully resolved to wipe off the old disgrace

¹ Demon. Mura was a famous demon killed by Sir Krishna.

of his soldiers having fled in panic and so had come in person this time. Kumarapala too was eager to show to the Magadhans that his soldiers were as brave as any others. The soldiers of Kanchi, Vengi and Kerala wanted to appear to the best advantage.

On this morning, both the armies were being harangued to by their leaders. Mihiragula, Chastana, Nahapana and Vajrayudha, spoke to their soldiers. Mihiragula addressed his army thus :—

‘Huns! To-day you have got another splendid opportunity of once more showing the fine mettle of which you are made. In spite of repeated defeats, these Hindus still dare to cross swords with us. It is up to you to exterminate the army opposed to you and strike such terror into the hearts of the people of this country that they will never again dare to stand against the Hun. This wretched force of our enemies is the only fence which separates you from rich and prosperous countries like Maha Kosala, Magadha, Kalinga, Vengi, Kanchi and Kerala. Kill all the ruffians you see yonder and all India is yours to enjoy as you like. Malwa and the older provinces are now almost completely depleted of their wealth and we must have some new pastures. Especially you the soldiers who have come from Bamyin, it is your special look-out to see that this fence is removed and the way made clear. Pataliputra has become very rich again. Kalingapatnam and Amaravati and Kanchi are world-famous for their hoarded wealth. They are all like so many ripe fruits waiting for you. I have no anxiety at all as to the battle. This discordant coalition of petty princelings is not going to be an anxiety to the soldiery who crushed the Guptas and the Persians. But I want to tell my Huns one thing. Be careful to kill every one of the enemy's soldiers if you want to save yourselves further bother. Of course, I need not tell you that the Hun or auxiliary who displays the least cowardice will be at once

cut down by his comrades. Huns, the spirits of your ancestors are watching to see how you acquit yourselves this day and let them not have cause to deplore our degeneracy!' (Cries of 'Long live the Hun'!)

Then spoke Chastana. He said, 'Huns, the world knows how brave the Huns are and how fearless of death. Cowardice is a word unknown in the Hunnish language. The soldiers opposed to you are weaklings and cowards. Still, they are a troublesome lot just as bees are. Nobody spares a bee if it becomes troublesome. They have also got much honey in the shape of hoarded wealth. Kill the unworthy slaves and take their wealth which belongs to you by reason of superior manliness. Huns we are and Huns we will remain. Show yourselves to be Huns in this battle and earn the admiration of the Royal Hun.'

Then spoke Nahapana. He said, 'Huns, we are here to conquer and to enjoy the loot. Such has always been the practice of the Huns. First hard toil, then well-earned reward. To-day we are within sight of the hoarded wealth of Magadha and Kalinga. Make this battle short and let us start early for Pataliputra.'

After this, Vajrayudha addressed his soldiers. 'Soldiers!' said he, 'you are now fighting as the allies of the Huns. Don't lag behind your allies in courage or daring. No doubt, after the victory, you will also get some of the spoils. Think of the Magadhan conquest of Kashmir and retaliate by conquering Magadha.'

The other army was addressed by Yasodharman, Murari, Kumarapala, and Kakavarna. Yasodharman said: 'Soldiers of Maha Kosala, Kalinga, Magadha, Kamarupa, Simhala, Vengi, Kanchi and Kerala, to-day you are face to face with the fiercest battle you have ever had in Aryavarta since the Mahabharata war. Our enemies, the Huns, are assembled in full force in order to crush our attempts at independence. For forty-three long years this country of

ours has been groaning under the weight of their horrible tyranny. The barbarian and the foreigner has ruled at Ujjaini all this time and reduced this land of milk and honey into a desert in the regions over which he has ruled. The land where perfect happiness prevailed is now rent with the cries of the dying and the oppressed. Tears of blood are shed every day by the unfortunate Aryas inhabiting the subject provinces. They look to you for help in their helpless condition. You are no doubt lesser than the Huns in numbers. You are only six hundred and fifty thousand whereas the Huns are nine hundred thousand strong. Let no man be discouraged by this. The Devas¹ number only thirty-three crores whereas the Asuras² number sixty-six crores. Still the Devas win always. Why? Because the Devas have always God and the right on their side. So have we to-day God and the right on our side. What is more, we have got two hundred thousand more soldiers than the proportion of the Devas to the Asuras. Make no mistake. The Devas will be watching this battle from the skies and if we fail they will cry shame on us and we shall go straight to Hell. Let every one of our soldiers, be his caste what it may, acquit himself like a true Kshatriya to-day.'

Then Murari addressed his Magadhans thus :—

'My beloved citizens, you have only come here to fight for the poor and the oppressed. You are not soldiers by profession and your ordinary avocation is not war. Still, when the call comes you have always been found ready. The cry of the widow and the orphan and the chaste woman has always been to you a trumpet-call to arms. You seek no gain in this war, you come here only to discharge your duty as citizens of this world, to fight untruth and tyranny wherever it is found and to succour the suffering and the

¹ Angels.

² Demons.

helpless in whatever part of this great country they may be. People who fight for a principle care nothing for life in the fight for that principle. Death in a fight for principle is sometimes even more joyous than victory. Citizens, fight to conquer or to die. Your prince will always be with you.'

Kumarapala then spoke a few words to his men. 'My men,' he said, 'here is a golden opportunity for you to show that you are brave soldiers and to avenge your defeat at Vaisali. Kill or be killed, there is no other honourable alternative for a brave soldier. Your women are waiting behind the Brahmaputra to receive you as victors or to receive your corpses.'

Lastly, Kakavarna turned to his soldiers and said: 'Soldiers, I am very eager to see that the horrible name for cowardice earned for our country by your predecessors be wiped out for ever. That is why I myself have come. Simhala is far-famed for the excellence of its soil and all its products. Let not men say that the Simhalas are the only disgrace to Simhala, that man alone is vile. Remember that you are the descendants of those who built Anuradhapura. Fight bravely if you want to save your country's name. I shall never leave the battle-field though you do. So if you run home you will have to run without your King.

After the speeches were made, the armies took their morning meals. Then the army of Yasodharman prayed for a short time for victory. After this was over, both the contending armies engaged in deadly conflict. Yasodharman had taken care to select a ground most unsuited for the deployment of cavalry and had thus deprived the Huns of the advantage accruing from their superior horsemanship. The battle was therefore mainly one of infantry against infantry.

The Hun cavalry dismounted and advanced with their

wild war cries. The army of Yasodharman stood on the defensive and received them with deadly showers of arrows which dealt havoc in their ranks. But the Huns were made only more furious by this reception. Like wounded tigers they got into the ranks of the allied soldiers. Then the battle was mostly with swords and spears.

Kumarapala was on the right wing of the allied army and was opposed to Vajrayudha. Soon the Kamarupa troops forced the hulky Kashmiris to flee. Most merciless was the pursuit and fearful was the fate of the unfortunate Kashmiris caught by the wild hillsmen who formed a strong contingent in Kumarapala's army. As soon as Mihiragula saw the flight of the Kashmiris, he ordered the Hun infantry to rush against the main body of Yasodharman's troops. With a wild shout the Huns locked themselves in mortal combat with the Maha Kosalas, the Kalingas and Magadhas who formed the centre of the allied army. The allies fought like heroes. But the Huns were more numerous in numbers and physically more powerful man to man. Further, they had no laws of war and so hit anywhere unlike the Aryas who never cared to hit below the belt. Hence, the Huns were slowly pushing back the Aryas in spite of the obstinate resistance of the latter. The left wing of the allied army was in charge of Kakavarna of Ceylon. This monarch had to face the Gurjaras, the Yaudheyas and other auxiliaries of the Huns. Rudrasimha was also here. The battle in this wing was contested fiercely for some time. The Simhalas were ashamed to retreat in the presence of their King especially so since the soldiers of Kanchi, Kerala and Gondwana were also in the same wing and would mock at their cowardice. Kakavarna acquitted himself like a born soldier and exposed himself to every risk. His soldiers were struck with the courage displayed by their King and resolved to give him no cause for complaint. Poor fellows, they were no match for the hardy Gurjaras and

Yaudheyas and were gradually forced to yield inch by inch.

Yasodharman saw the centre and the left slowly give way and became seriously alarmed. He recalled Kumarapala from the pursuit of the Kashmiris and reinforced the centre with a few thousand Kamarupas. Still the centre was giving way. So Yasodharman said to Murari, 'The day is turning against us. Make one supreme effort.' Murari shouted to his soldiers to advance. The Magadhans tried to advance but were unable to make headway against the Huns. The Kalingas and Maha Kosalas were equally unable to push back the numerically and physically stronger Huns. Meanwhile, the left was being rapidly pushed back by Rudrasimha. Kumarapala was sent to help Kakavarna and just managed to rally the left. Still the centre was slowly giving way despite the heroic efforts of Yasodharman and Murari. At last, Yasodharman said to his soldiers, 'Prepare yourselves for the last supreme effort. Let every man in the army pray to God and advance, come what may. I am resolved to advance regardless of consequences and I know that no Arya will lag behind.' Saying this, he resolutely went forward and was followed by Murari. The whole of the Magadhan, Kalinga and Maha Kosala soldiery followed their leaders. 'Think of your wives and sisters at home, think of your innocent babes,' said Yasodharman, 'If you fail to-day, they will fall a prey to the Hun. Soldiers, behave as your ancestors did in the Mahabharata war.' The soldiers were visibly moved. All made a supreme effort and the advance of the Huns was checked. Mihiragula, Nahapana and Chastana urged their troops on but to no effect. The Magadhans, Kalingas and Maha Kosalas were fighting with the courage born of a conviction that this was their last opportunity. Yasodharman told them, 'Soldiers, this is the last window to freedom you have got. Are you going to allow it to be closed? Let

not your sons and sons' sons have cause to curse you for your cowardice. Don't lose the heritage of freedom which you got from your ancestors. Fight like men to-day or be for ever fallen.'

The carnage was something terrible on both sides. The battle was tending to become a stalemate in the centre. Yasodharman knew that the more the battle was prolonged the less the chances of victory over the Huns since they were numerically stronger and could stand heavier losses than his own troops. The battle on the left in the meanwhile was also developing into a stalemate. Kumarapala and Kakavarna had regained their lost ground but the Gurjaras and Yaudheyas were rallied by Rudrasimha and made a resolute stand. Thus, the whole battle seemed destined to end in a draw. A drawn battle meant ruin to Yasodharman. When he was about to despair of victory, a large squadron of Huns under Chastana was seen to move from the centre. A courier came at that moment to Yasodharman and told him, 'Sire, 50,000 Huns under Chastana have been told off to attack the Sudras and outcastes who have come in large numbers and have fallen upon the rear of the enemy. Now is the time for a spirited advance.' Yasodharman at once ordered a general advance. The Huns were prepared to receive the enemy with their wonted courage. Just at that moment a messenger went to Mihiragula and told him, 'Sire, Ujjaini is in revolt. Sourashtra is attacked by Pulakesin the Chalukya, and the Yaudheyas have risen in arms against us. The palace in Ujjaini is besieged by a howling mob, and the exchequer is in great danger of falling into the hands of the rebels. The Yaudheyas are going to join the Ujjaini rebels within two days, and Pulakesin also is expected to send a strong contingent of troops in about the same time.' Mihiragula was very much perturbed at this piece of unpleasant news. 'It is of the highest importance to save Ujjaini,' said he, 'Ujjaini is the

seat of our power and a very important link in our communications with the home land. Oh, had this news but come to-morrow I could have crushed the rebels here and come back to Ujjaini to crush the rebels there. But the urgency is very great.' He called Nahapana and told him the grave news he had received. Nahapana agreed that not a second could be lost and that Mihiragula himself should go to the capital. So Mihiragula took a hundred thousand Huns and left the battle-field leaving Nahapana in supreme command. The news of Mihiragula's departure and the cause of that soon spread like wildfire among the troops on both sides. The Huns were somewhat depressed and their opponents highly elated. Yasodharman and Murari cheered their tired soldiers with these reassuring news and urged them all forward. All was enthusiasm in the ranks of the allies. The Yaudheyas under Rudrasimha were gravely perturbed at the news of the rising of their brethren at home and wanted to leave the battle-field. Rudrasimha too was very anxious about his province of Sourashtra. He thought that the star of the Hun was setting and did not want to link his fortunes any longer with a falling star. The net result of all this was that the Yaudheyas, the Gurjaras and Rudrasimha, that is to say the entire Hun right, left the battle-field suddenly. Thousands of Yaudheyas and the other auxiliaries even joined the allies. Of course Kakavarna and Kumarapala and all their troops were released at once and reinforced the centre. The allied troops were now wild with enthusiasm and quite sure of victory. 'Soldiers,' said Yasodharman, 'Victory is now within your reach. Go forward and snatch it. Avenge the wrongs of the widow and the orphan.' The allied army made a frantic irresistible rush. The Huns under Naphana made a heroic stand and displayed all their accustomed bravery and utter disregard for life. But all to no purpose. Hope and enthusiasm were on the side of the allies and

however desperately the Huns fought they seemed destined to be defeated. The Huns resolved to sell their lives dearly. Kakavarna was killed when he was making a reckless advance with his men but his troops went on undeterred under the leadership of his brother and heir Meghavarna. Prince Murari was also seriously wounded in a hand to hand fight with Nahapana and was soon brought to the rear, in spite of his protests, by Yasodharman's orders. Even so, the heroic prince consented to be taken to the rear only on the express promise of his Magadhans to continue to fight as they were doing. Yasodharman took direct charge of the Magadhan army also. The allied armies continued to fight as before. The Magadhans were eager to avenge the wound dealt to their beloved prince, and many a Hun paid with his life the price for wounding the prince of Magadha. The Huns were being steadily pushed back. The slaughter on both sides was horrible but was decidedly heavier on the side of the Huns. Even when Chastana returned after defeating the Sudras and outcastes with heavy slaughter he and the thirty thousand troops which were left to him were unable to stem the tide of Yasodharman's success. Yasodharman had already had two horses killed under him but had readily mounted a third and was directing the battle with even greater energy. All attempts of the Huns to kill him proved unavailing because of the devotion with which the Maha Kosala body-guard was defending him. Many a warrior of repute was smitten dead in averting blows directed at Yasodharman. At last, Chastana and Nahapana lost all hopes of a victory but still continued to fight desperately. The valour of the Huns was most admirable. 'In any other cause, those fellows would have been a God-send,' said Yasodharman. 'Infuse them with Aryan ideals of Dharma and it will be hard to beat them as soldiers. They are lions in battle and will be the bravest defenders of Hindu Dharma if properly converted.' The fight continued

to rage fiercely. At last, after three hours of fierce fighting, the Huns were driven to the banks of the Betwa which had received a good supply of water from the recent rains. Here with their backs to the river, the Huns made a last stand. So heroic they were that Yasodharman's victorious soldiers were hard put to it. But the peasants round about the battle-field had heard about the impending defeat of the Huns and had come from their villages armed with spades and crowbars. The country between Ujjaini and Karur had also risen as the Hun couriers told Nahapana and Chastana. Nahapana was most anxious to leave the battle-field and look after his province of Western Malwa which was being threatened by internal revolts and external invasions. Chastana wanted to fight to the bitter end but saw the fruitlessness of it all. Defeat stared the Huns in the face and heavy slaughter in the Betwa was a certainty in the case of a defeat. Chastana and Nahapana wanted to save the shattered forces for the defence of Western Malwa and Ujjaini. So they negotiated with Yasodharman for an honourable retreat.

Yasodharman was most unwilling to allow the Huns to retreat. But the slaughter on his side too had been terrible and the remaining soldiers were terribly exhausted. He was first and foremost a general. He did not dare to risk the advantages he had already got by a reckless move. He had with him only three hundred and fifty thousand weary soldiers. He knew that the hundred and eighty thousand Huns left with Nahapana and Chastana were resolved to sell their lives dearly if it came to a question of fight to a finish. The Huns were never more dangerous than when they were faced with certain death. Yasodharman knew too that the country would rise as soon as it heard about the defeat of the Huns. He wanted to gain some time. He had nothing to fear now. He very much desired to get a breathing space in which to reorganize his

resources. All these considerations combined with the fact that he had not enough boats to cross the Betwa to pursue the enemy in case of his utter defeat finally decided Yasodharman to agree to the retreat of the Huns to Ujjaini on certain conditions.

Chastana and Nahapana were most emphatic that no Hun should be left out of the clauses providing for retreat. They were also insistent that the Huns should be allowed to retreat with the Hun flags and arms which were in their possession though they reluctantly agreed to surrender the flags, arms and prisoners taken from the allies. Yasodharman however extorted from the Hunnish leaders the exemption from the armistice of the thirty thousand Indians who were still fighting for the Huns. These hapless soldiers were unscrupulously deserted by the Huns whom they had faithfully served. They were disarmed and butchered wholesale by the allied soldiers while the hundred and fifty thousand Huns were retreating across the Betwa in good order. Yasodharman and Kumarapala had no pity for the unfortunate thirty thousand who had most of them unwillingly fought on the side of the Huns. The Yaudheyas pleaded hard for the lives of these auxiliaries but Yasodharman was adamant. 'Traitors must die,' he declared coldly. 'The price of betrayal of their country is death. Some may escape by opportune change of sides, but not all.' This effectually silenced the Yaudheyas, and the thirty thousand devoted soldiers were coldly put to death by the victors. The unfortunate victims however never asked for mercy and died a brave death which excited the admiration of even Yasodharman who declared that the traitors had fully atoned for their misdeeds by their brave death.

After the slaughter of the auxiliaries there was wild rejoicing in the allied armies. A thousand trumpets and drums announced to the world the victory of the Indians over the Huns. Yasodharman and Kumarapala were

brimming with joy at the great victory. Only one thing damped their joy and that was the wounding of Prince Murari. Yasodharman went to the side of the wounded prince and said, 'Child, how are you faring?'

'What about the battle?' asked Murari. 'We won,' said Yasodharman. 'I rejoice,' said Murari with his face beaming with joy. 'I rejoice that the hated Huns have at last been defeated and this land rid of their detested yoke. I rejoice that I took part in this fight for our liberties and dharma. I rejoice that I have been true to the promise I gave my mother not to turn my back on the foe.'

'Well,' said Yasodharman, 'What about your wound?' Leaning down, he looked at the wound. He started back suddenly and exclaimed, 'Child, what a horrible wound you have got! The cruel spear has pierced deep into your stomach. The bleeding has been heavy, oh, so very heavy. It will take many days before you are your old self again.' 'Something tells me,' said Murari smiling, 'that I shall never recover.'

'Don't say that,' said Yasodharman. 'You are only twenty now and will live for many many years.'

'I don't think so,' said Murari faintly.

Kumarapala of Kamarupa came and bent by the side of Murari who had shut his eyes with pain.

'I wish I had a son like him,' said Kumarapala. 'Oh, how greatly would Vasavadatta be pleased to have a son like him! A braver warrior I have never seen and never shall see. But, alas, half the joy of victory has disappeared from my heart at this sight.' 'Send Prince Murari at once to the fortress of Kalanjar in the custody of a hundred chosen soldiers,' said Yasodharman to his generals. 'Queen Charumati will soon restore him to health. Send a courier to Pataliputra to inform King Baladitya about the great victory and Queen Saraswati about the plight of Prince Murari. Let Queen Saraswati come at once to Kalanjar

and join Charumati in the nursing back of Murari to health.'

The generals did at once as Yasodharman had ordered. Then Yasodharman and Kumarapala searched for the dead body of Kakavarna. They found it covered with wounds among heaps of slain. Meghavarna was mourning over it. Yasodharman and Kumarapala pacified Meghavarna to some extent by consoling words. Yasodharman told him, 'Brother, many princes of your royal line have before this died on many a battle-field which they have covered with glory. But surely none in even your royal house has earned so much undying glory as your brother and King, Kakavarna. He has died fighting for his civilization and culture 1,800 miles away from home. He has dedicated his life to humanity by his action. He is no longer a brave Simhala King who died valiantly in a battle-field. He is one of those rare warriors who come from time to time to save civilization from barbarism by sacrificing their lives. Kakavarna the Simhalese is no more, but Kakavarna the Arya will live for ever in the memory of all Aryas. King Meghavarna, I congratulate you on having had such a brother.'

Then Kumarapala said to Meghavarna, 'I come from Kamarupa, and Kakavarna came from a land full two thousand miles away. But brave men know no difference of country or clime or colour. Kakavarna died an Aryan warrior's death. What else can be coveted by a Kshatriya? Your brother, O King, has got the crown of dying in a righteous cause. He is now in Heaven honoured by all the Devas. You ought to rejoice rather than mourn, for it is given to few to die the death that Kakavarna had.'

Meghavarna was consoled a bit and replied, 'Brother Kings, I am deeply grateful for the kind words you said of my brother. But I recognize that you said no more of

him than what he richly deserved. I know that I ought to rejoice rather than mourn, but human frailty is such that I cannot think of my brother's death without sorrow. Still, I shall control my sorrow and console myself with the knowledge that my brother died in the defence of Dharma and that he was also a partaker in the deliverance of the holy places, where the Blessed One lived and taught, from the barbarian and the foreigner.'

Then the three Kings burnt the corpse of Kakavarna on the battle-field itself with all due rites and ceremonies and amid the blare of trumpets. All the soldiers on the battle-field paid their homage to the departed warrior King. After this was over, the Kings had arrangements made for the burning of the corpses of the allied soldiers who fell, leaving the corpses of the Huns and their allies to be devoured by the vultures which were already darkening the skies. This being done, the Kings made arrangements for conveying their wounded to the neighbouring villages for treatment. The wounded among the Huns were left to die on the battle-field by the three monarchs who felt no pity for their fate. When all these arrangements had been made, the monarchs marched to Benares with their armies in order to punish Indradyumna for not joining them.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE AFTERMATH OF THE WAR

THE news of the great victory threw Mahamaya, Charumati and Vasanta into a wild transport of joy. But the arrival of the wounded prince Murari cast a shadow over the rejoicings. Charumati and Vasanta were incessant in their attendance on the prince of Magadha. Old Mahamaya was also constantly keeping the wounded prince company. Whenever Mahamaya or Charumati or Vasanta was looking at him, Murari was most careful not to show by any sign whatsoever that he wanted anything. The motherly care with which Charumati and Vasanta nursed him, the grandmotherly affection displayed by Mahamaya, the brotherly interest taken by Narasimha and Chandrabhanu, and the sisterly interest taken by Lalita deeply touched the susceptible nature of Murari. His young heart drank deep of the fountain of love he found at Kalanjar and almost forgot the intense pain he was suffering on account of his wound. Especially did he like to be in the company of Lalita, this little girl of seven who was a reproduction of her mother Charumati. Often and often Lalita would go and help Murari to while the heavy hours away. Her childish talk interested him most. She used to ask him how Mihiragula looked, why he allowed that man to run away, where the spear was which stabbed him, why he did not kill the wicked Nahapana who administered the wound, why Yasodharman had not brought Nahapana bound to Kalanjar and such other childish questions. Sometimes

Charumati and Mahamaya feared that Lalita was causing too much excitement to the patient who required much rest and so ordered her not to go so often to the sick-room. But Murari implored them to allow Lalita to go in whenever she liked saying, 'Let her come in as often as she likes. I feel miserable without her. She brings in a bit of much-needed sunshine to this room.' And Charumati and Vasanta thereafter desisted from interfering with Lalita's visits.

Narasimha used to go and watch Murari now and then. He had told the prince of Magadha on the very first day of their meeting, 'Oh, how I envy you! I never got wounded yet! Murari, you should take me with you the next time you go to war with the Hun. Don't allow father or mother to prevent me. If I had been with you, you would never have got the wound. I would have prevented it.' Murari had solemnly promised to try his best to take Narasimha to war the next time he went. Narasimha's joy knew no bounds. He declared to Chandrabhanu and other boys that he was going to war soon with Murari and that he was not a mere boy any longer. Chandrabhanu was rather put out at this and he rushed at once to Murari saying, 'Brother, you promised to take Narasimha with you the next time you go to war, is it? Why leave me out? You know that I can shoot arrows very well. Yesterday I killed a deer with an arrow, didn't I grannie? Well, you know that Narasimha has not got half my aim. What is the use of taking him? I am the man you want. If I had been with you, that wicked Nahapana would have got my arrow in his belly instead of you his spear in yours.' Murari assured Chandrabhanu that he would never dream of going to war again without him. Chandrabhanu had thereupon gone to Narasimha and the other boys and duly published the fact of his indispensability to Murari in the next campaign.

Whenever he thought that people were not looking at him, Murari's eyes seemed to be looking furtively at the door. Mahamaya, Charumati and Vasanta had all noticed this but had not been able to find out the cause and meaning of these glances. Charumati had attributed it to the wish of Murari to see Lalita but this theory found no favour with Vasanta who asserted that the real significance of these glances was Murari's desire to see his mother. One day Vasanta abruptly went to Murari and said, 'Child, your mother has come!' A sudden ray of joy suffused Murari's thin face as he asked, 'Where is she? Where is she? Have my brother and sister too come? How is father?' Vasanta repented the next moment of her trick and said, 'Child, I was only joking. We have sent for your mother and she is expected every minute. She has not come yet.'

Murari's face assumed its natural expression and he sought to hide a solitary tear which had gathered in his eyes by averting his face for a second and putting a smile on. But all this did not deceive Vasanta. She kissed the wan cheeks of the sick prince and said, 'Poor child, you want to please us by appearing to be perfectly happy. In reality, the call of nature, the primitive instinct to see your mother, is deep within you. Mother is busy nursing the King who is very sick but slowly recovering. She will come as soon as father is a bit better. If you want to see her particularly, I shall send for her at once.'

'No, no,' said Murari, 'Pray don't send for mother till father gets quite better.' The self-sacrifice implied in it touched deeply Vasanta's feminine heart. Tears rushed to her eyes as she thought of this noble youth and she quickly went out in order to avoid Murari's seeing her tears. Charumati was very much affected when she heard about the incident from Vasanta and she said, 'How I wish that this wound had never been inflicted! This has almost eclipsed the joy of the victory. Such a brave warrior and

so very careful not to give anybody the least cause for pain! I wish Baladitya Maharaja would be cured soon and set Saraswati free to come over here with Dharmagupta and Narayani. I shall send a special messenger to-day also.'

Meanwhile, news was coming to Kalanjar of fresh successes every day. Indradyumna of Kasi had been thoroughly defeated and forced to give a large sum of money to the allies for compensating them for the expenses of the war and also to acknowledge the suzerainty of Yasodharman. The allied troops had then proceeded to Ujjaini where the Huns had already to meet a most formidable rebellion aided by the Yaudheyas and Chalukyas. The hundred and fifty thousand soldiers which retreated from Karur had been reduced to sixty thousand as a result of the guerilla attacks made by the country people between Karur and Ujjaini and the ambushes laid by adherents of Pulakesin. Nahapana and Chastana had taken these sixty thousand troops not to the relief of Ujjaini, which they despaired of relieving, but to the rescue of Nahapana's territories in Western Malwa. Mihiragula found the situation hopeless at Ujjaini on account of the tremendous rising of the oppressed peoples and the help given by Pulakesin and the Yaudheyas. At last, despairing of being ever able to retake Ujjaini and finding the Huns deserting *en bloc* on their being offered their existing estates by Yasodharman and Pulakesin, Mihiragula resolved to accept the asylum offered by the King of Kashmir and went to Srinagar with a faithful band of Huns. There he soon put Vajrayudha treacherously to death and usurped his benefactor's throne.

Yasodharman had been asked by Kumarapala for some territories in the west of India for a relation of his but had refused. So Kumarapala retired with his troops to the east of the Brahmaputra. Many petty princes, some Huns and some Indians, divided the former provinces of the

Hun among them. All of them promised to recognize the suzerainty of Yasodharman. Yasodharman accepted the offer since Baladitya had declared that he wanted no more territories. Pulakesin the Chalukya had conquered part of Sourashtra leaving only the northern half with Vallabhi as capital to Rudrasimha. Yasodharman objected to Pulakesin's taking half the province of Sourashtra. A war seemed inevitable between the two Hindu monarchs when Pulakesin averted it by promising to hold his half of Sourashtra under the suzerainty of Yasodharman. Rudrasimha and Nahapana also promised to hold Northern Sourashtra and Western Malwa likewise. Chastana and his Huns carved out a principality for themselves to the west of the Jumna and did homage for it to Yasodharman. Chastana and Nahapana became Hindus and called themselves Ranavir Simha and Dharma Simha respectively. They adopted wholesale Hindu manners and customs and became great patrons of Brahmins and Sanskrit learning. They claimed to be Kshatriyas of the bluest blood.

Yasodharman received messengers from all the countries in India congratulating him on his great victory over the Huns and hailing him as the overlord of all India. His head was turned with all this praise and success. He caused inscriptions to be carved all over his kingdoms of Kalinga, Maha Kosala and elsewhere in these terms, 'I Yasodharman, King of Kings, defeated the entire force of the Huns and other barbarians and brought the whole of Bharatavarsha from the Himalayas to Mahendragiri and from sea to sea under my umbrella.'

When Yasodharman returned to Kalanjar after all these activities, it was nearly two months since Murari had gone there. Great was the enthusiasm with which the people of Maha Kosala received their victorious ruler. All along the route crowds had gathered to see the conqueror of the Huns. When at last he reached Kalanjar, he found

Mahamaya, Charumati, and Vasanta and the three children waiting for him at the gate with a huge crowd of citizens. As soon as Yasodharman arrived at the gate, Mahamaya embraced him and said, 'Son, this day you have gladdened my aged eyes with a spectacle I scarcely hoped to witness. Welcome, my son, welcome to the ancient fortress of Kalanjar. Your ancestors rejoice in their graves to see the glory which you have brought on the house of Maha Kosala. May you live many many years more and cover this ancient house with still more glory.' (Cries of Long live the King! Long live Yasodharma Maharaja!). Then Charumati spoke and said, 'My lord and King, welcome to the fortress of Kalanjar, welcome to the land of your birth, the home of your ancestors. You went out of this ancient fortress as the King of Maha Kosala, you return to it as the Emperor of Bharatavarsha, the overlord of all the lands from the Himalayas to Mahendragiri and from Kalinga to the western ocean. The Queen of the Kalingas does homage to her overlord and welcomes the Conqueror of the Huns to this ancient fortress of Kalanjar.' (Cries of Long live the King! Long live the Queen!). Then spoke Vasanta. She said, 'My lord King, the drama which began at the choultry long ago has culminated to-day. The wandering fugitive Yasodharman has become the lord of all the lands between the Himalayas and Mahendragiri and between the two oceans. Welcome back to the cradle of your race, the home of the ancient dynasty of Maha Kosala.' (Cries of 'Long live the King!' 'Long live Vasanta!').

After this Lalita caught hold of her father and asked, 'Father have you killed the wicked Nahapana who wounded poor Murari?' Yasodharman was ashamed to reply to this innocent child's question. He asked Charumati, 'How is prince Murari getting on? I hope he is all right.' The serious look of Charumati somewhat frightened him. The Queen did not reply in so many words. But Lalita did.

She went to her father again and said, 'I shall tell you, father. Murari is sick. He used to talk to me often before, but he does not do so now. He shuts his eyes often, and often looks at the door. He has grown thin, very thin. Father, I don't know what is the matter with Murari. Vasanta told me that I was to marry him, but I don't know when he will be ready.' Tears came into the eyes of Yasodharman, Charumati, Vasanta and Mahamaya at the unconscious tragedy underlying the innocent child's utterances. Yasodharman and the other members of his family soon entered the palace after returning the salutes of the assembled citizens.

The first thing Yasodharman did after entering the palace was to rush to Murari's bedside and see how he fared. Charumati had taken him aside and told him, 'Dearest, the wound is proving fatal. I fear the poor darling may. . . .' Here her voice choked. With an effort she continued, 'Pray do not exhibit any emotion in the sick-room.' After this Yasodharman, Charumati, Vasanta and Mahamaya entered the sick room. At the sight of the skeleton lying on the bed Yasodharman burst into tears but soon wiped them off. Murari's eyes were closed. Yasodharman whispered to Charumati that the patient was sleeping.

'No,' said Charumati, 'The poor boy is shutting his eyes in pain. He never gives the least trouble, never makes the least complaint.' Vasanta went to the bedside softly and said, 'Murari, Murari!'. 'Has my mother come?' asked Murari opening his eyes.

'No,' said Vasanta, 'She will come to-morrow. Yasodharma Maharaja has come.' 'Has he?' said Murari, and the faintest smile appeared on his pale lips, 'Has he defeated the Huns thoroughly? Is Ujjaini free from their yoke?'

'Yes, Murari, Ujjaini is safe from the Hun,' said Yasodharman. 'The citizens wanted to crown you as King

and when I told them about your unwillingness they were very sorry. They wanted me to convey to you their gratitude. They also hope to see you soon.' 'They will never see me.' said Murari faintly, 'I am glad that the Huns are defeated. My mother will be glad to hear about the deliverance of Ujjaini, her birth-place. Where is my mother, has she come?'

'No, not yet,' said Yasodharman, 'She will come soon.' The sick man's eyes closed again.

Yasodharman asked Charumati in a whisper whether word had been sent to Saraswati and was told that the Queen of Magadha was expected that evening.

'How is Baladitya?' asked Yasodharman. It was many years since he had asked about Baladitya's health.

'He is a bit better now than before. That is why Saraswati finds it possible to come now leaving him in charge of the nurses. Dearest, don't you think that it is time to make up your quarrel with your old comrade in arms? Let Murari be the cause of your reconciliation. Don't deny me this,' said Charumati.

'Dearest,' said Yasodharman, 'I also was thinking of this. As soon as Baladitya recovers, I shall make up my quarrel with him.' 'Son,' said Mahamaya, 'My heart rejoices at this noble decision of yours. With all his faults Baladitya is incapable of any mean thoughts or actions. His ideals may differ, his religion may be different, but man to man he is as noble-hearted and generous as any prince on earth.'

'I agree,' said Yasodharman. 'It has taken me so many years to recognize my error.' 'Rather rejoice that at least now you have found out your error,' said Mahamaya. Then leaving Vasanta in the sick room, the rest went into the inner apartments.

That evening, Queen Saraswati came to Kalanjar with Dharmagupta and Narayani. Yasodharman, Mahamaya, |

Charumati and Vasanta received them at the gate and led them into the palace right on to the sick-room where Murari lay.

'How is my child?' Saraswati had asked on the way. Charumati had replied with a tear. Saraswati had caught its full meaning.

As soon as they went to the sick-bed, Saraswati bent over the wasted form of Murari and said, 'Murari, I have come.'

'Have you, mother?' asked Murari opening his eyes. A look of joy and contentment spread over the emaciated countenance. 'Mother, how is father?'

'Getting on all right,' said Saraswati.

'Where are Dharmagupta and Narayani?' asked Murari.

'Here we are,' said Dharmagupta and Narayani each catching hold of one hand of Murari. A look of heavenly joy enlightened Murari's eyes and he said, 'I am happy, mother, I am happy now. Where is Lalita? Let her also catch hold of my hand along with Narayani.' Lalita was soon beside Narayani and said, 'Here I am, Murari.'

'Mother,' said Murari again, 'I am very happy now. Put your hand on my forehead, mother.' Saraswati did as desired. The whole audience was visibly moved at the pathetic spectacle. Yasodharman went out and sobbed like a child, this warrior of a hundred battles.

'Where is Queen Charumati?' asked Murari. 'I want to see her. She has been a mother to me in your absence, mother. And Vasanta, I want to see her too, she has been an angel to me. I want also to see my grandmother Mahamaya and my little brothers Narasimha and Chandra-bhanu.' All these came and stood before the sick prince who looked at them all with a faint smile of gratitude. Yasodharman also came and stood by the bedside. All the people in the sick-room were so moved that not one of them, not even Lalita, said anything.

'Mother,' said Murari at last, 'I see the Ganga and the Sona.'¹ Oh, what a blazing light is this!' and Murari's eyes closed and he pressed the hands of Dharmagupta, Lalita and Narayani. An unearthly pallor spread over the features and a peace which was heavenly. Prince Murari was dead.

¹ The Ganges and the Son, the rivers of his native city, Pataliputra.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE DEATH OF BALADITYA

WHEN Saraswati returned to Pataliputra after the death of Murari, she was literally bent down with sorrow. The death of her first-born had been too much for her feminine heart. Such a sacrifice for her country Saraswati had made willingly and still intended to make if a similar situation arose, but she hardly tried to conceal the fact from herself or others that it was a sacrifice. Anybody who gives up what is dearest to him must feel the loss of that dearest, else it may be safely presumed that it was never the dearest. He is bound to miss it though he may be mentally glad that he had the courage to part with it. Such was Saraswati's state of mind. Never till she actually lost her child did her mother's heart know what a terrible sacrifice it was. The moving end of her beloved son made a deep impression on the heart of Saraswati as on the hearts of the other spectators but to a greater extent as was but natural. With a view to spare Baladitya the shock of seeing the dead body of his beloved son and his cremation ceremony, Saraswati consented to Charumati's suggestion of burning the corpse of the prince in Kalanjar itself.

After the obsequies were over, Saraswati hurried to Pataliputra. She found her husband worse than she left him. The difference between her nursing and the nursing of the nurses combined with the terrible news of his son's death which had reached him in spite of his nurses' precautions had produced a relapse. The fever had become acute again. Poor Saraswati forgot about her son's death

at this new calamity and devoted herself day and night to the careful nursing of her husband. Day after day, Baladitya's health became steadily worse in spite of all that his devoted wife and the doctors could do. Finally, it became evident that the end was not far off. Saraswati's health also had broken down as a result of her son's death and the constant sleepless watching over her husband.

One day, Baladitya called Saraswati to his side and asked her to sit close to him. She did so. 'Dearest,' said Baladitya, 'My end is fast approaching. It is good that I should talk to you now about some important matters.'

Saraswati began to weep like a child at this open hint of the inevitable end.

'Don't weep, dearest,' said Baladitya, 'Or you will discourage me so much that I shall not be able to say what I want.'

Saraswati wiped off her tears and said, 'My dearest husband, what is it you want to talk to me?'

'Dearest,' said Baladitya, 'You know that I am going to die soon. Do not begin to weep again. I am pained to see you so very much distressed. Don't you know how bravely the Blessed One met his death and how philosophically his disciples took it? Even the Bhagavad Gita which you read so often teaches us not to mourn over the inevitable but to face death with the same courage as we face old age. You know how the great Balarama went to the other world, sick of this world's sorrows and disappointments. Then again, think of that matchless warrior Bhishma waiting calmly for his death on his bed of arrows. In the logic of nature birth must of necessity be followed by death. Therefore, O darling, do not grieve fruitlessly over the unshakeable decrees of God.'

'I shall control my grief as best as I can,' said Saraswati, 'Now, dearest, what are the important matters about which you want to talk to me?'

'Dearest,' said Baladitya, 'The first request I have to make to you is not to commit sati¹ after my death.'

'But I must,' said Saraswati, 'Such has been the custom of our ancestors. I cannot bear to live without you. Pray, do not deter me from following the usage of high-born Kshatriya maidens. Even the Hun queens of Toramana committed sati.' With this, Saraswati held both the feet of the sick man and implored him not to order her not to commit sati.

'Saraswati,' said Baladitya, 'Sati is not an Aryan usage. If all the Aryan women committed sati, where is the need for injunctions and rules about the life a widow should lead? Still, all the sastras contain detailed rules as to the life a widow should lead. Again, another thing would also show that our sacred law-givers never wanted a wife to commit sati. Otherwise, what is the meaning of their saying that the son ought to protect the mother in her old age? Does it not clearly show that the husband has gone leaving the son to take care of the mother?'

'Dearest, you may be right in your interpretation of the sastras,' said Saraswati, 'But you forget that the best Aryan women have always accompanied their husbands beyond the grave. I need hardly tell you about Savitri.'

'But Savitri never committed sati,' said Baladitya. 'She was one who defied the Lord of Death and followed him to his dread abode in order to force Yama to bring her husband back to life. And, further, Satyavan died young and was free from all sins. Yama will never listen to an appeal regarding me.'

'Dearest husband,' said Saraswati, 'Why talk of what others did? I want to die with my husband and I have a right to do so.'

¹ Immolation on the husband's funeral pyre by his wife.

'No,' said Baladitya, 'Dearest, you are wrong again. No man or woman has a right to commit suicide. Suicide is rightly considered by all religions to be one of the deadly sins. Besides, every person who commits suicide except to save himself or herself from irreparable dishonour is a coward.'

'Dearest,' said Saraswati, 'What then is my duty according to you? That tell me decisively.'

'Remain here below to look after Dharmagupta and Narayani and our dear subjects of Magadha. Then, when the time comes and death calls, shake the dust off your feet without joy and without sorrow and come to the land beyond.'

'My dearest husband,' said Saraswati, 'So you say that only wives having no children can be even excused for committing sati, is it?'

'Even they will never be excused for committing sati,' replied Baladitya. 'They will do much better good to their dead husbands by living pious and godly lives here doing a lot of meritorious deeds. A wife being part of a husband, her good actions will redound to her husband's soul's benefit as his will to hers. Heroic are those misguided women who commit sati voluntarily for they do what they consider to be their duty fearlessly. But by their foolish action they deprive this poor suffering world of some of the best and most noble-hearted women. Thrice heroic will they be if they live in this world doing meritorious actions till such time as death calls them to the other world. What if they have no children? Let them treat the poor orphans and waifs of this land as their children and do all that they can for them. Nothing will be more pleasing to their dead husbands or to God. As regards those women who commit sati in spite of their having little children, I am of opinion that their action is sinful and their sacrifice impure. You cannot give as a gift stolen property, nor can you rob your

little children of the motherly care which is their due in order to pride yourself on your self-sacrifice as a wife. Dharmagupta and Narayani are only fifteen and ten years old now and it will be criminal on your part to leave them and follow me. Further, I shall be forced to have nothing to do with you if you desert them and come with me, for no honourable king can receive a deserter or a person who fails to do his duty to little children. The King is, above all, the protector of little children; how can he then connive at their desertion and profit by utilizing the services of the deserter? This argument applies also to all other men.'

'Dearest,' said Saraswati, 'I have become a convert to your views and have dropped all ideas of sati.'

'I rejoice at your decision,' said Baladitya.

'But tell me' said Saraswati, 'what kind of life an ideal widow should lead.'

'I shall tell you' said Baladitya, 'what I consider to be the best. Manu the great law-giver has said that an ideal widow should live on plain vegetable diet, dress in plain white robes of spotless purity, wear white jasmine flowers in her hair, devote her whole life to doing meritorious deeds and think of no other person than her husband in whose memory she should ever dwell and for whose spiritual salvation she should consecrate her life. She should avoid evil thoughts, evil words and evil deeds. She should follow the eight-fold path taught by the Blessed One. She should be a mother to all in distress and be ever ready to succour the helpless and the needy. Thus passing her days in righteous deeds she should wait till death knocks at the door to summon her to join her beloved husband.'

'I have never heard of this ideal set forth for a widow,' said Saraswati. 'What a pity women are not taught about these things!'

'Dearest, that is the mistake made by our ancestors', said Baladitya.

'Darling, won't you have something to eat?' asked Saraswati. 'It is such a long time since you have had anything.'

'Saraswati, I have no appetite,' said Baladitya. 'You should eat something,' said Saraswati, 'Look how thin you have become. This fever has eaten up all your flesh and blood. Oh, my husband, how changed you are! What is it that is eating your heart? Is it not the death of Murari?' and the Queen began to weep.

'No, don't weep,' said Baladitya, 'I am not pining on account of Murari though I thought that God would be pleased to take me and spare him. It is this wasting fever which is the cause of my weakness. I have no hope of recovery, absolutely none.'

'Don't say so, dearest, or I shall die with sorrow,' said Saraswati.

'What is the use of hiding what is going to happen?' asked Baladitya. 'Don't be upset, dearest. I shall not last longer than a week. I must prepare myself for the long journey. I have some more things to tell you. Wipe your tears.'

Saraswati wiped her tears, but new ones took the place of those wiped off. Do what Saraswati will, she found it impossible to restrain her tears.

'Well,' said Baladitya, 'I feel that I have done grievous wrong to many people. For one thing, I have not done my best for the helpless widows and orphans of this land. Saraswati, I want you to do something more for them. Let no widow lack means of honourable livelihood and let no child feel the pangs of starvation. Feel for all widows as you will feel for yourself, feel for all orphans as you will for Dharmagupta and Narayani. Promise me this.' 'I promise,' said Saraswati.

'Then, there are these unfortunate outcastes,' said Baladitya. 'These are the hapless victims of a heartless

society. Neither the Vedas nor the sastras have any sanction for this immoral and unnatural institution. Manu declared that there was no fifth caste. Rama was rowed across the holy Ganga by the outcaste Guha and gave salvation to the outcaste Sabari while refusing it to countless Brahmins and Kshatriyas and Vaisyas. The Great God Siva put on the garb of an outcaste hunter. Even the Blessed One showered his affection on the outcaste Upali equally with the Brahmin Maha Prajapati. Finally, when no one else in all Ujjaini would offer us an asylum it was the outcaste Madhavi who sheltered me and Yasodharman in her humble house at the greatest of all possible risks to herself. Still, the outcastes are treated in our unfortunate land as worse than dogs and pigs. I have done something to alleviate the misery of these down-trodden people. I want you to do more for them and to bring their condition to a far better state than now. God knows no outcaste. All those who treat some of their brothers as outcastes here below will be treated as outcastes by Him above.'

'I shall do my best for the outcastes,' said Saraswati. 'Thanks,' said Baladitya, 'I am satisfied. Let me go to sleep now. I feel sleepy.' Saraswati was about to leave him when Narayani and Dharmagupta entered the room. Narayani went straight to her father and asked him—

'What is the matter with you, father, that you don't take food regularly? Mother weeps incessantly when she is out of this room. Can't you eat something at least in order to make poor mother happy? Do, I have brought some sweetmeats for you.' With this she stretched her two tiny hands and offered some sweetmeats to her father. Baladitya tried to eat something just to please the child, but all in vain. All that he could manage was to swallow a little morsel.

'Father,' said Narayani, 'you are very sick. You look

like Murari when I saw him at Kalanjar. Mother tells me that Murari is now in Heaven. Where is Heaven, father, that tell me at once.'

'Narayani,' said Saraswati, 'Don't you see that poor father is weary and wants to sleep? He will tell you all about these things to-morrow.'

'Yes, perhaps I may know something more about the other world by then,' said Baladitya smiling sadly. Then he embraced Narayani with one arm and kissed her on both the cheeks.

'Father,' said Narayani, 'Why are your lips so hot? Mother, look, how hot are father's lips!' Saraswati knew also that Baladitya was having high fever and so kept quiet. All this time Dharmagupta was watching the whole scene without a single word or comment but with a most woeful expression. Baladitya motioned to him to go to the bed-side and said, 'Child, I shall soon be leaving you. Your mother will help you in all possible ways. Always be guided by her and do nothing to cause her the least anxiety or sorrow.'

'I promise to do so,' said Dharmagupta.

'Father, where are you going?' asked Narayani.

'You will know by and by,' said Baladitya, 'Now leave me.' All left the sick-room and Baladitya fell asleep. Saraswati soon came back to the room and sat with tearful eyes. From time to time Saraswati felt the pulse of the sick monarch and found the temperature rising higher and higher. The nurses who were with Saraswati became seriously alarmed. The doctor when he came at his usual hour found the fever much higher than he expected. 'Evidently, there has been too much excitement,' said he. 'Has His Majesty taken any food?'

'No,' said Saraswati. 'He says he has no appetite.'

'I see,' said the doctor. 'You had better remain here watching,' said Saraswati.

'I shall remain,' said the doctor, 'But it is of very little use. There is no hope.'

Tears rushed into Saraswati's eyes on hearing this considered medical opinion.

'Maharanee, I am sorry to cause you grief, but I shall be failing in my duty if I do not tell you that the end is near. I don't think that the Maharaja will survive the night.'

'Is it so bad as that?' asked Saraswati.

'Yes,' said the doctor.

News of this opinion of the doctor soon spread all through the city of Pataliputra. The business of the town was suspended and a huge crowd assembled before the palace, waiting in anxious suspense to hear the news about the Maharaja's sickness. Late in the afternoon Parvati came and joined Saraswati in the sick-room. In the evening, Baladitya began to have delirium. He raved about all kinds of things. He often called out, 'Murari, Murari! Saraswati! Narayani! Yasodharma! Dharmagupta! Madhavi!' Saraswati asked the doctor whether she should send at once for Yasodharman but was told that it was too late. Parvati went near the bed-side and stood. Baladitya opened his eyes but there was no sign of recognition in them. Saraswati went and touched his forehead softly. It was blazing hot. The doctor gave out his opinion that the disease had got out of control.

Parvati and Saraswati tried to make the patient drink the drugs, but to no purpose. As it was getting dark, Baladitya said, 'The Blessed One was, after all, right,' and again relapsed into silence. The questions of Saraswati and Parvati elicited no replies. These were the last words he ever spoke. Towards midnight the weary soul left its tenement of clay.

The assembled citizens were plunged in sorrow at the death of their King. They felt the death as a personal loss

to them. They were now face to face with a minority, and their beloved King who had done so much for their welfare was no more. Many among the crowd sobbed loudly.

'There was never a King like him before except Asoka,' said one citizen, 'and there will never be.'

'Oh, he was the father of his people,' said another. 'A better protector of widows and orphans Magadha never had in all the ages past,' said a third.

'He loved the poor like his own children,' said a fourth.

'What will happen to us now that our King is gone?' asked a fifth.

'They say that prince Dharmagupta will be crowned King and that Queen Saraswati will be Regent till he attains majority,' said the first.

'Is not Queen Saraswati going to commit sati?' asked the fifth citizen.

'No,' said the first, 'Baladitya has made her promise not to commit sati but to devote her life to her children and to us.'

'God be praised!' said the fifth citizen. 'Queen Saraswati is a mother to us and we need not fear the future.'

'You say true,' replied the first citizen.

CHAPTER XXXVI

YASODHARMAN—CHARUMATI—PURI JAGANNATH

YASODHARMAN and Charumati were in their palace at Puri Jagannath whither they had gone for visiting the famous temple and effecting some radical changes in its management and administration. It had always been an eyesore to Yasodharman that a barber should be the hereditary high priest in the most famous temple in his dominions and one of the most famous temples in all India. He had often told Charumati that it was necessary to put a Brahmin priest there in the place of the low-caste barber. Charumati had objected that though the change was perhaps in theory desirable still changes in the prevailing order were most undesirable in temples of such long standing as Jagannath unless imperatively called for in the interests of morality and religion.

'Why, Charumati, don't you think that this is a change in the interests of morality and religion? How can a barber unversed in the Vedas and Sastras do worship to God?' asked Yasodharman.

'As if all the Brahmin priests know all the Vedas and Sastras!' said Charumati. 'What they do is simply to repeat some mantras which they have learnt by rote and perform some mechanical rites. Faith is as essential a factor as learning, and you know that Ananda the barber had far more faith than Maha-prajapati the Brahmin scholar and so was more loved by Buddha.'

'I should not wonder if the barber stepped into Puri in the days of Ananda and the heretics,' said Yasodharman.

'May be,' said Charumati, 'For good and all, the barber has been in Puri for several centuries and has as good a claim there as any Brahmin priest in any other temple.'

Don't you know the story of how the barber came to be at Jagannath? Perhaps, not having been born in Kalinga, you have not heard about this.'

'What is the story?' asked Yasodharman.

'Oh, it is like this. One day, when there was an assembly of the four castes outside the great temple of Jagannath to witness the ceremonies preceding the great car-festival a miserable-looking Svapaka¹ leper of advanced age and with one leg cut at the knee was found lying near the place where the caste-proud Brahmin priest was. The Svapaka was a most gruesome sight to behold. He said feebly to the priest, "Give me some holy water, I am dying". "Holy water for you, you wretch?" asked the priest. "You vilest of the vile, were it not for the fear of being polluted by you I would have kicked you. Get out of my way, you abomination to all respectable men!" and he spat at the helpless outcaste in contempt and disgust amidst the loud approval of the assembled four castes.

"He is, after all, a man, and this is his dying request," said a barber. "He should not be refused." So saying, he took some holy water from the basin near the priest and gave it to the prostrate Svapaka and shocked the whole audience which yelled out with one voice, "A barber has touched the holy water!" and rushed to lynch the fellow guilty of such a sacrilege. All at once the Svapaka leper rose and changed his form to that of the great Lord of the Universe and spoke in a dreadful voice, "The barber shall touch the holy water of Jagannath temple for all time to come. He alone has shown true enlightenment and devotion and has been able to recognize Me in the Svapaka as well as in the Brahmin. He alone is fit to be my priest since he alone will deal with all equally. Let him and his descendants be my priests hereafter and let no Brahmin or other high

¹ The lowest of the outcastes.

caste man scorn to receive holy water from him, for by scorning him he scorneth Me," and the Great Lord of the Universe vanished suddenly. From that day the barber and his descendants have been the high priests of Jagannath and no Brahmin or other high caste man has questioned their right to do so.'

'Alas, Charumati,' said Yasodharman, 'Do you mean to say that the Svapaka is admitted freely into the temple of Jagannath though a barber is the high priest there?'

'No, that is the tragedy of it,' said Charumati. 'These barber high priests have missed the meaning of their original appointment and are now engaged in the most unedifying spectacle of basely imitating the Brahmin priests of other temples. In avarice and irreligion they are tending to excel the ordinary Brahmin priest, and in learning they are nothing compared with him. No wonder that the Lord of Jagannath has not become visible to the successors of the original barber priest or even to him after his initiation as high priest.'

'Oh, these hereditary priests are the curse of our country,' said Yasodharman. 'Why can't they choose the fittest and the most saintly man for this high avocation of high priest? If they did so, the temples would become the reform centres instead of so many dens of iniquity as at present.'

'Dearest,' said Charumati laughing, 'I thought that you were a pious Sanatan¹ Hindu! What has become of you that you talk so irreverently of temples?'

'I am a pious Hindu of the Sanatan type and it is because I am that and love our temples that I am forced to condemn the present iniquities in them. How many poor are fed at our temples out of the rice supplied for that purpose? In which temple is theft of things belonging to God

¹ Old—A Hindu of the old school.

unknown? Which temple priest has been known to be a saint? Alas, dearest, all the best Rishis and saints of India, all those who lend lustre and glory to the land of the Aryas have been other than temple priests. The wealth of the temples perhaps demoralizes even saints.'

'No saints enter our temples,' said Charumati. 'They seek God in their hearts and in the world around them. They need no image to teach them of the existence of God. The vocation of a temple priest will be repulsive to any noble soul.'

'Dearest,' said Yasodharman, 'Don't you see that unless some of these noble souls consent to be temple priests no great reform can take place in our temples? How much love, labour and money have been spent by the builders of these great temples and how little care has been taken for their proper administration! It is tragic to think of that. My whole being as a Hindu revolts against this iniquitous system. I want to reform our temples radically. I want to make the high priests changeable.'

'By whom?' asked Charumati.

'By the monarchs who are the trustees of these temples,' said Yasodharman.

'Not a very good idea,' said Charumati. 'For a bad monarch will be sure to appoint a bad man as high priest and share the spoils with him. Fancy Mihiragula appointing the high priest of the Vishnu temple at Ujjaini! No, no, the high priests should have nothing to do with monarchs.'

'In any case, I mean to replace the barber priests of Jagannath by better men of the Brahmin caste,' said Yasodharman.

'The Brahmin priest you appoint will become as bad in two generations as his barber predecessor. And he will not have the veneration which custom attaches to the present barber priests,' said Charumati.

'See what a wild wind is blowing outside!' said Yaso-

dharman. 'It is not the windy season now,' said Charumati. 'It is quite remarkable that we should have such a violent storm now. Something evil is brewing somewhere.'

'See, some courier is caught in that storm. Look, how he has to struggle!' said Yasodharman. Charumati went to the window and looked.

'It is a messenger from Pataliputra,' said she, 'He is on the Pataliputra-Jagannath road and wears the badge of the Guptas. I wonder what news he is bringing.'

'How is Baladitya now?' asked Yasodharman.

'He was getting better according to the latest news I got. But that was a long time ago when Saraswati was about to leave Kalanjar after the funeral of Murari.'

'I hope he is quite better now,' said Yasodharman. 'I intend to go to Pataliputra with you after our business in Jagannath is over. I dare say you are longing to see Queen Saraswati. I am also rather anxious to make up my quarrel with Baladitya. I can congratulate him in person on his recovery and resume my old relations of cordiality with him.'

'Oh, I am ever so glad to hear you say that,' said Charumati. 'Dearest, many a time I have felt it as an irony of fate that you and Baladitya who held together so finely in days of adversity should have fallen out in better times. The two noblest spirits among the monarchs of our age should never have quarrelled. I am very glad that they are going to make up their unseemly squabble. For my part, I shall be delighted to see Saraswati and the little darlings. I want to take our children also to Pataliputra. You are perhaps unaware of the fact that Lalita has sworn a lifelong friendship with Narayani, and Narasimha and Chandrabhanu have done the same with Dharmagupta.'

'I am delighted to hear that,' said Yasodharman.

'Let the children behave better than their elders! Perhaps one day there may be two family alliances also as a result of these oaths. Well, the messenger has reached the palace at last. Let us see what message he has got.'

Soon the messenger was ushered into the royal presence by a palace servant. He bowed low before the King and Queen of Maha Kosala and Kalinga, and tears trickled freely from his eyes as he said:—

'Sad news of the worst kind I bring to your Majesties. Baladitya Maharaja is dead!'

'Dead!' exclaimed Yasodharman.

'Dead!' exclaimed Charumati, and both the monarchs were stunned with grief. Yasodharman wept like a child and was joined by Charumati also.

'Among the last words the Maharaja spoke before his death was your name, O, King of Maha Kosala,' said the messenger. This news only increased Yasodharman's anguish.

'I shall withdraw now,' said the messenger with delicacy.

'Stay,' said Charumati. 'Has Saraswati Maharani committed sati?' As she spoke this, Charumati was a picture of anxiety.

'By God's grace, no,' said the messenger, 'Baladitya Maharaja with infinite difficulty managed to make her promise not to commit sati but to remain behind to look after her children and her subjects.'

'God be praised!' said Charumati, 'You can go now.'

The messenger then withdrew, leaving the King and Queen alone.

'Charumati,' said Yasodharman as soon as the messenger had withdrawn, 'Charumati, I am the worst sinner on earth. My best friend I have basely abandoned and him who remembered me even in the hour of death, him have I treated with base ingratitude. Oh, I have maligned him who loved me so well. I never even went to his death-

bed when the noble soul was about to part company with its tenement of clay. He saved me from the sword of Bhumaka, yet I treated him so badly. He scorned territorial aggrandizement and I basely used the troops he generously lent for usurping the lands of his ancestors. Oh, what a wretch am I that I published shamelessly those inscriptions declaring that I Yasodharman, King of Kings, had brought the whole of this Bharatavarsha from the Himalayas to Mahendragiri and from sea to sea under my umbrella! Let my soldiers be sent at once to demolish these lies on stone, to raze these pillars to the ground and to substitute instead this inscription that in the whole of this Bharatavarsha from the Himalayas to Mahendragiri and from sea to sea there lives no more boastful, untruthful and ungrateful wretch than Yasodharman of Maha Kosala. Oh, how I have disgraced my ancestors! And Yasodharman wept as if his heart would break.

'Dearest,' said Charumati embracing him, 'Do not say so. You are not so base or mean or ungrateful as all that. No doubt, you did injustice to Baladitya, but you did nothing base or mean. All that you cared for, all that you lived for, all that you worked for, was only for what you considered the good of your country and that of Bharatavarsha. Even your injustice to Baladitya was due to his not helping you in ridding this land of the barbarian and the foreigner who ruled at Ujjaini. No doubt, you misunderstood Baladitya and never grasped the real motive underlying his refusal. But that was only human. There was nothing base or mean or ungrateful in that. When passions are roused, when the blood is boiling, it is difficult to judge of persons clamly and rightly. Often we make mistakes then, but there is nothing iniquitous in that. You never wanted Baladitya to aid you in conquering territories for you, you only wanted him to aid you and to lead you against the Hun. You never usurped the lands of

Baladitya's ancestors. Baladitya did not want to rule over these lands and you did not want lesser men than you to tyrannise over these territories. After all, next to Baladitya you had the best claim for these lands for you conquered the Huns, and you were descended from Mahamaya, a princess of the royal line of the Guptas. Even Baladitya did not think that you were base or mean or ungrateful, otherwise he would never have mentioned you with his dying breath. Be consoled, my husband, and do not do grievous injustice to yourself in trying to be just to Baladitya. Of course, we must go to Pataliputra at once and console poor Saraswati and the little children. Let Baladitya's death serve as a spur to us to do the utmost for his bereaved queen and children. So we may do something to atone for our conduct towards Baladitya. Come, don't weep so much. I feel my heart bursting to see you weep like that.'

'Charumati, my mind is in a greater storm than the storm outside. My head burns and my mind is confused. What shall I do to assuage this anguish which withers my senses? I want to go to the raging sea down below and sit there a while.'

'In the storm?' asked Charumati.

'Yes, in the storm,' said Yasodharman, 'I want to hear the wild ocean roar.' Charumati also thought that it might be best for him to do so, for she believed in Nature's supreme healing powers. So Charumati and Yasodharman went to the seashore alone, refusing all attendance. The servants looked on with tearful eyes as their King and Queen went to the seashore alone with faces woven with sorrow. Yasodharman went and sat on a mound facing the sea. Charumati sat near him. Wild waves were rolling mountains high and the spray splashed on the royal pair who paid no heed to it. Yasodharman seemed to take a wild pleasure in hearing the deafening roar of the raging billows.

'Charumati,' he said, 'The waters are rising! The waters are rising!'

Charumati said, 'Yes, dearest, shall we go a little higher up?' 'No, no, no,' said Yasodharman. 'Let us remain here alone. Let the waves wash me and you and Kalinga and Maha Kosala into the Ocean in one vast destruction. Oh, that wave is calling me, Charumati, look, look!' and Yasodharman's eyes shone with a light which was not of this world. Charumati was seriously alarmed. She feared that her husband's senses were becoming deranged by the poignant grief. She did not know what to do. Her mind itself was weighed down under a great sorrow owing to Baladitya's death and the lone condition of Saraswati. Still the sight of her distracted husband made Charumati realize that something must be done speedily if her husband was not to lose his senses altogether. With a woman's quick resource she found out a way. She clasped her husband to her bosom and said, 'Dearest, calm yourself a little.'

'Leave me,' said Yasodharman, 'Leave me. Oh, what will console me, wretch that I am! Nothing will console me, nothing! What do you want me to do? Leave me. I want to be washed into the ocean and to quench this unquenchable grief which withers all my senses. Baladitya is calling to me from beyond the waves. Hark, hark, he calls, he calls. I must go, leave me. Baladitya, Murari, I am coming, I am coming.' And Yasodharman tried to free himself and to rush into the raging sea. Charumati held her husband firm in her arms and said, 'Yasodharma Maharaja, what is it you are doing? Are you, the brave Kshatriya King, going to commit suicide like a coward in order to evade doing your duty?'

'What!' said Yasodharman coming to himself a little, 'Who dares to accuse me of cowardice and dereliction of duty?'

'I, I your dearest wife and partner in life, I, Charumati wife of Yasodharman, I the custodian of Yasodharman's honour,' replied Charumati.

'How dare you accuse me of cowardice and dereliction of duty?' asked Yasodharman fiercely. 'Hear me for I will speak,' said Charumati, rising to the occasion, 'Is it not cowardice and dereliction of duty to leave me a poor widowed queen with three helpless children, a prey to the Huns and other foes? Is it not cowardice and dereliction of duty to leave the poor widowed queen Saraswati and her two helpless children entrusted to your charge in the dying words of Baladitya a prey to all their foes? Is it not cowardice and gross dereliction of duty to leave a portion of Aryavarta, the beautiful vale of Kashmir, in the hands of the barbarian and the foreigner who has got it by the foulest of all treacheries?'

Yasodharman ceased to struggle. He stood silent for a minute or two and then said, 'Charumati, you are right, I was wrong. I was about to commit a gross dereliction of duty without knowing it. So long as Mihiragula remains in Kashmir, so long as Narasimha and Chandrabhanu are unable to take care of themselves, so long as Saraswati and her children are helpless against their foes, so long my mission in life is not fulfilled and I have no right to go of my own accord to Baladitya and Murari beyond the grave. Come, let us go back to the palace. You have saved me from committing an unconscious wrong.'

Charumati tightened her embrace and kissed her husband fervently. 'Darling,' she said, 'Forgive me if I offended you by my harsh words but I did not intend to offend you in the least.'

'Dearest,' said Yasodharman, 'What have I to forgive? It is you that should forgive me for the anxiety and trouble I have given you.'

The husband and wife embraced and kissed one another

while the ocean roared and the great waves rolled. Then they returned to the palace very much becalmed.

When they reached the palace and were again alone, Yasodharman asked Charumati, 'What shall I do in token of the memory of Baladitya?' 'You can do three things,' said Charumati, 'to please his soul. Protect Saraswati and Dharmagupta against their foes, cease to hate Buddha and Buddhism, and try to alleviate the condition of the outcastes.'

'I shall do so,' said Yasodharman, 'and I shall do one thing more. Baladitya did not believe in caste. In honour of his memory I shall not disturb the barber priest of Jagannath as I had originally proposed.' 'I shall do still another thing which I ought to have done long ago,' said Charumati. 'If the child which I have conceived turns out to be a girl, I shall name it Madhavi.'

'When shall we go to Pataliputra?' asked Yasodharman.

'To-morrow we shall start,' said Charumati. 'Oh, how I long to see Saraswati and the children!'

Both Yasodharman and Charumati shed some more tears.

'Your mother will break her heart when she hears of the death of Baladitya,' said Yasodharman.

'It is a good thing that she was not here to-day,' said Charumati. 'If she had witnessed what I witnessed to-day, she would have joined Baladitya and Murari.'

'My grief was such,' said Yasodharman, 'that I hardly knew what I did. You must forgive me.'

'There is nothing to forgive,' said Charumati. 'I saw the height of your nobility to-day and I shall never, never forget it. Now let us go into this temple of Jagannath and pray that we may be spared further calamities.'

'Yes,' said Yasodharman, 'We have great need of the consolations of prayer. Let the Lord of the Universe shed some light into the recesses of our afflicted hearts. The mysteries of life and death appear to me now with the

same intensity as they appeared to Agnanandhakara and I now realize more fully his problem and its difficulty.'

Husband and wife together set out from the palace or the temple with chastened spirits after having given instructions to their servants for getting all things ready for their journey to Pataliputra the next day. As they entered the portals of the great temple, they saw Vasanta return from it with Narasimha, Chandrabhanu and Lalita. 'Father,' said Lalita, 'Have you also come to the temple? Vasanta, you go back with Narasimha and Chandrabhanu. I shall return with father and mother.'

'Mother,' said Chandrabhanu, 'I too want to come with you. Vasanta, you go back with Narasimha alone.'

'No,' said Narasimha, 'I too want to see the God again. Vasanta you go back alone.'

'I too want to see the God again,' said Vasanta, 'We shall all go in again.'

'The call of Jagannath,' said Charumati, 'the call of Jagannath has a strong hold on all of us. May it for ever remain so! May the whole world feel the call of the Lord of the Universe, the call of the God of this temple, the God around us and, above all, the God within us all!'

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