

KALIDASA

RAGHUVAMSAM

The Line of Raghu

Translated from the Sanskrit by

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PENGUIN BOOKS

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P.M.S.

For my grandson

Nikhil

with all my love

Introduction

This is a new translation of Kalidasa's epic poem *Raghuvamsam*. Both are well-known names, one in classical Sanskrit and the other also in world literature. Before any comment on the celebrated work, it is only fitting that one begin with some words about its renowned author.

Little is known with certainty about Kalidasa apart from his classic creations. His dates lie between 170 BCE, the approximate time of the Sunga king Agnimitra, who figures in one of his plays, and the 634 CE inscription of the Chalukya king Pulakesin II, at Aihole in southern India, which extolls him by name. Recent scholarship has placed him in the fourth to fifth century CE at the height of the Gupta Empire in a peak period of ancient India's courtly culture. Nothing is known of his life or person, though there are some picturesque but contradictory legends. Seven of his works are extant—three plays, two epic and two lyrical poems (1)—making him, at present, the most acclaimed poet and dramatist in Sanskrit literature as well as an established figure in the wider world of letters.

Kalidasa's global standing has a history of a little over two centuries. It commenced with the first translation of his work into English, that of the play *Shakuntalam* by Sir William Jones in 1789, and the effusive welcome it received from Goethe, Herder, Schiller and other prominent European figures of the time. Thereafter his repute spread steadily with the continued growth of Western interest in India's ancient language and culture, and further translations of his writings into other tongues. By the time of the first English literary rendition of *Raghuvamsam* in 1902, he had been recognized, in the words of its translator, the British civil servant and Oxford Sanskrit scholar De Lacey Johnstone, as 'India's greatest dramatist and the greatest epic poet of her classical days' (2).

Within India, Kalidasa's literary standing has always been high, as is evident from the words of many eminent commentators who lived at different times and places. In the north of the country, Bana, another famous writer in Sanskrit from the seventh century, praised him effusively in a well-known verse:

Who would not delighted be
when Kalidasa's well said words,
come forth, charming with sweet scents,
like flower buds in nectar soaked? (3)

In the south, almost a thousand years later, a distinguished commentator from the Vijayanagara empire lauded him in an often quoted epigram, here translated:

In the count of ancient poets
Kalidasa does at the first place stay;
for the lack of one comparable,
the next is nameless to this day. (4)

Nearer our own times, just over a century ago, the poet Rabindranath Tagore was inspired by Kalidasa's lyrical poem to write:

Ah, supreme poet, that first, hallowed day
Of Asarh on which, in some unknown year, you wrote
Your Meghaduta! Your stanzas are themselves
Like dark layered sonorous clouds, heaping the misery
Of all separated lovers throughout the world
Into thunderous music. (5)

And more recently, the philosopher and Sanskrit scholar S. Radhakrishnan, later the President of India, hailed him in these words: 'Kalidasa is the great representative of India's spirit, grace and genius . . . [He] has absorbed India's cultural heritage . . . enriched it, given it universal scope . . . We find in his works . . . an intense poetic sensibility and fusion of thought and feeling.' (6)

*

We may now turn to *Raghuvamsam*. It is an epic poem which narrates with elegance and great dignity the legendary stories of a famous line of kings. The heroic second sovereign provides the work with its title. Its central figure is of course the greatest hero of them all, the divine incarnation Rama, also addressed in this poem by the well-known names Raghupati and Raghava. His forebears and some descendants are described with no less detail and colour, as they are brought to life in Kalidasa's poetry amidst settings of both natural and man-made beauty. In the words of A.B. Keith, a much respected historian of Sanskrit literature, this work 'may rightly be ranked as the finest Indian specimen of the Mahakavya' or epic poem. (7)

What is its place in Kalidasa's oeuvre as a whole? Any literary comparison and grading is best left to specialists and can also be subjective. But, while each of this great writer's classics has its own delights for the general reader, three actualities deserve to be noted here. First, with its 1557 verses spread over nineteen cantos, *Raghuvamsam* is by far the largest of the poet's compositions, more than twice the length of his other epic, and ten times that of the two lyrical poems. Second, it seems to be the most studied and commented on of his works in India over the centuries, as far as known. And third, it is perhaps the only work of Kalidasa with which his name has been associated in other Sanskrit writing. The last two points may also be illustrated with the distinguished academic opinions quoted below.

Since its previously mentioned translation in 1789, *Shakuntalam* has been the best known of Kalidasa's works outside India. *Meghadutam*, translated by H.H. Wilson in 1813, and *Kumarasambhavam*, by R.T. Griffiths in 1853, also became well known, more so after their well-received translations by the reputable American Sanskritist, A.W. Ryder in 1912. His book on Kalidasa (8) also includes some verse renditions of selected extracts from *Raghuvamsam*. The latter was first edited and translated into Latin by A.F. Stenzler in 1832, and into English prose by G.R. Nandargikar of Pune in 1897. However, in India it had been a subject of study since much before. The Fellow of Deccan College S.P. Pandit, who edited the original in 1869, wrote at the time: 'It is the first poem, indeed the first text book, read by those who begin to study Sanskrit outside government schools and colleges,' and 'that it has always been read very generally throughout the country is amply proved by the large number of commentaries on it'. (9)

This reputation in the Indian world of Sanskrit continued into modern times, as described by the distinguished Sanskritist V. Raghavan in his foreword to another edition of the work in 1973. He wrote, 'If Kalidasa represents the highest achievement in classical Sanskrit poetry, his largest work, the *Raghuvamsa*, is the all-round best representative of his poetry. It embodies all the ideals of Indian thought and culture . . . and for centuries it has served as the model and inspirer of all classical epic poems. It has the largest number of Sanskrit commentaries and has been the most extensively, and often, edited, printed and translated . . . in all Indian languages.' (10) It may be added that these scholarly works on *Raghuvamsam* also range over a considerable span of space and time. The oldest of the commentaries now available is the *Panjika* of Vallabhadeva, perhaps from tenth-century Kashmir, and the most used at present is the *Sanjivani* of Mallinatha from fourteenth century Andhra Pradesh. Others, earlier and later, originate from Maharashtra, Gujarat and other areas. As for translations, they extend from the Tamil of sixteenth-century Jaffna to the Brajbrasha of nineteenth-century Uttar Pradesh. (9 & 10)

Its continued and widespread study over time perhaps led to the particular association of Kalidasa with this work. In the words of its editor from India's national Sahitya Akademi, it alone has been found as 'giving titles to its writer like Raghukara and Raghuvamsakrit'. (11) The Monier Williams dictionary gives the meaning of the first title as 'author of the *Raghuvamsam*' and explains it as a name for Kalidasa. Other scholars have noted that it also figures in the well-known Sanskrit saying about Kalidasa, 'who here does not enjoy Raghukara'. (12) The second epithet is found in the twelfth-century astrological compilation,

Jyotirvidabharana (xxii.22), which also mentions this poet as a jewel in the legendary court of King Vikramaditya. As far as known, there is no other work of which Kalidasa has been described as the author in Sanskrit writings.

Raghuvamsam's popularity for study and comment in India was doubtless enhanced by its subject matter and poetic style. The first, as already mentioned, describes a line of kings famous in myth and legend, with the divine Rama as the central figure. This had a powerful appeal to cultural imagination in India, as it does to this day. As for style, *rasa* or flavour has traditionally been regarded in Sanskrit literature as the essence of poetry. It is also classified in categories evocative of specific moods: the erotic and the comic, the heroic and the furious, the compassionate and the fearful, the marvellous, horrific and calm. Rather than dwell mainly on the erotic and beautiful *shringara* rasa more common in poetry, this epic poem invokes the whole gamut of flavours, thus widening its appeal. The *shanta* rasa of stillness and peace stands prominent in the epic, according to its Sahitya Akademi editor, with an overall outcome of 'beauty, silence and solace'.

There is another aspect of this work's appeal which would have attracted readers over the centuries. It also illustrates the pursuit of the basic human ends as conceptualized in ancient Indian thought. In the words of the modern scholar A.K. Warder, it 'is a portrait gallery of the kings of Rama's line, illustrating the four ends of virtue, wealth, pleasure and release . . . Rama of course deals equally with all'. The epic's diverse stories thus also trace the human striving for *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*, which further gives 'a thematic unity and development in the poem'. (13)

*

Some time ago I was invited by Penguin Books India, to select a work I could translate for their classics series on Kalidasa. This was an honour but also a formidable responsibility, given the poet's repute and the numerous translations and dissertations that have bolstered it over time. After much thought, I selected *Raghuvamsam*. Its reputation as a great and highly readable work of literature was, it seemed, being overshadowed at present by one as a textbook mainly for study in the classroom. Though it had many English translations, they were mostly in literal prose, intended specially for use by students of Sanskrit at different stages. There appeared to be only three translations which also conveyed something of its literary spirit and tone for general readership—two done more than a hundred years ago, and the third over four decades old. (14) One of these, moreover, was only partial. As such, the time had clearly come for another complete translation to present the multiple flavours of this famous work to the modern general reader.

To this end I have translated it directly from the Sanskrit, stanza by stanza, in free verse form. The use of names and epithets has mostly been left in accordance with the original, so that each ruler is actually named only on few occasions. The translated verses are numbered for ease of reference to the original. At a few places their original sequence has been slightly altered for better reading, and the changes mentioned in the notes. For the same reason the verses have also been presented in separate groups unlike in the original where they are continuous in each canto. As for the cantos, though some commentators give them titles, I have followed the original which does not have any. I have however devised sub-headings within each canto for their overall presentation. The text used for this translation was edited by Pandit Haragovinda Sastri and published by Chaukhamba Sanskrit Sansthan, Varanasi, in 1985 with the Sanskrit commentary of Mallinatha which I have also consulted. It has further been cross-checked with the text critically edited by Dr R.P. Dwivedi for Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, in 1993.

Translating *Raghuvamsam* has been a wonderful though taxing experience. Kalidasa's narrations and descriptions are dramatic but straightforward. His evocations of scenes and moods are sensitive and effortless. But his play on words, their multiple meanings, their music and cadence, is difficult to reproduce in a language as different as English, though I have attempted this wherever possible. This translation endeavours to convey something of the epic poem's grace and dignity in contemporary language while fully adhering to its original text. The poetry has, overall, a majestic flow, touching on many aspects of human existence, from the noblest to the lowest, amidst striking descriptions of nature in all its variety. The story of Rama and Sita has been retold many times but has its own charm when put in the

words of Kalidasa.

The modern reader may also be interested in his vivid invocations of other kings before and after Rama: Dilipa and his wife Sudakshina, Raghu's valour and generosity, the love and tragedy of Aja and Indumati, the travails of Dasaratha, the feats of Kusha and Atithi, not to forget the contrast provided by Sudarshana and Agnivarna at the end. The work also gives an absorbing account of social and cultural values, practices and thought in ancient India, as also of its geography, several names from which are current to this day.

In conclusion, my deep appreciation and thanks to the editors of this book at Penguin Books India: R. Sivapriya, with whose initiation the work commenced; Ambar Sahil Chatterjee and Tarini Uppal who brought it to completion; and Shatarupa Ghoshal for its copy-editing. I further thank Lana Soglasnova of Robarts Library, University of Toronto, Canada, and Shafali Bhatt of India International Centre Library, New Delhi, for their help with the reference material. This translation was begun at the home of my son Vikram and daughter-in-law Annika, and completed at that of my daughter Sharada. To all of them, my love and gratitude, especially for their crucial computer help at different stages. I am deeply grateful as always to my wife Priti for her patient support throughout. The first help with the computer, and to see and correct the first page of the translation in draft, was my dear grandson Nikhil. This book is now dedicated to him on his birthday today with the fond hope that it may provide a glimpse of the cultural treasures to which he is heir.

New Delhi,

9 February 2016

A.N.D.H.



CANTO 1

PROLOGUE

For better endowing
my word with meaning,
I first pay homage
to Parvati, the mountain born,
and Paramesvara, lord supreme,
the world's begetters,
who are joined together
like word and meaning. 1

How great was that dynasty
descended from the Sun,
and how slight the capacity
of what I comprehend?

Foolishly do I wish to cross
the ocean in a small canoe. 2

A fool who seeks the poet's fame,
it will but earn me mockery—
like a dwarf who greedily
stretches up his arms for fruit
accessible only to the tall. 3

(2-3)

Or, I may enter by the path
into that dynasty laid
by the words of ancient sages:
like a thread which passes through
a gemstone by a diamond pierced. 4
Thus, even with my meagre phrases,
but prompted by some fantasy
following what one has long heard
about the merits of the Raghus,
I will of this dynasty speak. 5

(4-5)

They ruled the earth right to the sea,
their chariot paths led up to heaven,

from birth blessed with purity,
they laboured till their work bore fruit. 6
They fed the sacrificial fires
as laid down in the sacred law,
honoured supplicants' desires,
punished according to the crimes,
were vigilant, keeping with the times. 7
Their words were measured to be true,
they gathered wealth for charity,
sought victory but for glory's sake,
and married just for progeny. 8
In childhood they acquired learning,
in youth they looked for pleasure,
in old age led a hermit's life,
and gave it up through yoga. 9
These lines are as such fit to be
heard by those who may distinguish
doers of good deeds from the bad:
like fire in which one may see
gold's purity and blemish. 10

(6-10)

KING DILIPA

There was a scion of the Sun,
a Manu named Vaivasvata.
Respected by the sages, he
was the first of this earth's rulers,
like the sacred syllable *Om*
is of all the Vedic hymns. [11](#)
Born in his noble family
was Dilipa, purest of the pure,
one radiant midst the kings, arisen
like, from the sea of milk, the moon. 12

(11-12)

Broad of chest, of bull-like shoulders,
tall as the *sal* tree, with great arms,
his own self equal to his duties,
he symbolized true royalty. [13](#)
His person, like the mountain *M eru*,
firmer, stronger, than all else,
his lustre surpassing all others,
he towered over the entire earth. [14](#)
With a mind strong like his body,
and learning ample as his mind,
his work accorded with his learning,
its fruit was from its start defined. 15

(13-15)

But with all these regal qualities,
and their formidable glow,
he seemed to all the populace
a refuge difficult to approach,
a sea with gems but also sharks. 16
Thus, his folk did not transgress
the lines marked out from Manu's time;
they kept to the trail of chariot wheels
left by a skilful charioteer. 17

(16-17)

He levied taxes from the people,

but only for their prosperity,
like the sun which absorbs water
but rains it down a thousand-fold. 18
In due array was kept his army,
which, to be effective, needed,
a mind kept sharp with every science,
and a bow full-drawn to shoot. 19
But his thinking was kept secret,
and hidden too its manifestations,
his moves could only be inferred
by results, like those from a former birth. 20
He had no fear, but guarded himself;
did virtuous deeds though not by stress;
of wealth partook, but with no greed;
and of pleasure, but indifferently. 21
Twinned as if from the very start,
his merits were complementary:
with knowledge, no verbosity;
with power, forgivingness;
and modesty with charity. 22

(18-22)

To the senses unattached,
looking beyond all learning,
devoted to the path of virtue:
he had achieved maturity
even before old age attaining. 23
Giving guidance to his people,
nourishing and protecting them,
he was their veritable father:
others merely gave them birth. 24
The goals of even artha and kama
were for this wise, learned man,
treated as a part of dharma:
for the sake of stability,
he would chastise those who sinned,
and regarded matrimony
as but for the sake of progeny. 25

The earth he milked for virtue's sake,
 as heaven Indra does for rain:
 both nourished their respective regions
 by placing its wealth on pledge. 26
 His glory as the great protector,
 no king indeed could replicate:
 the word for banditry became,
 only hearsay in his rule; 27
 virtuous enemies he accepted
 as a medicine for one sick;
 but the wicked, even dear, rejected,
 like on one's hand the serpent's nick. 28
 Just as he had been created
 by the five great elements' union,
 so too, his merits had but one
 purpose: the welfare of others. 29
 As never done before,
 the earth entire thus he ruled,
 as if it were a single city—
 by the coast ringed around,
 with the ocean as its moat. 30

(26-30)

Like a gift obtained through prayer,
 the king's consort was Sudakshina.
 In the Magadha family born,
 she was known for her nobility, 31
 and though there was a numerous
 harem for this lord of earth,
 he considered himself espoused
 only to this high-minded goddess. 32
 From her, who was his other self,
 he wanted very much to have
 a child, but this wish would not bear
 fruit, and time kept passing on. 33
 To seek a way for having offspring,

he then lay down the heavy burden
of his realm, and handed over
that responsibility to his ministers. 34

(31-34)

JOURNEY THROUGH THE FOREST

And, to the Creator praying,
pure in their wish for a son,
that couple then proceeded to
the hermitage of their guru, Vasishtha, 35
in a chariot with the deep
dulcet rumble of a rain-cloud,
as if in it a streak of lightning
and Airavata, the heavenly elephant. 36
To not trouble the hermitage,
they went with few attendants,
but such was their majestic splendour,
they seemed surrounded by an army. 37

(35-37)

Enjoying the pleasant feel
of that regal forest's breeze,
scented as it passed through trees
of sal, wafting floral pollen; 38
listening to the calls, delightful
and echoing both the tones
of the sixth note, of the peacocks
which heard the chariot, necks upraised; 39
and watching antelope pairs exchanging
mutual glances like their own,
as from the chariot's path they moved,
their gazes upon it still fixed. 40
They went past water birds, which stood
in line, like archways pillar-less,
and called indistinctly as they lifted
their long necks from time to time. 41
And the dust their horses raised,
did not her hair touch or his head-dress,
for the wind with them did blow,
a sign that their wish would be met. 42

(38-42)

So, they went inhaling the fragrance

of lotus flowers from the lakes,
by the rippling water cooled
and replicating their own breath. 43
They passed villages marked by posts
for sacrifice they had donated,
accepting from the residents there
blessings deemed infallible, 44
and taking milk with its fresh butter
offered by the cowherd elders,
while asking them about the names
of forest trees upon their way. 45

(43-45)

How splendid was the spotless raiment
of that couple as they proceeded?
It was like the frost-free union
of the constellation Chitra
with the Moon, as spring begins, [46](#)
and like their begotten, Budha,

was that handsome lord of earth:
yet all that he had pointed out
to his wife he put aside
as they went further on their path. 47
At last, their horses tired out,
that king of incomparable fame
finally did that evening reach
with his queen, the hermitage
of their self-disciplined guru. 48

(43-48)

THE HERMITAGE OF VASISHTHA

It was full of ascetic hermits,
from the forest coming back
unseen, with wood upon their shoulders,
and welcomed by a sacred fire. 49

It was also teeming with
deer, which got of food their share,
crowding at its cottage doors
like the children of the ascetics' wives 50
and, once the heat had diminished,
sitting around the courtyard floors,
chewing cuds of grain which had
by then been spread out for them. 51

(49-51)

The hermit girls would leave young trees
promptly after watering them,
to reassure the birds which would
then drink from their trenches. 52

The air above the hermitage
the lighting of its fires signalled
with a smoke-filled fragrance from
the oblations poured into them:
they purified these visitors too. 53

(52-53)

Commanding then his charioteer
to unyoke and rest the horses,
the king his consort helped dismount
and also came down from the carriage. 54

He was indeed the law's own eye
and protector: so, the hermits
there assembled, self-controlled,
did salute him and his queen. 55

(54-55)

And, as the evening worship ended,
he beheld the ascetic sage
attended by Arundhati,

like Fire by the goddess Svaha. [56](#)

The king, and his queen from Magadha,

touched their feet with due respect

while the guru and his wife

did greet them lovingly. 57

(56-57)

Comforting him from travel's stress

with the rites of hospitality,

the sage asked of the kingdom's welfare

from one himself a royal sage. 58

That conqueror of enemy strongholds

and lord of much wealth did then raise

before that master of the Vedas

some matters which were meaningful. 59

(58-59)

'With you there,' he said, 'to ward off

their problems, human and celestial,

my seven limbs of state cannot but be

all in safe and good condition. [60](#)

You pronounce incantations, and

foes they pacify from afar,

making pointless all my arrows

which can but visible targets pierce. 61

O leader of the sacrifice,

the oblations by you offered

as prescribed into the fire

do become the rainfall for

all greens withering in a drought. 62

If my subjects live full lives

free of fear, without disease,

the reason for it all, indeed,

is your shining godly light. 63

O knower of Atharva Veda,

with you thinking of my welfare,

how can it not continuously

be of every problem free? [64](#)

But here is your daughter-in-law:

seeing her without a child
who could be like myself,
this earth with its gem-filled islands
does please me not at all.' [65](#)

(60-65)

'My forefathers,' he then added,
'are accustomed to oblations
from the *shraddha* ceremony
and, seeing this may discontinue
after me, cannot but be
concerned by that possibility. [66](#)
Considering that the water offered

by me may, after my time,
be hard to get, these progenitors
now find it heated with their sighs. [67](#)
I, too, though cleansed by sacrificing,
do feel shut out without a child:
both in light and darkness I am—
like the hill at this world's end. [68](#)
Merit from charity and penance

gives bliss in the next world, you see,
but progeny in a family pure
gives bliss there and in this world too. [69](#)
And seeing me deprived of that,
how can you not saddened be?
I am, O guru, like a tree
you yourself with love have nurtured
that yet stays fruitless here. [70](#)
Lord, know this is my final debt,
without release from which my pain
is as unbearable as an elephant's
chafing, fettered with a chain. [71](#)

How to be relieved from it
you, O father, should ordain.
It lies in your hands: resolving
such issues in Ikshvaku's line.' [72](#)

(66-72)

Thus spoke n to by the king,
the sage meditated, his eyes closed
for a moment, like a fish
slumbering within a lake. 73
His pure mind in concentration,
he beheld that which denied
progeny for this lord of earth,
to whom he thereafter replied. 74

(73-74)

'Once,' he said, 'the cow celestial,
Surabhi, to your earth proceeding
after serving Shakra, king of heaven,
was resting on the way, beneath
the wish-fulfilling tree, Kalpataru. 75
Though she deserved the courtesy
from you of circumambulation,
you did not perform it, thinking
of the queen's menstrual bath
and fearing compromise of duty. 76
"You have insulted me," she said,
"and so of progeny you will
have none without propitiating one
born of me": she cursed you thus. 77
You did not hear this curse, O king,
nor your charioteer, because
of the cosmic elephants' bathing
in the heavenly river's flow. 78
Know that your wish did then get barred
because, O king, of that insult:
breach of respect when it is due
does obstruct auspicious ends.' 79

(75-79)

'Now, Surabhi at present lives
in the serpent-gated nether world
of Prachetas, the god who holds
long sacrifices,' the guru said. 80
'Therefore treat her daughter as
her representative, and with purity,
serve her together with your wife:
if pleased, she will grant all you wish.' 81

(80-81)

And even as the guru spoke,
that source and pourer of oblations,
from the forest did a cow emerge—
it was the sinless Nandini. 82
Glistening pale red, like a flower,
with some curling white hairs' gleam
on her brow—just like a crescent
moon in twilight, she did to them seem. 83
She dripped milk which appeared to flow
from her having seen a calf:
it wet the earth, was warm, and purer
than that meant for sacred rites. 84

(82-84)

The bits of dust her hooves threw up
brushed the nearby monarch's limbs,
on them bestowing the purity
which comes from an anointment holy. 85
And the sage, who omens understood,
seeing that angelic creature,
and that the ruler's wishful prayer
had been heard, then said to him: 86

(85-86)

'This blessed one has here appeared
as soon as she was invoked.
Know, O king, your goal is now
no longer too far away. 87
You deserve to please this cow.
Do so now, by following her

always, leading a forest life
as for acquiring knowledge. 88
You should move when she is moving,
stand still when she is still,
sit down when she sits,
and drink water when she does. 89
Your devoted consort too,
with purity should reverence her
each morning as she wanders out
of the hermitage, and welcome
her back at dusk each day. 90
Serve her thus, till she is pleased,
and may your task be free of hindrance.
And may you, like your father, have
the best of sons,' the sage concluded. 91

(87-91)

'So be it!' said the king humbly,
a pupil welcoming an order:
the place and time he understood,
and was delighted; his wife too. 92
Meanwhile night had fallen and,
the learned sage, the Creator's son,
let the mighty king retire: 93
he knew how such a vow is kept,
and even though he could organize
for its being done in regal fashion,
he arranged it in the forest. 94
Thus, as directed by the sage,
sleeping on a bed of straw
in a cottage made of leaves,
the king together with his queen,
did in that place spend the night,
the end of which was signalled by
the students' chants at dawn. 95

(92-95)



CANTO 2

DILIPA AND NANDINI

Its calf suckled and separated ,
at dawn the sage's cow received
a fragrant garland from the spouse
of that glorious lord of men,
who let it loose inside the forest. 1
As the pathway's dust was purified
by its hooves, that paragon
of chastity, the wedded wife
of the king did follow it,
like texts remembered those revealed. 2
And then the kindly king relieved
his beloved, to protect

the heavenly Surabhi's radiant offspring,
whose milk shames the oceans four:
guarding it as he did the earth. 3

(1-3)

In keeping with his vow he went with
the cow himself and forbade
his retinue from following,
for he felt no need for others
to defend him: Manu's line
is by its own prowess guarded. 4
Then the sovereign was engrossed
in pleasing the cow with tasty morsels
of grass, stroking its skin, warding off
insect bites, and letting it
wander freely as it willed. 5
He walked with it and also stopped,
stayed on guard when it sat down,
sought of water for its drinking—
following it just like a shadow. 6

(4-6)

Evident was his royal glory,
not from symbols but an aura

like a lordly elephant's is when
it is in rut, before the ichor. 7
Vine tendrils clinging to his hair,
his bow held ready and full-drawn
to guard the sage's cow, he seemed
to be on march across the forest,
controlling wicked elements there,
like the god who wields the noose. 8
While his attendants had dispersed,
the many trees near him did seem
to hail him with the ringing calls
of excited birds upon them, and 9
like a fire, he glowed in the wind
rustling through young nearby creepers,
which greeted him with sprinkled flowers
as city girls do with showers of rice. [10](#)
And the does, with their large eyes,
gazed upon his regal figure:

he held a bow, but his bearing
made a merciful nature known. 11

(7-11)

He heard the sylvan deities sing
of his fame in the treble notes
sounding through the flutes they made
of split bamboo stems filled with air. 12
And the forest air too served him
when he, despite his proper conduct,
was fatigued because of heat
and absence of a parasol:
it did so, cooled by waterfalls
and filled with scents it shook out of trees. 13
With this guard inside the forest,
its fruit and flowers multiplied,
without rainfall were its fires doused,
and its weaker creatures were
not harassed by the bigger ones. 14

By then it was the end of day
 and, having cleansed the forest
 with their presence, they proceeded
 homewards—both the copper-tinted
 sun's light and the sage's cow. 15

The latter, a means for consummating
 the rites for gods, ancestors, guests,
 shone like faith in good men's minds,
 and the king did follow it. 16

He went, seeing the forest darken
 with wild pigs swarming out of pools,
 peacocks headed to nesting trees
 and deer spread out upon the turf. 17

Both he, with his stately form,
 and the young cow with large udders,
 each carrying a heavy burden,
 graced the path they followed them
 to the hermitage as they walked. 18

And the spouse of the king who was
 with Vasishtha's cow returning
 from the wilds, drank in the sight
 with unblinking, thirsty eyes. 19

On the path, before the monarch
 greeted by his wedded wife,
 the cow between them seemed to shimmer,
 like gloaming betwixt day and night. 20

It was circumambulated,
 rice bowl in hand, by Sudakshina
 who bowed to it and offered reverence
 in the space between its horns immense
 for fulfilment of her wishes. 21

Though anxious for its calf, the cow
 stood still, the offering accepted,
 giving that couple great delight:
 for those devoted, such a favour

means their wish will fruitful be. 22

(19-22)

Dilipa, of foe-quelling arms,
then did with his wife massage
the guru's feet and so completed
his evening rites. Then he once more
attended to the cow, now seated
after being milked meanwhile. 23
A gifted lamp placed near that creature,
he sat behind it as the guard
with his wife. They slept only after
it had gone to sleep, and wakened
well before it in the morning.
This became their daily routine, 24
and observing his vow for progeny,
that ruler of great renown
given to helping all poor people,
did together with his queen
thus spend three times seven days. 25

(23-25)

THE KING AND THE LION

Wishing on the following day
to gauge the mind of its protector,
the sage's holy cow did go
inside a grass-covered cave
by the side of Ganga's torrent
in the mountain, birth place of
the goddess Gauri, Shiva's consort. [26](#)

There it was by a lion seized,
the attack unnoticed by the king

who was the hillside's splendour viewing
and thought the cow inviolable,
even by carnivorous creatures. [27](#)

But the good ruler's gaze,
fixed upon that king of mountains,
was as if pulled back and turned
to the cow's loud cry of distress
as it echoed through the cave. [28](#)

(26-28)

And that Bowman then beheld
the lion on the pale red cow
like a blooming *lodhra* tree
upon a mound of ferrous soil. [29](#)

He too was a lion and,
displeased by what he witnessed,

that forceful slayer of his enemies
and known protector, wished to draw
an arrow from his quiver to
strike down that kingly lion. [30](#)

But his right hand, the fingers touching
the arrow's feathers as they gleamed
with the glow of his fingernails,
then did freeze, as if in a picture. [31](#)

And, to strike his nearby foe unable,

his arm frozen, anger rising,
he smouldered with inner rage
like a snake, its venom stayed
by special herbs and incantations. 32

A symbol of the Manu line
with his power leonine,
and a partisan of good people,
he was also filled with wonder
at his own condition, and
even more so when the lion
spoke to him in human voice. 33

(29-33)

'Enough, O monarch!' said the lion.
'Just as the wind's force which uproots
trees is stifled by high rocks,
so, even shot with all your effort
this arrow can no purpose serve. 34
Know me as Nikumbha's friend,
that servant of the eight-formed Shiva,
whose back the deity renders pure
each time he mounts his snow-white bull.
Kumbhodara is the name I bear. [35](#)

(34-35)

'The god, whose banner bears a bull,
has treated like his child that tree
of *deodar* you see ahead.
It knows the taste of milk which flows
from the golden breasts of Skanda's mother,
her son being the heavenly general. [36](#)
Once, this tree's bark was torn off by
an elephant scratching its brow there.

This grieved the Mountain Lady as if
the general was by demons wounded. 37

(36-37)

'From then, to scare off forest elephants,
I was by the god ordained

as a lion in this hill-side cave,
living off nearby creatures. 38
And this cow, come at a time appointed
by the god for quenching hunger,
is for me, who breaks fast on blood,
a moon for the demon of eclipse. [39](#)
Go back! Do not feel ashamed.
A pupil's service for the guru
has by you, sir, been displayed.
If that which is to be protected,
cannot be so with a weapon,
that does not at all diminish
the glory of the weapon's wielder.' 40

(34-40)

Listening to the arrogant words
of the king of beasts, that lord of men
knew his weapon was restrained
by the divine Shiva's power,
and felt humiliated no more. 41
It was as if the thunderbolt,
which its wielder Indra hurls,
had been stayed by Shiva's glance.
His arrow halted similarly
before its use, the king replied. [42](#)

(41-42)

'The words I wish to speak,' he said,
'O lion, may seem laughable,
for my action got restrained.
But I will say them as you, sir, know
all that is in people's minds. 43
That cause of beginning, stay and ending,
of all that moves or is motionless,
that god I honour. But this possession
of the guru cannot be ignored. 44
Therefore, please, with this my person,
meet all of your own body's needs,
and release the sage's cow, whose calf

at day's end will anxious be.' 45

(43-45)

That servant of the lord of elements,
with a little laugh, that split
by its gleaming fangs the darkness
of the cave, then told the king: 46
'Your body's lustre, age still young,
unfettered worldly sovereignty:
all this your wanting to give up for
a trifling reason, seems to be
devoid of any thought to me. 47
If it is that you pity creatures,
your end now will benefit only
this one cow. Therefore live on!
And, from all difficult problems,
O lord of men, protect forever
your people, as a father should. 48
Or, if you fear that fiery guru
for your offence with a single cow,
you, sir, can cool off his chagrin
with the gift of a million cows. 49
So, with your strength, protect yourself,
you enjoy a train of blessings.
A prosperous kingdom, it is said,
is heaven but for being earthly.' 50
With these words, the lion stopped,
but they echoed through the cave.
It was as if the mountain too
said them out of love for the king. 51

(46-51)

But he was a Kshatriya warrior,
and that word's root, it is well known,
means 'one who saves from injury'.
For one to act contrarily,
what would kingdom, even life,
be worth tainted with ignominy? [53](#)
'How can it possible be,' he said,

'to calm the sage with the gift of other
cows? This one is no less than
Surabhi, the cow divine.
If it was attacked by you,
that too was due to Shiva's power. 54
The offer of my body, then,
in exchange for its deliverance
from you, sir, is both fit and fair:
your breaking fast will not be harmed,
nor the sage's liturgy. 55

(53-55)

'You too, sir, are under orders,
your efforts for this deodar show.
One cannot stand before one's master
unhurt but with one's charge destroyed. 56
And if you think that unhurt I should stay,
know that my kind have no care
for the physical form, which must end.
But be merciful to my repute. 57
It is said that dialogue
can lead to friendship, and that too
has taken place between us here.
So, you, O servant of the god,
are my friend and should not spurn
this, my entreaty to you.' 58

(56-58)

As Dilipa did thus speak,
his stricken arm freed instantly,
he dropped his weapon, and to the lion
offered himself as a piece of meat. 59
And at that moment, on his face,
which had been downcast while he thought
of its fierce attack, there fell
a rain of flowers, by godly hands
showered on that people's guardian. 60
The lion was no longer seen,
but he heard a voice—'Arise, O son!'

sweet as nectar, and beheld
just the milk-rich cow before him,
like it were his mother own. 61

(59-61)

GRANTING OF THE BOON

To the king amazed, the cow then said:

'O good man! You have been tested

with an illusion conjured by me.

Such is the sage's power, I cannot
be harmed even by the god of death,
what to say of beasts of prey! 62

And I am pleased with you, my son,
for your devotion to the guru
and for me your sympathy.

Choose a boon! Know that I can give
not just milk, but when satisfied,
all that anyone desires.' 63

(62-63)

He, who had all suppliants pleased,
and earned the title 'mighty hero'
with his own hands, then folded them
and for Sudakshina sought a son
to continue his line with glory. 64
'So be it,' that cow then promised
the king who wished for progeny.
'Milk me, son, in a cup of leaves
and drink that milk,' it instructed him. 65

(64-65)

'I wish, O mother, just to take
the portion of your milk remaining
from the calf and the sacred rites,
and that too with the sage's consent,
as if it were the one-sixth due
from the earth which I look after.' 66
Thus requested by the king,
Vasishtha's cow was further pleased.
Escorted by him, it then returned
from the mountain cave to the hermitage. 67
Its satiety was evident

from good signs, but still the monarch,
his face also a moon of joy,
conveyed it to his guru, and
then again to his darling wife. 68
Thereafter, permitted by Vasishtha,
that blameless guardian of the good
drank eagerly the portion left
by the calf and after the rituals
of the milk of Nandini—
milk bright as glory incarnate. 69

(66-69)

The vow they made now consummated,
the sage gave them his benedictions,
and in the morning sent away
that couple to their capital. 70
His blessings magnified the lustre
of the king, who circumambulated
the fire and the cow with calf,
the master and Arundhati,
as he departed with his queen. 71

(70-71)

His wish fulfilled, that resolute man,
with his wedded wife proceeded
smoothly on his way, enjoying
the merry rumble of the chariot. 72
Anxious had his people been
at not seeing him since long:
they now drank in with thirsting eyes
his appearance, somewhat weakened by
his vow for their sake, as if it
were the new moon freshly risen. 73
The city was with flags aflutter
as he entered, greeted by the citizens.
Glorious like the king of heaven,
in his serpent-strong arms he then
once more assumed the kingdom's care. 74
And pregnant did the queen become,

with a treasure for their family,
endowed with great and godly powers,
like the sky with light from Atri's eyes
and with Shiva's fiery lustre,
the river of the gods. [75](#)

(72-75)



CANTO 3

THE QUEEN WITH CHILD

A requisite for the continuity
of Ikshvaku's family line,

long awaited by her spouse,
and for her friends like autumn moonlight,
Sudakshina's time had now arrived:

she bore the signs of pregnancy. 1
Her limbs lost flesh, she could not wear
all the ornaments as before,
her face turned pale like lodhra flowers,
and she did then appear to be
like the night sky before dawn,
with a fading moon and dimming stars. 2

Her mouth now had an earthy odour
which the king in private smelled
but, like an elephant at a pool
with raindrops filled at summer's end,
it could not content him. 3

It seemed she wanted first a taste
of earth rather than other flavours,
as if her son would take possession
of it when his chariot rested
at land's end like Indra's in heaven. 4

And so, that lord of Uttara Kosala
would always ask, with all respect,
her dear friends: 'This Magadha girl
is so coy, she never tells me
of her wishes, what she wants.' 5

For she had now the hard-to-please
longings of a pregnant woman,
and he could obtain all she wanted
even from paradise itself. 6

Gradually she came out of
the unease of pregnancy,

her limbs filled out and she shone
like a vine without old leaves
but plush with bright new sprouts and shoots. 7
As days passed, her twin breasts,
their nipples dark and somewhat swollen,
surpassed in beauty lotus buds
with two black bees upon them. 8
And the king his queen with child beheld
as the sea-girt earth with treasures loaded,
the *shami* tree with its inner fire
and Sarasvati, the secret stream. 9
Full of all care for his beloved,
with riches from the world entire
earned by the prowess of his arms,
and with his noble inclinations,
the wise monarch then performed
the *punsavana* and other rites
in keeping with due tradition. 10
He then came home, and was overjoyed
by her tender gaze as she,
heavy with a womb that bore
elements of some godly glory,
made efforts from her seat to rise,
her hands feebly clasped in greeting. 11

THE BIRTH OF RAGHU

The lying-in was managed by
trusted physicians, skilled with infants.

Seeing that her time had come
and his beloved was prepared
to give birth, her husband was
filled with bliss, it was as if
at last his sky was filled with rain clouds. 12

In due time she then gave birth,
like Indra's consort, to a son:
it was an everlasting treasure
born of the threefold energy. [13](#)

And at that moment there occurred
good omens: the horizon cleared,
the wind blew favourably, the fire
flamed southwards with oblations offered.

A birth such as this, it was clear,
was for the uplift of the people. 14
The newborn's own effulgence then
spread around the mother's bed;
it outshone the night-time lamps
which suddenly became like pictures. 15

(12-15)

The folk within the inner rooms
began to cry, 'A son is born!'
The words were nectar for the king,
who gave away all things but three:
his moon-white parasol and two
whisks—the signs of royalty. 16
And like a lotus bloom in a windless place,
motionless, with riveted eyes,
the king drank in his dear son's face:
like with the moon the ocean's swell,
his great delight he could not hide. 17
For, like a gem sprung from the mine

was Dilipa's son, and he did shine
even brighter on being anointed
with all the birth rites by the sage
who came there from his hermitage. 18

(16-18)

Drums and pipes played joyous music
with the charming dance of courtesans:
the happy sounds not only flooded
the royal palace but burst upon
even the pathways of the gods. 19
The monarch then had no prisoners
to be freed to mark his prince's birth;
but he freed himself from debts ancestral
by which he alone had been bound. 20
This child, he prayed, will go beyond
book learning as well as foes in war:
and in light of the verb root 'to transcend',
he gave the name Raghu to his son. 21

(19-21)

RAGHU GROWS UP

With all the efforts and resources
of his father, that child grew,

day by day, with lovely limbs,
like the baby moon which waxes,
by the sun's radiance infused. 22

The king and his Magadha consort
delighted in their son, just as
on Skanda's birth did Shiva and Parvati,
and at Jayanta's, Shachi and Indra. 23
Their mutual love was like that of birds,
by feelings for each other bound
and a refuge, one for the other;
now, divided with their son,
between them it grew even greater. [24](#)

(22-24)

The child increased his father's joy
with his first words, when he came
with the nurse, grasping her finger,

with a little bow, as trained. 25
Taking him then in his arms,
and holding him in tight embrace,
was for the king like nectar on his skin,
as he closed his eyes and just enjoyed
the pleasure of his own son's touch. 26

A guardian of the rules eternal,
the king considered his line blessed
by this son's impeccable birth;
it was like Prajapati creating
merit with his manifestations. [27](#)

(25-27)

The child hereafter underwent,
with other boys of his own age,
the ceremony of the first hair-cut

and, with his side locks still dangling,
learned the alphabet, after which
he entered the world of words
like a river does the sea. 28
In time invested with the sacred
thread, this pupil to his teachers dear
was taught by learned gurus whose
efforts met no obstacles as,
with good students, such work bears fruit. 29
For he had an open mind
with a full intelligence,
and crossed in due course all the four
seas of learning, like the sun
crossing quarters of the sky. [30](#)
And, wearing a pure black-buck skin,
he learnt the use of missiles from
his father, not just a king unique,
but also an unequalled archer. 31

(27-31)

Thus did Raghu gradually grow
beyond infancy into youth:
his body matured handsomely,
like a calf's into a well-built bull
or a lordly elephant. 32
Following the ceremony
of his entry into manhood,
his father had him invested with
the sacrament of matrimony,
and princesses like lamps did glow
on obtaining him as husband,
as Daksha's daughters did in the past. [33](#)

(32-33)

With limbs long and muscular,
and chest as broad as a palisade,
young Raghu did surpass his father,

but with good breeding continued
to look smaller than the king. 34
Seeing he was well-disciplined
by temperament as well as training,
the king, who wished to lighten his own
long-held burden of the people,
then made him the Crown Prince. 35
The title a position signalled
next to the king's own primacy,
and royal glory, which seeks merit,
moved to it in partial measure,
like from a full-blown lotus flower
to its new incarnation. 36
And with his help the king became
invincible, like with wind the fire,
with dispersing clouds, the sun,
and like with rut, the elephant. 37

(34-37)

INDRA AND THE HORSE SACRIFICE

The king appointed his archer son
to lead the noblemen in guarding

the horse, and held without obstruction
full nine and ninety sacrifices,
like Indra with his century. [38](#)

For the hundredth sacrifice
a horse was once again let loose
but, in front of the guarding archers,
Indra stole it secretly. 39

While the princely guard were left
amazed but grieved and lost in thought,
Nandini, Vasishtha's cow,
whose power is well known to all,
on her own did there arrive. 40

And, putting the blessed water from
her body to his eyes, Dilipa's son,
who was honoured by good people,
became enabled to perceive
even that which is invisible. 41

And the prince beheld the god,
cutting through the eastern mountains,
abducting their horse, now leashed
to his chariot, its restiveness
by the charioteer controlled. 42.

(38-42)

From the eyes that did not blink
and the chariot with its hundred steeds,
Raghu realized it was Indra,
and addressed him in solemn words
which seemed to echo in the sky. [43](#)
'O king of gods,' he said, 'you are
always by sages described
as the first partaker of

every sacrifice. So, how can you
be set to spoil that of my father
whose rites are zealous and unceasing? 44
O lord of all the three worlds,
by you with your sight divine
the spoilers of such rites have always
been restrained and, if that is so,
to yourself become an obstacle
in such deeds by virtuous people
is dereliction of the law. 45
As such, Indra, you should free
this horse which is the foremost part
of this great rite, for lords divine,
who show the path laid down in scriptures,
do not follow wicked ways.' 46

(43-46)

The lord of heaven was astonished
to hear the bold words Raghu spoke,
and turning around his chariot, he
began to answer back. 47
'What you say is so, O prince.
But those to whom their glory matters
have to guard it against others.
And your father, sir, is trying
with this sacrifice to undo
all my glory so well known. 48
Just as Vishnu alone
is known by sages as Purushottama,
and only Shiva as Tryambaka,
so am I Shatakratu,
or centurion of sacrifice;
there is no second for this title. 49
Therefore, like Kapila, I have seized
this your father's stallion.
Enough of your efforts here,
do not follow Sagara's sons.' 50

RAGHU FIGHTS INDRA

Raghu laughed, and fearlessly

spoke to Indra once again:

'If this indeed is your decision,
then first defeat the horse's guardian.

Take hold of your weapons, sir!' 51

Then on his bow he fixed a shaft
and, facing Indra, took a stance
with his body bent like Shiva. 52

Struck in the breast by Raghu's arrow,
Indra mounted an infallible one
on his bow which puts to shame
the moment of the gathering clouds. 53

Used to the blood of fierce demons,
that arrow pierced Dilipa's son
between his great arms, curious
for untasted human gore. 54

Valiant as another Skanda,
the prince then did plant a missile
bearing his own name upon
Indra's arm, which had a sign
traced by Shachi, and fingers hardened
in the driving of his elephant. [55](#)

And with a peacock-feathered arrow,
he cut down Indra's banner marked
with a great thunder bolt.

This incensed the god, as if
his glory had by force been shorn. 56

(51-56)

Then commenced between the two,
one looking upwards, one below,
a clash tumultuous; arrows flew
like winged snakes with dreadful glow,
past gods and troops in the vicinity,
both striving to gain victory. 57

The rain of missiles hurled by Indra,
ceaselessly, could not put out
that citadel of formidable radiance,
just as clouds cannot quench fires caused
by lightning they themselves let loose. 58
Then, with a crescent-headed shaft
Raghu severed Indra's bowstring
with a sound like oceans being churned
by the sandal-tinted arm divine. 59
With rage redoubled then the god
put down his bow for fighting with
a forceful foe and took hold of
the shimmering thunderbolt missile
he used for cutting the wings of mountains. 60
Struck hard by it upon his chest,
Raghu on the ground collapsed
amidst his soldiers shedding tears
but, shaking off the pain, stood up
within moments to their cheers. 61
And, seeing he was still prepared
for a long and hard fight with him,
Indra too was satisfied
by his bravery immense:
with due merit one may plant
one's foot in each and every place. 62
'My potent weapon,' Indra said,
'could not be stopped by even mountains.
No one else but you endured it.
Know me to be pleased, and ask
for anything, except this horse.' 63
The prince, who always softly spoke,
had then half drawn from his quiver
an arrow which his fingers lit
with a golden glow. He restored it,
and to the king of gods replied. 64
'Master,' he said, 'if you think
this horse to be unreleasable,

then bestow the fruit entire
of this sacrifice, completed
with due rites, upon my father
purified by their performance. 65
To obtain that fruit is hard
as it is a part of Shiva,
so, please make sure the king directly
hears your message from its bearer.' 66

(63-66)

On Raghu's wish, the god then promised,
'So be it,' and Malati,
his charioteer, straightaway proceeded
to the king's assembly hall,
and so too did Sudakshina's son,
though not in too cheerful a mood. 67
The king had already been informed
by Indra's message bearer and
met his son, whose body bore
the wound made by the thunderbolt,
caressing it with both his hands
which were now benumbed with joy. 68

(66-68)

RAGHU SUCCEEDS DILIPA

The esteemed monarch had by now,
with ninety-nine great sacrifices,
prepared the stairway for one seeking

to mount to heaven at life's end. 69
His mind had turned from worldly matters
and, now yielding with all ceremony,
to his young son the white parasol,
the emblem of his royalty,
he departed with his queen
to the shade of hermitage trees,
as was the family tradition
of Ikshvakus on growing old. 70

(69-70)



CANTO 4

RAGHU AS KING

With the realm on him bestowed
by his father, he then shone
even more, as does the fire
with sun's light when day is done. [1](#)
As the fuming hearts of other rulers
flamed like fire at the news
that he was duly established
after Dilipa as the king, [2](#)
the people and their progeny,

their eyes raised up, were overjoyed
to behold this new elevation,
like that of Indra's flag celestial. [3](#)
For this royal elephant-rider
had taken into full control
both his father's throne as well
as a whole circle of enemies. [4](#)

(1-4)

The goddess of prosperity, Padma,
though unseen, with divine glow,
herself served this new crowned king, [5](#)
and Sarasvati, of speech the goddess,
stood with bards to sing his praise
in paeans which were meaningful. [6](#)
And the earth, though it had been
enjoyed by Manu, and such rulers,
offered itself to this monarch
as if it was the first occasion. [7](#)
For, with equitable policies,
he had captured every heart:
he was like the southern breeze,
neither too soft nor too sharp. [8](#)
And with his merits he relieved

the people's longing for his father:
like the mango bloom, forgotten
when on the tree the fruit appears. 9
And when experts explained to him
both noble and base policies;
the first alone did he accept
never of the second kind. 10

(5-10)

With this new lord of the earth,
all things seemed to new become:
even in the five great elements,
their qualities were amplified. 11
As from the root sense of the word,
a moon means that which gives delight,
and a sun that which can scorch,
so he truly was a king:
one who keeps the folk content. 12
His large eyes to the ears extended,
but through the law was his perception:
it also saw the subtleties
of a work and its intent. 13

(11-13)

A NEW TURN

With the season of the autumn lotus,
a second royal glory came
to this king who had already
made his inheritance secure. [14](#)
His irresistible radiance
spread in all directions, like
the sun's when, their water spent,
empty clouds from the sky disperse. 15
As Indra laid the rainbow down,

Raghu raised the bow of victory:
both endeavouring to obtain
more benefits for the populace. 16
And he was by autumn followed,
though his royalty it could not match
with the white lotus, its parasol,
and its whisks the flowering grass. 17

(14-17)

Those, who could see, took delight
in him no less than in the moon:
for both had similar relish,
one with its pellucid light,
the other with his graceful glow. 18
Raghu's glory was reflected
in the splendour of the stars,
in the rows of flying swans,
and in waters white with lilies. 19
And farmer women sang of it,
resting in the cane field's shade
while guarding harvested rice:
their great protector's merits had
been talked of by even their boys. 20

(18-20)

Now waters turned clear with the rise
of the pitcher-born sage's star,

but the minds of foes were filled
with fears that Raghu may now attack. [21](#)
For his power seemed to be
like that of massive, huge-humped bulls
at play: as if in a game,
they tear down even river banks. 22
And his elephants, maddened by

the odour of mimosa trees,
exuded rut from seven places,
as if in retaliation. [23](#)

(21-23)

Firstly, it was autumn's power
which his setting forth inspired:
it makes the rivers fordable
and dries the slush from marching tracks. 24

Then the fire kindled for
the rite *niranjana*
flamed towards the right, as if
itself to hand him victory. [25](#)

(24-25)

MARCH TO VICTORY

His palace and the forts protected,
his armed force's rear secured,
he set forth with a sixfold army,
seeking world-wide victory. 26

Old city women sent him off
in a shower of rice grains,
like foam flecks on Vishnu raining
when breakers from the sea of milk
crash on the Mandara mountain. [27](#)

He was like another Indra,
and he eastwards headed first,
his banners tossing in the wind,
as if to warn adversaries. 28
With elephants looking like dark clouds

and chariots raising clouds of dust,
he made the earth look like the sky
and the sky just as the earth. 29

(26-29)

The army moved to fourfold beats,
first of glory, then of tumult,
after that the dust, the chariots
and the rest just marched behind. 30

And, with his power he transformed
deserts into watered land,
brightened dark forests, made
fordable rivers that needed boats. 31

He led an enormous army,
like Bhagiratha did the Ganga
when she from Shiva's locks cascaded. [32](#)

(30-32)

THE EAST

With chiefs displaced, of gains deprived,
and in many other ways put down,
his path he cleared, like of the brushwood,
one trodden by the elephants. 33
Vanquishing thus the eastern lands,
that victor reached the vicinity
dark with forests of palm trees,
of the vastness which was the sea. 34

(33-34)

His force was like a river's torrent,
uprooting that which did not bend:
the Suhma people saved themselves
by resort to pliancy. 35

With his legions he then set up,
on islands in the Ganga's stream,
his victory pillars upon defeating
the Bangas, who use boats to fight. 36,
At Raghu's feet their chiefs prostrated,
and filled his granaries with grain;
he greeted them like rice shoots are
pulled out, to be replanted again. 37

(35-37)

He crossed the river Kapisha with
a bridge of elephants his troops formed,
and by a path the Utkalas showed
he then marched towards Kalinga. 38
And there he planted his fierce glory
on Mahendra's mountain peak,
like a skilful driver placing
the goad upon the elephant. 39
Kalinga's chief, with use of elephants,

put up resistance, showering him
with missiles, as the mountains did

with rocks when Indra cut their wings. 40

But that hail of iron arrows,
the scion of Kakutstha treated
like a ceremonial bath
before he claimed a victory. [41](#)

And there his soldiers made a place
for quaffing wine of coconuts
from cups of folded betel leaves
while vanquishing the enemy. 42
But a virtuous victor was the king,

he caught then freed Mahendra's lord,
dispossessing him just of glory,
not his kingdom nor the land. 43

(38-43)

THE SOUTH

Thereafter, down the ocean's coast,
wreathed with fruiting betel palms,
he proceeded southwards, undefeated,
like the sage Agastya. [44](#)

His troops enjoyed Kaveri's waters
which, scented with the rut of elephants,
now seemed coloured as they flowed
towards the sea, the lord of rivers. [45](#)

The force, however, went ahead
in search of further victories;
it camped in the hill Malaya's valley,
where pigeons flit through pepper fields. [46](#)

And the pollen from the fruit
of cardamom plants tossed up
by his horses' hooves did stick
to elephants whose rut smelt the same; [47](#)
but the collars round their necks did not

slip even though they tried to break
on the way their threefold chains
on trees of sandal coiled with serpents. [48](#).

(48-44)

Even though the sun's own radiance
tends to dim in that direction,
the Pandya rulers of the south
could not withstand great Raghu's power. [49](#)

Where the river Tamraparni
meets the sea, they offered him
in homage their hordes of pearls,
as also their store of fame. [50](#)

His valour was irresistible,
and he then enjoyed at will
the sandalwood tree-covered slopes
of the Malaya and the Dardura hills,
the twin breasts of southern lands, [51](#)

as he crossed the Sahya range,
with its covering slipped away
like from the flanks of earth itself. 52
His army was now prepared
to move on towards the west,
and swarmed along the Sahya hills,
which seemed again to be conjoined
to the sea, from which they had
been separated by Parasurama. [53](#)
And the dust his soldiers raised
took the place of ornaments
which Kerala women, out of fear,
had discarded from their hair. [54](#)

(49-54)

The tunics of his warriors,
that protected them from arrows,
had effortlessly been pervaded
by the pollen of screw pine flowers
in the river Mur ala's breeze; 55
but the sound of palm leaves trembling
in that breeze was overtaken
by the tinkling armour on the bodies
of their horses as they moved, 56
while bees left *nagesvara* flowers
to settle on the elephants' temples
which smelt of their rut, exuded
while they were to the date palms tied. [57](#)

(55-57)

THE WEST

The rulers in the western region,
who had asked for and been given
land for the sage Parasurama,

now to Raghu paid tribute. 58

And he a victory pillar mounted
on the hill Trikuta, where
the marks of his prowess were clear
from pits dug by his rutting elephants. 59

He, who had controlled his passions,
the elements understood, and knew
that the senses are one's real foes,
then by the surface route proceeded
on the conquest of the Parasikas. [60](#)

For he had never tolerated
their ways and those of Yavana women,
just as fresh lotus buds cannot
the rising of unseasonal clouds. 61

(58-61)

Then took place a fight tumultuous
with the westerners, on horses mounted,
the twang of bows alone made known
the contestants in that dust. 62

And he cut with crescent arrows
their bearded heads, which fell on the ground
to cover it, like beehives
enveloped by hordes of bees. 63

Taking off their helmets, then
the rest came to him for sanctuary:
for the anger of great souls, they knew,
submission is the best remedy. 64

And his own warriors then relieved
the fatigue of their victory
with wine on deer skin mats they spread

on the ground in a captured winery. 65

(60-65)

THE NORTH

Thereafter did Raghu proceed
towards the north, to dry it up
with arrows, like the sun with rays
dries the moisture boreal. 66

On the river Sindhu's banks
he stayed, his toiling to relax,
as did his horses, shaking off
the saffron powder on their flanks. [67](#)

And then, the flush upon the cheeks
of the Huna women did display
Raghu's actions on their lords,
which made clear his mastery. [68](#)

The Kambojas also were unable

to resist his great virility,
they bent low, like walnut trees
pulled down to tie his elephants, [69](#)
and gifted to the Kosala lord

much gold and many horses fine,
though he had no covetous arrogance. [70](#)

(66-70)

Thereafter, riding on his horse,

he went up the Himalayan mountain,
embellishing its peak with dust
raised from its wealth of minerals. 71

The lions sleeping in their caves,
turned to gaze upon his troops
but were untroubled by their noise:
it showed their spirit was like his. 72

(71-72)

Meanwhile, a cool breeze on the path,
rustling through the birch tree leaves,
and making *kichaka* bamboos whistle,

served to offer relaxation. [73](#)
And his soldiers rested in the shade
of *namura* trees, on rocks
scented with the musk exuded
by deer which had been sitting there. [74](#)
At night they were then guided by

herbs which shone like oil-less lamps,
lighting the collars of elephants
tethered to the *sarala* pines. [75](#)
But when they were from them untied,
the tree bark torn off by their ropes
made it known to forest tribes
the dimensions of those elephants. 76

(73-76)

There took place a fierce battle
with these mountain-dwelling tribes
hurling rocks and iron arrows
from whose friction flames arose. 77
But those clans, so given to feasting,
Raghu deprived of merriment
with arrows, making forest deities
sing paeans of victory to his arms. 78
And with their tribute in his hands,
each side the other understood,
the king the treasures Himalayan,
and the hill tribes, royal power. 79
Planting there his fame immutable,
as if to take away its shame
for having been by Ravana shaken,
he from the Himalaya then descended. [80](#)

(77-80)

Next he crossed the stream Lauhitya
and his elephants tied to trees
of black aloe wood, which then trembled
as did the Pragjyotisvara lord, [81](#)

who could not bear even the dust
raised up on the chariots' path
which covered the sun as if with clouds.
How could he fight this army? 82
So, that lord of Kamarupa,

to him, whose valour had surpassed
even Indra's, did present
elephants which had defeated others. [83](#)
And, treating him like a deity,
his feet placed on a seat of gold,
the king of Kamarupa then
honoured him with gems and flowers. 84

(81-84)

R AGHU'S RETURN

This triumphant victor now turned back,
having won in all directions,
letting the dust in the wake of his chariots
rest on the heads of kings deprived

of their royal parasols. 85

He then performed the *Visvajit*,
the sacrifice of world victory,
in which is offered all one has:
for acquisition is only for
giving away, and good men are
like the clouds which give of rain. 86

(85-86)

Treating them like friends and comrades,
and calming shocks of their defeat
with munificent gifts and presents,
that scion of the Kakutstha line,
permitted the kings to then return
to their own capitals, where
their women had long awaited them. 87

They bowed to him as they departed,
their fingers touching both the feet
of their sovereign, turning them
white with pollen displaced from
the flowers worn upon their heads:
for those feet bore royal signs
and could be reached but at his pleasure. 88

(87-88)



CANTO 5

RAGHU MEETS KAUTSA

The monarch, who had given away
his entire treasury
in the *Visvajit* sacrifice,
was by Kautsa now approached:

this student of the sage Varatantu,
having all knowledge obtained,
sought a due fee for his guru. 1
Faultless was the king's character,
hospitable and bright with fame.
He had no gold, so took the water
for the guest in a cup of clay, 2
and the ascetic did he greet
with ceremony, he knew the rules,
and that respect is the best of gifts;
then seating him on a grassy mat,
with folded hands the king addressed him. 3

(1-3)

'Is your guru well,' he asked,
'that foremost of the learned sages,
from whom you have now acquired
all wisdom, student, as do people
get awareness from the sun? 4
His penances were always done
through body, speech and also mind;
is that triad of the sage
which makes Indra lose his calm,
being by that god obstructed? 5
The trees within your hermitage,
cared for no less than a child,
with diligence, and water channels
which can then reduce the labour:
are they free from accidents
of conflagration and the rest? 6

And are they safe, the baby deer,
which drop umbilical cords on beds
of hermits who, lovingly, do not refuse
their wishes even for the grass
kept for sacred ceremonies? 7
Is all well with your blessed stream
of water for ritual ablutions
and the offerings to ancestors,
with the one-sixth grain to give as tax
kept aside on its sandy shore?' 8

(4-8)

'Did the village cattle consume
the wild rice and similar grain
you keep aside for possible guests
as also for your own subsistence? 9
And, after his thorough teachings,
has a pleased sage permitted you
to move into that second stage,
the time for which has now arrived,
that of the householder, capable
of looking after the other stages? 10
Have you come here from the forest
at his command or on your own?
For just your coming, worthy one,
does not content my mind, so eager
to act in keeping with your wishes.' 11

(9-11)

On hearing Raghu's generous words,
but noting from the cup of clay
that his wealth was gone already,
that disciple of Varatantu,
his hopes for getting what he wanted
now weakened, to the king replied. 12
'We are well, O king,' he said,
'in every way. How can there be
any problem for your subjects
when you, our lord and master, rule;

just as with the shining sun,
how can this world be dark? 13
Your Majesty has gone beyond
your ancient family tradition
of devotion to the learned, but
it is my sorrow that I come
as a supplicant to you
when the time has passed already. 14
Your wealth to worthy people gifted,
you reign, O king, with just your body—
like stalks of wild rice that remain
after the fruit is plucked by forest people. 15
Though a ruler paramount,
you show that nothing must be left
after a great sacrifice:
it is like the waning moon,
its glory being drunk by gods,
which is then more laudable
than when it is just waxing. 16
May all be well with you.
As my work cannot be done
here, I will now to others go
to get things for my guru's sake.
The *chataka* bird too does not ask
an autumn cloud which has no rain.' [17](#)

(12-17)

Saying this, he tried to leave,
but the king detained the sage's student.
'What is it, O learned one,'
he asked, 'that you must your guru give,
of what and how much should it be?' 18
To the leader of all castes and stages,
who performed all prescribed rites
but free of arrogance remained,
that learned celibate then replied. 19
'At end of study with the sage,
I asked about the guru's fee.

He said it was but my devotion
and service to him done since long. 20
But my constant asking angered him
and, my scanty means ignoring,
he said: 'You count the sciences taught,
and give me fourteen crores of money.' 21
And, seeing from this cup of water
that Your Majesty has now been
left only with the title 'Master',
I dare not press you for the cost
of my studies which is much more.' 22

(18-22)

By that twice-born best of scholars
thus informed, the sovereign lord,
whose senses were of all sins cleansed,
with a moon-like glow then spoke again. 23
'May I never have to face
such censure, that a learned scholar
seeking something for his guru,
and, from Raghu, failing to get it,
had to go to another donor. 24
So, worthy one, be good enough
to stay here for a few more days
in my well-known fire temple
like the fourth among its sacred flames
while I try to meet your needs.' 25
Convinced the pledge was not in vain,
the ascetic accepted it. Meanwhile,
seeing it was the god of wealth
who the riches of the world collected,
Raghu planned to take it from Kubera. 26

(23-2 6)

Like a cloud empowered by
Vasishtha's incantations and
which moves unhindered in the sky,
helped by sea winds and the hills,
his chariot was unstoppable. 27

And brave Raghu, full of zeal,
with his wish by force to vanquish
that lord of mount Kailasa, slept
at dusk itself in that armoured chariot. [28](#)

But, at dawn, as he was riding out,
the men appointed to his treasury
told him with great bewilderment
that a golden rain had fallen
in the treasury from the sky. [29](#)
It was a glittering pile of gold,

cut off, as if, by thunderbolts,
from the peak of mount Sumeru.

Obtained from Kubera, who
felt menaced by the royal intent,
it was now by the king donated
to Kautsa in its entirety. [30](#)

And both men were lauded by
all the denizens of Saketa:
one who sought unselfishly
more than was the guru's fee,
and the other who then gave much more
than what the supplicant had sought. [31](#)

(27-31)

That people's king then got a hundred
mules and camels to carry the gold
and bowed before the happy sage
while Kautsa held his hand and said: [32](#)
'Is it strange if, with a king

who abides by proper conduct,
the earth gives what the people want?
But it was indeed beyond all thought
that with your power, even the sky
would yield all one could wish for. [33](#)
You have the best of everything,

a blessing for which would be repetitious,
so may you have a son like yourself,
and be a father as yours was.' 34
With this blessing to the king,
that scholar to his guru proceeded.
And, with it, the monarch too,
like the world with sunlight brightened,
very soon did have a son. 35

(32-35)

THE ADVENT OF AJA

Just before the break of dawn,
at a time by Brahma blessed,
his queen gave birth to a son
and the father named him Aja,
after the god and the holy moment.
The boy looked like the god Kumara; [36](#)
like a lamp lit from another,
he was no different from his father:
the same looks and vitality,
the same force and nobility. 37

(36-37)

From gurus he obtained due learning
and, with youth, became more pleasing.
Royal glory, though it sought him,
like a lofty-minded virgin
who awaits parental sanction,
looked for the consent of his father. 38
Then Bhoja, lord of the land Vidarbha,
eager that the prince be present
for the *svayamvara* ceremony
of his sister Indumati,
to Raghu an envoy despatched. [39](#)
And he, thinking his son to be
at a stage befitting marriage,
and this a noble alliance,
sent the prince with a troop of soldiers
to Vidarbha's opulent capital. 40

(38-40)

With facilities fit for kings,
furnished by provincial people,
places for the prince's stay
were like pleasure parks on the way. 41
The journey done, Aja camped the tired
force, its banners covered with dust,
on the river Narmada's banks

where the *naktamala* trees

shook in a cool and moist breeze. [42](#)

AJA AND THE ELEPHANT

There they saw an elephant wild,
which had gone inside the water
to avoid the bees above it,
from the river now emerging
with its rutting temples washed. 43

Its body cleansed of mineral soil,
the dark lines upon its twin tusks
blunted by rocks, pointed to
its butting at Rikshavata's slopes. 44

Its trunk curling and unfurling
to cut through the river's flow,
to the shore it headed noisily,
as if to break some chaining post. 45

Like a great rock it appeared
as it neared the river's bank,

breaking out of the flow before it
and pulling a net of weeds behind. 46

(43-46)

This was a solitary elephant
with the rich rut dripping stopped
from its temples for the moment
while it was inside the water:
but seeing others, though not wild,
it started rutting once again. 47

This rut had a pungent odour
like the milk of seven-leaf trees,
unbearable for the army elephants
which, on smelling it, ignored
their mahouts and ran away. 48

Thus, that beast created turmoil
in the army camp entire
with chainless draught horses fleeing,
chariots downed with broken axles

and soldiers helpless to protect
women in that turbulence. 49

(47-49)

The learned prince knew that for a king
wild elephants are inviolable:
to turn away that charging creature,
he shot an arrow at its brow
but with the bow not fully drawn. 50
And while astonished soldiers watched,
as soon as it was struck, the beast
gave up its elephant shape, assuming
the radiant form of a heavenly being
shining midst a ring of light. 51

(50-51)

Showering the prince with blooms
plucked by magic from trees celestial,
his garland gleaming like his teeth,
that eloquent one then spoke to him: 52
'Know me to be Priyamvada,
the son of Priyadarshana, lord
of the *gandharvas* divine.
Matanga cursed me for my pride,
and I turned into an elephant. [53](#)
Now, though fire makes it hot,
water is by nature cool,
and with my prayers at his feet,
the sage was at last pacified. 54
Then that store of penance told me:
"When Aja of Ikshvaku's line
does pierce your forehead with
an arrow made of iron, then
you will resume your form divine." 55
By you, whose sight I long awaited,
and your power I am now freed
from the curse, and if I cannot

reciprocate such good to you
my having it is but in vain. 56
So, comrade, accept this weapon,
the sleep-inducing *Sammohana*
of the gandharvas, with separate
spells for its recall and use:
its user does gain victory
without killing the enemy. 57
You struck me, but with sympathy,
so do not feel at all embarrassed
or make show of any roughness,
and refuse this, my request.' 58

(52-58)

'So be it!' said the prince then
and, touching the water pure
of the river Narmada,
he received the weapon's spells
from one now from the curse released. 59
Thus, by an inexplicable chance
they friends became and went their way,
one to the Chaitraratha celestial
and the other to Vidarbha's kingdom. [60](#)

(59-60)

THE AWAKENING OF AJA AT VIDARBHA

There, overjoyed at his arrival,
like sea waves rise to greet the moon,
Vidarbha's lord went out to meet him
on the outskirts of the town. 61

Humbly did he let the prince
precede him into the capital,
with such a wealth of offering that
people thought he was the visitor
and Aja master of the place. 62
But he was like his father, Raghu,
and stayed where bowing officers took him,
a charming place before an altar
adorned with pitchers filled with water
for him, a youthful god of love. 63
There, at the svayamvara ceremony
of that attractive best of damsels,
for the royalty assembled
there was no sleep throughout the night:
they sought her, but were unaware
of Aja and his qualities. [64](#)

(61-64)

His unguents rubbed off in bed sheets,
the ear jewels pressing on his shoulders,
at dawn he was by bards awakened
as they sang most charmingly. 65
'O best of minds, the night is over.
Wake up! The burden of the world
has in two parts been divided
by the gods, and one of them
is by your sleepless father borne;
the other now rests on you. 66
You, sir, want to stay asleep,
but night is like a woman scorned
who will not for your wishes care,

and the moon, which sports with comfort,
is from you its glow withdrawing
as it does set in the west. 67

(65-67)

'Two openings are beautiful,
and may they happen here, together:
of the lotus with the bee inside,
and of your eyes with their gleaming pupils. 68
The morning breeze is seeking now
the natural fragrance of your breath,
shaking trees with blooms to get it
and from lilies unfolding in the sun. 69
Dewdrops spread like strings of pearls
on coppery leaves of new tree sprouts
are as charming as your teeth,
which gleam behind your smiling lips. 70
As, even before the sun appears,
darkness is dispelled by dawn,
so, with you in the van of battle,
does your father need to slay the foes? 71
Up are your elephants, with their tusks
looking like red chalk in dawn's light,
and their clinking chains removed,
as, done with sleep, they leave their beds. 72
And your Persian horses too,
tied inside large, cloth-bound bowers,
have given up sleep and now besmirch
with their licks those slabs of salt. 73
The floral bouquets are now faded,
the light of lamps is fading too;
even your parrot, in its cage,
repeats our words to wake you up!' 74

(68-74)

With these words sung by the bards,
the prince awoke and quit his bed,
like Supratita, the celestial elephant,
when by royal swans awakened,

leaves the sand banks of the Ganga. 75

Having thereafter performed
the rites appropriate to the morning,
and accoutred suitably,
he went to the royal assembly
for the svayamvara ceremony. [76](#)

(75-76)



CANTO 6

THE SVAYAMVARA GATHERING

There he saw, upon a rostrum

ceremonially bedecked,
many kings in splendid dresses,
enthroned like gods are in the sky. 1
They too beheld Kakutstha's scion

who looked like Kama, god of love,
and hope of attaining Indumati
in their minds began to fade. 2

(1-2)

Like a lion cub which scrambles up
a mountain peak, with rocks for stairs,
the prince that fine rostrum mounted
by the steps Vidarbans showed. 3
And, upon a seat gem-studded,
spread with cloth of many colours ,
he gleamed like Guha, god of war,
riding on his peacock mount. 4
His glory in that row of kings
spread with rays a thousandfold,
like lightning in a line of clouds
with flashes that are hard to watch. 5
And the son of Raghu shone
amidst those dashing, richly dressed
chiefs on magnificent seats
like among the trees celestial
shines *parijata*, the coral tree. 6
The people's gaze was turned on him,
leaving the other kings aside,
as in a forest, bumblebees
will abandon flowering trees
for the odour of an elephant's rut. 7

(3-7)

While expert bards then eulogized

the scions of those royal lines,
the incense *agaru* was lit,
its smoke swirling through the flags. 8
And the auspicious sound
of pipes and conch shells that was heard
all over had the peacocks dancing
in all parks around the city. 9
Then, in a litter four men carried,
and by her family surrounded,
on the rostrum's path arrived
the girl adorned in wedding dress
who was to choose a husband. 10
In her was manifest the finest
of the Creator's work, and now
a hundred eyes were on this maiden
fixed, while the inner thoughts of kings
flew to her, with just their bodies
left upon their royal seats. 11

(8-11)

Like new sprouts on trees appearing,
their efforts at attracting her—
with initial signals of desire
which could manifest their wishes—
many different forms assumed. 12
One a lotus blossom twirled
with its stem cupped in his hands,
the pollen still inside the bloom,
the leaves being flapped to shoo off bees. 13
Another, more voluptuously,
made a face, while pulling up
a sash which had slipped off his shoulder,
and thumping his gem-studded armband. 14
Another lowered his eyes a bit
as, with all his toes contracted,
he scratched beneath his golden seat
with his feet, their toenails shining. 15

Yet another, a shoulder raised,
the garland hanging down his back,
his left arm placed across the seat,
was in talking with a friend engrossed. 16

A young one, with his fingertips
a delicate screw pine leaf caressed
as if it were a sweetheart's bottom
or, perhaps, an ear decoration
for the pleasure of some wanton girl. 17

And another, with his palm,
copper-tinted like a lily,
marked with the outline of a flag
and gleaming with bejewelled fingers,
tossed up dice, as if in sport. 18

Another prince his crown adjusted,
which, though in place, had slipped a bit,
with a hand he moved towards
its diamond-studded opening. 19

(12-19)

THE PRESENTATION CEREMONY

Then she who knew all families,
Sunanda, keeper of the door,
bold and eloquent like a man,
led the princess to the lord
of Magadha and there announced: 20

'This is Parantapa, king of Magadha:
he is, like his name, a scorcher
of others, but also well known
as a sanctum for refuge seekers,
famed for his subjects contenting,
and with a nature fathomless. [21](#)
Just as, though strung with stars and planets,
the night is lit up by the moon,
so too, though there are kings in hundreds,
it is by him that this earth is known
as having a real ruler. 22
Indra he always invites
for his sacrifices , so
Shachi, the consort of that god,
has turned pale of face since long
with no flowers in her hair. 23
He is worth choosing, and if you wish
that he take your hand, you could
then the Pushpapura palace enter,
a feast for all the ladies there.' 24
Thus spoken to, that slender girl
looked at him, then slowly lowered
the garland strung with honey flowers
and with a ritual formal bow
passed him by without a word. 25

(20-25)

As billows surging with the wind
take a swan on the lake Manasa
to yet another lotus, so,

she who bore the baton, then
took the princess to another king. 26
'This,' she said, 'is the lord of Anga,
whose beauty and youth are sought
even by celestial nymphs,
for though he is in this world,
his status is like that of Indra.
His elephants are by experts trained, [27](#)
and he made the tears of his foes' wives
spread upon their breasts like pearls
enormous and in garlands that
were not held together by any string. 28
The goddesses of wealth and eloquence,
though they different natures have,
both within him dwell, and you,
O blessed one, are fit to be,
with your grace and gentle speech,
the third among that divinity.' 29
It was not that he was unattractive,
nor that she could not see and judge.
But people do have different tastes,
and that girl did from the king of Anga
her gaze avert as she asked
the escort mother to carry on. 30

(26-30)

Then that door-keeper showed
to Indumati another king
handsome as a moon newly risen,
though unbearable to enemies. 31
'This one with long arms,' she said,
'broad of chest and slim of waist,
is the ruler of Avanti.
He glows like the sun when it was burnished
by the god Tvashtra on his grindstone. [32](#)
He has all the powers and,
when he marches out, the dust
raised by his advancing horses

shrouds the crest jewels of all chiefs. 33

His abode is not far from
the temple of Mahakala, where
that god crested with the moon

lights up even moon-less dusks
for enjoyment with his friends. [34](#)

Are you, of lovely thighs, inclined
to take pleasure with this king
in the gardens rustling with
breezes from the river Sipra?’ 35

But he was like a sun, which can
make friends bloom like lotus flowers
while drying the enemy mud with heat:
and that delicate lily of a girl
was not drawn to him. 36

(31-36)

The Creator had endowed her with
the charming hue of lotus petals,
she did not lack in any merit.

Taking her before the monarch
of Anupa, Sunanda spoke again. [37](#)

‘There was a king named Kartavirya,
a unique holder of that title,
a yogi, thousand-armed in battle,
who in all the eighteen islands
had sacrificial pillars planted. 38

He also was the people’s guide:
and if they even thought about

evil deeds, he promptly would
appear before them, bow in hand,
and command them to behave. 39

In his gaol had been confined
even that conqueror of Indra,
the lord of Lanka, all whose mouths
were filled with sighs, and his arms tied,

until this king was satisfied.' 40

(37-40)

'In his line,' she continued,
'was born the ruler here, Pratipa,
who serves old and learned people
and has disproved the calumny
of royal glory being fickle. 41
He had the fire god's support
in battle and as such regarded
the sharp edge of the axe of Rama,
that nemesis of all warriors,
as no more than a lotus leaf. 42
If you wish to see the river Reva,
which his palace ramparts girdles
with its lovely flow at Mahishmati,
then be the splendour in his arms.' 43
But though pleasant and good-looking,
this king was no more to her taste
than the full moon in a cloudless
autumn sky is to the lily. 44

(41-44)

That keeper then to the princess showed
Sushena, lord of Shurasena,

the jewel of his line, pure of conduct,
praised and well known everywhere. 45
'This king of the Nipa line,' she said,
'prays and is in a state of peace
where, in the sanctuary of virtue,
he transcends the contradictions
so natural to worldly creatures. 46
His sheen, eye-gladdening like the moon's,
pervades his own palaces, but
on his enemies' mansion roofs
it casts a flush unbearable
on the wild grass growing there. 47

And the waters of the river Yamuna,
flowing past his city of Mathura,
carrying the sandal paste washed off
the bosoms of his harem women
during their aquatic sports,
look blended with the Ganga's waves. 48

In Yamuna lives the snake Kaliya
which, of the eagle Garuda scared,
gave this king a gemstone that,
borne on his chest, has a glow
to shame the Kaustubha worn by Vishnu. [49](#)

Accepting this man as husband,
O lovely girl, you could enjoy
the glorious beauty of your youth
on a bed of flowers overlaid
with tender leaves from Vrindavana,
a grove no less than Chaitraratha, [50](#)
and, seated on sweet smelling rocks
sprinkled with cool drops of water
in Mount Govardhana's pleasant caves,
watch peacocks dancing in the rain.' 51

But, as a river flowing sea-ward
passes by a hill on the way,
that damsel with a lovely navel,

who was to be another's bride,
passed by that king and carried on. 52

(45-52)

The escort maid then took that girl
of face as delicate as the new moon
near Hemangada, Kalinga's lord,
who wore a chain upon his arm. [53](#)
'This,' she said, 'is the master of
the mount Mahendra and the sea;
like the mountain is his power
and when his rutting elephants march,
Mahendra as if moves before them. 54

Foremost of the archers, he
carries on his handsome arms

two bow string marks which seem to be
made by tears mixed with the kohl
of his enemies' sovereignty
which by him has been subdued. 55

From his windows can be seen
sea waves that, with their deep sound,
surpass the palace pipers, and
from sleep the king awaken. 56

With him you could all pleasures take
amidst the forest palms which rustle
along the sea coast, where the breeze
laden with clove blossoms from
other islands would dry up
the drops of any perspiration.' 57

But, though his good looks tempted her,
his fortune was then contrary:
the Vidarbha ruler's younger sister,
like wealth withdrawn by policy,
from that monarch moved away. 58

(53-58)

The door-keeper then the princess took
to the godlike king of Uruga city
and said: 'O you with lovely eyes,
behold the person on this side. 59

A garland pendant from his shoulders,
his limbs with sandal paste anointed,
this is the Pandya lord, who shines
like a mountain peak at dawn
gleaming red with waterfalls. [60](#)

When wet with a sacrificial bath,
his welfare is enquired after
even by the sage Agastya
who transfixed the Vindhya hills
and drank up the sea entire. [61](#)

Though having obtained from Shiva
a rare missile for conquering heaven,

even the lord of Lanka once
allied with him because he wanted
to destroy the Dandaka forest. 62
He rules the region of the south
girdled by the gem-filled ocean
and, if your hand is given in
marriage to this noble one,
you would that region's co-wife be. 63

And you would always be delighted
to dwell in that Malaya land
midst trees of betel-nut and sandal
wreathed with vines of betel leaf
and cardamom, on a ground covered
with a sheet of khadira leaves. 64

This king is, like blue lilies, dark;
your body has a golden glow:
the union would embellish both,
like that of lightning and the cloud.' [65](#)

But this advice did not inspire
the sister of Vidarbha's king,
just as the moon does not the lotus flower,
closed when it does not see the sun. 66

THE INTRODUCTION OF AJA

She was there to choose a husband,

and like a lamp's flame in the night,
each royal tower she passed by,
leaving that king pale without her light. 67

At last she reached the son of Raghu
'Will me she choose or not?' h e wondered,
but the throb beneath the bracelet
on his right arm quelled his doubts. 68

The princess too, on reaching him,
faultless was whose every limb,
ceased moving on towards the others,
just as a swarm of bees does not
other plants seek when it has found
in full bloom a mango tree. 69

Seeing Indumati had fixed
on him her heartfelt inclination,
Sunanda, who knew when to speak
now did so at some length. 70

(67-70)

'In Ikshvaku's line,' she said,
'the best of kings, for virtues famous,
was Kukustha, a name reputed,
from which the rulers of North Kosala,
with high intents do always bear
the word Kakutstha as a title. 71

A bull to ride he made of Indra,
and had Shiva's skill in battle:
with arrows shot he did deprive
of ornaments the demon women. 72

Their armbands jostled with each other.
as he took a seat on half the throne
of Indra who had been fatigued
by managing the heaven's elephant. 73

(71-73)

'Born in his line was King Dilipa,
that famous light of the family
who, to assuage Indra's jealousy,
stopped his own sacrifices when
he had ninety-nine performed. 74
In his rule, when dancing girls
slept on roads after performing,
even the wind their wraps to touch
did not dare, what to say of men. 75
That realm is now administered by
his son Raghu, who performed
the great *Visvajit* sacrifice,
winning from all the world great riches
of which he kept but a cup of clay. 76
There is no limit to his fame;
it has spread across the sea
and beyond the mountain peaks,
reaching down to the land of serpents,
and mounting even up to heaven. 77
This prince, Aja, is his son,
like of Indra is Jayanta;
still being trained, he bears already
the kingdom's burden with his father. 78
He is like you, in family,
in beauty and in youthful years,
in decency and other merits:
choose him and it will be
a union of gold and diamond.' 79

(74-79)

On this utterance of Sunanda,
putting aside her modesty
with a pure and tranquil gaze,
the princess then this prince accepted,
the garland raised ceremonially. 80
Bashful, she was still unable
to say how much she wanted him,
but the thrilling of the body

of that girl with curly hair,
made her feelings very clear. 81
She was aroused. As her comrade
the baton-bearer laughed and said:
'Madam, we go to another?'
the girl gave her a dirty look. 82
And, like love personified,
then she of a slender waist
had the red-white garland placed
by the hands of her attendant
around the neck of Raghu's son. 83
And the garland with its blessed flowers
that upon his broad chest hung,
he took to be the arms around him
of the sister of Vidarbha's king. 84

(80-84)

The citizens then spoke happily
words bitter for the other kings:
'Moonlight joins a cloudless moon,
Ganga flows into the sea,
similar merits here have met
together in a unity.' 85
The groom's group, joyous, on one side,
on the other, silent kings,
it was like a lake at dawn,
when the lotus blooms and lilies close. 86.

(86-85)



CANTO 7

THE WEDDING PROCESSION

Then, the ruler of Vidarbha
turned towards his capital
with his sister and her chosen husband:
an image did they look together,
of a Skanda and a Devasena. [1](#)
Other kings too, went to their camps

like stars at daybreak, their lights fading,
blaming their raiment and appearance
for lack of success in their wishes
to have the princess of Vidarbha. [2](#)
Though envious of the Kakutstha scion,
these kings their feelings kept in check
and, at the sva yamvara itself,
as Shachi was also there,
no one caused any disturbance. [3](#)

The groom together with the bride
had meanwhile reached the royal road
which was profusely decorated,
marked with arches rainbow-bright,
and flags shading it from the heat. [4](#)
And, to get a glimpse of them,
the elegant ladies of the city
had all other work abandoned

in climbing to the balconies
gold-latticed of their mansions. [5](#)

In her hurry to get there,
a garland slipping from her hand,
one woman still held in the other
her hair which she had tried to coil. [6](#)
Another just pulled back her foot,
which then was being lacquered,
and rushed towards her window,

leaving lac marks on the floor. 7
One had got her right eye lined
with the left still to be done:
yet to the balcony she ran
holding the brush for her eye. 8
Another, her gaze fixed upon
the lattice, did not tie the knot
at her waist, but went holding up
the skirt she wore with just one hand,
the bright glow of its ornaments
shining straight into her navel. 9
The girdle of another lady,
partly fastened, came undone
as she stood up and rushed out,
spilling its beads at every step,
with just the string left on her thumb. 10

(6-10)

Their eyes flitting like bright black bees,
their mouths redolent with scent of wine,
these curious ladies seemed to be
like thousands of lotus blossoms
decorating their balconies. 11
Their gazes fixed on Raghu's son,
they lost track of all other things:
it was as if their every sense
had been by their eyes enslaved. 12
'Sought after by the other rulers,'
some of these matrons observed,
'this princess thought the svayamvara
to be the best; otherwise how could
she have found one like herself,
a Narayana for a Lakshmi?' 13
'This couple do provide each other
a splendour which is enviable;
if here they had not come together,
all efforts of Creation's Lord
to endow both of them with beauty

would then have come to naught.' 14

'They must surely be incarnations
of Rati and of Kamadeva.

for, amidst a thousand kings,

this girl found one like herself:

it is as if their minds remembered

affinity from another birth.' 15

(11-15)

Amidst such talk by the city women,

so pleasing to hear, the prince

reached the palace of his hosts

with its auspicious embellishment. 16

There he alighted from his elephant,

his hand on Kamarupa's lord,

and entered the courtyard shown

by Vidarbha's ruler, just as he

had gone into his women's hearts. 17

And there, seated on a throne,

he a pair of cloaks accepted

and a drink with honey mixed

in a goblet set with gems,

by Bhoja sent, together with

the glances from its bearer maids. 18

In those cloaks attired, then

he was by some courteous guards

of the inner apartments led

to the bride, like by the moon

the foam-flecked sea tide to the shore. 19

(16-19)

THE MARRIAGE CEREMONY

There King Bhoja's priest, revered
like the sacred fire is,
lit a holy flame as witness
of the rites to be performed
for joining the bride and groom. 20
The bride's hand taking in his own,
the prince shone like a mango tree
the new sprout of which is joined together
with one from an ashoka vine. [21](#)
In that instant their hearts were
by Kama equally inspired:
the hair upon his forearm thrilled,
while the fingers of the bride perspired. 22
They gazed at each other, then
their eyes modestly turned away.
The meeting and the parting of
their mutual glances was delightful. 23

And the circumambulation
of the fire with its leaping flames
was, by the couple, like day and night
round Mount Meru revolving
while they are joined, one with the other. 24

(20-24)

That bride of lovely hips and eyes,
advised by the godlike priest,
then shyly put into the fire
an offering of parched rice grains. 25
And from the fire there arose,
with the scent of rice and other things,
a spiral plume of sacred smoke
that for an instant covered her temples
like earrings of dry barley sprouts
which can ornament the ears. 26
It moistened the collyrium

and caused irritation to her eyes,
making the bridal cheeks turn pink
as she breathed in the ritual's smoke. 27
Then they both, the girl and prince,
seated on a golden bench,
were with wet rice grains blessed
in due order, by the priests,
by family members and the king,
and by women deemed auspicious 28

(25-28)

THE OTHER KINGS

Thus the wedding of his sister
was concluded by King Bhoja,
the light of his line, who separately
ordered every courtesy
for all the kings assembled there. 29
Pleased outwardly, but inside
like alligators in a lake,

they sent back his gifts as their presents
and took leave for their departure. 30
But they had earlier agreed
on accomplishing their desire
to get that girl like a pound of flesh
in due time, and took position
on the road Aja would take. 31
Meanwhile, the ruler of Vidarbha,
having completed the marriage
of his younger sister, bade farewell,
with nuptial gifts to match his status,
to Raghu's son, then followed him. 32
At the first three camps along the way,
he stopped with Aja for the night;
then from him he came away
like from the full moon does the sun. 33

(29-33)

The other kings, with the lord of Kosala
had even earlier been annoyed
for his humiliating each of them,
and they could not tolerate his son
getting now that jewel of a girl. 34
Forcibly did they surround him
as he on the road proceeded
with the princess: it was like
Prahlada blocking Vishnu's feet
as he claimed the earth that Bali gave. [35](#)

Then the prince, for her protection,
assigned an officer of his father
with many soldiers, and himself
engaged the army of those kings,
like the river Shona does the Ganga. 36

(34-36)

THE BATTLE

Then commenced a battle royal
of opponents who were matched,
foot soldiers fighting those on foot,
chariots, horses, with their like,
the elephant force with elephants. 37
When pipes play, the archers cannot
hear others' words, nor shout their own,

their arrows' swish alone conveys
their name and power to the foe. 38
And the clouds of dust by the horses raised
added to by chariot wheels,
and spread by flapping elephant ears,
gradually made the sun invisible. 39
Fish-shaped flags waved in the wind,
like gaping mouths the dust to swallow,
and seemed like actual fish that drink
water sullied by the rain. 40
So dense became that fog of dust
that the chariots could be known
by the rumble of their wheels alone,
the elephants by their clanging bells,
and one side's fighters or the others'
just by names they raised of masters. 41
And blood spurting from the wounded
warriors, horses and war elephants
became a scarlet dawn amidst
the darkness of the dust pervading
that field of battle, blocking out
all the vistas of one's sight. 42
By the blood kept off the ground,
and with the wind spread out above,
that dust seemed like wisps of smoke
which spiral from a dying fire. 43

Chariot warriors, who had swooned
on being struck, their horses pulled back,
scolded their drivers and returned
to the flags where they were hit
to fight even more furiously. 44
Arrows shot by dextrous archers,
though cut down by others' shafts,
nevertheless their targets struck
with just the flying arrowheads. 45
In elephant fights, some warriors were
decapitated by razor sharp
discus blades. But their heads, the hair
caught in the claws of circling hawks,
only fell to the earth afterwards. 46
A cavalier, who had struck first,
seeing the enemy not hit back,
but lie swooning on his horse,
did not strike that foe again,
waiting rather for his revival. 47
And frightened elephants tried to douse
with water squirted from their trunks
the blaze of unsheathed scimitars
about to fall upon their huge tusks
from combatants prepared to die. 48
The field of battle thus did seem
like the drinking field of death,
its fruit the heads cut down by arrows,
and helmets the goblets, filled
with the flowing wine of blood. 49

(44-49)

She-jackals, who love meat,
seized bits of human arms from birds
but then threw them down, because
the pointed armlets hurt their palates. 50
By an enemy's sword beheaded,
a soldier now sat in the sky
as the lord of a vehicle heavenly,

a nymph celestial at his side,
and saw his headless trunk below
still dancing in the battlefield. [51](#)
The drivers of their chariots slain,
two warriors turned to driving too:
their horses gone, they sparred with maces,
their weapons cracked, they fought bare-handed. 52
Hitting and wounding one the other,
the two at the same time lost their lives,
but even on their reaching heaven
both went after the same nymph

and their conflict continued. 53
Both forces, poised against each other,
prevailed, retreated, continually:
it was like the ocean's waves,
surging forth and rolling back
with the wind, successively. 54

(50-54)

AJA IS VICTORIOUS

Though his force had been repelled
by the enemy, splendid Aja
still bore down upon the foe:
like fire burning into grass
though wind blows the smoke away. 55

In his chariot, clad in armour,
bow in hand and quiver readied,

that proud warrior singly did
by force curb that group of kings,
like the great boar did the ocean
at the time an epoch ended. [56](#)

With his right hand on the arrow,
and the left to the target pointed,
the bowstring drawn back to his ear
seemed to fling foe-killing arrows. 57

And those crescent-headed shafts
cut through enemy throats and covered
the ground with heads whose lips
had been with anger bitten red,

with grunts still lingering within,
and the eyebrows upwards drawn. 58

(55-58)

The kings attacked him in that field,
all of them, with every effort,
and many armour-piercing weapons
and all their forces, led by elephants. 59

Their missiles his chariot covered,
only its flagstaff could be seen;
like in a morning filled with frost
is a little gleam of sunlight. 60

The prince, who like the love god shone,
and was wide awake, then used
the missile that induces slumber,

which he had obtained from Priyamvada. [61](#)

Then bows and hands all motionless,
the helmets hanging on one shoulder,
the bodies on the flagstuffs drooping,
that force of kings was put to sleep. 62

(59-62)

AJA AND INDUMATI

And then the prince put to his lips,
already by his darling tasted,
a conch shell into which he blew,
as if delighting in the glory
he had, single-handed, earned. 63
Recognizing the peal of his conch,
his soldiers then returned and saw
all the enemies slumbering,
and their lord an image of the moon
amidst lotus flowers which had closed. 64
Then, with bloodied arrow heads,
they inscribed upon the banners
of those rulers, words which said:
'Raghu's son has now deprived
you of glory, but not your life:
that is his act of kindness.' 65
And he, one hand resting on the bow,
the helmet doffed, the hair dishevelled,
beads of sweat upon his forehead,
to his tremulous darling went, and said: 66
'You now have my leave to see,
O princess, the enemy;
their activities have so ended
that their weapons now a child can take;
and they wanted to take away
you who have come to me.' 67

(63-67)

She saw, but bashfulness prevailed
and she could not herself express
her commendation to her lover
but did that through her girlfriends:
just as the earth itself does not
greet the gathering clouds, but does so
through the cooing calls of peacocks. 68
Freed of all the distress caused

by their foes, her sighing ceased,
her face lit up and regained
its natural radiance, like a mirror. 69
Her hair roughened with all the dust
from horse and chariot, she was
the living image of the glory
from that contest and victory,
as he, with that sinless girl, moved on,
his left foot on those kingly heads. 70
Then the victor with his noble wife
were welcomed once they had returned
by Raghu, who already had the news
and himself sought his road to peace.
He now on them his burdens placed,
for, when the progeny seems prepared
the Sun's scions do always retire. 71

(68-71)



CANTO 8

AJA IS CROWNED

Once his son had been invested
with the splendid marriage string,
the earth itself into his hands,
like another Indumati,
was made over by the king. 1
And that, which sons of many rulers
try to acquire sinfully,

Aja took at his father's instance,
not in search of luxury. 2
By Vasishtha he was then
anointed with the blessed water
and the earth to this bore witness
gratefully with a joyous breath. 3
With all the rituals now performed
by that Veda-knowing guru,
martial and spiritual powers
were in him combined, like that
of the wind with the fire's force,
to make him invulnerable to foes. 4

(1-4)

The people this new king regarded
like a Raghu, young again,
for he had all the father's merits,
not only the sovereignty. 5
Specially, two things joined together
shone in his person even more:
the splendid office Aja now held
and, with youth, his decency. 6
Sudden force can cause alarm,
but he enjoyed most tenderly,
like a newly married wife,
the realm that he had now inherited. 7
All the people were convinced
that the king held them in high regard;

for he did not ignore anyone,
just like the sea does not the host
of rivers which to it does flow. 8
And, as with trees a gust of air
neither too strong nor too mild,
he employed with other kings
a middle line in policy—
of bending, not uprooting them. 9

(5-9)

Raghu saw his son established,
self-possessed, in everything;
and became then undemanding
of both the transient and divine. 10
Born in Dilipa's family pure,
it was clear, on getting old
one passed on the monarchy
to a son with merit, and became
a hermit garbed in the bark of a tree. 11
But, the son, with the crown adorned,
prayed that he not be forsaken
and fell at the feet of his father who
was set to leave and live in a forest. 12
Raghu loved his son, now tearful,
and agreed to what he wished,
though like the snake with slough discarded,
he would not the throne resume. 13
But, staying outside the city,
in the final state of life,
his senses subjugated, he
was just served by sovereignty,
like the son was by his wife. 14

(10-14)

With the former king in quietude,
and a new one now in charge,
the dynasty looked like the sky
with a setting moon and a risen sun. 15
Raghu was in hermit's garb

and his son in regal state,
the people did then see them both
as on the earth two parts of dharma—
of attainment and of release. 16

His vulnerabilities to secure,
Aja consulted with ministers
adept in policies of state;
while Raghu engaged in yogic practice
the imperishable to attain. 17

The young king took the seat of judgement
to know the nature of his people,
and the old one sat on a mat of straw,
to train his mind in solitude. 18

One brought under his control
rival kings, through strength and wealth,
the other, the five bodily breaths,
through the practice of meditation. 19

The new lord did reduce to ashes
the gains of earth by his opponents,
the other his karmas incinerated
in the fire which is wisdom. 20

After judging their consequences,
Aja applied the measures six
of state, alliance and the like;
Raghu, looking at wood and gold
as the same, gained ascendancy
over the natural qualities three. 21

The new king was in work persistent
and did not stop till it bore fruit;
the old one, with a mind resolute,
did not cease the yoga practice
till the ultimate could be seen. 22

Thus, alert to the containment,
one of the senses, of foes the other,
both the twofold aims accomplished—
of progress and of absolution. 23

As Aja wished it, for some years,
viewing all impartially
did Raghu live, and then through yoga
united with eternity. 24

The son shed tears on learning that
his father had discarded the body.

He knew the rituals, but performed
his rites as are for ascetics done,
without recourse to any fire. 25

He carried out the funeral service
in devotion to his father;

he knew the ceremony, but also
that those, who leave the body like him,
do not seek the son's oblations. 26

His mind calmed with exhortations
from savants, when they spoke of Raghu,
that there was no salvation in grief—
he drew the bow and continued
his governance of the earth. 27

With a master of such manly prowess
of both the earth and Indumati,
the first produced a host of gems,
the other bore a valiant son. 28

Named Dasaratha, as scholars know,
of Ravana's foe he was the father,
bright with a thousand rays of fame
and glory spread in all directions. 29

(24-29)

With study, sacrifice and son,
King Aja was freed of all his debts
to the sages, gods and ancestors
and shone like the sun in a cloudless sky. 30

Not only was the ruler's wealth
put to use for people's benefit,
but his strength calmed the fears of those in pain,
and his knowledge honoured learned scholars. 31

(31-30)

THE DEATH OF INDUMATI

Once this guardian of the people
and good father, with his queen
disported in the city park,
like Indra with his consort Shachi
in Nandana, the park of paradise. 32
At that time, Narada, minstrel sage,
was traversing the path celestial

to the shore of the southern sea
with his lute to sing the praise
of the great god Shiva at Gokarna. 33
At the tip of his lute was wrapped
a wreath of flowers heavenly,
which got swept off by a breeze
tempted as if by its fragrance, 34
while the sage's seven-stringed lute,
still surrounded by the bees
that had hovered on the blooms,
looked as if shedding tears, insulted
by the roughness of the wind. 35
And that wreath of the gods immortal,
with its mass of honeyed scents
more than of blooming vines in season,
fell upon the king's beloved,
on the tender nipples of her bosom. 36

(32-36)

She glimpsed that wreath for but a moment,
a partner to her lovely breasts,
then she trembled, and the beauty,
like a moonbeam at the moon's eclipse,
closed her eyes forever. 37
As her body fell, the senses gone,
it also brought the husband down
to the earth, like a lamp extinguished
when the last drop of oil runs out. 38

By the couples' anguished sounds,
the people nearby were alarmed
and there was a great commotion;
the lotus pond, which was full of birds,
also seemed overcast with grief. 39
But, while the king could be revived
with fanning and by other means,
the queen remained as she was found:
resuscitation is fruitful only
when something of life is left. 40
With her vital forces gone,
she was like a lute unstrung
when the royal lover picked her up
to enfold her in his arms. 41
And, with his beloved in his lap,
colourless with loss of life,
the husband did appear to be
like a pockmarked moon at dawn. 42
Even iron melts with heat,
what to say of human beings;
his natural firmness lost,
the king's tears flowed as he lamented. 43

(32-43)

AJA'S LAMENT

'If flowers falling on the body
are able life to take away,
alas, what other means might fate
possess to strike another too? 44
Or is it that death destroys only
the tender with such methods soft?
Like the lily, which I know,
can be by a snowflake felled. 45

Indeed, if this wreath took her life
then, placed upon my heart, O why
does it not kill me? Or is it
that, at times, by the will divine,
even nectar into poison turns,
or the other way around? 46
Or was it a quirk in my destiny
that fate designed a thunderbolt
by which this tree was not destroyed,
only the vine which clung to it? 47

(44-47)

'You did not chide me, ever, though
I made so many mistakes,
yet how is it that, suddenly,
now you do not speak to me,
a person of all blame free? 48
Or is it that you, of innocent smiles,
so certainly did think of me
as a villain who loved roguery,
that without now telling me,
you have gone to another world
from which there is no return? 49
If my life was also stricken,
following my darling's, then,
why did it return without her?
Was it to bear the terrible

agony of what I did? 50

Your face still bears a trace of sweat
from exertion in our pleasures,
but you have that body forsaken,
a curse upon its transience. 51

I may be called the lord of earth
but, being filled with love for you,
I never crossed you, in thought even,
how can you leave me thus?' 52

(48-52)

'But, my love, the wind does ruffle
your wavy hair, with flowers dressed,
bringing to my mind the thought
that you are coming back to me! 53
Darling, with your wake-up call,
be quick and dispel my grief,
light up the darkness of this cave
with a flaming torch tonight. 54

But this face, with hair dishevelled,
grieves me, for it does not speak,
it is the lotus closed at night,
with a bee inside it, silent. 55

The night does meet the moon again,
so does the loving bird its mate:
this helps them bear their separation.
But you have gone for good, and so
how can this not burn me out? 56

(53-56)

'Even on soft beds of leaves
your limbs did not feel quite at ease,
how then, O belle of lovely thighs,
will they bear the funeral pyre? 57

This girdle gave you company
close, when you lay in privacy,
it now lies as if asleep,
with no sound of any movement,
and no life because of grief. 58

The sweet song of koels,
the graceful gait of royal swans,
the flitting glance of wild does,
the wind's frolic in quivering vines: 59
truly, all these activities,
you left behind for me to savour,
as you were set to go to heaven:
but they cannot my heart console
in deep distress at your separation. 60

This mango tree and fruiting vine,
you regarded as a couple:
to go without their nuptial rites,
this cannot appropriate be. 61
This ashoka tree you kicked
at the time of your pregnancy,
its flowers were to your hair adorn,
how will I take them for last rites? [62](#)

That tree, as if remembering,
your foot's grace, so hard to have,
has showered flowers as its tears
in grief for your lovely limbs. 63

The fragrance of these *bakula* flowers
is like that of your own breath,
you and I had half prepared
with them a girdle for our pleasure,
but, without completing it,

you have now gone to sleep:
what is this, you sweet-voiced beauty? [64](#)

(57-64)

Your friends, who shared your joys and sorrows,
this son, a new moon yet to wax,
and I, who have but one love:
you are now leaving us,
it is very hard indeed. 65
This day I can no more endure,
all pleasures lost, the singing stopped,

a season with no festivity
or occasions for dressing-up,
and my bed does lie empty. 66
You were my wife and my adviser,
the comrade in my solitude,
and in fine arts a pupil dear:
death indeed has no compassion,
tell me what it has not taken
from me in taking you away? 67
You drank the tasty liquors that
had earlier been tasted by me.
How will you of sparkling eyes
now sip the blessed water, which
is offered for another world,
but rendered unclean with my tears? 68
Though this kingdom is still here,
Aja's joy from it, without you,
is not there: remember that
all my pleasure on you depended,
to other allures never drawn.' 69

(65-69)

THE END OF AJA

Thus did Kosala's lord lament,
sunk in grief for his beloved:
it had weeping even trees,
shedding tears with resin soiled. 70
Thereafter, from his arms, his friends,
somehow took that beautiful woman
with her ornament celestial,
and consigned her to a fire
lit with sandalwood and incense. 71
If the king did not consign himself
in that pyre with his queen,
it was not because he wished to live,
but only as people would say
that even though a learned person,
he died in distress for his sweetheart. 72
Ten days afterwards, the ruler
for his spouse the other rites concluded
with an elaborate ceremony
in that very city park. 73
He looked like a moon at night's end
when to the city he returned,
in its women's tears beholding
the flow as if of his own desolation. 74

(70-74)

The guru was at his hermitage,
in a sacrifice engaged,
but knowing of the king's distress,
addressed him through a disciple. 75
'The sage's rites,' this pupil said,
'are not yet complete. Though he knows
the cause of your grief, he cannot
himself be present to restore
your person to the path now lost. 76
But his message is here given
in my words, O noble one,

hear it with your well-known spirit
and keep it in your heart. 77
With a vision unrestricted
and full of wisdom does he see
the past, the present and the future,
the triple aspects of infinity. 78

(75-78)

'Perturbed by the penance rigorous
of Trinabindu in the past,
Indra sent the celestial nymph
Harini to spoil his meditation. [79](#)
Like a wave of the final deluge
upon the shore which was his peace,
she came before him with her charms
and the sage, annoyed by this disturbance,
cursed her to be born a human. 80
"Lord, forgive my captious conduct.
This person is but a slave."
Thus beseeched, the sage then told her:
"Stay on earth a human, only

till you see the flowers divine." 81
Thereafter, born in the line Vidarbhan,
she was long your royal consort,
but the curse did end when she beheld
the flowers which came down from heaven. 82
And so, stem your grief for her:
all those born must also die;
this earth you must look after now,
to it indeed are kings espoused. 83
'So, avoid the inexpressible, and
with self-knowledge from the scriptures
cleanse manfully the mind again
of the grief which now pervades it. 84
How will you find her with such weeping?
Even dying, you cannot,
as dead folk follow different paths,

on the karma of each depending. [85](#)

With mind free of grief, now favour
your spouse with the final oblations;
it has been said the constant tears
of a loved one scorch the soul
of one who has departed. 86

Death is but natural for the living,
life is an accident, the sages say,
a creature indeed is the richer
in living even for a moment. 87

But the loss of something dear,
for a fool is a thorn in the heart,
a tranquil mind the same considers
a thorn extracted smoothly. 88

When creatures unite and part
even with their very own bodies,
say, why should parting from another
then torment the person wise? 89

You are the best of the self-possessed,
and should not like a common person
give way to grief: if in the wind
both bend, what would the difference be
between a mountain and a tree?' 90

(79-90)

The king bid farewell to the pupil
and with 'As you say,' accepted
the words of that most wise adviser,
which, it seems, went back to the guru,
with no peace within a heart that was
still overwhelmed with grief. 91

That good, kind man then somehow passed
eight years with the child, his son,
seeing in pictures his beloved,
and in dreams, for a moment's pleasure. 92

But despair's thorn had pierced his heart,
like a fig tree growing through a roof;
doctors could not treat it, and

death he thought would give relief
and let him his beloved follow. 93
His prince was by now trained and armoured,
and, counselling him to guard the people,
the king, his body wracked by illness,
sought release from it by fasting. 94
And he cast it off at the meeting place
of the Ganga and the Sarayu rivers,
mounting straight away to heaven,
where he and his sweetheart, who was now
more charming even than before,
both sported in the pleasure pavilions
of Nandana, park of paradise. 95

(91-95)



CANTO 9

THE RULE OF DASARATHA

Having his father succeeded,
thereafter did Dasaratha rule
over the state of Uttara Kosala.

The first among the land's protectors,
he was a warrior, well-disciplined,
and master of his senses too. [1](#)

In prowess like the god of war,
he looked after the realm inherited,
as was proper in his line,
in keeping with all the rules,
and his merits pleased the people. [2](#)

As has been said by learned scholars,
both Indra, with timely rain,
and, with his work, this scion of Manu,
made labours less for everyone. [3](#)

There was no ill health in the country,
nor any attacks by enemies,
the land was fruitful with the brilliant
and peace-loving son of Aja as king. [4](#)

(1-4)

His valour was no less than that
of Raghu, victor of the world,
or Aja, who enhanced prosperity:
the realm shone no less under him. [5](#)

In showers, both of rain and wealth,
and in controlling wickedness,
this king followed in the paths
of Varuna, Yama and Kubera;
in glory he was like the sun. [6](#)

For progress did he always strive,
and was not distracted by
love for the hunt or playing dice,
by wine reflecting rays of moonlight,
or some young girl as a paramour. [7](#)

And while he ruled, he never made

supplications, even to Indra,
or spoke falsehoods even in jest,
nor cruel words, even to enemies. 8
Other kings, from this Raghu's scion,
experienced both rise and fall;
he was kind to those who were amenable,
and heartless with adversaries. 9
With his bow and a single chariot,
the earth he subdued to the sea;
his army, elephants and swift horses
merely declared his victory. 10

(5-10)

In treasures equal to Kubera,
with just one armoured chariot
did this wielder of the bow
all earth conquer, as the sea
trumpeted his victory. 11
As Indra had cut down the wings
of mountains with his thunderbolt,
did this king of a lotus face,
with a shower of his arrows,
the enemy forces subjugate. [12](#)
And as the gods bow down to Indra
to touch his feet whose toenails' glow
outshines their crowns' bejewelled glitter,
so did rulers in their hundreds
salute this king of unsullied might. 13.
With compassion did he treat
his foes' wives and children, who
had been by his men imprisoned.
He then returned from the ocean's shore
to his own city which was another
Alaka, capital of Kubera. 14
With the other crowns eclipsed,
of all realms he became the hub,
glowing like both moon and fire,
but still he worked tirelessly, knowing

the fickleness of sovereign power. [15](#)

(11-15)

But sovereignty is also loyal
and, apart from the first of deities
and this scion of Kakutstha,
lesser ones it would not serve. 16
The unspoilt daughters of the kings
of Kosala, Magadha and Kaikeya,
now did him as a husband gain,
this vanquisher of enemies,
like rivers flowing to the sea. 17

And, with three beloved wives,
he shone like Indra with three powers;
anxious, keen, to lead his people,
he was skilled in slaying enemies. [18](#)
In battlefields this warrior aided
Indra, and set free from fear
of arrows all the nymphs who praised
his might and valour in their songs. 19

(16-19)

Free of all base qualities,
he won treasures everywhere,
but took off his crown at a sacrifice
on the banks of the Tamasa-Sarayu,
which, with ritual posts of gold,
he had caused to be adorned. 20
There he was for the rite ordained,
staff in hand, with *kusha*-grass girdle,
in a deer skin with its horn to hold,
and in this state, the Lord Supreme
his body entered, made it shine. 21
Then, purified with the final bath,
his senses in control, he was
fitted to sit in the gods' assembly,
his head held high and only bowed

to Indra, maker of the rain. 22

For he was a strong and matchless warrior
who, bow in hand, formed Indra's vanguard,
washing off the battle dust
with the blood of heaven's foes
as it spouted to cover the sun. 23

(20-23)

ARRIVAL OF SPRING

Then came spring, with flowers fresh
to serve the king, for valour famed,
a worldly hub, as are the gods
Yama, Kubera, Varuna and Indra. [24](#)
The sun now left the Malaya mountain,
wishing to head towards the north,
its chariot turned in that direction
to make the mornings free of frost. 25

And in that land of trees and forests,
spring's coming happened in due order:
first the flowers, then new shoots,
the hum of bees, the calls of koels. 26
The black bees and the water birds
did burgeon the lotus ponds,
as did the king his treasury,
guarded by good policy,
with fruit for the good and supplicants. 27
Not only did the seasonal blooms
of *ashoka* inflame love,
so did its fresh budding shoots
which incite pleasure-lovers when
they put them on their sweethearts' ears. [28](#)
And spring scattered amaranth flowers
like beauty spots on a garden goddess;
profuse in their gifts of honey,
they made the bees buzz even more. 29

(24-29)

The bakula trees burst out in blooms
with the scent of wine from women's mouths,
bumblebees, which crave for this,
went to them, row after row. [30](#)
The goddess which is spring spread out
on *kimsuka* trees a net of flowers,
like the fingernail scratches made

on the body of her paramour
by some drunk and shameless beauty. [31](#)
The frost had earlier made unbearable
lovers bites on the lips of girls
who had taken off the girdles
on their loins, as too cold.

The sun now did reduce that frost
though still not quite completely. [32](#)
But the budding mango vines,
trembling in the southern breeze,
seemed adept in all the arts
which excite even the sages, who

have conquered all of lust and rage. [33](#)
Wind rustled through forest creepers
which shook as if with a dance of hands
and flowers' gleam like teeth in smiles
to the pleasing sound of humming bees. [34](#)
And in the rows of forest trees,
fragrant with their blossoming,
were heard the first calls of the koels
like hesitant words of young new brides. [35](#)

(30-35)

Women skilled in arts amatory
drank wine scented with bakula blossoms
with their husbands, as an aide to love
which would not interfere with passion. [36](#)
The ponds of water in their houses,
full of blooming lotus flowers
and the chirping of the birds,
themselves looked like pretty girls
with their loosened girdles tinkling. [37](#)
And the lady which is night,
grew more slender with the spring,
her face as pale as the rising moon,
like a woman unsatisfied
with the pleasures had in making love. [38](#)

And the moon, clear, free of frost,
with rays which soothe the stress of love,
sharpened Kama's flower arrows
as he did his pennant raise
with its sign of the crocodile. [39](#)

A flower with the burnished glow
of a golden ornament, belonging
of to the forest goddess, with
delicate petals, was now placed
by young women in their hair. 40

And blossoms on the sesame trees,
marked by sitting rows of bees
like with charming spots of kohl,
were ornaments, indeed for girls,
though not so much of the forest. 41

But the *navamallika* vine,
with its host of lovely flowers
which smelled of perfume and of wine,
intoxicated both trees and minds. [42](#)

(36-42)

Cloaks more rosy than the dawn,
ear ornaments of barley sprouts,
and the cooing of the koels—
this army of the god of love
made men who indulge in pleasure
seek it solely with their sweethearts. 43

Vines clinging to the sesame trees
surrounded by a swarm of bees
with bright specks of floral pollen

looked like nets strung out with pearls
to bind the hair of elegant women. 44
Like banners of the love god Madana,
and pomade for the season's beauty,
flights of bees pursued the pollen
swept by the wind through the forest. 45

Some woman there, celebrating spring
with the festival of the swing,
though skilful, did loosen her arms
upon its ropes, because she wished
to put them round the lover beside her. 46
'O, give up pride,' the bees did tell her,
'don't resist, for youth, once gone,
will not come back,' and with such words
to incite her, she made love there. 47

(43-47)

THE KING GOES HUNTING

This festive season to enjoy
together with intimate friends,
the king, who was like spring itself,
then went out on a sporting hunt. 48
He went with the consent of ministers,
for hunting also gives one practice
in the bringing down of moving targets,
their fears and anger understanding,
and making such efforts efficient. 49
He went dressed for forest hunting,
the bow placed by his muscled throat,
that glorious king, whose horses' hooves
raised dust like a canopy in the sky. 50
Clad in a tunic the colour
of the dark *palasha* tree
and wearing, of sylvan blooms, a garland,
his earrings swinging with the speed
of his horses, he adorned
that forest, haunt of the *ruru* deer. [51](#)
On the way, the jungle deities,
in vines embodied, looking through bees,
saw this bright-eyed ruler, who delighted
the Kosala people with his rule. 52

(48-52)

He was in a forest full of deer,
the nilgai antelope and birds,
with water, but firm ground for the horses,
the hounds and nets already there.
No signs were there of forest fire. 53

That best of kings then strung his bow
which shone like a rainbow in the sky
with a golden string like a lightning flash
and a twang that enraged the lions. 54
Then before him there appeared

a flock of deer, grass in their mouths,
led by a proud, dark-spotted stag,
the does held back by fawns for milk. 55
Chased by the king on a galloping horse,
drawing an arrow from his quiver,
with fearful glances that flock scattered,
the forest darkening like a lake,
its lotus leaves swept by a wind. 56
That archer, who matched Indra, then,
having targeted a deer,
beheld its mate bringing her own
body in between; sharing
that feeling, with a tender heart,
he lowered the shaft pulled to his ear. 57
At other deer too, wishing to shoot,
the bowstring drawn back to his ear,
on looking at their fear-struck eyes
and remembering his own wives,
his clenched fist loosened once again. 58

(53-58)

He followed then a troop of pigs
just out of a mud pool, bits of grass
stuck on them, their still-wet feet
clearly marking out their path. 59
The boars bristled and tried attacking
him who bent to strike at them,
not realizing he had pierced already
with his darts the trees, their legs. 60
With another arrow he did strike
a forest buffalo in the eye
with such speed there was no blood
on the arrow feathers: the body fell
first and it only flowed after. 61
A crescent arrow he released
cut off the horn of a rhinoceros,
lowering the creature's proud head
without depriving it of life. 62

Some tigers coming out of caves
then appeared, like blooming flowers
blown by the wind off *asana* trees;
and, with trained and nimble hands,
he filled their gaping jaws with darts
within a moment, fearlessly. 63
Lions lurking in the thickets
he incited with the bowstring's twang,
fierce as a thunderclap:
jealous of the word 'king' used
for this beast, he wished to kill it. 64
And, having slain those enemies
traditional of the elephant tribe,
whose glands stick in their cruel claws,
he felt relieved of the debt he owed
to elephants for their help in battle. 65.

(59-65)

He circled on his horse the deer
whose tails are used as royal whisks,
releasing shafts drawn to his ear
and, acquiring those white hair
like a king, then kept his peace. 66
But the peacock flying past his steed
with its lovely tail, he did not target,
for it brought to mind the hair, decorated
with a colourful garland, of his sweetheart
and loosened in the course of love. 67
By now his face was covered with
gleaming sweat drops, the result
of the roughness of this sport,
though they were dried by the forest air
with its ice-cold drops of moisture. 68
But the hunt, like a clever woman,
made the king to it addicted,
and increased his love for it,
and so he forgot his other duties

and left the state to his ministers. 69

(66-69)

AN UNINTENDED KILL

He spent the night, from his troop away,
on a bed soft of flower buds
lit by the glow of herbs medicinal
which like tiny lamps did gleam. 70
At dawn was his sleep dispelled
by the noise, sharp as a rattling drum,
of flapping elephant ears,
while he relished the wake-up calls,
a chirping melody of the birds. 71
Then, by his bodyguards unseen,
he took the path the ruru deer
follow in the forest, and his horse,
foaming with the effort, reached
the river Tamasa where ascetics bathe. 72
There he heard a gurgling sharp,
as of a pot being filled with water,
and, thinking it an elephant's caper,
he let fly at it an arrow
targeted to the sound. 73
It was an act to kings forbidden,
one which crossed the line prescribed,
but even the learned, moved by power,
do take steps which are prohibited. 74
Then he heard a cry: 'Alas! O father!'
Downcast, looking for its source
deep in the river reeds, he saw
an ascetic's son with a water pot,
by his arrow pierced, and himself
was wounded by an inner dart. 75

(70-75)

Dismounting from his horse, the king,
the scion of a noble line,
asked that boy, whose body lay
upon the pot, of his family:
and the ascetic's son did tell him,

in indistinct and faltering words,
that he was other than a twice-born. [76](#)
On being told this, to his sightless parents
the king took him without extracting
the arrow, and explained to them,
what he had done to their only child,
entirely out of ignorance. [77](#)
That couple lamented ceaselessly
as they got the striker to extract
the shaft piercing their child's chest,
but he died, and then the old man
with flowing tears did curse the king. [78](#)

Like a hurt snake spitting venom,
he cursed the king for his offence:
'You, sir, too, in your old age,
will die, lamenting for your son!' [79](#)

(76-79)

'Even with this curse pronounced,
you have favoured me, my lord,
for I have no son as yet:
farming land, though scorched by fire,
becomes more fertile with the flames.' [80](#)
Thus spoke the king, and then continued:
'This having happened, what should be
done now by this pitiless person
who deserves your execution?'
At this the ascetic requested
for wood and kindling of a fire
as he, together with his spouse,
wished for death to join their son. [81](#)
Carrying out this order promptly,
the king then to his followers returned
and went home, his fortitude
shattered by this lapse, and within him
lodged a curse for his own destruction,
like the ancient fire in the sea. [82](#)



CANTO 10

THE QUESTS OF DASARATHA AND THE GODS

An extremely long time passed,
almost ten thousand years it seemed,
as prosperous, he ruled the earth,

with a glory matching that of Indra. 1

But the light that instantly
dispels the darkness of despair,
he did not have: that is a son,
the means for obtaining release

from one's debt to ancestors. 2

Long did the monarch await
progeny and with all good faith,
like the sea, before its churning,
the sight of gems still unrevealed. 3

His priests, who had their passions conquered,
like Rishyashringa and the others,
also anxious for his heir then
commenced the sacrifice for a son. 4

(1-4)

At that time, the gods, oppressed
by Ravana, to Vishnu went,
like travellers suffering in the heat
seek a tree which gives them shade. 5

And, as they the ocean reached,
the Primal One awakened too;
no delay is a sign auspicious
that a task will be accomplished. 6

(5-6)

THE VISION OF VISHNU

The gods saw Vishnu seated on
the great coils of the serpent Sesha,
his body shining in the glow

of the gems in its many hoods. 7
His foot was resting in the hands
of the goddess Lakshmi, in her lap,
on her girdle lined with silk
as she sat upon a lotus bloom. 8
Like a lily white were his eyes,

and his garment pale like morning light;
he was like an autumn day,
to behold which is a joy. 9
The gem Kaustubha, the oceans' essence,
his broad chest did decorate,
mirroring the grace of Lakshmi
and lighting up the sign Srivatsa. [10](#)
Like long branches were his arms
embellished with jewels divine,
he shone like another parijata,
tree of heaven, midst the water. [11](#)

(7-11)

His weapons, which can even erase
the rouge from demon women's temples,
were also full of life, and sounded
their accolades of victory. 12
His eagle mount celestial, Garuda,
marked with scars from thunderbolts,
stood humbly beside, with folded hands,
free of rivalry with serpents. 13
And, calm after the yoga sleep,
he favoured with a glance pellucid

Bhrigu and the other sages
who asked if he had slept at ease. 14
Imperceptible by word and thought,
he was the one who quelled their foes
and before him bowing, prostrate,
the gods acclaimed him with this song: 15

(12-15)

THE GODS' PRAYER TO VISHNU

'Salutations to you who are
threefold in your very self:
as first, Creator of the world,
then as its Protector, and
finally its Destroyer. 16

Just as all the different flavours
are in rain from the sky combined,
so too are the qualities three
united in your changeless self. [17](#)
Measureless, you the world do measure,
need nothing yourself, but wants satisfy,
unconquerable, but ever winning,
subtle, but cause of the explicit. 18

Known to be in every heart,
yet you are unreachable;
an ascetic, desireless,
tender, but not given to grief;
ancient, but ageless. 19
You are unknown but omniscient,
the self-created cause of all ,
the lord universal, with no master,
the one, but part of everything. 20

(16-20)

'It is you, who are addressed
in the seven hymns of praise,
who in the seven seas abide,
with a visage like the seven flames,
the one refuge of the seven worlds. 21
Knowledge of the four endeavours,
extent of the aeons four,
and the world with its four classes—
all come from your fourfold person. [22](#)
With minds by exercise disciplined,
the yogis do meditate on you,
the light which rests within their hearts,

for seeking emancipation. 23
But who knows your reality?
For, unborn, you yet take birth,
make no moves, but slay foes,
and sleeping, still stay awake. 24
Indifferent to everything,
you partake of worldly pleasures,
carry out most difficult p enance,
and are the people's guardian. 25

(21-25)

'Though many paths serve as the means
in different scriptures to perfection,
they all lead to you, just like
Ganga's currents to the sea. 26
You are the access to salvation
for many renunciates who have
placed their mind in you alone
and their actions to you dedicated. 27
This earth and all your other glories
will always inestimable be,
what to say of words in scriptures
and inferences made thereby? 28
When you purify a person
through his meditation alone,
all his other actions do simply
make its consequences known. 29
As are gems within the ocean
and the beams of a radiant sun,
so shines all that comes from you,
our acclaim cannot suffice. 30
There is nothing that you do not have,
or need ever to obtain;
the only purpose of your birth
and deeds is mercy for the people. [31](#)
If in the praising of your glory
there are no more words, it is
because our effort and ability

VISHNU'S RESPONSE

Thus the gods did Vishnu please;
but it was not praise for the Supreme One,
it was but expression of
that which is reality. 33

He expressed pleasure at the words
to him by the gods addressed,
and they told him of their fear
of the demon, who was like
the sea in flood at the end of time. 34

Then, in a voice which resonated
in the echoes of the ocean's waves
and in the mountain caves close by,
the great lord spoke to the gods assembled; 35
he was the first of poets, and
perfected with word and meaning,
the language itself served its purpose. 36
And it flowed forth from his mouth,
lit with the radiance of his teeth
like the river Ganga rising
in its fullness from his feet. [37](#)

(34-37)

'I know your dignity and prowess
are by that demon overcome
like the other two qualities
in humans by dark inertia. [38](#)
That the three worlds are tormented
by him, like an unsought evil
does the hearts of virtuous people,
is also known to me. 39
But, simply for this single task,
Indra need not pray to me:

I myself will help provide,
as the wind does to the fire. [40](#)

Having cut the others off
with his own scimitar, the demon
has indeed preserved his tenth
head for my discus blade. 41
The Creator granted him a boon
because of which I tolerated
the rise of this, a wicked foe,
as the snake's does the sandal tree. 42
With penance did the demon please
creation's god, and sought that he
may not be killed by gods—

but he ignored the human race. 43
So, I will the son of Dasaratha be,
and sever that demon's head
with arrows sharp as an offering
for the sacrifice of the battlefield. 44
And of that sacrifice, due share
you will get, in the prescribed manner:
this will take place soon, without
the demons tasting any part. 44
So, you blessed ones, who travelled
by aerial vehicles in the sky,
but now hide in clouds, afraid,
on seeing the Pushpaka,
must now give up this consternation. [46](#)
You need to free the nymphs celestial
whom Ravana, by a curse constrained,
could not by force defile,
and so caught and knotted their hair.' [47](#)
Thus, with the nectar of his words
showering that field of gods
withered by the drought called Ravana,
that dark cloud did then disappear. 48
And, intent on the task divine,
Indra and the other gods

in spirit did follow Vishnu,
like trees the wind do with their flowers. 49

(38-49)

THE INCARNATION

The sacrifice for the realization
of the royal wish had meanwhile ended,
and there appeared, to the priests' surprise,
a person out of the sacred fire. 50

A stew of milk in a cup of gold
he did bear with both his hands:
it the Primal One embodied
and was held with utmost care. 51

That libation, sent by the gods,
the king accepted with respect
as had Indra in times past
the nectar by the sea presented. 52

His acceptance also did declare
the merits of this king, so rare,
that even the maker of three worlds,
through him to be born desired. 53

Then that oblation, Vishnu's glory,
the king between two wives divided,
like the sun does morning's light
between the earth and the firmament. 54

Kausalya was his senior wife,
and Kaikeyi the one he loved,
and the lord wished that they both
Sumitra honour with a part. 55

These two queens well knew the mind
of their spouse, the heedful king,
and each of them did then arrange
to give half her portion to the third, 56

who also loved her co-wives both,
like a bee does both the flows
of ichor from an elephant's temples. 57

Thus the three were impregnated
for the growth of progeny,
by elements from the gods derived,

as water is by solar rays. 58
At the same time made with child,
they shone together with the glow
of a wealth of crops about to bear
the fruit begun in them to grow. 59
And all commenced to see, in dreams,
that they were being guarded by
miniature images embellished with
bow, sword, mace, with shell and discus. 60
They saw themselves being transported
swiftly through the sky, like clouds,
by a net of lights, the golden wings
of the eagle Garuda whom they rode. 61
And they were being served by Lakshmi,
a fan of lotus leaves in hand,
radiant with the Kaustubha jewel
suspended between her breasts. 62
They also saw the seven sages
meditate on the Vedas' essence,
having bathed in the stream divi ne. 63
Hearing from them of their dreams,
their husband was then overjoyed
to think of himself as the best,
the father of the world's progenitor. 64

(50-64)

And the Lord Supreme, though one,
to several wombs divided himself
to stay in them, like the moon's reflection
in limpid and rippling waters. 65
Then the first queen of the ruler
entered into labour and
bore a son who dispelled the darkness
of the night like a gleaming herb. 66
Inspired by his glorious body,
his father did then name him Rama,
one who would be the foremost
blessing for the world entire. 67

Of Raghu's line he was the light
and, in his unequalled lustre,
the lamps inside the birthing chamber
seemed as if to have grown dim. 68
With Rama on the bed beside her,
his mother, now with a slendered waist,
was like Ganga, thinned in autumn,
with its flowers gathered on the banks. 69
Kaikeyi bore a son named Bharata:
of goodly character possessed,
his mother he did adorn
as modesty does majesty. 70
And like learning duly served
by wisdom and humility,
Sumitra gave birth to the twins,
Lakshmana and Shatrughna. 71
Then from evil the world was freed
and with all merit embellished:
it was as if heaven followed
that best of beings come to earth. 72
With the advent of these four,
the four directions, filled so far
with the fear of Ravana, seemed to breathe
clean and dust-free air again. 73
Fumeless did the fires burn
and the sun shone clear and pure,
it was as if their gloom was lifted,
along with their fears caused by the demon. 74
And that demon's sovereignty,
at that very moment, dripped
like gems from his ten-headed crown,
on to the earth as drops of tears. 75

(65-75)

The music played on the birth of sons
to this father first commenced
in paradise, where all the gods
sounded it on their kettledrums. 76

A rain of flowers heavenly
fell on the palace of the king:
it was the very first of rites
that provide auspicious blessings. 77

By the midwives being nursed,
and purified with all the rites,
the princes then began to grow
to their father's great delight. 78

Their inborn grace and decency
flourished with training and education
as does the fire's natural glow
with the offerings of oblation. 79

There was no rivalry between them;
they graced Raghu's unblemished line
like the seasons do together
the gardens of paradise. 80

While they were good brothers all,
a mutual love did however couple
Rama and Lakshmana,
as it did Bharata and Shatrughna. 81

But this coupling never divided
their feeling of unity,
it was like the wind's with fire,
and as the moon's is with the sea. 82

With their glory and humility,
these princes of the people did
win the hearts of the populace,
like days dark and cloudy do
at the end of the summer's heat. 83

And this fourfold progeny
of the monarch did appear
like the four ends incarnate
of dharma, artha, kama and moksha. [84](#)

With their merits and filial piety,
they pleased their father, lord of the earth,
like the four seas do with gems
give pleasure to the mighty ocean. 85

And the king shone with these four,
like the elephant of the gods
with tusks that shatter demon swords,
like Vishnu with his long arms, and
like policy with its four means
which are proven by success. [86](#)

(76-86)



CANTO 11

RAMA GOES WITH KAUSHIKA

One does not the age consider
of persons glorious and heroic,
and the hermit Kaushika asked
his sacrificial rite to be guarded,

by Rama, who was still a boy
with side-locks called raven's wings. 1
And he was given to that sage
along with Lakshmana by the king,
though they were to him most precious:

for never, in the line of Raghu,
were supplications turned away
even if they begged for one's own life,
and he also honoured learned people. 2
He wanted that the streets be cleared
for their departure from the city,
and this was done immediately
by the wind blowing the dust away

and clouds pouring a rain with flowers. 3
Then the two boys, bows in hand,
ready to act on their father's orders,
bent down at his feet as he
shed on them his tears of love. 4
Their side-locks moistened with the tears
of their father, the two then
followed that sage, with all eyes
in the city fixed on their path. 5
The sage had wanted to take Rama
with Lakshmana only, so the king
sent no army for their protection;
his blessings alone did go with them. 6

The two, then touched their mothers' feet

and, following that radiant hermit,
shone like Chaitra and Vaishakha,
the months when northwards moves the sun. 7
Their movements, with waving arms,
boyish, nimble, seemed to be
like the coming of the rains
when streams do more swiftly flow. 8
And as, with the knowledge he possessed,
the hermit did converse with them,
the two, who knew only jewelled ground,
felt they were still near their mothers. 9
Listening to the stories told
by this learned friend paternal,
Rama and his younger brother,

though used to moving in a chariot,
did not feel troubled by walking. 10
Lakes served them with tasty water,
birds with cooing sweet to hear,
breezes with fresh scent of flowers
and the clouds with giving shade. 11
Ascetics enjoyed the glimpses
of the two, however brief,
more than of waters bright with lotus blooms
or of trees providing rest,
as they neared a hermitage. 12
The charming Rama, bow in hand,
though he was in looks like Kama
whom Shiva had incinerated,
was not at all like him in deeds. 13

CONTEST WITH DEMONS

Learning from Kaushika of the curse
placed upon Suketu's daughter,
on the path laid waste by her,
the two boys then their bow tips planted
on the ground and strung their bows. [14](#)
That sound was heard by Tadaka
who appeared, like a moonless night,
with the rings upon her temples gleaming
like lightning flashes in a cloud. 15
Clad in a rag from a corpse torn off,
she was like a storm from a cemetery,
with a force which on its path shook trees:
by her was Rama now assailed. 16
Raghava pitied killing a woman,
but he saw her arm raised like a club,
hips with human entrails girdled,
and he let loose a shaft at her. [17](#)
In the chest, rock hard, of Tadaka,
the hole that Rama's arrow drilled,
opened a door for the god of death
to a realm demonic, so far barred to him. 18
Her heart cut through, when she fell,
it shook not only the forest's ground,
but even Ravana's sovereign power,
firm in its conquest of the world. 19
Like a damsel struck by Kama's dart
smeared with scented sandal paste,
goes forthwith to the lord of her life,
so, pierced by Rama's bloodstained arrow,
that demon went to the lord of death. 20
Tadaka's slayer then received
from the sage, pleased with his feat,
the missile spell to decimate demons,
as the *suryakanta* gem does
from the sun its burning glow. [21](#)

They then passed by the blessed
 place of Vamana's hermit life;
 the sage had told the boy of it
 and he felt excited, even though
 he could not his earlier birth recall. [22](#)
 Eventually, the sage arrived
 at his own forest hermitage
 managed by his priests and pupils;
 the trees saluted them, the birds
 and the deer at them looked up. 23

There, the two sons of king Dasaratha
 were ordained to guard the sage
 from intrusions, like the rays
 of the risen moon and sun in turn
 guard the world from darkness deep. 24
 The priests who tended to the rite,
 meanwhile, saw the altar spattered
 with drops of blood, appearing like
 enormous *bandhujiva* flowers,
 and, in confusion, stopped their work. 26.
 Rama looked up and beheld
 a demon army in the sky,
 its banners streaming in a wind
 by the wings of vultures raised,
 and he drew an arrow from his quiver. [26](#)
 Of these disturbers of the rite,
 he targeted their leaders two,
 not the others: will the eagle,
 its prowess focused on great snakes,
 attack mere worms in the water? 27
 In weapons proficient, he then loosed
 an arrow swift, like the god of wind,
 and with it brought down Tadaka's son,
 like a leaf turned pale with age,

though he was like a mountain huge. 28

And Subahu, the other demon,

who moved by magic here and there,

he cut down with a razor arrow,

the pieces thrown to birds outside. 29

(24-29)

JOURNEY TO MITHILA

The priests then praised the valour of
the two adepts in battle, and completed,
on behalf of their chief laconic,
the rite of the boys being ordained. 30
After their sacramental bath,
the hermit blessed the brothers two;
as they bowed, their side-locks dripping,
he placed upon them his hands, scarred
with squeezing the holy grass. 31
He had been invited by

Mithila's lord for a sacrifice
and, going there, he took along
the two who had also heard about
the bow there, and were curious. 32
On that path the three then travelled,
and by the evening reached
a hermitage with lovely trees,
where the consort of a holy ascetic
had become for a moment joined
to the god Vasava, as his spouse. 33
Since long turned into a rock,
now Gautama's wife regained her own
charming form: it was by favour
of the dust from Rama's feet,
which does all evil dispel. 34

(30-34)

Hearing of the hermit's visit
with the Raghu scions,
Janaka, lord of Mithila, came
to greet the three, embodiments
of dharma, with artha and kama. 35
For citizens of Vid eha's capital
they were a starry constellation
as if from heaven come to earth:

people looked at them and thought
that even an eye's blink was their loss. 36

(35-36)

THE BOW OF SHIVA

The royal sacrifice concluded,
Kaushika, who sensed the time,
then told the Mithila king about
Rama's wish to see the bow. 37
Gazing at the gentle form
of that boy of noblest birth,
and aware the bow was hard
to bend, the king was troubled by
the condition that he had set
as the fee for his own daughter. 38

(37-38)

'Lord,' he said, 'the task is difficult
even for great elephants, and
I do not dare to let a calf
at it make a futile effort. 39
This bow, sir, has put to shame
many kings and expert archers
who went away, by its string whipped,
cursing their own muscled arms.' 40
'Listen, O king,' the sage replied,
'about his power, otherwise
there is no need to speak at all.
The bow itself will make it clear,
like a mountain struck by a thunderbolt.' 41
And such words convinced the king
that, as with the fire in the beetle,
there was within Rama a power
though he still the side-locks wore. 42

(39-42)

Then the lord of Mithila did command
many men to bring the bow,
just as Indra bids the clouds
the brilliant rainbow to display. 43
Awesome was that bow indeed,

it looked like a sleeping serpent
and with it Shiva had discharged
his arrows at the magic deer;
but the son of Dasaratha saw it,
and then simply picked it up. 44
As the people there assembled,

stared at him with eyes amazed,
though its weight was like a mountain,
he strung it without much effort,
like Kama does his tender weapon
known to all as the bow of flowers. 45
As he drew it strongly, it then cracked
with a sound as sharp as thunder,
as if to tell Bhrigu's angry scion
that the Kshatriyas were now ready
to bend their bows again. [46](#)

(43-46)

A WEDDING IS ARRANGED

True to his vow, without delay,
the Mithila lord then gave his daughter,
who had been born miraculously,
to that scion of the Raghu line
in the presence of the beaming sage
and with the fire as his witness. 47
He then despatched a priest revered
to Kosala's king for his direction
on acceptance as a servant
this daughter of Nimi's line. 48

Now, Kosala's ruler had been looking
for a fine daughter-in-law
when, with this good news, the priest
arrived there, like the tree divine
which gives people the fruit they seek. 49
Having his epistle heard,
to him conveyed with ceremony,
that comrade of the king of heaven
then set forth, his army raising
dust which overcast the sun. 50

(47-50)

He reached Mithila, and his force
laid rings around its tree-filled gardens,
but the city bore this siege of love
like a girl her lover's lustful groping. 51
Courteously did the two kings meet,
like Indra and Varuna they were,
and, in keeping with their majesty,
arranged a marriage ceremony
for their sons and daughters dear. 52
The first among the Raghava brothers
wed the daughter from the earth,
and Lakshmana her younger sister
Urmila, while their brothers two

wed the slim daughters of Kushadhvaja. [53](#)

And the four sons of the king
with their new brides did shine
like the fourfold means of policy
over which he had full mastery. [54](#)

The princes with those princesses,
and they with them, fulfilled each other:
the unions of these brides and grooms
were like those of root words with affixes
and of faith with temperament. [55](#)

Thus were married his four sons
and the loving Dasaratha started

from Mithila on a three-stage journey
for returning to his own city. 56

(51-56)

A CONFRONTATION

A wind contrary plagued the road
on which Dasaratha's army marched,
the flags and trees it overwhelmed,
like a river's flood does the shore. 57

A halo dark then ringed the sun,
like a gem encircled by
the body of a lifeless serpent
by the eagle Garuda slain. 58

Grey with circling falcon wings
and draped in blood-red evening clouds,
the skyline seemed like menstruating

women who should not be seen. 59

The sun now moved in a direction
where lived she-jackals, and they howled
as if to incite that fierce scion
of Bhrigu who performed his rites
ancestral with Kshatriya blood. 60

Noticing all these evil omens
and concerned for general peace,
the king, who understood his duties,
turned to his guru, who assured him
that in the end all would be well. 61

(57-61)

Then, immediately, there appeared
a mass of light before the army;
it blinded soldiers' eyes at first,
but then they saw a human form. 62
It wore the thread and held a bow,
its signs paternal and maternal,

looked like a sun joined by the moon,
a serpent fused with the sandal tree. 63

It was of one who executed

the order of his cruel father,
even though it crossed the law,
and his trembling mother beheaded:
renounced first pity, then the world. 64
He wore on his right ear a string
of seeds on which he had kept count
of the twenty-one times he had
of the Kshatriyas made an end. 65
And the king, who had young sons,
was distressed that he was pitted
against that scion of Bhrigu, who was filled
with rage at his own father's killing
and sworn to destroy royal families. 66
His heart was also struck by fear
of this most unfriendly presence,
whose name, Rama, was the same
as his own son's: like gems are
the same, in snakes and necklaces. [67](#)
'Take this, take!' the king then cried
but, ignoring him, that person
fixed on Bharata's elder brother
his fierce eyes which flamed as if
the Kshatriyas to incinerate. 68

(62-68)

THE DIALOGUE

With a bow clenched in his fist
and an arrow at his finger,
he then spoke to Raghava
who stood before him, unafraid. [69](#)

'The wrongs the Kshatriyas committed
have made them my foes,' he said,
'and slaying them does give me peace;
but your valour's display angers me,
like a sleeping snake hit with a stick. 70
On hearing that you have broken
the Mithila bow, which other kings
could not even bend, it is as if
my own flagstaff had been snapped. 71
Once, uttered in this world, the word
"Rama" to me alone referred;
now, it shames me, that it turns
contrarily towards your rise. 72

(69-72)

'My weapon is never blunted
even striking at a mountain;
its foes are two, with the same offence:
Haihaya stole my cow and calf,
now you have done that to my fame. [73](#)
My killing all Kshatriya, even,
cannot satisfy me without
your defeat. How can the fire
count for anything at all, unless
it burns in the sea as in a twig? 74
The bow of Shiva that you broke,
know its strength had been depleted
by Vishnu: it was like a tree
on the riverside, willing to be uprooted
even by a modest breeze. 75
So, string this bow of mine, and stand

with an arrow on it drawn,

to prove your arms are no less strong

and can vanquish even me. 76

But if you are a coward, scared

of the sharp edge of my axe,

then no need to draw that string;

clasp your hands and plead for mercy.' 77

(73-77)

Thus did the fearsome Bhargava speak,

and Raghava, with a little smile,

gave a fitting answer simply by

taking that weapon in his hand. 78

It was the bow of his previous birth,

with it he made a pleasing sight:

like a new cloud, by itself agreeable,

but now embellished with a rainbow. 79

Then, one end of that bow he stood

upon the ground, and strung it strongly;

it made that enemy of the Kshatriyas,

a comet now reduced to smoke. 80

And people saw, in the two of them,

the sun and the moon at end of day:

glory of the one extinguished,

and of the other on the rise. 81

(78-81)

CONCLUSION

Raghava was like the god of war,
but also merciful and tender;
as the arrow had to be discharged,
and the other was downcast, he spoke: 82
'I cannot strike you pitilessly,
O Brahmin, though you slighted me:
say, with this dart what should I hit—
your progress or your gaining heaven?' 83
'It is not that I do not know
you, Ancient One,' that sage replied,
'but I just wished to see the glory

of Vishnu incarnate on earth
and therefore enraged you. 84
My father's foes I had reduced
to ashes, and the sea-girt earth
gifted to deserving people;
so, my defeat by you, Parameshthi,
is deserving of all praise. 85
As such, O foremost of the wise,
guard the progress that I seek
to the blessed sanctum, for
your laying waste the way to heaven
will not pain one like myself
who does not those charms covet.' 86

(82-86)

'So be it,' said Raghava,
and, looking east, discharged the arrow
which barred Bhargava's way to heaven
though many good deeds he had done. 87
Raghava also bowed before that sage,
touched his feet and sought forgiveness:
courtesy to the one defeated
gives glory to the victor strong. 88
'As I leave my mother's stock dynamic

and move to that of peace paternal,
you have indeed favoured me
by barring me from the joys of heaven. 89
I go, and may the work you will
do for the gods be trouble free.'
With these words to Lakshmana's brother,
that sage then did disappear. 90

(87-90)

With the sage gone, and Rama winning,
as if being born once more,
he was hugged by his loving father
who now felt a great relief
at the passing of a moment's grief:
like a tree on fire does
with a shower of the rain. 91
Having travelled for some nights
in tents, the king then did return
to his capital of Ayodhya,
where girls were peeping through their windows
for a glimpse of Mithila's daughter. 92

(91-92)



CANTO 12

THE TRAVAILS OF DASARATHA

Having enjoyed all its richness,
he had reached life's final stage
and, like an oil lamp's flame at dawn,
was awaiting his release. 1

Now age, in the guise of his grey hair,
crept and whispered in his ear,
as if afraid of Kaikeyi,

to invest Rama with sovereignty. 2

As he was loved by all the citizens,
the talk of Rama's elevation
filled everyone with joy, as does
a watercourse the garden trees. 3

But Kaikeyi's cruel thinking did
poison plans for this appointment,
and the tears shed by the king
dried up in a fever of grief. 4

Like the earth, when wet with rain
does squeeze out a pair of snakes,
that virago, though assured
by her husband, did remind him
of the two boons he had promised her. 5

Now, with one, she sought exile
of Rama for fourteen years,
and with the other, sovereignty
for her son, not knowing it would
lead to her own widowhood. 6

(1-6)

Rama, who had wept on having
the earth bequeathed by his father,
now accepted happily
the order sending him to the forest. 7

People were astonished that,
whether wearing silks auspicious
or being garbed in barks of trees,

his expression stayed the same. 8
Joined by Sita, and by Lakshmana,
he entered Dandaka's forest land
and the hearts of all good people,
his father's vow kept inviolate. 9
The king, distraught at this separation,
then his own deed did recall
as also the curse which had followed,
and concluded his repentance
lay in forsaking his body. [10](#)
Then the kingdom, with its ruler dead,
and the princes sent away,
became a hunting ground for foes
adept at searching for some weakness. 11

(7-11)

BHARATA AND RAMA

The citizens were now orphaned;
holding back their tears, they sent for
Bharata, who was with his uncle,
through ministers hereditary. 12
Thus did the son of Kaikeyi
learn about his father's death;

but he turned his back not only on
his mother, but even sovereignty. 13
In tears he went then with the army
to the trees where Rama lived
with Lakshmana; the hermits there
pointed out the place to him. 14
There, in the Chitrakuta forest,
he told Rama of their father's death,
and asked him to take the sovereignty
with its wealth which was untouched. 15
But that firstborn of the siblings
would not the sovereignty accept;
he believed his taking it
would be like a younger brother
marrying before the elder one—
and would go against the law. 16
As the other also was unable,
to bypass their father's order,
he begged for his pair of sandals
to keep as rulers of the realm. 17
'So be it,' his brother said,
and Bharata left, but did not enter
the capital, going instead
to Nandigrama, where he guarded
the kingdom, as if held in trust. 18
Firm and steadfast in devotion
to his elder, his back turned
to any hankering for the realm,

Bharata seemed to be atoning
for the misdeed of his mother. 19

(12-19)

RAMA IN THE FOREST

Though still young, Rama observed
the vow made by his ancient father,
and stayed in the forest with Vaidehi
and his younger brother, peacefully. [20](#)

Under its greenery he rested,
its shade pinned on him by his power,
and, occasionally, when feeling tired,
he reclined in Sita's lap. [21](#)

Her breasts were once pecked by a bird,
which indeed was Indra's son,
acting as if to find some fault

with marks on them of making love. [22](#)

By her of this being informed,
Rama hit him with a dart
made of straw, and he could only
save himself with the loss of an eye. [23](#)

(20-23)

Rama, being much concerned
that Bharata was in a place nearby
and may come to him again,
then left the Chitrakuta woods
with their many restless deer. [24](#)

Like the sun, when the rains are over,
he moved southwards, staying at
the hospitable hermitages

of ascetic sages on the way. [25](#)

And, though forbidden by Kaikeyi,
the daughter of Videha's ruler
followed him, like sovereignty
that still esteemed his qualities. [26](#)

Anusuya to her presented
an ointment of blessed scent

which drew the bees that flitted off
the forest blooms towards her body. [27](#)

(24-27)

Then a demon named Viradha,
red-brown as an evening cloud,
stood obstructing Rama's way,
like the planet Rahu does the moon. 28
A scorcher of the world was he,
and made off with Maithili
from between the brothers two,
like a drought does with the rain
midst two months of the rainy season. [29](#)
The two Kakutsthas slew him then,
and thinking that his fetid smell
would pollute that region whole,
in the earth thereafter buried him. 30

(28-30)

SHURPANAKHA AND OTHER DEMONS

Then Rama stayed at Panchavati
as advised by the sage Agastya,
keeping to its natural limit,
like the Vindhya mountain at its site. [31](#)

Here, king Ravana's younger sister,

seeking sex, did come to Rama,
like a she-snake sick with heat
goes to a Malaya sandal tree. [32](#)
Women in the grip of lust excessive
cannot comprehend occasions:
in Sita's presence itself, she

sought him, and spoke of her family. [33](#)

'Lady, I have a wife,' said Rama,
'go and court my younger brother!'

Thus did he of bull-like shoulders
speak to that libidinous woman. [34](#)

But, unwelcome to the brother too,
as she had earlier sought his elder,

she then came back to Rama,
like a river seeking either shore. [35](#)

She looked pretty for the moment,

but Maithili then laughed at her,

and this enraged her terribly,
like a nascent wave on a windless sea

is stirred up by the rising moon. [36](#)

'You'll quickly learn the consequence
of this insult; just look at me

and know what you have done

is like a doe scorning a tigress.' [37](#)

Thus rebuked, and out of fear,

Maithili hid in her husband's arms,

as Shurpanakha then did reveal

her real form, true to her name. [38](#)

Lakshmana had heard her speak,
 first sweetly, like a koel's call,
 then with a jackal's terrible howl:
 he knew that she was magical. 39
 So, quickly he went into their hut,
 and drawing out his scimitar,
 he made her frightful ugliness
 doubly worse in every way. 40
 Shouting threats, she skyward leaped,
 her knee-joints rough as bamboo knots,
 fingers, curled like cattle goads,
 brandishing their crooked nails. 41
 Swiftly she reached Janasthana,
 and told Khara and the others
 of the slight, as it had taken place,
 done by Rama to the demons. 42
 But, as on Rama they then marched,
 her face demonic, mutilated,
 which before them she displayed,
 turned out to be a luckless omen. 43

Seeing them as they approached
 with arrogance and weapons raised,
 Rama placed Sita with Lakshmana,
 and hope of victory on his bow. 44
 Though alone was Dasaratha's son,
 and in thousands were the demons,
 he seemed to multiply himself
 wherever they looked in battle. 45

Just as good people cannot bear
 an evil utterance of the wicked,
 so too, he could not tolerate
 the demon Dushana come before him. 46
 With arrows did he battle him,
 Khara too, and the ghoul Trishira:

his darts, discharged one after another,
seemed to leave his bow together. 47
Their sharp points, the demons' bodies piercing,
emerged as stainless as before:
they emptied all three of their lives,
left their blood for birds nearby. 48
Cut down thus by Rama's arrows,
nothing of that army vast
could be seen except the headless
corpses lying in a pile. 49
Thus, having confronted him,
that fiendish force was put to sleep
in the shade of vultures' wings,
by Rama raining arrows on it,
never to wake again. 50
Of the demons slain by Raghava,
Shurpanakha alone remained
to give Ravana this bad news. 51

(44-51)

IN SEARCH OF SITA

The mutilation of his sister
and the killing of his kin,
to Ravana seemed to be the foot
of Rama placed upon his ten heads. 52
So, with a fiend in deer's disguise,
he tricked both the Raghava brothers
and carried off the lady Sita,
though he was stalled momentarily
in fighting with a lord of birds. [53](#)
As the brothers then searched for Sita,
they found this vulture, which had been

indebted to Dasaratha for his love;
now, with both its wings cut off,
if was on the verge of death. 54
It told the two of Ravana's deed,
the abduction of Maithili,
and its own preventive efforts,
from wounds evident, as it died. 55
This brought back to them the memory
of grief at their own father's passing,
that bird's cremation they performed
as it was for their parent done. 56

Now, Rama slew and freed the demon
Kabandha from a previous curse
and, on his advice, then developed
with a monkey a friendship close. [57](#)

(52-57)

Thereafter did this hero slay
Bali, and in his long-hoped place
instal Sugriva, it was like
a verb united to its root. [58](#)
Then, directed by their master,
the monkeys searching for Vaidehi

spread out in every direction,
as did Rama's thoughts and hopes. 59
Through the vision of Sampati,
they obtained due news of her,
and Maruti did then cross the ocean,
like a selfless person does this world. 60

Searching in the city of Lanka,
he finally saw Janaki
surrounded by she-demons, like
a healing herb by poisonous vines. 61
The monkey came to her, submitted

her husband's ring of recognition
and then beheld her welling tears,
like of her joy some cooling drops. 62
Having Sita reassured
with her lover's message, the monkey then
was pleased to kill the demon Aksha,
and for a moment suffer enemy bonds,
before setting Lanka's town on fire. 63

(58-63)

With him, it seemed, Vaidehi's heart
itself returned, as he displayed
to Rama the jewel she had sent
as a token of her remembrance. 64
As her husband took that gem
which had rested by her heart;
its touch, though it was not her breast,
had him close his eyes in bliss
at the embrace of his darling. 65
Having news of his beloved,
Rama longed to be with her:
he thought the sea surrounding Lanka
was no more than a meagre moat. 66

(64-66)

MARCH TO COMBAT

Then, the enemy to destroy,
he proceeded, followed by
an army of monkeys, moving
on land as well as in the sky. 67
On reaching the ocean's shore
he was by Vibhishana met,
whose mind had with love been filled,
a godsend for the demon's fate. [68](#)
In good time initiated,
policies indeed bear fruit;
and Raghava promised him, in response,
sole dominion over demons. 69

He then had on the salt-sea water
a bridge laid out, which seemed to be
like the serpent Sesa risen
from the nether world for Vishnu's rest. 70
And, crossing over by that path,
he surrounded Lanka with
a second golden wall, as if
formed by monkeys red and brown. 71

(67-71)

Then commenced a fearful battle
of the demons and the monkeys,
as victory calls from either side
were heard from every direction. 72
Iron clubs were struck with trees,
maces crunched by rocks and stones,
other arms with claws confronted
and elephants with mountain peaks. 73
Sita lost all consciousness
on seeing Rama's head cut off:
Trijata brought her back to life,
telling her it was just magic. [74](#)
'My lord lives, indeed,' she cried,

and stopped grieving, though ashamed
that, having earlier thought him dead,
she had continued to live. 75

(72-75)

HEIGHT OF BATTLE

Meghanada's net of serpent missiles
was for the two sons of Dasaratha
an affliction for some moments,
but, severed by Garuda's advent,
it was like a passing dream. [76](#)

Then Paulastya did pierce the breast
of Lakshmana by a weapon which
tore with grief the heart of Rama
though he was not by it struck. [77](#)

Lakshmana's suffering was relieved
by a herb that Maruti brought,
and with his arrows he once more
made the women of Lanka weep. 78

He dealt with Meghanada's roar
and the heavenly bow he bore,
as the autumn does with clouds,
letting no part of them remain. 79

Then Kumbhakarna, who had been

by the king of monkeys put
in a similar state as his own sister,
like a hill of red rock pared by chisels,
came forward to challenge Rama. [80](#)

Untimely wakened by his brother
with, 'Useless is your love of dreaming,'
now, the arrows shot by Rama
put him to everlasting sleep. 81

Many other demons too
were by the monkey army felled,
like dust arising from the battle
into rivers full of blood. 82

THE FINAL DUEL

Then did the demon king emerge
from his palace for the battle,
his mind made up for the world to be
of Ravana or of Rama free. 83
Seeing Rama fight on foot
with Lanka's lord in a chariot,
Indra then dispatched for him
one harnessed with bay stallions. 84
And Raghava, seeking victory, took
the arm of the charioteer divine
to mount that car, its banner waving
with a wind from the Ganga of the sky. 85

Matali, the charioteer, placed
upon his body Indra's armour,
on which the weapons of the demons
would be, like lotus leaves, futile. 86

(83-86)

The long-awaited time had come
for displaying to one another,
their prowess and heroic valour
in the Rama-Ravana battle
that was now about to start. 87
He was no longer as before
and, though alone, Kubera's brother
with his many heads and arms,
now looked as if to be a part
of his mother's family. 88
A conqueror of all the deities,
one who lifted Mount Kailasa
and had his own heads sacrificed
to the great god, he was considered
by Rama as a worthy foe. 89

(87-89)

In Rama's right arm, still aquiver

to make known it longed for Sita,
Ravana drove through now an arrow
he let fly with utmost anger. 90
And Rama's arrow also pierced
the chest of Ravana, and then sank
into the earth, as if to offer
his greetings to the serpents there. 91
The wrathful clashing of their weapons
then continued and escalated,
like two contestants in debate,
cut at each others' words to win. 92
In that heroic give and take,
both were matched quite equally:
victory betwixt them seemed
poised like the fencing in between them,
buffeted by two rutting elephants. 93
Their arrows, showered on each other,
did not let through the rain of flowers
on them released by gods and demons
delighted at their thrusts and parries. 94
A club studded with iron nails
the demon then launched at his foe,
like the mace of the god of death,
earlier won by him, it was. 95
It carried all demonic hopes,
but with crescent-headed arrows,
as if slicing through bananas,
Rama cut it down with ease
before it reached his chariot. 96

(90-96)

Then that matchless archer placed
Brahma's missile on his bow:
it was the remedy for extracting
that thorn, the loss of his beloved. 97
With its flaming rays it spread
a hundredfold across the sky,
and like a serpent huge, uncoiled,

dreadful with a host of hoods. 98
With due incantations launched,
within a moment it cut down
Ravana's array of heads,
that had no time to feel the pain. 99
And as they fell, cut at the throats
of the demon, this multitude
shone like the rising sun's reflections
multiplied by rolling waves. 100
Those falling heads, the gods beheld
but, fearing that they could be
joined together once again,
could not fully believe the sight. 101

(97-101)

VICTORY

Then, on the head of Ravana's rival,
now nearing its jewelled crown,
the gods sent down a rain of flowers
with fragrance that drew bees away
from their own elephants' ichor flow. 102

Raghava, having now accomplished
the task required for the gods,
then put away his bow and arrows
as, after taking his permission,
the charioteer of Indra flew
that chariot of a thousand horses,
its flagstaff marked with arrows bearing
Ravana's name, into the sky. 103

Raghupati then welcomed his darling,
by the fire rendered pure,
entrusted his friend Vibhishana
with the crown won from the enemy,
and with Lakshmana, and attended
by the monkey king, Sugriva,
did mount that jewel among
the aerial cars that he had gained,
and proceeded homewards. [104](#)

(102-104)



CANTO 13

RAMA AND SITA: OVER THE SEA

The sky is also Vishnu called,
and as the god, here known as Rama,
now traversed it in an aerial car,
alone with his wife, he looked down
at the ocean, and said to her: 1
'Behold this foaming sea, Vaidehi,
ti ll the Malayas by my bridge divided,
like the clear and star-filled sky

of autumn is by the Milky Way. 2
Our forebears enlarged this ocean
as they dug through the earth in search

of their father's sacrificial horse
which Kapila took to the netherworld. 3
It gives the sun's rays fertility,
and within it pearls do grow;
it guards the fire submarine,
and from it the birth occurred
of the moon with its gladdening glow. 4
Its glory spreads in all directions
and assumes so many aspects
that their forms, like those of Vishnu,
are beyond our estimation. 5

On it, even at time's end,
having all the worlds dissolved,
lies the Primal One in mystic sleep,
lauded first by the Creator, who sits
on the lotus risen from his navel. 6
And mighty mountains in their hundreds,
deprived of wings and arrogance
by Indra, seek refuge with it,
like kings oppressed by enemies
do with a virtuous emperor. 7

Its waters spread at the end of time
and on that occasion gave
to this earth a veil of modesty
when it was from the netherworld
rescued by the Primal One. [8](#)

(1-8)

'The sea drinks rivers, makes them drink,
and taking the bold ones by the mouth,
offers them its waves as lips—
as spouses do in common life. 9
And great fish, with gaping jaws
take in the river flows, together
with the creatures in them, and
then spout the water through

the openings upon their heads. 10
Look at those monster crocodiles,
no smaller than elephants,
leap through the sea foam suddenly
and split it into sections two,

which then, for a moment, cling
to their cheeks like fly whisks. 11
And, almost like the rolling waves,
look at those snakes from them emerging
for a bit of seaside air,
the gems on their spread-out hoods
in the sunlight glittering even more. 12
And at those shells of conch in clusters
flung up suddenly by the waves,
still entangled in their nets
of coral shoots which match your lips. 13
Wishing as if, with clouds, to drink
itself in the vortex of that whirlpool,
this sea indeed looks wonderful,
as if, with a mountain churned again.' [14](#)

(9-14)

REACHING THE SHORE

'And that dark and slender row
of forest palm and *tamala* trees
marks out like a rusty line,
looking like iron from this distance,
the shores of this salt-water mass. 15

The seashore air adorns your face
with pollen from the *ketaka* flowers,
as if it knows, O wide-eyed beauty,
that I cannot bear the loss of time
in its make-up and decoration
while thirsting for your red lips! 16

And now, with this air vehicle's speed,

we are on the ocean's other shore,
its sands peppered with oyster shells
and rows of betel bent with fruit. 17
So, you of lovely eyes and hips,
just have a look at the way behind us,
the sea does now seem far away,
and the wooded land coming out of it. 18

Look at this aerial car, it moves
in any way that I may wish,
sometimes by the path of gods,
at others by that of clouds and birds. 19

Curious, with a hand put out
of this car, you quickly touch
a cloud which has, it seems, provided
with its lightning flash, for you
a second bracelet on the wrist. 20

But, as the day now touches noon,
the flow of air throughout the sky
will dry the sweat beads on your face:
cool with the heavenly river's waves,
it has the scent of Indra's elephant.' 21

OVER JANASTHANA AND BEYOND

'See, those people wearing tree barks,'
he then continued to tell her,
'who their hermitages left long ago,
now new huts entering:
they know that this land, Janasthana,
is now of past afflictions free. [22](#)
This is the same land where I found,
while searching for you, on the ground
an anklet which lay silent there,
as if in grief at being parted
from the lotus bud, your foot. 23
And, timid one, when you were

by that demon carried off,
his path was kindly shown to me
by those vines, which cannot speak,
with their branches bent with buds. 24
Those does ignored the grass they chew
and told me, who did not know,
where you were taken, with their eyes,
wide open, pointing to the south. 25

That hill in front is Malyavan
with a peak that meets the sky,
on it fresh clouds did shower rain
and I tears at separation from you. [26](#)
For, the scent of rain-drenched buds
of half-opened *kadamba* blooms,
and the sweet calls of the peacocks,
had become unbearable
without you beside me. 27
Somehow did I pass the night
in a cave reverberating
with the rumble of the clouds,
with memories of your tight embraces

when you trembled, were afraid. 28

(22-28)

'My eyes were troubled by the vapours
rising from the rain-soaked ground,
like the smoke from our wedding fire
which made your lovely eyes as red
as a new bloom on the plantain tree. 29

I looked out at the Pampa lake,
its shore lined with clumps of cane
through which floated waterbirds;
and my tired eyes seemed, as if,
to drink its water from afar. 30
On it I saw birds, in their couples,
each other feeding lily stems.
Darling, this made me envious,
for I was far away from you. 31
That ashoka vine, so slender,
bent with blossoms like your breasts:
in tears I was and wished to embrace it
in your place, till Lakshmana stopped me. 32

(29-32)

'Hearing the sound of golden bells
from this aerial car suspended,
the birds from the river Godavari
are now flying up to welcome you. 33
And here is the Panchavati grove,
seeing which gives me great joy.
Here young mango trees you watered,
even when it was hard,
as the spotted deer did gaze upon you. 34
I remember sleeping here
in a straw hut, just the two of us,
my head resting in your lap,
all fatigue of hunting gone
in the breeze from Godavari's waves.' 35

(33-35)

PASSING OVER HERMITAGES

'The land below is the hermitage
of the sage who water purified,
whose mere raising of an eyebrow
made Nahusha fall from Indra's state. [36](#)

I smell the scent of offerings
in that blessed sage's triple fire;
it makes me feel light, free of stress,
as the smoke swirls up into the sky. 37

And there, proud one, beside the forest,
where lived the hermit Shatakarni,
lies the lake called Panchapsara,
which, from this distance, shimmers
like a moon amidst the clouds. 38

In ancient times that sage lived there,
subsisting merely on the grass
he grazed alongside antelopes.
Indra, frightened of his penance,
trapped him with five youthful nymphs. 39

Within the waters of this lake
he then in a palace lived,
engrossed in music. And the roll
of drums resounding from its turret
still for a moment echoes there. 40

(36-40)

'And here, an ascetic, self-restrained,
his name Sutikshna, does perform
a penance amidst the fires four,
with the sun's flames as the fifth. 41
His penance also worried Indra,
but he could not disturb it through
the sensuous efforts of the nymphs,
their smiling glances and their tricks
in flashing one half of the girdle. 42
His left arm is always upraised,

but with the other, which is bound
in a string of beads, and he uses to
pluck sacred grass and caress the deer,
he greets me with courtesy. 43

As he observes a vow of silence,
so, with a slight nod of the head,
he acknowledges my salute,
then turns his gaze away from us,
and fixes it on the sun again. 44

Here is a blessed place of refuge,
the hermitage of Sharabhanga,
the fire-sacrifice performer, who
long fed its flames with due oblations,
and then, with spells making it pure,
his own body in them cast. 45

And now, the trees here, like good sons,
greet his guests with tasty fruit
and give shade that does dispel
their fatigue by travel caused. 46

(41-46)

'This, fair one, is Chitrakuta,
filled with the sound of waterfalls
in front of its caves, and clouds
massed in clusters by its peak.

It holds my gaze, as does a mound
of earth that of a butting bull. 47

That river, flowing clear and calm,
looking narrow from this distance,
is the Mandakini, gleaming,
like a string of pearls around this hill. 48

And near the hill is that fine tamala,
the tree with whose fragrant buds
I made an earring to decorate
your cheek, pale as a barley sprout. 49

(47-49)

'This is the grove of Atri's penance,
it manifests his noble power:

free of fear, all creatures here
are gentle, and the trees do bear
fruit before they even flower. [50](#)
Here indeed, by Anusuya,
for ascetics to have their baths,
was Ganga made to change her course,
that stream, a garland on the head
of Shiva, from which the seven sages
do pluck the golden lotus blooms. 51
In this still and windless place
even the trees appear to be
performing yoga, in between
the altars of meditating sages
sitting in the heroic pose. [52](#)
This dark fig tree is known as Shyama,
you prayed before it in the past;
it now has fruit which glow and glitter

like a pile of emerald gems.' 53

(50-53)

OVER THE GREAT RIVERS

'And, O beauty of faultless limbs,
there, behold, the Ganga's flow,
so different from the Yamuna's waves:
like the great god Shiva's form,
some of its parts with ash besmeared
and others decked with serpents dark. [54](#)
At places, like a rod of pearls

soaked in the light of massed sapphires,
at others, a garland of pale white lotuses
also strung with lilies blue. [55](#)
Somewhere it is like a row of swans
with dark-winged herons alternating,

elsewhere a line of black incense
drawn on sandal-powdered ground. [56](#)
In places, moonlight spotted with
and merging into shadows dark,
in others, like white autumnal clouds
through gaps in which blue sky is seen. [57](#)
In the concourse of the waters
of these two consorts of the ocean,

a dip indeed for men and women,
even if they aren't enlightened,
frees them from all earthly bonds. [58](#)

(54-58)

'Here, in this town of the chief of boatmen,
by me the crown jewel was discarded
and my hair tied in a knot,
as Sumantra, charioteer
of Dasaratha, wept and cried:
"Your wish has been achieved, Kaikeyi!" [59](#)
And this is the river Sarayu, which
with its waves cooled by the wind,

hugs me, who has returned from far,
like my mother, who lost her lord. [60](#)

Its source is in the Manasa lake,
as sages and the scriptures say,
the pollen from its lilies golden
adorns the breasts of nymphs celestial. [61](#)

Its banks with ritual posts embedded
at the sacrifice of the horse,
for the rite's concluding bath
Ikshvaku's scions come to them
and bless its waters at Ayodhya. [62](#)

These sandy banks are a lap of comfort,
which nourish with ample water
the people of Uttara Kosala,
and my heart respects this river
like a mother for us all.' [63](#)

THE WELCOME ON RETURN

'There rises from the ground ahead
dust with the copper tints of dusk.
I think , informed by Hanuman, Bharata
comes to greet me with the army. 64
A saint, he did sovereignty guard
in keeping with our father's vow,
and will give it back to me,
untouched, as did on my return
from battle, killing Khara and the rest,
Lakshmana, who had guarded you. 65
And here he comes, garbed in tree-bark,
the gift in hand, with old ministers;
he is on foot, has placed the guru

before himself and the troops behind. 66
The sovereignty, by our father given,
went to him, but he took it not
out of respect for me; instead,
though young, he kept it like the vow
of the sword's edge all these years.' [67](#)

(64-67)

With these words of Dasaratha's son,
and of his wish by the gods informed,
that aerial chariot from the sky descended,
watched in wonder by the people
who had come in Bharata's train. 68
And from it Rama then came down
on a crystal stairway to the ground,
with a hand to him extended
by the monkey king, adept in service,
and the way shown by Vibhishana. 69
Always pure, he did salute
the guru of Ikshvaku's line,
accept the offering from his brother

tearfully, embracing Bharata

and sniffing his head which had
with love declined its coronation
to the kingdom of their father. [70](#)

His face now sprouting unkempt whiskers
like roots which hang from banyan trees,
he acknowledged the old ministers'
salutations with loving looks
and sweet words of enquiry. 71

'This is my friend from difficult times,
the leader of the bears and monkeys,
and this the scion of Pulatsya
who struck the first blow of the battle';
thus by Rama introduced
Bharata did salute the two. [72](#)

And then he met Sumitra's son,
raised his head as it was bowed,
and folded him in a tight embrace,
as if he felt himself the hurt
of the harsh wound on the other's chest
inflicted by Indrajit. [73](#)

With Rama's permission, then,
the lord of monkeys did assume
human form and climb atop
the elephants rutting like waterfalls,
from which he obtained the pleasure
of having gone up to a hilltop. 74

The demon lord with his retainers
also mounted chariots, though
their splendour, made by magic,
did not match the others there. 75

(68-75)

Then Raghupati, with his brothers,
once more stepped on to the aerial carriage,
which could, with its fluttering banners,
move in accordance with his wishes:

it was a scene which did compare
with the moon and two bright planets
at night, on a cloud with lightning flashes. [76](#)
And there Bharata bowed before
the steadfast Maithili who had been
saved by Rama from the ten-headed demon,
like the earth from the great deluge,
and the moon from thundering clouds. [77](#)
And then, the feet of Janaka's daughter,
who defied the lord of Lanka,
touched now by the head of one
who had long served his elder brother,
did purify, the one and the other. [78](#)
Thereafter, that aerial car,
with the people walking before it,
went forward very gently and,
after half a league, they reached
the charming garden of Saketa
where Shatrughna had made arrangements. [79](#)

(79-76)



CANTO 14

FAMILY REUNION

Thereafter, upon the garden reaching,
Dasaratha's two sons, both together,
saw their mothers in a piteous state:
their husband gone, they were now like
two vines whose tree had been cut down. 1
Both sons, who had their enemies slain
and shone splendid with that valour,
their mothers saluted in due order
but, blind with tears, those ladies could not
see them straight, just recognized
their children's touch, and its pleasure. 2
Fresh tears, cooled with this joy,
followed the hot ones born of grief,

as do cascades from snowy peaks
join the Ganga's stream, in summer hot. 3
Both touched their sons' limbs tenderly,
as if still fresh were the demons' wounds,
but the word 'begetter of a warrior',
so sought by women of the Kshatriyas,
was one that they did not like. 4
'I am that ill-omened Sita,
who caused such suffering for her husband':
thus did the daughter-in-law herself
now introduce, with no distinction
as she bowed to both the queens
of her departed father-in-law. 5
'Arise, O child,' both matrons said
in words pleasing, but not false,
to one who their love deserved,
'it was only with your conduct pure
that your husband and his brother
could come through that terrible time.' 6

Thereafter, Rama's consecration,

begun with the joyous tears of mothers,
was by old ministers sealed
with golden jars of blessed water. 7
And on that victor's head were poured,
like streams from clouds on Vindhya's peaks,
the waters brought by monkeys and demons
from all the rivers, lakes and seas. 8
But for one, who even in ascetic garb
was more than glorious to behold,
such splendour, that of a king of kings,
now assumed, was repetitious. 9
With old ministers, demons, monkeys,
his army's drums delighting citizens,
and rice grains showered from the mansions,
he entered the family capital. 10
Seated in a chariot, with
the whisks waved by Sumitra's sons,
and the parasol held by Bharata,
he seemed to be surrounded by,
literally, all the means of state. 11
The smoke of incense lit in houses,
swirling up, spread with the wind,
as if, on his return from the forest,
that best of Raghus himself was
undoing the city's plaits. 12
And his wife, in a litter carried,
dressed elegantly by her mothers-in-law,
was with clasped hands saluted
by the ladies of Saketa
peering from their mansions' windows. 13
Splendid in the glittering glow
of Anusuya's pomade golden,
she shone, as if again displayed
by her husband to his city that,
in fire tested, she was pure. 14
Good-hearted Rama, having given
his friends abodes and facilities,

then tearfully the palace entered
of his father, where a portrait
commemorating him still remained. 15
There, with folded hands, he assuaged
the ignominy of Bharata's mother,
saying: 'O mother, we do believe
that if our father did not falter
from the truth which leads to heaven,
it was to your goodness due.' 16

(7-16)

RAMA'S ELEVATION

People's minds were filled with wonder
at Sugriva's and Vibhishana's work
of arrangements at the ceremony
whereby all things materialized
upon merely being wished for. 17
Honouring the heavenly sages
who had come for that assemblage,
from them he heard a full account,
underlining his own valour,
of the foe that he had slain. 18
Thereafter Rama bade farewell
to the lords of monkeys and of demons,
whom Sita served with her own hands
in such comfort that they forgot
that half a month had passed already
since the sages had departed. 19
That car heavenly, which did move
as one wished, and also helped
deprive the demon of his life,
that flower of light, the Pushpaka,
was then once again returned
for the carriage of Kailasa's lord. [20](#)

(17-20)

At his father's order undertaken,
the forest stay was thus concluded.
Rama now assumed the kingdom,
treating all three worldly ends
those of dharma, artha, kama,
in the same way as he did
all his younger brothers three. 21
He was loved by all the mothers
and gave to each equal respect,
like the heavenly army's leader
with his faces six does drink
from the breasts of the Krittikas. [22](#)

From his virtues, people gained:
he had no greed, and they earned wealth;
he cleared obstructions for their work;
he led them, and they had a father;
he gave them joy, as does a son. 23
Devoting full time to public work,
he took delight in sovereignty,
which expected his enjoyment,
as did the princess of Videha
of charming body, always present. 24
The palace filled with pictures of
their living in the Dandaka forest,
the pains there were now remembered
as pleasure in their present comfort. 25
Then Sita, with love moistened eyes

and a face as pale as *shara* reeds,
became a new joy for her husband
with a pregnancy needing no words. 26
But he knew, and took that charmer,
now thin and shy, with darkened nipples,
when alone, into his arms
and asked what pleasure did she want. 27
She then wished once more to visit
the sylvan groves on Ganga's banks
where she knew the hermit girls
whose spread of grains the wild beasts ate,
and the Raghu chief to this wish agreed. 28

(21-28)

THE RENUNCIATION OF SITA

To see Ayodhya in good cheer,
followed by an aide, he went up
to the palace top which touched the sky. 29

And there he revelled in beholding
the rich shops on the royal road,
boats plying on the river Sarayu,
and the gardens near the city, full
of pleasure-loving citizenry. 30
In speech foremost, in conduct pure,
with arms as strong as a kingly serpent,
that conqueror of foes then asked
his monitor Bhadra of the talk
when people spoke about his ways. 31
Pressed to answer, that man replied:
'All your deeds do please the people,
except the lord's acceptance of
a lady who lived in a demon's house.' 32
With this grave censure of his spouse
which was a blot on his own repute,
the heart of Vaidehi's lover
was split, as if it had been struck
by a red-hot iron hammer. 33
'Should I disregard this obloquy,
or renounce an innocent wife?'
In distress at either option,
his mind swayed, as if upon a swing. 34
As disgrace could not be countered
except by his renunciation,
he then wished his wife to give up:
for those who value their reputation
it is greater even than their selves,
what to say of personal needs. 35

He called his younger brothers then,

and sad to see their perturbation
at his being thus condemned,
in these words did speak to them: 36
'See, what kind of stigma is this,
like a mirror clouded with
some miasma of wet air,
now staining one of conduct pure
and born in a line of royal sages. 37
My reprobation spreads among
the people like oil drops on water;
such censure I can no more bear
than an elephant its chaining pole. 38
To be free of it, with no regard
even of the consequences,
I will give up Videha's daughter,
as I did the earth entire
at my father's order, in the past. 39
I know that she is sinless, but
think people's censure to be strong,
like the blemish on the moon
they hold the earth's shadow to be. 40
As for my slaying of the demon,
that effort was not meaningless,
but reprisal for his hostility:
does an angered snake want blood to drink
when it bites the foot that tramples it? 41
So, if you want that I extract
this thorn of slander and live on,
then my conclusion should not be
with pitying hearts by you opposed.' 42

(36-42)

This decision of their king,
so harsh and hard for Janaka's daughter,
no brother was able to oppose
nor indeed give it support. 43
Then, looking at compliant Lakshmana,
his famous older brother, who

always said what he did mean,
gave an order separately. 44
'Gentle one, your brother's wife
is pregnant and also wishful
to see hermitages; on this pretext
take her to Valmiki's grove
as the charioteer, and leave her there.' 45
This command of the elder brother
the other heard and duly accepted,
as Bhargava had, on his father's order,
like an enemy, struck his mother:
an order given by the elders,
indeed is not to be debated. [46](#)
Thereafter, on a chariot yoked
with well-trained horse, and the reins
in Sumantra's hands, he placed
Vaidehi, who was much pleased
that her wish was being met,
and set off on the journey. 47
She was delighted that her lover
was pleasing her with such a tour
to likable places, but did not know
that rather than wish-yielding trees,
the foliage there had swords for leaves. 48

HER BANISHMENT

While Lakshmana hid her destination,
the throbbing of her right arm declared
the endless, deep unhappiness

into which she was now heading:
her beloved never again to see. 49
The shock of this ill omen, quickly
paled the lotus of her face
as within her heart she prayed
for the king's well-being and his brother's. 50
That chaste and virtuous woman, however,
was about to be abandoned
by Lakshmana on his brother's order,
though the Ganga, now before them,
wished as if to prohibit this
with a wave risen as its hand. 51

He was true to his commitment,
and once the charioteer reined the horses,
he helped his brother's wife descend
from the chariot on the riverbank
and, in a boat the oarsman brought,
ford the Ganga, keeping his vow. 52

(49-52)

Pulling himself together, somehow,
in a choking voice, eyes raining tears
like a cloud with hail portentous,
then did Sumitra's son pronounce
that injunction of the king. 53
It was a sudden blow, and Sita,
like a vine struck by a storm,
the flowers gracing it torn down,
collapsed upon the earth, which had
been the source of her own appearance. 54
But the earth, which gave her birth,

would not shelter her, as if
doubting: 'How could he,
that husband of noble conduct
and scion of Ikshvaku's line
renounce you so suddenly?' 55
She had lost all consciousness
and her sorrow could not feel,
till Sumitra's son revived her;
then it set her heart on fire,
so that regaining her senses was
more painful than having fainted. 56
But that noble woman did not blame
her husband for her banishment
though she had done nothing wrong;
she rather cursed repeatedly
her own self for being one
who has to suffer all the time. 57

(53-57)

Then Rama's cadet brother showed her
the way to the dwelling of Valmiki,
as he assured that lady chaste,
bowed to her, and sought forgiveness
for himself, who was obliged
by her husband's harsh command. 58
Raising him up, Sita said:
'I love you, gentle one, live long;
you are subject to your older brother
as the god Indra is to Vishnu. 59
Please convey my salutations
to all the mothers-in-law, and say
that their son's seed is now within me,
they should think of it and pray. 60
And these, my words, say to that king:
"On hearing public talk, to blame me
who had been before you proved
pure in fire: was that in keeping
with a family such as yours?" 61

Or, "You have a blessed mind,
and this wilful act, I have no doubt,
this thunderbolt unbearable,
is fruit of sins from my earlier births. 62
Sovereignty was yours before
you gave it up and went with me
to the forest; you have it now
but it cannot bear I live with you
with due respect within your house. 63
The hermits, by the demons troubled,
have now by your grace received
refuge; how can I from their wives seek
the same when you so shine with splendour?" 64
Or, "If I did not have within me
your glory, which needs protection,
I would ignore and forsake life,
fruitless with this final separation. 65
So, after having given birth,
I will essay an act of penance,
my gaze fixed on the sun above,
for you alone to be my husband
inseparable in other lives. 66
Now, guarding classes and life's stages
is a king's duty, Manu said.
As such, though exiled by you,
I must be like an ascetic seen." 67
'So be it!' And when she had thus
received the words of Rama's brother,
and he had passed out of her sight,
sunk in distress, she burst forth
in wailing like a frightened doe. 68
Her grief spread even to the forest
which wept, as peacocks gave up dance,
the bees their flowers, and the does
the bits of grass that they had gathered. 69

REFUGE WITH VALMIKI

He was the one who saw a bird
by a hunter shot, and was aroused
to grief that he expressed in a verse.
This poet, gone to fetch some wood,
heard her weeping, and came by. 70
Sita wiped her tear-filled eyes,
ceased lamenting, and bowed to him.
That sage noticed her pregnancy,
blessed her for a safe birth, and said: 71
'From meditation, I do know
of your exile by a husband angered
by false allegations; but Vaidehi,
do not grieve, for you have now
reached another father's house. 72
I am annoyed with Bharata's brother

at the way he has treated you,
both badly and for no cause;
even though he did pluck out
the demon thorns from all three worlds,
and kept his vow without self-praise. 73
Your father-in-law was my friend,
your father comforts all good people,
of faithful wives you are the foremost,
how can I not then sympathize with you? 74
Stay in this hermitage, free of fear,
all creatures here are very gentle
as ascetics do care for them;
your giving birth will cause no problem
and all the rites will be performed. 75
This river Tamasa takes away
all darkness of sin and grief;
a dip in it and then due prayer
on its sandy bank, where hermits live,
will bring tranquillity to your mind. 76

This new sorrow will be assuaged
by soft-spoken hermit girls,
who come here for our prayers, bringing
fruit and flowers of the season,
and seeds of plants which here grow wild. 77
Helping as much as you can
with watering pots our trees to grow,
there is no doubt that you will develop
more love for the infant to be born
even before you give it birth.' 78

(70-78)

As she welcomed his kind favour,
Valmiki, with a heart full of pity,
then took her that very evening
to his hermitage, where by the altar,
all the deer sit peacefully. 79
Like the waning moon in its last phase
to herbs medicinal its glory passes,
the sage did this still-grieving lady
hand over to the hermit women
who were pleased with her arrival. [80](#)
They provided for her stay
and prayer at the end of day
a straw hut with a deer-skin bed
and a lamp of *ingudi* oil. [81](#)
There she stayed, in a tree bark dressed,
subsisting on forest food,
engaged in looking after guests
and guarding her husband's progeny. 82

(79-82)

Meanwhile, wondering if the king
would be inclined to sympathy
at Sita's message and lament,
the slayer of Meghanada did
convey it to his older brother. 83
And Rama it brought to tears,
suddenly, like a winter moon

raining down a frosty shower;

for, fearing blame he had dispatched
Videha's daughter from his house,
never from within his heart. 84
But he swallowed his own grief,

and wise, alert in looking after
all the classes and the stages,
he ruled the realm, his mind composed,
with all his brothers, normally. 85
And his one wife, whom he had banished,
afraid of blame, though she was chaste:
she lived with him within his heart,
a queen without a rival consort. 86
For, on Sita's exile, Ravana's foe
did not marry anyone else,
but kept her image, made of gold,
as the partner for his sacrifices.
And having this, her husband's news,
she too somehow bore the grief
unbearable of her banishment. 87

(83-87)



CANTO 15

RAMA AS RULER

Having renounced the virtuous Sita,
that protector of the kingdom
then devoted himself only
to the ocean-girdled earth. 1
Ascetics from the Yamuna's banks
now came to him to seek recourse
as Lavana, demon of the night,
was their sacred rites desecrating. 2
On him they had not used their power,
seeing that Rama was there,
for ascetics use their curse as weapon
only when they have no guard. 3

The Kakutstha then assured them
retaliation for this sacrilege:
it was for protecting dharma
that Vishnu had come down to earth. 4
A means to slay that foe of gods
they to Rama then explained:
'With his spear, Lavana is invincible,
strike him when he is without it.' 5

(1-5)

Rama then bid Shatrughna
to look after these ascetics
and make his own name meaningful
by chastising enemies. 6
For, any one of the Raghu scions
was able to overcome
and prevail over the enemy,
like exceptions do a general rule. 7
With his elder brother's blessings,
that son of Dasaratha now proceeded
in a chariot to the woodlands
fragrant with their many flowers. 8

(6-8)

To achieve his ends, an army
followed him on Rama's order,
staying with him, as in grammar
a prefix will do with its root. 9
Going by the pathway shown
by ascetics, that warrior shone,
like the sun upon its chariot,
followed by Balakhilya sages. [10](#)
For the night he halted at
the penance grove of Valmiki,
where the sound of chariot wheels
did startle and scare the deer. 11

There the sage welcomed the prince,
and his tired retinue,
with honour and special goods
obtained by the power of his penance. 12
And, his brother's pregnant wife
did give birth that very night
to twin sons; like from the earth
come the final sword and sceptre. 13
Asking the sage with folded hands,
Sumitra's son was most delighted
to learn about his brother's progeny
and, his chariot yoked, he left at dawn. 14

SHATRUGHNA FIGHTS LAVANA

He reached the town of Madhupaghna
where Kumbhinasi's demon son
stood on guard with a horde of creatures
drawn, like revenue, from the forest. 15
From a tribe which raw flesh consumed,
he was like a moving funeral fire,
like the colour of smoke and the smell of blubber,
and flame-red hair upon his head. 16
But this Lavana held no spear
when Lakshmana's younger sibling
found and then attacked him,
and victory comes to one who strikes
where the other is vulnerable. 17
'For my meal the food is not enough:
seeing this, the frightened Maker

has today sent you to me!' 18
Threatening Shatrughna thus,
the demon, bent on killing him,
then tore out a tree enormous,
as if it were a clump of grass. 19
But this tree, which he did fling,
was by Sumitra's son cut down
into bits with arrows sharp,
so that only flowers reached his body. 20
His tree destroyed, the demon then
hurled upon his foe a rock
huge, which stood separately,
like the fist of the god of death. 21
But, drawing out Indra's missile,
Shatrughna then hit that rock
and smashed it into fragments small,
more tiny than grains of sand. 22
Then the demon charged at him

with, in his right arm upraised,
a palm tree swept off a mountain
as if by a stormy wind. 23
But his heart was pierced by
an arrow used on dark-skinned stags,
and the earth shook as he fell,
the hermitages freeing from fear. 24
And birds descended on the body
of the enemy just then slain,
while a rain of heavenly flowers
fell on the head of his adversary. 25

(15-25)

That warrior, having Lavana slain,
now thought himself the brother true
of his strong and vigorous sibling,
who shone at the death of Indrajit. [26](#)
He too glowed, as his head held high
with prowess bent down modestly
at the praise of grateful hermits. 27
An ornament of manliness,
as selfless in worldly matters
as he was gentle in appearance,
he built upon the Yamuna's banks
at Mathura, a beautiful city, [28](#)
which gleamed in the light of good governance
and the citizens' prosperity,
like another heaven filled with people. 29
There, climbing to the palace top,
he was delighted to behold
that river Yamuna with its geese,
like a gold-laced plait upon the earth. 30

(26-30)

THE SONS OF SITA

The sage, who sacred texts recited,
and was a friend to Janaka, also Dasaratha,
now, with love, performed the rites
for both the sons of Maithili. 31

A sacred grass is *kusha* called,
and *lava* the fine hair on cows' tails:
with these the moisture at their birth
being wiped, that poet named
as Kusha and Lava the infants two. 32

As they through infancy progressed,
he taught them Vedas with annexes,
and the singing of his own creation,
that first work of poetry. 33

And, before their mother warbling,
in sweet tones of Rama's deeds,

her two sons could, to some extent,
relieve the pain of her separation. 34

(31-34)

Glorious like the threefold fire,
the other three Raghu scions too,
each of them and their faithful wives,
also did two sons beget. 35

Shatrughna, by his elders loved,
had two sons, slayers of all foes,
Subahu and Bahushruta,
to whom he would eventually give
the towns of Mathura and Vidisha. 36

And, so that there may not again
be any disturbance of the penance
in Valmiki's hermitage, where
the deer were tranquil with the songs
of the sons of Maithili,
he avoided it while returning. 37

Instead he came back to Ayodhya,

decorated for his return,
where people looked at him with pride
at his having Lavana slain. 38
There he saw, in the assembly,
Rama amidst his courtiers,
but the king looked somewhat different
since Sita's renunciation. 39
And, as he bowed, the elder sibling
greeted him, the demon's slayer,
lovingly, as Indra welcomed
his bow-wielding younger brother
on the death of Kalanemi. 40
On being asked, he gave the king
all news except that of his progeny,
as ordered by the first of poets,
who would bring them in due time. 41

(35-41)

THE KILLING OF SHAMBUKA

Meanwhile, a Brahmin of the land
laid down from his arms a child
that had not yet youth attained
at the royal door, and wept: 42
'Alas, O earth, it is so sad
that, relieved of Dasaratha,
you are now in Rama's hands;
from one evil into a greater one.' 43
On learning of his grief the cause,
the monarch, also his protector,
was shocked, for in Ikshvaku's realm,
there was no untimely death. 44
'Forgive me, but give time,' he said,
as he assured the grieving Brahmin.
But then, wishing to vanquish death,
he summoned Kubera's car divi ne. 45
As, duly armed, that best of Raghus
the car mounted and proceeded,
a hidden voice then spoke to him. 46
'O king,' it said, 'amidst your people
some misdeed is taking place;
investigate and put it right,
then you will successful be.' 47
On hearing this message, Rama,
who set right all class violations,
looked everywhere from that car divine,
its flag motionless as it sped. 48
He saw then, hanging from a tree,
one with eyes reddened by smoke,
engaged in penance, upside down. 49
Asked by the king his identity,
that person who inhaled the smoke
gave his name as one Shambuka,
a Shudra who sought godly status. [50](#)
He had no right to such a penance

which was causing pain to people;
so the protector drew his weapon,
deciding to behead him. 51
And he severed, from the neck,
that head with whiskers scorched by sparks,
like a lotus with frost-bitten petals
being cut down from its stem. 52
Chastised by the king himself,
that Shudra forthwith heaven attained;
by penance he would not have got it
as that was for him a misconduct,
which did go against his duties. 53

(42-53)

The lord of Raghus then met with
the great Agastya, who had shown
him the path; their meeting was
like that of autumn and the moon. 54
The pitcher-born to him presented
an ornament divine he had
been given by the ocean, on
its release when it was quaffed. 55
And Rama bore it on his arm
deprived of Maithili's embrace,
as he returned; the Brahmin's son
had meanwhile come back from death. 56
And the Brahmin, with his son united,
now took back his past complaint
with praise for one who had delivered
him even from the god of death. 57

(54-57)

THE HORSE SACRIFICE

Rama held the royal sacrifice
and, for it, released a horse,
as monkeys, demons, other kings
showered gifts for it, like clouds
do rain on fields of grain. 58
Great sages were for this rite invited,
and they came from all directions,
not only from abodes on earth,
but even those celestial. 59
They stayed on the outskirts of the city,
and Ayodhya, with its portals four,
looked splendid, like the worldly form,
grandfatherly, of the world's creator. 60
Though renounced, Vaidehi, too
was honoured by her husband, who
had no other wife, and placed

her golden image as his consort
inside the hall of sacrifice. 61
Then commenced the ritual sacred:
much more than just the ceremony,
there was no one for its disruption
as demons themselves were the guards. 62

(58-62)

And then, the sons of Maithili,
Kusha and Lava, by their guru urged,
began to move around and sing
the Ramayana of Valmiki. 63
Rama's tale, Valmiki's verse,
and the singers' dulcet tones:
which heart would not be truly charmed
among the listeners present? 64
As it was told by those aware
of their good looks and singing sweet,
Rama, with his younger brothers,

watched and heard them eagerly. 65
Like a woodland silent, with no wind,
and dripping frost at break of day,
in tears was that great assembly,
intent on listening to their song. 66
So different in age and garb,
there was a sameness, yet, between
Rama and the singers two,
which people noticed as they stared,
with eyes unblinking at them all. 67
And the people were amazed,
not so much by the singers' skill
as by the gaze of selfless love
that the king did fix on them. 68

(63-68)

RAMA AND VALMIKI

'Who has you this singing taught,
who is the poet of this work?'
Asked thus by the king himself,
the two told him it was Valmiki. 69
And then Rama, with his siblings,
went to the Prachetas sage
and to him offered his kingdom
together with his very self. 70
That kind poet tenderly
told Rama that the singers two
were his sons from Maithili,
and pleaded he take Sita back. 71
'Father,' the king said, in reply,
'your daughter-in-law is pure.
Before our very eyes, in the fire,
this was seen: but the wickedness
of that demon does not let
the people here to trust in her. 72
Let Maithili convince the people
with respect to her character;
then I will, at your command,
take her back and these my sons.' 73
On this promise of the king,
the sage, his purpose to fulfil,
and in accord with ascetic rules,
had Janaki, by his disciples,

escorted from the hermitage. 74
Thereafter, on the following day,
the king gathered the citizenry
and invoked the poet for
completing the work begun. 75
Then the sage to Rama came
with Sita, and with the sons:
it was like the sacred hymns

SITA

Covered in a saffron drape,
with eyes lowered to her feet,
and her person calm and peaceful,
it was clear that she was pure. 77
The people did not look at her;
their gaze averted as she came,
and they stood there with faces downcast,
like corn stalks ripe with grain. 78
From his seat, the sage then asked,
'Daughter, now, before your husband,
free these people of their doubt
about your virtuous comportment.' 79

(77-79)

Then, by a pupil of Valmiki,
given blessed water, which she sipped,
as is the practice at oath-taking,
Sita spoke words pure and true: 80
'If in thought, or word, or deed,
there never was any transgression
by me with respect to my husband,
then, O goddess of the Earth,
take me back inside yourself.' 81
No sooner than that faithful spouse
said this, that a chasm opened up
in the earth, from which arose
a ring of light like a lightning flash. 82
It encircled a serpent's hood,
on which, seated on her throne,
was the goddess Earth herself,
with the ocean as her girdle. 83
Taking Sita in her lap,
as the husband looked at them,
crying 'Do not! Do not!' she
then passed into the earth. 84
Wanting to have Sita back,

he was now with anger filled,
but his guru that archer pacified,
making known the force of fate. 85

(80-85)

THE FINAL PHASE

At the end of the sacrifice,
bidding farewell to the sages
and on his friends rewards bestowing,
Rama now turned his love for Sita
towards the two who were their sons. 86
He guarded all the populace
and, on the advice of Yudhajit,
gave the land, as Sindhu known,
to Bharata, whom he had empowered. [87](#)
There, Bharata in battle conquered
the gandharvas, who abandoned
their wielding of martial weapons
and bearers of the lute became. 88
He then anointed his two sons,
Taksha and Pushkala, in
capitals named after them,

and again came back to Rama. [89](#)
Lakshmana also his two sons,
Angada and Chandraketu,
made lords of the Karapaya land
on the orders of his king. 90
Having thus installed their sons,
the four brothers, lords of people,
performed the last rites of their mothers
who had passed on to their husband. 91

(86-91)

Thereafter, Death, in hermit's garb,
came to Raghava, telling him:
'We two must converse in secret.
If anyone sees us, give him up.' 92
'So be it,' the king agreed.
Then that one revealed himself,
'Parameshthi,' he said, 'commands

that you now come back to heaven.' 93

Lakshmana, who stood at the door,

knew this, but them interrupted,

for he feared being cursed by Durvasa

who wanted to meet with Rama. [94](#)

Going then to the Sarayu's banks,

by yoga he gave up his body

to fulfil the promise made

earlier by his elder brother. 95

With his thus having gone to heaven,

it was as if one-fourth of Raghava

had also gone, and he remained,

as if lessened, on the earth,

like dharma with just three legs. [96](#)

(92-96)

The king then installed, in Kushavati,

Kusha as goad on enemy elephants,

and Lava, whose fine words brought to tears

good people, in Sharavati. 97

Thereafter, with his younger brothers,

he went northwards, firm of mind,

giving up his loved Ayodhya,

preceded by a sacred flame. 98

The monkeys and demons knew his mind

and followed him on his path,

with huge kadamba blossoms showered,

and by the tears of the populace. [99](#)

(92-99)

The car divine for him stood there,

but he cared for his devoted folk

who had followed him up the Sarayu;

for them he did on its bank build

a stairway leading straight to heaven. 100

Those who enter the river there,

can do so with the ease of cows,
and by the name of Goprartara
is that holy ford known on earth. 101
For, they were a part of him,
and now assumed their real form;
all those creatures gods became,
for them he built another heaven. 102
The ten-headed demon having slain,
and for the gods this work completed;
the lord of Lanka and Wind's progeny
having established as his pillars

on the mountains of the south and north;
the great god Vishnu then resumed
his own form which guards all the worlds. [103](#)

(100-103)



CANTO 16

AYODHYA AFTER RAMA

With the cordial fraternity
traditional in their family,
the seven other Raghu chiefs
now offered precious gifts to Kusha,
their elder by both birth and merit. [1](#)
Though all successful and distinguished
in work like farming and bridge-building,
catching elephants and the like,
they respected each others' lands,
and did not transgress frontiers,
like the ocean with the shore. [2](#)

They had within them elements
of the power of the four-armed god,

and, like the rut which flows eightfold
from sky elephants in the Sama Veda,
through them all their line progressed. [3](#)

(1-3)

Then, in the middle of the night,
with lamps extinguished, folk asleep,
Kusha, who was still awake,
saw, in the garb of a mourning spouse,
a woman he had not seen before. [4](#)
She stood there, with folded hands,
before that conqueror of foes,
whose sovereignty, for all good people,
was like the glory of an Indra,
and said the word of greeting: 'Jaya.' [5](#)
Still half in bed was Dasaratha's grandson
as, amazed, he spoke to her,
one come into a room secured,
like an image in a mirror. [6](#)
'Though you come into a bolted room,

no yogic force is seen in you;
your looks are those of one in pain,

like a lily touched by frost. 7

Good lady, who are you, whose spouse,
why is it that you come to me?

But you should know, before you speak,
that Raghu scions control their passions,
and turn away from others' women.' 8

(4-8)

'The city from which your sinless father,
heading for his own abode,
took citizens with him,' she then said,

'of it, O king, know me to be
the resident deity, now an orphan. 9

This city, with its good governance,
prosperity and festivity,
outdid the capital of Indra.

You are there, with all the power
of your solar line, but I
am now in a pitiful condition. 10

My home, its houses desolated,
its ramparts shrunk, without a master
it looks like a sun about to set
or a wind-slashed cloud at the end of day. 11

The highways which the women trod
with gleaming, tinkling anklet bells
to meet a lover in the night,
are now by jackal hordes frequented
with loud yelps in search of meat. 12

The lakes, where water splashed by girls,
echoed like the beat of drums,
now buffeted by wild buffalo horns,

all the time they seem to weep. 13

Their resting spots in trees destroyed,
their tails at risk in forest fires,

their drums of dance now lying idle,
the peacocks have wild birds become. 14

(9-14)

'My stairways, on which pretty girls
put their crimson-tinted feet:
there tigers out to hunt for deer
now do place their bloodstained paws. 15
Pictures, which displayed
elephants down in lotus ponds
with lily stems given by their mates,
now bear the sharp nail scratches
of furious lions clawing at them. 16
The women's statues on the pillars
are now grey, their colours gone,
the cast-off snake skins left on them
serve as drapes around their breasts. 17
On palace walls turned dark with time
and moss taking root on them,
moon's rays are no more reflected
thought purer than pearls on a string. 18
And my gardens, where the vines
were gently bent by playful lasses
to pluck flowers, are in tatters
with monkeys and the jungle folk. 19
The latticed windows, which prevented
lamplight shining out at night,
and the glow on women's faces
even in the day, do now
hold back even smoke, because
they are covered with spider webs. 20
To see the river Sarayu grieves me,
of sacred rites its bank denuded,
the cane fields empty on its sides,
no bath facilities by its waters. 21
So, leave this place, where you now stay,
return to me, the family capital;
just as your father did give up

his incidental human form,
and resumed the one eternal.' [22](#)
'So be it,' said that best of Raghus
who was pleased at her request,
and she, too, with a happy face
on her bodily form then disappeared. 23

(15-23)

KUSHA COMES TO AYODHYA

This wondrous meeting in the night
was recounted in the morning
by the king in his assembly
where, on hearing it, his priests
welcomed his sovereign acceptance
by the goddess of the family capital. 24
Then he placed Kushavati in the hands
of eminent scholars and embarked
on a suitable day, with his women folk,
and his army, like wind-driven clouds;
his face turned towards Ayodhya. 25

Like a moving capital was his army,
its string of flags the parks and orchards,
its elephants huge, like hill resorts,
its chariots like fine city houses. 26
The splendour of that numerous force,
by his pure parasol preceded,
moving towards the earlier abode,
was like as with a rising moon
the ocean moves towards the shore. 27

(24-27)

As if unequal to the strain
of such an army on the march,
the earth rose up to a second heaven
in the guise of all its dust. 28
And that army through the city moved,
one part ahead, another still to start,
wherever it was seen, it seemed
that it was there in entirety. 29
Soaked with the rut of royal elephants,
and struck by hooves of the army's horses,
the dust on the road turned into mud,
and the mud also turned to dust. 30
To find a way through the Vindhya hills,

the army split in many parts,
with a tumult like the river Reva
echoing in the mountain curves. 31
And its lord, his chariot wheels
red with the mineral soil cut through,
the drum beats joined to the marching sound,
crossed the Vindhya, looking at
the gifts brought to him by the jungle folk. 32

(28-32)

He crossed Ganga with a bridge of elephants
that made the river westwards flow,
and on its north bank, wings of swans
flying in the sky became
spontaneously his fans of welcome. 33
Its waters, turbulent with boats,
that three-stream river he saluted
for the entry into heaven
of his ancestors whose bodies
the angry Kapila turned to ashes. [34](#)
With several days of travel thus,
Kusha reached the Sarayu's bank
and there beheld sacrificial pillars
in hundreds set up by the Raghus. 35

(33-35)

THE CITY RENEWED

In the capital's park, the breeze
by the Sarayu's billows cooled,
and rustling through the trees in bloom,
the army's tired ranks refreshed. 36
They were, with their fluttering banners,
the flagstaves of his family,
and the king, the citizen's friend,
in a nearby village placed the soldiers
whose arrows were but for enemies. 37
Then masons, by the king appointed,
with all the means they had assembled,

renewed the long forsaken city,
like clouds with rain will do to earth
for long scorched by heat of summer. 38

The Raghu chief also restored,
with those versed in sacred rituals,
the worship with due sacrifice
before the images in the temples. 39

He entered the royal palace
like a lover the heart of his beloved,
and also did arrange the stay
in due order of his colleagues. 40

With shops full of goods on sale,
stables sheltering the horses,
and elephants to their pillars fastened,
the city was splendid, like a woman
with ornaments on all her limbs. 41

And living in his forebears' city,
now restored to its old glory,
Maithili's son felt no competition
from the lords of heaven or of Alka. [42](#)

ARRIVAL OF SUMMER

Then, summer there arrived,
to advise new dresses for the charmers:
sashes embroidered with gems,
garlands pendant on pale breasts,
and garments lighter than a breath. 43
As the sun towards it came,
on returning from the South,
the North showered its tears of joy,
dew drops cooled by mountain snows. 44
But the days, with heat increasing,
and the nights, even shorter getting,
behaved like lovers parted,
remorseful at their contradictions. 45
Each day, the water in the tanks
went down, exposing steps and weeds,
and leaving lotus blooms on stems,

no higher than a woman's hips. 46
And the buzzing bee did put its feet
on each flower of the night jasmine
with its heady scent in forests,
as if to make a count of them. 47
But the *shirisha* bud in a woman's ear,
though it slipped on to her cheek
moist with perspiration
could not fall down straight away. 48
Rich people passed the summer's heat
at rest in rooms equipped with showers
of cool water wetting special stones
sprinkled with sandalwood essence. 49

(43-49)

Kama's zest had been reduced
by the passing of the spring;
it was now strengthened by the hair
of girls, wet after a bath,

spread out, fragrant with incense
and the evening jasmine's blooms. 50
And the flowered vine of the *arjuna* tree,
with its pollen golden hued
gleamed like the string of Kama's bow,
though Shiva had destroyed his body. 51
The mango blossom's odour sweet,
cane liquor's scent, new *patala* blooms:
in bringing all these together, summer

removed all weakness in the lovers. 52
At that time, the people loved
their king and the moon, both on the rise,
the one who took their pains away,
and the other that relieved the heat. 53.

(53-50)

THE ROYAL WATER SPORT

Kusha sought summer's enjoyment in
sport and play with lady friends
on the Sarayu with its rolling waters
midst frolicking swans and floating flowers. 54

And, glorious as Vishnu, he
on its banks, which divers had
rendered free of crocodiles,
then commenced, in keeping with
his royalty and vast resources,
sports like plunging, swims and dives. 55
The swans upon the riverbank

were fearful of women coming down
its steps, their armbands clinking
one against the other, and
the tinkle of their ankle bells. 56

(54-56)

The king beheld their love for dips

as they splashed water on each other
and, to a forest maiden by his side
who fanned him on the boat, then said: 57
'See, all these my palace women
in water, their body paint
has washed off by the Sarayu's flow
and to it given a myriad colours,
like of a cloud at time of dusk. 58
The waters now stirred by this boat
have washed away the mascara
from these harem beauties' eyes,
but their wanton looks preserved. 59
With the weight of hips and breasts,
to bear themselves they are unable,
but these girls with armbands tight
love to swim though it is hard. 60

The flowers, which the ears adorn
of these mermaids in the water,
fall off, sink and trick the fish
who think them weeds inside the river. 61

They are busy, splashing water,
drops of which are just like pearls
on their breasts, so that a garland,
even broken, is not noticed. 62

The beauty of these lovely damsels,
may be compared to the river
in which they now play about:
navels, like whirlpools deep set;
brows with curves as in a wave;
breasts like pairs of water birds. 63

And, the drumming of the water,
in keeping with the welcome songs
of the peacocks on the shore
all our ears does now pervade. 64

The girdles of these girls press down
on wet skirts clinging to their hips,
but like stars in moonlight dimmed,
their bells are by the water stilled. 65

The young ones cockily do throw
handfuls of water, as their faces
are by their girlfriends doused;
the powder to their hair applied
drips down in crimson drops. 66

The hair let loose, the make-up gone,
the pearly earrings taken off:
their faces though in disarray
with riverine sport are charming still.' 67

(57-67)

Then he got down from the boat,
and with them revelled in the water;
his garland tossing, like an elephant
with a lotus stem upon its shoulder
will play with its many mates. 68

And, now joined by the radiant king,
those charmers seemed even more attractive;
are not pearls, already lustrous,
made more so with a great sapphire? 69
He was then drenched playfully
by those saucy girls, with coloured water
squirted from syringes golden,
and looked splendid in that state—
a mountain streaming red-chalk flow. 70
Thus, sporting in that best of rivers
with the beauties of his harem,
he followed Indra who revels
with the nymphs in the Milky Way. 71

(68-71)

KUSHA MEETS KUMUDA

The ornament of victory
obtained from the pitcher-born sage,
which Rama gave with the realm to Kusha,
now came off, unknown to him,
and sank in the waters of the river. [72](#)

Having bathed at will with women,
only when to the shore returned,
did he see his arm without
that precious armlet fastened there. [73](#)

That symbol of victory
was given him by his father,
and he could not bear its loss,
though not out of covetousness,
as jewels to him were same as flowers. [74](#)

He forthwith ordered all the divers
to mount a search inside the river;
they did so in the Sarayu, and

then told him, straight forwardly: [75](#)

'We tried, O lord, but did not find
your best of jewels within these waters;
we think it taken greedily
by the serpent Kumuda, who lives there.' [76](#)

(72-76)

Then, going to the river bank,

with eyes which were with anger red,
that archer bent his bow and mounted
on it the missile known as Garuda,
in order to slay that serpent. [77](#)

As he came, the river lifted
its own hands, which are the waves,
with a wail like of an elephant
fallen in a forest pit. [78](#)

And, with the crocodiles excited,

the king of serpents then emerged
from the river, with a damsel,
like the tree divine with Lakshmi,
at the churning of the ocean. 79
Seeing that he was now present,
that jewel in hand, to give it back,
the king withdrew the Garuda missile:
the good do not attack the humble. 80

(77-80)

Though his head was raised with dignity,
Kumuda understood the missile.
He greeted Kusha, king anointed,
the goad of enemies, and the son
of the three worlds' lord, and said: 81
'I know you as the son of Vishnu
in human form for tasks particular;
you are adorable, how can I
do anything against you? 82
Your symbol of victory fell
in the river like a light from the sky,
or a ball bounced by the hand,
this girl saw it, was curious,
and as such did take it. 83
May it again be on your arm,
strong and long up to the knee,
marked with scars by bowstrings caused,
the door bolt which does guard the land. 84
O king, this is my younger sister,
Kumudvati, do not refuse her,
she will make up for her mistake
with long service at your feet.' 85
With these words, as he returned
to the ruler that ornament,
and with that girl, his family jewel,
did Kumuda also honour him,
saying 'Sir, you are one of us.' 86
As the king then took her hand

in the partnership of marriage,
and tied the blessed woollen string
on it before the fire's flames,
drums divine played in the sky
and magic clouds rained scented flowers. 87

Thus that serpent gained a kin
in the son of Maithili
and of the master of three worlds,
and Kusha too in the fifth offspring
of the serpent Takshaka.

One was freed of his fear of Garuda,
caused by the killing of his forebear;
the other, with serpents pacified,
and people pleased, did rule the earth. 88

(81-88)



CANTO 17

THE END OF KUSHA

As from the last phase of the night
the mind acquires tranquillity,
from Kakutstha's scion, Kumudvati
now had a son named Atithi. [1](#)
Of matchless lustre, like his father,
he brightened both his parents' lines,
as the sun its pathways does
to the north and to the south. [2](#)
His father, himself well-versed,
first had him suitably equipped
with knowledge fit for the family;
and, thereafter, in marriage joined
with daughters of other kings. [3](#)
Kusha, noble, brave, disciplined,
with a son possessing qualities same,
saw in him a replication
of himself, with another name. [4](#)

In keeping with his line's tradition,
he helped Indra in a battle
where he slew the demon Durjaya,
and by him was also killed. [5](#)
And Kumudvati, the sister of
Kumuda, the serpent king,

then did her husband follow,
like the moonlight does the moon. [6](#)
Of that couple, he attained
half the throne of heaven's lord,
and she a share in the tree divine
as Shachi's companion. [7](#)

THE ANOINTMENT OF ATTITHI

Remembering the last command
of their king as he went to battle,
the old ministers then installed
his son as the head of realm. 8
For his anointment, they arranged,
through masons and architects,
a new pavilion with high altar
constructed on pillars four. 9
There, seated on a noble couch,
he was with sacred river waters
poured from pitchers made of gold
now bedaubed by his ministers, 10
to the sound, both sweet and deep,
of drum beats and ringing cymbals
which the auspiciousness bespoke
of his immaculate pedigree. 11
The elders of the clan performed
on him the lamp-light ceremony
with barley corns and *durva* grass
joined to the fig tree's bark and buds. [12](#)
The family priests, the best of Brahmins
his anointment then commenced
with Atharva success prayers
for one seeking victory. [13](#)
And on his head then fell a stream
anointing him with sovereignty:
the sound of its unending flow
was like Ganga on the crown of Shiva. [14](#)
With minstrels his praises singing,
at that moment he did look
like a rain-filled cloud serenaded
by flamingos and chataka birds. [15](#)
Bathed in waters purified
with the chant of sacred verses,
his glory multiplied, like fire

in lightning that is drenched with rain. 16

(8-16)

At the end of his anointment,
to the priests he gave largesse
which would suffice as offering
for all their future sacrifices. 17

Greatly pleased, they too pronounced
on him blessings, whose results
would add to those already earned
by his deeds in previous births. 18
Thereafter, he ordered the release
of prisoners, and not execute

those condemned to death,
the carriers of their loads relieve,
and to leave cows with milk for calves. 19
Even birds, confined for sport
in cages, parrots and the others,
on his orders gained their freedom,
and went wherever they felt pleased. 20

(17-20)

Then, to put on decorations,
he was seated on a chair
of ivory pure, spread with a sheet,
located in another hall. 21
His hair with incense had been dried
and valets, their hands washed with water,
then did decorate his person
with all kinds of ornaments. 22
The knot of hair upon his head,
they braided with a string of pearls,
splendid like a ring of light,
strung with rubies in between. 23
His limbs were brushed with sandal powder
mixed with fragrant scent of musk;
and on them were drawn patterns
of leaves, in yellow paint bovine. [24](#)

Wearing ornaments of pearls,
garlanded, and with a cloak
marked with signs of swans, he was
a sight magnificent to behold,
the very bridegroom of the realm. 25
Gazing at his decorations,
in a golden mirror reflected,
he shone like the wishing tree
at sunrise on the mountain Meru. 26

(21-26)

Then, to the cheers of his attendants
who bore the emblems of royalty,
he went to the assembly hall
which was like another heaven. 27
There, under a canopy,
he sat upon the throne paternal,
the foot of which had felt the touch
of the crest-jewels of many kings. 28
And that great, auspicious seat,
taken by him, did then shine
like the chest divine of Keshava,
with the Kaustubha gem and the mark Srivatsa. [29](#)
From a child to a sovereign lord
he had grown, as does the moon,
and now his splendour did compare
with that orb when it shines full. 30

(27-30)

His face had a blissful glow,
he always smiled before he spoke,
his followers thought him to be
the very image of trust and faith. 31
Glorious as another Indra,
he made the city, with its flags
which looked like wish-fulfilling trees,
another place heavenly, where
elephants like Airavata marched. 32
There was held, above his head,

a parasol which was so pure
that it all distress removed
of people who had been parted
from their ruler previous. 33
While after smoke come flames of fire,
and sun's rays after it has risen,
his glory did both surpass:
his merits shone in his very presence. 34
The city women looked at him
with twinkling and loving eyes,
as do starry autumn nights
at the advent of the polar star. 35
And the deities who were worshipped
in the temples of Ayodhya
favoured him, who was deserving,
with their presence in the images. 36

(31-36)

ATITHI AS KING

Such was his formidable power,
that it touched the ocean's shore
while the waters of anointment
had yet to dry upon the altar. 37
For, guru Vasishtha's incantations
and the arrows of this archer:
what could they not achieve
when they had been joined together? 38

Firm in virtue and the law,
he sat together with colleagues
and tirelessly himself considered
the claims and counter claims of litigants
in order to clear all doubts. 39
When satisfaction was apparent
to all others, his face lit up,
and to the staff, who had assisted,
he gave rewards for their work. 40

In his father's time, the populace

had grown strong, as do the rivers
in the first month of the rains;
with him it grew stronger still,
as rivers do in the second month. 41

He never did a falsehood speak,
nor take back what he had given:
but he broke this rule with enemies
whom he dethroned, then re-installed. 42

Beauty, youth and affluence,
each one can to madness lead;
all of them in him were present,
but did not cause his head to swell. 43

Love for him was thus renewed
in his people from day-to-day,
but, though fresh, it constant stayed
like a tree with steadfast roots. 44

Transitory are foes external,
and many are far away,
so he first conquered six enemies
which are always there inside. [45](#)
And opulence, by nature fickle,
with this king, who favoured all,
was a feature permanent,
like on whetstones a streak of gold. 46

(37-46)

HIS POLICIES AND WORK

Stratagem alone is used
by cowards, and intrepidity
is the practice of a beast of prey:
as such he combined the two
in order to gain success. 47
With spies he posted in the realm,
there was nothing which remained
unseen for him anywhere, 48
like sun's rays in a cloudless sky.
All that which is prescribed for kings
as duty in the day and night,
that he did as an obligation
with no room for indecision. 49
With ministers he consulted
every day, but it was through
a secret door, so that none knew
that this was taking place. 50
And though in bed at proper time,

he was awakened, kept informed
through agents sent by friends and foes
who were unknown to each other. 51

(47-51)

Though he could all foes destroy,
his forts were kept inviolate:
lions sleep in mountain caves,
not out of fear of elephants
which they can kill in any case. 52
His works, in main benevolent,
were all with due thought begun
and carried out immaculately
so that they could fructify
like grain stored in secret places. 53
And even as he went ahead
he never took improper paths:

the tide's flood from the salty sea
only up the river flows. 54
Though able to quickly pacify
discontent among the people,
he preferred not to let it develop
to a point needing retaliation. 55
Though powerful, he marched against
only an appropriate target,
like the forest fire which
keeps off water, though it may
have the wind to help provide. 56

(52-56)

The goals of human action three,
he regarded similarly:
not letting dharma be hurt
by artha or by kama,
nor artha, and neither kama,
get hurt by the other two. [57](#)
No favour can the base provide,
the great can be a cause of harm;
with this thinking, he established
friendly ties with middle powers. 58
Balancing the strength and weakness
of another and his own,
he would strike if he was stronger,
and not when it was otherwise. 59
Concealing his own debilities,
he struck foes when they were weak,
and their activities repelled
while continuing with his own. [60](#)
And the army, by his father groomed,
given missiles and battle-trained,
he regarded, as its leader,
no different from his very self. 61
And he gathered wealth because
by the treasury is provided
one's standing as a source of help:

impregnated with rain, a cloud
is always welcomed by the birds. 62

(57-62)

The threefold power, which is like
the jewel upon a serpent's hood,
others could not take from him:
but he drew it out of them
like iron by a magnet drawn. 63
And he moved about at will,
with merchants and others too,
at wells and streams, in hills and forests,
as he would in his palace garden. 64

He guarded ascetics from trouble,
and property from robbery,
so that people of all classes
and stages accepted him
as taker of the one-sixth tax. 65
And gems were by the mines produced
grain by farmlands, elephants
by the forests, as emolument
for his guarding of the earth. 66

(64-66)

With the prowess of the six-faced god,
in merits and in powers six,
he was well versed in application
of measures which attained results. 67
And, using the fourfold policies

in due order, he achieved
their fruit without impediment,
all the way to holy fords. 68
Though he understood the ways
of crooked warfare, he did fight
righteously, and victory,
which always does seek the brave,
on its own did come to him. 69

But with his enemies shorn of pride,

it was hard for him to others find,
because a rutting elephants' smell
draws other beasts away in battle. 70

(67-70)

He grew, like the waxing moon
and a sea rising with the tide,
but they both in time diminish,
and he did not like them decline. 71

On approaching him for help,
even penniless supplicants
could reach the stage of being donors:
like the clouds do with the sea. 72

But, while his conduct was admired
he was embarrassed by praise,
and though eulogizers he opposed
it only did increase his fame. 73

By discernment, evil ways,
by reality, ignorance:
like sunrise, he dispelled darkness
and made his people independent. 74

The lotus has no time for moonlight
nor the lily for sun's rays,
but his merits found a place
even with opponents. 75

(71-75)

HIS HORSE SACRIFICE

Then he sought a victory through
the rite of the equine sacrifice,
and though his efforts were designed
to mislead his adversaries,
they were in keeping with all laws. 76
Thus, along the path prescribed
by the law, his power soared:
he became the king of kings,
like Indra is the god of gods. 77
His qualities, the people said,
made him the fifth world-guardian,
the sixth of the elements ultimate,
and the eighth of sacred mountains. 78
His commands on governance
were accepted by other kings,
their heads, deprived of the parasol,
now bent before him, like
of the gods to Indra's orders. 79
And the largesse he bestowed
on priests at his great sacrifice,
was such that no gap remained
between him and the god Kubera. 80
Indra then proffered him rain;
Yama controlled the spread of illness;
Varuna made smooth waterways
for those who needed to ply boats;
Kubera, knowing his predecessors,
amplified the treasury;
and the guardians of the quarters
served him like seekers of refuge. 81



CANTO 18

KINGS FROM ATITHI TO NABHA

That dispeller of his enemies,
from the daughter of the Naishadha king
had a son, strong like Mount Nishadha,
who was also Nishadha named. [1](#)

With this valiant son, the father
and the people were delighted,
as are grain fields with good rain
which will protect and let them grow. [2](#)

The son of Kumudvati enjoyed
for long all pleasures of the world,
then making his child the king,
through his pure deeds went to heaven. [3](#)

And the grandson of Kusha, too,
brave, his mind deep as the ocean,
his great arms the city guarding,
ruled paramount, up to the sea. [4](#)

On his death, the sovereignty
passed on to his son, Nala named,
lotus faced, with fire's glory,
who crushed enemy forces like
an elephant does a host of reeds. [5](#)

Celestial beings sang his fame,
he had a sky-complexioned son,
dark of body, known as Nabha,
who was by the people loved
like the months which bring the rain. [6](#)

Installing him in rulership
of the Uttara Kosala land,
his father, virtuous and just,
in old age sought the company
of wild deer to gain salvation. [7](#)

FROM PUNDARIKA TO UNNABHA

By the new king was begotten
a son invincible midst kings,
like Pundarika is midst elephants.

He too was named Pundarika,
and when his father was no more,
sovereignty took refuge with him,
as the lotus bearing goddess does
with the god of lotus eyes. 8

That archer's son was Kshemadhanva,
adept in nurturing the people
with patience and forgivingness;
passing on to him the realm,
that ruler of forbearing nature
went for penance to the forest. 9

The new king's son looked like a god
who led the army's van in battle;
he was known, even in heaven,
by the name of Devanika. 10

With the care that he provided,
his father truly had a son,
just as, with paternal love,
the son too was with a father blessed. 11

Of these two, the older one,
a known repository of merits
who performed all sacrifices,
to his begotten, who was like him,
passed on the yoke of guarding all
four classes, as he departed
for the paradise of sacrifice. 12

(8-12)

His son was so persuasive
in speech that even enemies
approved of him as did his friends:
just as sweet sounds can cast a spell
even on the frightened deer. 13

Ahinagu was his name,
though young, he always kept away
from the base, had no bad habits,

and with the prowess of his arms
did rule over the earth entire. 14
His father's heir, he was just like
the man primeval incarnate,
he understood the minds of people
and, ably using all four means,
became the lord of the four directions. 15
And when that vanquisher of foes
departed for the other world,
sovereignty in turn did serve
his son Pariyatra, who,
in holding high the head
beat the mountain Pariyatra. 16
His son was Shila, generous-natured,
his broad chest like a slab of rock,
who, even subjugating enemies
with arrows, did embarrassed feel
on his being eulogized. 17
His father old, an innocent soul,
made this self-possessed young man
the crown prince, and himself enjoyed
pleasures, for the work of kings
prevents this—it is like a prison. 18
But old age had crept on him
jealously, and though unable
to enjoy damsels fit for this,
his cravings for love still remained. 19
The new king's son was named Unnabha,
though he had a deep set navel,
but he was like the lotus-navelled lord,
the navel of the ring of rulers. 20

FROM VAJRANABHA TO KAUSALYA

His son, Vajranabha, in prowess was
like the wielder of the thunderbolt,
with a voice as deep as thunder;
lord of the earth with all the gems
from its mines of adamant. 21
And when he had gone to heaven
by his virtuous deeds attained,
his son Shankhana, foes' destroyer,
was served the gifts of jewels produced
from the mines of the sea-girt earth. 22
On his demise, the father's crown
was assumed by one bright as the sun
with the beauty of the Ashvina gods,
who placed on sea shores mounted troops:
scholars call him Vyushitashva. 23
Praying to the god Vishveshvara,

he begot a son like himself,
Vishvasaha, friend of all,
able to guard the earth entire. 24
That adept in policies,
on birth of his son, Hiranyanabha,
who was a part of the deity Vishnu,
became irresistible to foes,
like a windswept fire is to trees. 25
Of ancestral debt free, the father
sought, at life's end, bliss eternal,
made his long-armed son the king,
and himself became a hermit. 26
That son, now lord of Uttara Kosala,
an ornament of the solar line
who partook of the sacred Soma,
had an offspring like a second moon,
a delight for the eyes, Kausalya named. 27

Pious, learned in the Vedas,
his fame spread up to Brahma's heaven,
to which he went, his rights entrusted
to Brahmishtha, his son and heir. 28

(21-28)

FROM BRAHMISHTHA TO SUDARSHANA

The new king was a family jewel;
he ruled the earth, as it should be,
for long; the people were delighted
with his rule, and tears of joy
filled the eyes of the populace. 29
The very image of the god Vishnu,
his care of elders honoured him,
and Putra, his son, lotus-eyed,
hailed him as the best of fathers. 30
The family's continuance assured
through his son, the king who was
to be Indra's colleague, turned away
from pleasures, bathed in the triple ford
of Pushkara, and heaven attained. 31
His son's wife had meanwhile birthed,
in the month of Pausha, Pushya,
their son, more brilliant than rubies,
whose arrival brought prosperity
to people, like a second Pushya. 32
That noble king did fear rebirth,
and, giving the kingdom to his son,
took refuge with the learned Jaimini
to free himself from birth through yoga. 33
From that son, the realm passed on
to his offspring Dhruvasandhi
who was like a polar star:
excellent, true to his word,
he made lasting peace with foes. 34
But that bright-eyed best of men,
while hunting was by a lion taken,
at a time when his son Sudarshana,
good to look at, like the new moon,
was still just a little child. 35

With him gone, his old ministers,
seeing the people sad and orphaned,
and his son the sole family link,
installed him with due ceremony
as their lord, unanimously. 36

And with a king in childhood still,
the House of Raghu now became
like a forest with a lion cub,
a lake with a lotus yet to bloom
and, with a new moon, the sky. 37

THE GROWING UP OF SUDARSHANA

On his crowning, people hoped
that he would be like his father:
even a cloud no bigger than
an elephant calf spreads in the sky
with a wind to draw it on. 38
Riding, held up by his mahout,
on an elephant down the royal road,
people saw him as the master
with his father's dignity,
though he was but six years old. 39
He well may have not have fully filled
the whole of his paternal throne,
but his glory did pervade
all its gold and scarlet frame. 40
From it his feet, besmeared with lac,
though hanging down, just could not touch
the golden foot stool kept below,
so that the lords saluted them
with slight raising of their heads. 41
Just as, despite its tiny size,
with the brilliance of its lustre
a gem is called the great sapphire,
similarly, the words 'great king'
were here usable even though
they were for a little child. 42

(38-42)

Though side locks curled on both his cheeks,
with the royal whisk waved by his side,
his orders were not disobeyed
right up to the ocean's shores. [43](#)
And wearing on his brow, the tilaka
put on with a pin of gold,
of the same he rendered void
the faces of his enemies' wives,
with a smile upon his own. [44](#)

More delicate than a flower bud,
even jewels gave him discomfort,
but he bore with dignity
the weight immense of governance. 45

As long as he was being taught,
and learning how to read and write,
he used the skills of those well-versed
to carry out strong policies. 46

And the goddess that is sovereignty,
his person thinking insufficient
for herself while she awaited
his growing older, now embraced
his royal parasol, as if
it was just to seek some shade. 47

For, the earth was by his arms protected
though they had not yet touched a sword;
unmarked they were by bowstring scars,
and still to become like a yoke. 48

As time passed, growth continued
not only of his limbs and body,
but also of intrinsic merits,
subtle first, then gaining weight
to the joy of the populace. 49

And, to his forebears' delight,
from earlier births recalling it,
he gained the father's triple knowledge
and that of the threefold ends. [50](#)

Then, the upper body stretched
to knot his hair upon the head,
knees bent, the bow drawn to the ear,
he learned the use of various weapons. 51

Thereafter, he entered youth,
the age of luxury and pleasure,
a wine enjoyable with women,
a flower on the tree of passion
which does bud and bloom with love,
and the whole body pervades. 52

Then princesses, more beautiful than
the pictures shown by messengers,
and brought by his ministers seeking
purity of the natal line,
agreed to be the co-wives of
the sovereignty and the earthly realm
that he had already acquired. 53

(43-53)



CANTO 19

ACCESSION OF AGNIVARNA

In his final stage of life,
that disciplined Raghu scion,
an adept in sacred lore,
installed in his place, his son
Agnivarna, bright as fire,
and took refuge in the Naimisha forest. [1](#)

There, in penance he engaged,
uncaring of the fruit it gave,
for a straw hut he forgot the palace,
for a straw mat on the ground, his bed,
for river water, his step-wells. [2](#)

His son was not unsettled by
managing what he had received,
a realm his father won from foes,
not looking for his child's exertions,

only, that he would enjoy it. [3](#)

For some time did the son pursue
the duties for his lineage proper;
then, being lustful and libidinous,
he passed them on to his ministers,
and to the other sex his youth devoted. [4](#)

HIS NATURE AND RULE

With his womenfolk, this lover would,
to the sound of beating drums,
hold within his palace feasts,
the grandeur of which far exceeded
the festivities in earlier times. 5
He was not able to bear
even one moment devoid
of some pleasure for the senses,
spending all his days and nights
in the inner rooms, ignoring
the people, anxious and impatient. 6
If there was any display
sought by people, and advised
by ministers, it was of
just his foot, stuck from a window. 7
And that foot, with toe-nails gleaming
softly, like a lotus touched
by the sunrise, was saluted
by his servants and dependents. 8

(5-8)

Totally immersed in Kama,
he liked to play about in water
of step-wells in his pleasure palace,
where lotus blooms were pushed around
by the breasts, thrust up with youth,
of wanton beauties, with him there. 9
Mascara washed off their eyes,
and the lipstick off their lips,
these girls, with their natural glow,
did allure him all the more. 10
Like an elephant with its mates
goes to a lake with blooming lilies,
with his favourites, he would go
to a drinking spot he organized,
delighted with the scent of wine. 11

And, because of too much drink,
the girls sought more from him in secret:
he drank wine out of their mouths,
like the bakula tree in season. [12](#)

(9-12)

For enjoyment at his leisure,
his side did never stay without
a lute with its enchanting sound,
and a pretty-eyed, sweet-talking girl. 13
His expert playing of the drum,
as his wreath and armlets quivered,
won over the hearts entire
of dancing girls, who missed their steps,
shaming teachers by their side. 14
And, at the end of a pleasing dance,
sweat spoiled the makeup on their faces;
he blew on it affectionately,
kissing them, as he surpassed
even the life of gods in heaven 15
But, as he looked for pleasures new,
some obvious, some less apparent,
his inamoratas drew him back
to those which were still half-enjoyed. 16
They cajoled him with bud-like fingers,
looked at him with eyebrows raised,
tied him, not once, with their girdles,
as he could deceive them too. 17
On the night appointed for his sleeping
with one of them, he sat behind
the message bearer, listening to
the timid words of that lady love,
worried she would be abandoned. 18
But he was greedy to enjoy,
apart from dancers, housewives and
others who were hard to get;
so, tracing with a sweat-stained pin

lines and figures on their bodies,
somehow did he pass the time. 19

(13-19)

His wives, the queens, of their love proud,
and jealous of the other women,
gave up rage, and organized
for the king love-festivals
as a trick to gain their ends. 20

But they were vexed at having been
passed over, when he came at dawn
with the glow of having enjoyed others.
With folded hands, he pleased them, but
was tired for love, to their anger. 21

And they did not speak to him,
who rivals praised, even in dreams:
with tear drops falling on bed sheets,
and bangles broken out of rage,
they simply turned their face away. 22

He then went to garden cabins
through paths shown by female escorts,
where, on beds of flower petals,
he had sex with servant girls
as they trembled, out of fear
of the ladies in the harem. 23

As he sometimes spoke in sleep,
the girls told him: 'I do have the name
of your darling, but my mind
is greedy, and does now covet
the good fortune that she has had.' 24

(20-24)

When that lecher got up, the bed,
marked with paint, with powder brown,
with broken bits of girdle strewed,
made clear his amorous activity. 25

He would himself the paint apply
on a girl's feet, but not too well,
as his eyes were fixed upon

her thighs and bottom, now laid bare
with her garment slipping off. 26
In kissing, she could her lip withdraw,
bar his hand undoing the girdle,
but even such obstructions did
stoke the fire of desire. 27
He stood behind her, with a laugh,
as, after making love, she looked
in the mirror: and his smile
reflected there, embarrassed her
so much that her gaze was lowered. 28
With her soft arms around his neck,
his foot pressed down with both her feet,
the sweetheart asked him for a kiss
at night's end, as he rose from bed. 29
Then, seeing himself in the mirror,
that young man was not as pleased
with his royal garb, exceeding Indra's,
as with the signs of his lovemaking. 30

(25-30)

Those mistresses he tried to leave,
citing some work for a friend,
they caught him by the hair, and said:
'We know, you villain, it's a trick,
for, you want to run away.' 31
Tired with the labour of
pitiless lovemaking, damsels,
on the excuse of a last embrace,
lay down upon his spreading chest,
its sandal paste on their plump breasts. 32
In search of sex, he moved about
at night in secret; procuresses
brought the ladies who came out
to catch him, with the words 'O lover,
how can you trick us in the dark?' 33
The pleasure of a woman's touch
was for him like moonlight, and,

awake at night, asleep by day,
he too was like the moon. 34
And he was attracted by
the sidelong looks of the minstrel girl,
showing hurt in both her plays:
of the flute with her bitten lips,
and the plucking of the lute
resting on her nail-scarred thighs. [35](#)
But, with his girls' display of dance
based on movements, words, expressions,
to experts he gave competition
in the company of friends. 36

(31-36)

HIS SEASONAL SPORT

Smeared with pollen of kadamba,
with a flower garland on his shoulder,
he sported in the rainy season
with peacocks on artificial hills. [37](#)

In bed he did not hasten to
make up with the girl who had
quarrelled, turned her back to him;
he hoped that, startled by the thunder,
she would by herself turn over
and come right into his arms. 38

In autumn, during Kartika nights,
on canopied palace roofs,
he enjoyed, with wanton wenchies,

the moonlight, clear and free of clouds,
which soothes the fatigue of love. [39](#)
And, he looked through palace windows
at the Sarayu, which
wore on the sand banks of its hips

a girdle of the water birds,
emulating the dalliance
of his own inamoratas. 40
With the hiss and scent of incense,
and the golden girdle taken off
one hip below her winter jacket,

some slender girl his lust evoked
with knots and slips on the other side. 41
And the winter nights did witness,
in a room free of gusts of wind,
with unflickering lights of lamps,
his skill in all techniques of love. 42
Then, beholding mango blossoms
blooming in a southern breeze,

and finding separation hard,
damsels gave up their resistance
and themselves solicited him 43
Taking one into his lap,
on a swing, by servants rocked,
he left its rope to scare her so
that this trick made her hold him hard. 44
His girlfriends on him danced attendance
thereafter in summer garb:
their bosoms touched with sandal paste,
their elegant bracelets strung with pearls,
girdles swinging on their hips. 45
As spring advanced, his zeal wore out,
but it came back like new again
as he sipped wine of mango blossoms
mixed with blood red patala blooms. [46](#)

(37-46)

HIS ILLNESS AND DEATH

Thus the king, by Kama stoked,
passed the seasons, like himself
steeped in sensual pleasures, and
from other duties turned away. 47
Though wanton, he had power still,
could not be hurt by other kings,
but an illness born of love for sex
wasted him, as does the moon
waning under Daksha's curse. 48
He did not listen to the doctors,
nor give up habits hazardous,
even though their faults were visible:
it is painful for the senses
to forsake agreeable pleasures. 49
And so, that votary of Kama,
by the ailment of consumption,
was to a state reduced in which,

pale of face and faint of voice,
he could just a few jewels wear
and walk only with support. 50
The king afflicted by this illness,
his line also then became
like a sky with the waning moon,
a pond left with just mud in summer,
a lamp with but a sinking flame. 51

(47-51)

To conceal his sick condition,
then did his ministers say
to people who could fear the worst:
'The king is really spending time,
the birth of his son to ensure.' 52
But a lamp cannot the wind extinguish,
and, even though he tarried with
many women, he could not

see progeny to free his debt;
nor could he live through an illness
which had defied the doctors' efforts. 53
And, in the garden of his house,
on the pretext of a cure,
with a priest who knew last rites,
the ministers, in secret did
consign his body to the flames. 54
Then they quickly held a meeting
of the principal citizens; and
her pregnancy by an expert noted,
his wedded wife the crown received. 55
And her womb, now with a child,
at first simmering in hot tears
of grief at that monarch's departure,
now received outpourings cold
from gold pitchers, of anointment
in keeping with the line's tradition. 56
With that root within her, like
seeds sown in earth during the rains
and the people waiting for a harvest,
she sat upon the golden throne,
ruling, with minister veterans,

in accordance with the laws
the realm left by her departed husband. 57

(52-57)

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. The three plays are: *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*, *Malavikagnimitram* and *Vikramoversiyam*; the two epic poems, *Kumarasmbhava* and *Raghuvamsa*; and the two lyrical poems, *Meghadutam* and *Ritusamhara*.
2. From his Introduction to *The Story of Raghu's Line*, tr. P. De Lacey Johnstone, J.M. Dent & Co. London, 1902.
3. *Harsha Charita* (I.16) of Banabhatta, ed. P.V. Kane, Bombay, 1918. Here translated by A.N.D. Haksar. Bana was the court poet of King Harsha of Thaneshvara (606-47 CE) and also author of the romance *Kadambari*.
4. *Kuvalayananda* (v.164) of Appaya Diksita, (circa 1350-1405 CE) from the anthology *Subhashitaratnabhandagara*, ed. N.R. Acharya, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1978. Here translated by A.N.D. Haksar. It has puns on the Sanskrit names of the little finger and the ring finger, which have been excluded.
5. Published in *Manasi*, 1889. *Rabindranath Tagore-Selected Poems*, William Radice (tr.), Penguin Books India, 1985.
6. From his Introduction to *The Complete Works of Kalidasa*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1963.
7. A.B. Keith, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, London, 1920.
8. Arthur W. Ryder, *Kalidasa: Translations of Shakuntala and Other Works*, E.P. Dutton, New York, 1912
9. *Raghuvamsa*, ed. Shankar Panduranga Pandit, Fellow, Deccan College. Indu-Prakash, Bombay, 1869. He also details the Sanskrit commentaries.
10. V. Raghavan's Foreword to *Raghuvamsa*, K.N. Anantapadmanabhan (tr.), Madras, 1973. He also details the early Tamil translation.
11. *Raghuvamsa*, ed. R.P. Dwivedi, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1993.
12. *Raghuvamsa*, ed. H.R. Karnik and N.A. Deshpande, Siddhartha College, Bombay, 1953.
13. A.K. Warder, in *A Cultural History of India*, ed. A.L. Basham, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1975. The second quote is from Warder's *Indian Kavya Literature*, vol. 3, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1974.
14. The first two are as at 2 and 8 above. The latter covers only some of the verses. The third is *The Dynasty of Raghu*, Robert Antoine (tr.), Writers Workshop, Calcutta, 1972.

The first digit on the left in these notes indicates the canto, and the subsequent ones the verse numbers shown in the text.

CANTO 1

- 1.5-9 In the original text these verse are serially numbered 9 and 5-8. This order has been slightly modified here.
- 1.11 In mythology Manu was one of the progenitors of the human race. Vaivasvata is his other name. Om is a sacred sound and symbol much used at the start of Hindu liturgy.
- 1.13 Sal is the valuable timber tree *Vatica robusta*.
- 1.14 A mythical mountain at the centre of the world.

[1.25](#) The words dharma, artha and kama have multiple meanings. Broadly they refer respectively to virtue and righteous conduct, wealth and material well-being, and desire for pleasure. They are also conceptualized as three natural objectives of human activity.

[1.26](#) In the Hindu pantheon Indra is the king of heaven and also the god associated with rain, clouds and thunder. Among his other names is Sakra, as in 1.75.

[1.46-7](#) Chitra is a constellation of stars, the Moon's entry into which marks the advent of spring. Budha, also the name of the planet Mercury, is the mythical child of Chitra and the Moon.

[1.56](#) Arundhati is the sage Vasishtha's consort, and Svaha that of the Agni, the god of fire.

[1.60](#) The seven limbs of state were traditionally specified as: ruler, minister, ally, treasury, people, castle and army.

[1.64](#) One of the four Vedas.

[1.66](#) The shraddha is a religious ceremony in which water and other items are offered to the gods and in memory of ancestors.

[1.68](#) A mountain at the world's end in traditional geography.

[1.72](#) Ikshvaku was the son of Manu, *vide* 1.11.

CANTO 2

[2.2](#) The two types of scriptural texts were *smṛiti*, remembered, and *śruti*, revealed. The first were considered as subsequent and subordinate to the second.

[2.10](#) A reference to the traditional practice of welcoming visitors by showering them with rice.

[2.26](#) Another name of the goddess Parvati mentioned at 1.1.

[2.29](#) Lodhra is *Symplocos racemosa*, a tree with cream-coloured flowers and medicinal bark.

[2.35](#) The god Shiva, addressed as Paramesvara at 1.1, is here called light-formed. This is his mythical presence in the five elements—earth, water, fire, air and space—and in the sun, the moon and the sacrificial priest.

[2.36](#) A well-known coniferous tree *Pinus devadara*. Skanda, a son of Shiva and Parvati, is the leader of the divine army.

[2.39](#) The eclipse is depicted in myth as the swallowing of the Moon and the Sun by the demon Rahu.

[2.42](#) See with 1.26.

[2.53](#) The second of the four traditional Hindu castes.

[2.75](#) Reference to a mystical impregnation in mythology.

CANTO 3

[3.3-4](#) There is an old Indian folk belief that pregnant women yearned to taste or eat earth, perhaps symbolic of fertility.

[3.5](#) Uttara or north Kosala is identified with the north-eastern part of present-day Uttar Pradesh, a region north of the river Sarayu.

[3.9](#) The wood of the shami tree, *Prosopis spicigera*, was used for kindling sacred fires.

[3.10](#) The punsavana was a religious rite performed in the third month of gestation and associated with the birth of a male child.

[3.13](#) Force, effort and incantation or deliberation were the traditional components of threefold energy.

3.24 The birds in the original text are *chakravaka*, identified as the ruddy goose.

[3.27](#) The reference is to the divine creation of merit and virtue.

[3.30](#) The four types of learning are described in Mallinatha's commentary as logic, Vedic studies, agriculture, and civil and military administration.

[3.33](#) The reference is to the administration of this sacrament to a princely child, usually in his sixteenth year, and preceded by that of the sacred thread, mentioned at 3.29. Marriage was also a sacrament. The description here would indicate polygamy.

3.38 The god Indra, as at 1.26, is also called Shatakratu or performer of a hundred sacrifices.

[3.43](#) In mythology a sign of godly eyes was that they did not blink.

[3.49](#) The title at 3.38 was exclusive to Indra.

[3.50](#) The reference is to a legend well known in ancient literature, described further at 13.3.

3.55 Skanda is the divine general earlier mentioned at 2.36. Shachi is Indra's consort. Both are also mentioned in verse 3.23.

CANTO 4

[4.1](#) At its setting, the sun's light was considered as having passed into the fire.

[4.7](#) See note 1.11 for Manu.

[4.14-16](#) The autumn season was the traditional time for military campaigns.

[4.21](#) Pitcher-born is an epithet for the mythical sage Agastya, also identified with the star Canopus, at the rising of which in the sky turbid waters turned clear. Also see note 12.31.

[4.23](#) Saptaparni or seven-leaf is the mimosa tree, *A lstonia scholaris*. The seven spots for the elephant's secretions are the penis and two each of the trunk nostrils, the eyes and the temples.

[4.25](#) The ceremony of purification with a lighted lamp of weapons and armed forces before the start of a campaign.

[4.27](#) The god Vishnu is often depicted as reclining on the coils of a serpent in a sea of milk along the mountain Mandara.

[4.32](#) This refers to the legendary king Bhagiratha who led the river Ganga to the sea when it emerged from the god Shiva's hair where it had fallen from heaven.

[4.35](#) The region has been identified with the western part of modern Bengal.

[4.36](#) The name still lives in that of the people of that region.

4.38 The river Kapisha is identified with the modern Cossye. The locations and names of Utkala and Kalinga are the same as at present.

[4.41](#) Kakutstha, like Ikshvaku at 1.72, was another famous predecessor in Raghu's line.

[4.44](#) The legendary sage is also mentioned at 4.21.

[4.45](#) This river still has the same name.

[4.46](#) Identified with the Ghat hills to the south of present-day Mysore.

[4.50](#) Identified with the present-day Tamaraparani running through Tirunelveli district.

[4.53](#) A feat of the sage also mentioned at 4.58, who was an earlier incarnation of the god Vishnu.

[4.54](#) The name persists to this day.

[4.57](#) The flower is identified with *Mesua roxburhii*.

[4.60](#)-61 The names Parasika and Yavana are often identified with Persian and Greek people.

[4.67](#) The present-day river Indus.

[4.68](#) Tribal inhabitants of the area.

[4.69](#) A land and people placed in the north of present Kashmir.

[4.70](#) For Kosala see 3.5.

[4.73](#) Kichaka refers to a hollow bamboo stem.

[4.74](#) Namura is identified as *Elaecarpus saritrus*.

[4.75](#) Sarala is identified as *Pinus longifolia*.

[4.80](#) In legend the demon king Ravana shook the Himalayan peak to gain the attention of the god Shiva who sat there.

[4.81](#) Identified with the present-day river Brahmaputra.

[4.83](#) Identified as present-day Assam with its capital mentioned at 4.81.

CANTO 5

[5.17](#) Chataka is a legendary bird that lives on rain drops, and so welcomes clouds.

[5.25](#) Three sacred fires were traditional in such a temple.

[5.26](#) Kubera is the god of wealth.

[5.27](#) The sage Vasishtha is first mentioned at 1.35

[5.28](#) The lord of Kailasa here refers to Kubera in 5.25.

[5.31](#) Saketa was the capital of Uttara Kosala at 3.5.

[5.36](#) Kumara is another name of the divine general at 3.55.

[5.39](#) Identified with the area of present-day Berar. The sv ayamvara was a ceremony in which the bride selected a groom from the assembled aspirants.

[5.42](#) The tree is *Pongaria glabna*. The river still has the same name.

[5.44](#) Hills along the river Narmada, perhaps the present-day 'marble rocks'.

[5.48](#) The seven-leaf tree is as at 4.23.

[5.53](#) Gandharvas were a class of demigods often associated with music and erotic rites. Matanga was a legendary sage.

[5.60](#) Chaitraratha is the divine garden of the gandharvas.

[5.64](#) For svayamvara see 5.39 above.

[5.76](#) See 5.39.

CANTO 6

[6.2](#) The prince's lineage is further detailed at 6.71. See also 4.41.

[6.4](#) Another name for the god called Skanda in verse 3.55 and Kumara in verse 5.36.

[6.6](#) Parijata, considered one of the heavenly trees, is the *Erythrina indica*.

[6.8](#) Incense from *Amarys agallocha*. Its stick is now commonly called agarbatti.

[6.18](#) Such lines on the palm denoted royalty in traditional palmistry.

[6.21](#) Magadha approximates to present-day Bihar. Its capital, mentioned at 6.24, is better known in history as Pataliputra.

[6.27](#) The region was adjacent to Magadha.

[6.32](#) A part of present Madhya Pradesh. Tvashtra, also called Vishvakarma, was the technician god.

[6.34-35](#) The temple at 6.34 and the river at 6.35 have the same names in present-day Ujjain, the ancient capital of the kingdom.

[6.37](#) The present geography of this kingdom is untraceable.

[6.42](#) The reference is to Parasurama—Rama with the axe—known in mythology as a previous incarnation of the god Vishnu. Also mentioned at 4.53 and verse 4.58.

[6.43](#) The city is considered to be near the river Narmada in Madhya Pradesh.

[6.45](#) A region between present Delhi and Agra, as is evident from the still-current name of the city and the river as in 6.48. The union of the latter's darker water with that of the lighter river Ganga at present-day Allahabad is well known.

[6.49](#) This refers to the divine gemstone which adorns the god Vishnu. The legend of his subduing the serpent Kaliya in his incarnation as Krishna is well known.

[6.50](#) Adjacent to the city named in 6.48 and the hill in 6.51. The park is the same as that at 5.60.

[6.53-54](#) This land and mountain are also mentioned in 4.38-39.

[6.60](#) Also mentioned in 4.49 and subsequent verses.

[6.61](#) The hill range still bears that name. It is also associated with the legendary sage earlier mentioned in 4.21.

[6.62](#) This refers to legends about Ra vana, the demon king of Lanka.

CANTO 7

[7.1](#) Skanda is the divine general as at 3.55. Devasena mentioned here is his consort, though he is mostly depicted alone.

[7.3](#) For Shachi see 3.55.

[7.15](#) Rati is the consort of Kamadeva, god of love.

[7.21](#) This vine may be related to the well-known ashoka tree, *Jo nesia asoka* Roxb.

[7.35](#) A reference to legend of the god Vishnu's earlier incarnation as Vamana who sought and received the earth from the son of his devotee Prahlada, the demon king Bali.

[7.51](#) It was believed that a warrior killed in battle would straightaway mount to heaven.

[7.56](#) In mythology the god Vishnu incarnated as a boar protected the earth from being submerged by the ocean at the end of a cosmic age.

7.61 Priyamvada and his gift are described in verses 5.53 and 5.57

CANTO 8

[8.19](#) The hum an body was believed to have five vital airs or breaths, including those inhaled and exhaled, the air within the upper and lower bowels, and that pervading the whole body.

[8.21](#) The six traditional means of strategic policy were: alliance, war, marching, halting, making shelter and trickery. The three natural qualities were broadly, equilibrium, dynamism and inertia.

[8.62](#) See 7.21 for the ashoka tree. It was believed that it would flower if kicked by a pregnant woman.

8.64 Bakula is *Mimosa elengi*, a tree with flowers used for personal ornamentation. Also see 9.30.

[8.79](#) Trinabindu was a legendary ascetic whose penance was disturbed as mentioned here.

[8.85](#) Karma refers here to the deeds of a lifetime which can influence a subsequent life.

CANTO 9

[9.1](#) For Uttara Kosala see 3.5.

[9.6](#) Varuna, Kubera and Yama are gods in the Hindu pantheon associated respectively with water, wealth and death as well as discipline among other attributes.

[9.12](#) In legend mountains originally had wings but the god Indra cut them off as their flights caused problems for others.

[9.15](#) The word 'hub' here denotes a central point round which others revolved. The comparison in the third line indicates that the king was agreeable like moonlight to friends and fierce like fire to enemies.

- [9.18](#) The threefold components of energy or power are also mentioned at 3.13.
- [9.24](#) The gods as at 9.6.
- [9.28](#) Ashoka is mentioned at 7.21.
- 9.30 For bakula, see 8.64. The legend was that it would start blooming if sprinkled with wine from the mouth of a pretty girl.
- [9.31](#) Kimsuka is the tree *Butea frondosa* with bright red flowers called Flame of the Forest.
- 9.34-35 Numbered 35 and 34 in the original text.
- [9.36](#) The same as at 9.30 above.
- [9.38](#) A poetic reference to nights becoming shorter as winter gives way to spring.
- [9.39](#) The love god's arrows are made of flowers and his flag has the image of a crocodile.
- [9.42](#) This is the flowering creeper *Jasminum sambac*, also called mogra.
- [9.51](#) Much hunted for both skin and flesh, the ruru deer. It is perhaps described best in the contemporary *Jatakamala* of Arya Shura (tr. A.N.D. Haksar, HarperCollins, New Delhi, 2014). The tree is *Curcuma zedorica*.
- [9.63](#) Asana is the flowering tree *Terminalia tomentosa*.
- [9.74](#) The commentator Mallinatha explains this with reference to a scriptural injunction that elephants are not to be killed except in war. See also verse 5.50.
- [9.76](#) The king was concerned that he may have committed the sin of killing a Brahmin.
- [9.82](#) A reference to the legend that a primal fire resided within the sea.

CANTO 10

- [10.4](#) In another legend, Rishyashringa was also a sage who married Dasaratha's daughter.
- [10.5](#) A reference to Ravana, the well-known legendary demon king. One of his epithets is Pulastya, which refers to his ancestry.
- [10.6](#) A reference to the god Vishnu in the previous verse.
- [10.10](#) For Kaustubha, see 6.49. Srivatsa was a legendary curl the god bore on his breast.
- [10.11](#) For parijata, see 6.6.
- [10.17](#) For the three qualities, see 8.21. They have multiple meanings in philosophical terms,
- [10.22](#) The four ends of human endeavour or action are given their well-known names of dharma, artha, kama and moksha in verse 10.84. Very broadly these mean virtue, wealth, pleasure and salvation. The four aeons or ages which comprise a cycle of time are *Krita*, *Treta*, *Dvapara* and *Kali*, in which the condition of the world successively declines. The four classes or castes are well known.
- [10.31](#) This refers to the successive incarnations of the god Vishnu to remove worldly evils.
- [10.37](#) A reference to the legendary origin of the river Ganga from the god Vishnu's feet.
- [10.38](#) See note 10.17; this refers to the qualities of equilibrium and dynamism being overcome by inertia.

[10.40](#) The legend was that Ravana at verse 10.5 had ten heads which he cut off in succession in the course of seeking boons from Brahma, the god of creation.

[10.46](#) Pushpaka was the aerial vehicle used by Ravana, who won it from Kubera, god of wealth, mentioned at 5.26.

[10.47](#) This refers to another legend that, following his rape of the nymph Rambha, Ravana had been cursed to die immediately if he ever again took a woman by force.

[10.60](#) All these are associated with the god Vishnu who is usually depicted as holding the conch shell, discus and mace in his hands. He also carries a sword and bow. All these are divine weapons and have separate names and persons.

[10.84](#) See note 10.22.

[10.86](#) The traditional four means of state policy were *sama*, *dama*, *bheda* and *danda*, that is the use of respectively conciliation, compensation, dissension and force.

CANTO 11

[11.1](#) Kaushika is the patronymic of the sage also known as Visvamitra. Raven's wing is a literal translation from the Sanskrit. Such locks were worn by boys before their heads were shaved for the sacred thread ceremony mentioned in verse 3.29.

11.7 Chaitra and Vaisakha are the first two months of the Indian lunar calendar year which starts with the spring season. They correspond roughly to March and April.

[11.14](#) Suketu was a demi-god whose daughter was cursed to become the demon Tadaka, named in the next verse. Rama was told the story by Kaushika, named in 11.1.

[11.17](#) Raghava is a patronymic often used for Rama in this text and elsewhere.

[11.21](#) A mythical gem which absorbed and emitted sunlight. The name literally means 'bright as the sun'.

[11.22](#) In mythology the boy sage Vamana was an earlier incarnation of the god Vishnu, in which he secured the earth from the demon king Bali. See 7.35 also.

[11.26](#) Red flowers of the plant *Pentapete phoenicea*.

[11.33](#) This refers to the legend of the sage Gautama's wife Ahalya. She was seduced by Vasava, another name for the god Indra, and then cursed by her husband to become a rock until absolved by a touch from the feet of Rama, as in the next verse.

[11.35](#) For dharma, artha and kama, see note 1.25.

[11.38](#) This refers to the legend about the condition set by this king for the betrothal of his daughter Sita.

[11.42](#) This refers to a common red beetle which was supposed to have fire within it. His having side locks is indicative of Rama's youth, vide 11.1.

[11.46](#) 'Bhrigu's scion' is a translation of the patronymic Bhargava also used in later verses. It refers to Parasurama, mentioned in note 6.42, who cleared the earth of Kshatriyas mentioned at 2.53.

[11.53](#) Rama's wife Sita is also called the daughter of the earth. According to legend she was found in the earth when King Janak, who later adopted her, was tilling the soil. K ushadvaja was the brother of the Mithila king.

[11.54](#) The four traditional means of state policy are given in note 10.86.

[11.55](#) The last line in the original is a play on the double meanings of the textual words *pratyaya* and *prakriti*.

[11.60](#) See 11.46 above .

[11.63-65](#) See 11.46. In legend Parasurama was born of a Brahmin father and a Kshatriya mother, and had the traditional qualities and signs of both castes.

[11.67](#) See note 11.46.

[11.69](#) See notes 11.17 and 11.63-65.

[11.73](#) This refers to a sinful Kshatriya ruler vide 11.46

[11.85](#) Another name for the god Vishnu.

CANTO 12

[12.2](#) See note 12.5 below. Kaikeyi is earlier mentioned in verses 9.17 and 10.54.

[12.5](#) In the legend, King Dasaratha had promised two boons to his wife Kaikeyi, for her help to him in a battle. She was Rama's stepmother.

[12.10](#) See verse 9.79.

[12.20](#) Vaidehi, i.e. from the land of Videha, is one of the many names for Sita.

[12.22-23](#) Refers to the legendary blinding of Jayanta, the son of the god Indra.

[12.27](#) Wife of the legendary sage Atri, whose hermitage was there.

[12.29](#) Maithili, i.e. from Mithila, is another name for Sita.

[12.31](#) The legendary sage Agastya established hills and seas in their natural boundaries.

[12.42](#) Janasthana was a land taken over by demons. Khara, their leader, was related to Ravana, the demon king.

[12.53](#) The legendary vulture Jatayu fought Ravana to free Sita when she was abducted.

[12.57](#) Another demon encountered by Rama.

[12.58](#) Bali was the king of the monkeys who was dethroned by his brother Sugriva.

[12.60](#) The brother of Jatayu at 12.53 above, Sampati had the gift of long-distance vision. Maruti is another name for the well-known monkey god Hanuman.

[12.68](#) The youngest brother of the demon king Ravana.

[12.74](#) The demon-woman Trijata befriended Sita during her captivity in Lanka.

[12.76](#) The demon Meghanada was the son and heir of Ravana.

[12.77](#) A patronymic for the son of Ravana, whose own patronymic is Pulastya, also at 10.5.

[12.80](#) The demon Kumbhakarna, Ravana's second brother, was given to sleep. This verse hints that he probably woke up when Rama's monkeys mutilated his face.

[12.104](#) Raghupati is another name for Rama.

CANTO 13

[13.2](#) The Malaya hills earlier figure at 4.46 and verse 4.51. The location is presumably at the southern end of India.

[13.3](#) The legend is of an earlier ancestor, King Sagara, also mentioned at 3.50. Wishing to disturb his horse sacrifice, the god Indra hid his horse in the nether world near the abode of the sage Kapila. Sagara's sons dug down to that place in search of the horse, enlarging the sea which is also called *sagara*. The angry sage incinerated them with a curse from which they were ultimately purified when their descendant Bhagiratha led the river Ganga to the sea. Commentators have pointed that the word Kapila here used is also an epithet for Indra.

[13.4](#) See 9.82.

[13.7](#) See 9.12 for the legend about the cutting of mountain wings.

[13.8](#) This refers to the god Vishnu's incarnation as the great boar which rescued the earth from the deluge at the end of a cycle of time.

[13.14](#) A reference to the churning of the ocean by the gods and the demons with a mountain as the churning rod.

[13.15](#) Tamala is *Xanthochymus pictorius*. Ketaka, in the next verse, is *Pandanus odoratissimus*.

[13.22](#) See 12.42

[13.26](#) For Kadamba see 19.37

[13.36](#) The sage Agastya, earlier mentioned at 4.21 and 12.31. Nahusha was another legendary king.

[13.50](#) The sage Atri and his wife Anusuya had powers derived from holiness. She figures in the next verse. See also 12.27.

[13.52](#) The *vira sana* or heroic pose was a yogic posture used in meditation.

[13.54](#) In the original text this is v. 13.57. It has been shifted up for the translation.

[13.55-57](#) These are verses 13.54-56 in the original text.

[13.60](#) This is verse 13.63 in the original text.

[13.61-63](#) These are verses 13.60-62 in the original text.

[13.67](#) The reference is to a traditional vow which involved a man and a woman sleeping with an unsheathed sword between them to ensure the celibacy of both.

[13.70](#) Sniffing the head of a younger person was a traditional sign of love and blessing.

[13.72](#) The reference is to Vibhishana. Pulastya is a patronymic both for him and his elder brother Ravana. Also see 12.77.

[13.73](#) Another name for Meghanada, the son of Ravana.

[13.76](#) The planets specified in the original are Budha and Brihaspati, that is, Mercury and Jupiter.

[13.78](#) The reference is to Sita being saluted by her husband's brother Bharata.

CANTO 14

[14.11](#) A parasol (*chhatra*) and two whisks (*chamaras*) were the traditional insignia of royalty in ancient India as in verse 3.16. For the four means of state, see notes 10.86 and 11.54.

[14.20](#) Lord of Kailasa is an epithet for Kubera, the god of wealth. He was the original owner of the celestial vehicle Pushpaka, which was seized by the demon king Ravana, and later used by Rama to return from Lanka, as described in Canto 13.

[14.22](#) The divine general is earlier mentioned at 3.55 and 7.1. His names include Skanda, Kumara and Kartikeya. The last derives from three demi-goddesses known as Kritikas, who nursed this six-faced god as a child.

[14.26](#) Shara is the reed *Sac charum sara*, which was also used for making arrows.

[14.46](#) See 11.46 for the legend of Bhargava, or Rama with the axe.

14.54-5 Sita came out of the earth, as at 11.53.

[14.70](#) This refers to a verse traditionally regarded as the very first composed in classical Sanskrit and attributed to Valmiki, also known as *adi kavi* or the original poet.

[14.80](#) The totally waned moon was believed to transfer its light to certain herbs which thus became medicinal.

14.81 This is the plant *Terminalia cattapa*, known in Hindi as *hingot*.

CANTO 15

[15.4](#) See 4.41 for the epithet Kakutstha, derived from a famous forebear. His deeds are mentioned at verses 6.71-73.

[15.6](#) The literal meaning of 'Shatrughna' is 'slayer of enemies'.

[15.7](#) A reference to the rules of grammar and logic, also in verse 15.9.

[15.10](#) Numerous mythical divinities, all the size of a human thumb, who went with the Sun god's chariot.

[15.26](#) See 13.73 for Indrajit who is slain by Lakshmana in verse 12.79.

[15.28](#) The original text here has the word Kalindi, another name for the river Yamuna. Mathura earlier figures at verse 6.48.

[15.33](#) The second reference is to the Ramayana of Valmiki. The six annexed texts, traditionally taught with the Vedas for proper performance of rites mentioned in them, were: *Shiksha*, *Kalpa*, *Vyakarana*, *Nirukta*, *Jyotisha* and *Chhandas*, respectively, dealing with pronunciation, ritual rules, grammar, a glossary, astronomy and prosody.

[15.50](#) The fourth and lowest of the four castes in Hindu tradition. Certain sacerdotal practices were forbidden to its members.

[15.54-55](#) See 4.21, 12.31 and verse 13.36 for Agastya. In legend he was born in a pitcher.

[15.70](#) The patronymic of Valmiki.

[15.87](#) Yudhajit, perhaps from the northwest of the subcontinent, was the brother of Kaikeyi at 12.5, the mother of Bharata.

[15.89](#) This is surmised as the derivation of Takshashila, present-day Taxila in Pakistan.

[15.94](#) In legend, Durvasa was a powerful sage, but given to anger and cursing.

[15.96](#) In tradition, Dharma was manifest in entirety during the first of the four ages of time, but depleted by a quarter in each successive age. Thus it was one-fourth less in Treta, the second age in which this story is set. In the present Kali age it is down to its last quarter.

[15.99](#) For Kadamba also see 19.37.

[15.103](#) The reference is to Vibhishana at 13.72. and Hanuman at 12.60.

CANTO 16

[16.1-2](#) This refers to Rama's other son and six nephews, named in verses 15.36, 89, 90 and 97, together with their respective realms.

[16.3](#) The four-armed god is Vishnu who incarnated as Rama and his brothers.

[16.9](#) See verse 15.98. Here Ayodhya is presented as the goddess of the city.

[16.22](#) Refers to Kushavati, mentioned at verse 15.97.

[16.34](#) The Ganga is often described as the three-streamed. Its bringing is mentioned at 4.32. The original bringers were incinerated by the angry sage Kapila. See 13.3 also.

[16.42](#) Alaka was the capital of Kubera, god of wealth. The lord of heaven is Indra.

[16.48](#) This is the white flower of *Accacia sirisa*, often used for decoration.

[16.51](#) The tree *Terminalia arjuna*.

[16.52](#) The patala or red trumpet flower is of the plant *Begonia suavelons*.

[16.72](#) As at verse 15.55.

CANTO 17

[17.1](#) See 4.41 for Kakutstha, an epithet also used for this king's other forebears.

[17.7](#) For Shachi, see 3.55 and 7.3.

[17.12](#) The ceremony of waving a lighted lamp before the honoured person or object is called *nirajana* in the original text, but is better known now as *arati*. See 4.25 also. Durva grass used in various religious rites is *Panicum dactylon*.

[17.13](#) The Atharva is one of the four Vedas, and also contains supplication prayers.

[17.14](#) A reference to the legend of the god Shiva receiving on his head the river Ganga as it descended from heaven.

[17.15](#) See 5.17.

[17.24](#) This refers to *gorochana*, a yellow cosmetic pigment derived from bovine bile.

[17.29](#) Keshava is another name of the god Vishnu, described with these ornaments at 10.10.

[17.45](#) The six internal enemies are lust, anger, greed, delusion, pride and jealousy.

[17.57](#) See 1.25 for the three objectives of human action.

[17.60-62](#) In the original text, verse 60 is numbered as 61, 61 as 62, and 62 as 60. This has been slightly changed for better reading in the present translation.

[17.63](#) For the triple energies or powers, see 3.13.

[17.65](#) The four classes of people and four stages of life traditional to Hindu society are well known. One-sixth of the produce was the traditional tax due the ruler.

[17.67](#) The six-faced god is the divine general mentioned at 5.36. The six powers of a ruler are described as limbs of the state in 1.60. Also see 8.21 for the six measures of policy.

[17.68](#) For the fourfold policy, see 10.86.

[17.78](#) The gods guarding the four quarters of the world in tradition are Indra, Yama, Varuna and Kubera, also mentioned earlier and at verse 17.81. The five basic elements were earth, water, light, air and space. Tradition also listed seven sacred mountains.

[17.79](#) The parasol was a traditional symbol of sovereignty.

C ANTO 18

[18.1](#) Some scholars identify the location of Nishadha with the Kumaon hills region in the present Uttarakhand state.

[18.3](#) This refers to Atithi, as in verse 17.1.

[18.4](#) The reference is to King Nishadha, as in verse 18.1.

[18.7](#) See 3.5 for Uttara Kosala. The father here is Nala.

[18.8](#) This verse plays on multiple meanings of the word *pundarika*: a celestial elephant, a white lotus flower, and a proper noun.

[18.10](#) The new king is Kshemadhanva.

[18.16](#) Pariyatra is one of the seven sacred mountains alluded to by 17.78.

[18.20-1](#) These verses play on the words *nabhi* and *vajra*, for navel and thunder respectively.

[18.24](#) The god Shiva, known as Vishvanatha in Kashi.

[18.27](#) Soma was a legendary plant's juice used in sacred rituals.

[18.31](#) Pushkara was a venue of pilgrimage, the name is still borne by one near Ajmer.

[18.32](#) This verse focuses on the word Pushya, both the name of the prince it mentions, and of a starry constellation visible in the sky during December-January which gives the name Pausha to that lunar month.

[18.43](#) The whisk and the parasol were emblems of royalty as at 14.11. Side locks, also called raven's wings, were a sign of early age vide 11.1

[18.44](#) The tilak is the auspicious mark put on the forehead, specially on ceremonial

occasions. The implication here is that the kings had been killed and their wives widowed.

[18.50](#) See 1. 25 for the threefold ends of human activity. The triple knowledge of state refers broadly to intelligence gathering, punishment and policymaking.

CANTO 19

[19.1-2](#) The king mentioned here is Sudarshana, described in Canto 18 from verse 18.35 onwards. Incidentally, Naimisha is also the forest where, in tradition, the story of the Mahabharata was narrated to the sages by Sauti.

[19.12](#) The tree is *Mimusops e lengi*, traditionally said to blossom when sprinkled with wine from the mouth of a young woman. See 9.30.

[19.35](#) Biting and scratching were associated with making love, and their marks seen as signs that it had happened.

[19.37](#) Still known by the Sanskrit name, the tree is *Nauclea cadamba*, famous for its fragrance and flowers in the monsoon season . See also 13.27 and 15.99.

[19.39](#) Kartika is the Sanskrit lunar month corresponding to October-November, when the moon usually shines in a cloudless sky.

[19.46](#) This is the trumpet flower from the plant *Bignonia suaveolens* . Also at 16.52.

[19.53](#) In tradition, a man's debt to his ancestors was discharged with the birth of a son. See verses 1.67-71.



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