

वेतालपञ्चविंशतिः

TWENTY-FIVE STORIES
TOLD BY 'VETAALA'

TRANSLATION
FROM THE ORIGINAL SANSKRIT TEXT

BY

Narayanalakshmi

VETAALAPANCHA VIMSHATI

INTRODUCTION

These stories are a part of the 'Kathgaa-Sarit-Saagara' of Somadeva.

Vikramaaditya (Sun among valorous men) was a legendary emperor of Ujjain, India, famed for his wisdom, valor and magnanimity.

The term 'Vetaala' means 'a spirit' acting through a dead body; not exactly a vampire.

'Vetaala-Panchavimshati' is a collection of twenty five stories related by the spirit to the king. A great Yogi with his Yogic power enters a corpse and tells these stories to the king.

World is a collision-network filled with so many varieties of relations, passions, desires, philosophies, gods, demons and what not. Strange situations rise up in life making us wonder what is right and what is wrong. The Great Yogi presents the king such varied situations in twenty four stories and asks him to analyze the right or wrong of situations. The king answers all the questions based on Dharma.

In the last and twenty fifth one, the Yogi purposely presents an impossible situation, which has no answer proper and thus ends the king's torment and bestows on him the emperorship of Vidyaadharas.

OM

KING TRIVIKRAMASENA

On the bank of River Godavari, there is a country named 'Pratishtaana'.

Son of VikramaSena named 'TrivikramaSena' a celebrated king equaling Indra in valor ruled that country. When the king attended the court, a Buddhist mendicant (Bhikshu) named ShaantiSheela daily visited the king and offered him a fruit. The king just took the fruit and handed it over to the treasurer who was standing next to him.

In this manner, twelve years passed.

One day the mendicant as usual gave the fruit to the king and left the court premises. On that day, the king gave that fruit to a 'performing monkey cub' which had escaped from its guardian and had entered the court by chance.

The moment the monkey ate it, a priceless excellent precious stone fell out of the bitten fruit.

The king saw that and questioned the treasurer-

"Where have you kept the fruits offered by the mendicant which I handed over to you daily?"

The treasurer answered with fear-

"Lord! I threw all the fruits out of the window. If permitted, I will go and search for them."

He went out permitted by the king and returned within some seconds and said-

"Lord! I found a heap of rotten fruits and countless precious stones shining in their midst."

The king ordered the gems to be placed in the treasury.

Next day, when the mendicant came, the king said to him-

"Hey Bhikshu!

Why do you serve me like this spending so much wealth? If you do not tell me the reason for your action, I will not accept any more fruit from you."

The mendicant took the king to an isolated place and said-

"O Brave one! There is some achievement that can be completed only with the help of a courageous king like you."

The king agreed to help.

The mendicant was happy and said to the king again-

“Lord! You should meet me in the large cremation ground, under the fig tree, on the forthcoming fourteenth night of the dark half of the lunar month.”

The king promised to meet him as requested and the mendicant ShaantiSheela returned to his monastery happily.

On the fourteenth day of the dark half of the lunar month the honorable king remembered the request of the mendicant; wore a blue turban on his head; held a sword in his hand; and went to the cremation ground at night-fall. He searched for the mendicant here and there in that cremation ground; found him sitting under a fig tree reciting some chants.

He approached him and said-

“Bhikshu! I have come as I promised! What do you want me to do now? Tell me!”

The Bhikshu saw the king; was very happy and said-

“King! If you want to please me, go in the southern direction alone towards that Shimshapaa tree at a distance; bring me the corpse hanging there; and thus help me.”

The king who never broke any promise he ever made, heard his words; said *“So be it”*; and walked in the southern direction. After he walked in that cremation ground alone like this for some distance, he saw a Shimshapaa tree and a corpse hanging from that tree. He climbed the tree; cut the rope tied to the corpse; and made it fall on the ground. The moment the corpse touched the ground; it cried loudly as if it had become alive. Then the king climbed down the tree; wondered if the person was alive; and touched it moved by kindness. Immediately the corpse laughed uproariously.

The king then understood the corpse to be possessed by a spirit (Vetaala) and said without fear –

“What are you laughing for? Come on, let us go”.

Before he finished his words he saw the corpse had vanished from the ground. He looked up and found that the corpse was hanging from the tree as before.

Again the king climbed up the tree; brought down the corpse with great effort; placed it on his shoulder and started walking silently.

वीराणां चित्तं वज्रादपि अखण्डितं अकम्प्यं ॥

*The minds of the brave ones are harder than the diamond
and never tremble in fear.*

STORY ONE

As the king kept walking, the spirit staying in that corpse (Vetaala) said to the king-
“King! To entertain you on your journey, let me tell you a story! Listen!”

There is a city named Vaaraanasee, where resides Lord Shiva. Meritorious people visit the place as if it is the Kailaasa, the abode of Shiva. The heavenly river Ganges surrounds it like a pearl garland.

A king named PrataapaMukuta (one who has valor as his crown) lived there, who had destroyed the forest of enemies by the blazing fire of his valor. He had a son named VajraMukuta (one who wears a diamond crown) who equaled Manmatha, the god of love in beauty and subdued the arrogance of others by his bravery. He had a friend named MahaaMati (one of great intelligence) who was the son of the minister.

Once the prince and his friend went to the forest to enjoy the hunting-sport and had journeyed far into the forest. As they moved in a slow pace slicing away the manes of the lion-heads which were like the chowries fanning the Goddess of valor, they reached a very huge forest. They found a lake there; quenched their thirst with the water; washed their hands and feet; sat under a tree growing on the bank of the lake.

At that time they saw a young girl coming toward that lake to bathe in its cool waters. She was extremely beautiful; was wearing finely made clothes; was filling the lake as it were by the flowing waters of her charm; was producing lotuses there as it were by her looks; making the lotuses feel ashamed by the beauty of her face shining brighter than the moon.

She stole the mind of the prince the moment she was seen by him. That prince also pulled her eyes towards him instantly.

The girl was infatuated by the handsome prince. Yet she could not speak her mind out to him, overcome by shyness. But she communicated her feelings to him through some gestures. She took a lotus and placed it on her ear. Then she bared her teeth. She then placed the lotus on her head and touched her chest.

The prince could not understand the meaning of her gestures; but the minister's son who was very intelligent understood what she communicated through her gestures.

Within few moments, her companions came and took her away. She went home and lay down on her bed. Her mind was lost in thoughts about the handsome prince she had seen in the forest.

The prince also was deeply in love with her; went home somehow with the help of his friend; pined for her company and emaciated.

The minister's son observed his distressed state of the mind and consoled him saying that the girl was easily attainable.

The prince who had lost all hopes of ever seeing her said-
"Friend! The name or village or the family of that girl is not known at all. How can I see her again? Why do you raise hope in me wastefully?"

The minister's son said-
"Lord! Did you not observe what she communicated through her gestures? When she placed the lotus (Utpala) on her ear (Karna), she meant- 'I reside in the country ruled by King Karnotpala.'
When she bared her teeth, she meant –'I am the daughter of a dentist.'
When she placed the lotus on her head, she meant –'My name is Padmaavati'.
When she placed her hand on the chest, she meant- 'My lives are with you'.
There is a king named Karnotpala who rules the KalingaDesha (Kalinga Country). A dentist named 'SangraamaVardhana' lives there. He is very much favored by the king and is a very prosperous and rich man. This girl Padmaavati, a gem among women is his daughter who is dearer to him than his lives.
I have found out all this through some men. That is how I was able to understand the meaning of her gestures."

The prince was immensely happy when he heard the words of his friend and praised him for his intelligence. He now knew how to get the girl of his heart.

He consulted his friend and decided to go again to that lake in search of that girl. He and his friend again started on their journey to the very same forest on the pretext of hunting animals. When they had crossed half the distance, both he and his friend left the soldiers and other friends far behind and riding horses which ran with the speed of the wind, reached KalingaDesha. They then reached the city where the King Karnotpala lived; searched for the mansion of the dentist; found an old woman's hut nearby and decided to stay there for the time being. They fed grass and water to the horses; hid them out of sight and entered the house of the old woman.

The minister's son asked the old lady-
"Old lady! Do you know anyone who attends to dental structures in this place?"

The old lady welcomed them inside with affection and said-
"Son! Of course I know him. I work there only. I have been appointed by him to serve his daughter Padmaavati. But today I did not go there because my saree has been stolen away. My wicked son steals away any good cloth that is seen by him."

The minister's son gave her the garment that covered his upper body (Uttareeya) and made her happy.

Again he said-

"Mother! Whatever we tell you do it secretly. Go to Padmaavati, the dentist's daughter and tell her -

'The prince whom you saw on the lakeside has come here now. He requested me to meet you because of his love.'"

The old lady who was pleased by their charities immediately went to meet Padmaavati and told her-

"Daughter! The prince and the minister's son have arrived here to this city in order to meet you. Tell me what I should do."

Padmaavati scolded her and applying camphor paste on both her palms stuck the old lady on both her cheeks.

The old lady was hurt by the rude behavior of the girl and returned home crying.

She told the two young men-

"Sons! See how she has made camphor marks on my cheeks!"

The prince felt very disappointed. But the wise son of the minister took him aside and said-

"Friend! Don't be so disheartened!

The girl has only tried to protect the secret and has sent a message through those camphor marks seen on the old lady's cheeks. She has said that - 'The ten nights of these full moon phase are not conducive for our meeting. Please wait.'"

The minister's son consoled the prince; went out; sold some gold he had in his hands; and got the old lady to prepare food of a very high quality. Both of them ate along with the old lady. The old lady was very happy for the delicious meals. Requested by them again, she went again to meet Padmaavati.

She returned after some time and told the young men-

"Sons! I met the girl as you said. I stood there in front of her silently for some time. She loudly expressed her annoyance of you both disturbing her again and again. She dipped her three fingers in the red paint used for applying on the feet and hit me on the chest. I have returned now insulted by her in this manner."

The minister's son took his friend aside and said-

"Friend! Do not mistake her actions. By applying the red marks with her fingers she has said that the next three days she will be having the menstruation process."

The minister's son consoled the prince and after three days sent the old lady again to meet Padmaavati. But that day the old lady was welcomed by Padmaavati with great affection; was offered food and drink; and entertained the whole day.

In the evening the old day got ready to return home. At that time a lot of terrified voices of people were heard outside the house.

“Ha! Ha! Look out for the mad intoxicated elephant! It has got loose! It is crushing everyone with its feet! Run! Run!”

Shouting like this and screaming in fear people were all running helter skelter.

Padmaavati said to the old lady-

“Mother! Do not go out on the road now when the elephant is running madly. You sit on this small seat; I will tie the seat to the rope and let you down through this big window into the garden. You climb the tree; jump out of the wall; climb another tree and jump into your house.”

Then the girl made the old lady sit on a seat and tying it securely with ropes with the help of her friends dropped her into the garden through the window.

The old lady returned home safely and reported all that had happened to both the young men staying at her house.

Then the minister’s son said to the prince-

“Friend! Your wish has been fulfilled! She has shown you what path you have to use to meet her. At night-fall you go through the path used by the old lady and meet your beloved.”

The prince went likewise and entered the garden accompanied by his friend. He saw the seat securely bound by ropes hanging out from the window; and Padmaavati standing next to the window with the maids holding the rope tightly in their hands waiting for him. The moment he saw her, he started climbing up through that rope. The maids standing at the window pulled him up safely. He entered Padmaavati’s room through the window. The minister’s son saw this and returned back to the old lady’s house.

The prince saw the beautiful Padmaavati. She had the face as pretty as the full moon and her charm flowed out of that face like the pleasant moon light. She was like the beautiful moon-lit night hiding from the new moon night. She saw him and moved by extreme love for him rushed towards him; hugged him and entertained him in many ways.

The prince married her through the ceremony of Gandharvas (exchanging garlands) and spent a few days in her company happily.

One day he said to his beloved wife-

“Beloved! My friend the minister’s son who accompanied me to this city is staying alone at the old lady’s house. I will just meet him once, enquire about his welfare and return soon.”

Then that wicked Padmaavati asked the prince –

“Master! I ask you this! Whatever gestures I made, who could decipher them- you or that minister’s son?”

The prince replied-

“Dearest! I did not understand anything. My friend who is extremely wise explained to me what the meaning of your gestures was.”

The girl thought for some time and said-

“Master! You did an incorrect thing by not telling me this for so long. Your friend is my brother. I should have honored him with auspicious offerings in the beginning itself.”
(auspicious offering: Taamboola –betel leaves and betel nuts with coconut and fruits)

That night the prince bid farewell to her and dropped out of the window into the garden through the rope held by the maids and went to meet his friend in the old lady’s house. He told his friend what Padmaavati had said about honoring him. The minister’s son being humble natured, refused such an honor as it was not proper according to him. The night passed as they conversed on various matters happily.

In the early morning as they completed their morning rites, Padmaavati’s friend arrived there with a plate filled with cooked rice and Taamboola. She enquired the welfare of the minister’s son; offered him the food and cleverly making the prince avoid the food said-
“Your beloved is waiting there for you to eat food with you.”

Then the minister’s son said to the prince-

“Lord! I will show you some amazing thing. Come with me.”

He took a little of that cooked rice and gave it to a dog which was standing there.

The dog ate it and died the very next moment.

Observing that, the prince asked the minister’s son-

“What is this amazing event?”

The minister’s son replied-

“Lord! As I deciphered her secret gestures to you, she thinks I am too clever and wants to kill me because of her attachment to you.

She thinks – ‘The prince will not be single mindedly attached to me because of his friend. He will leave me here and follow his friend back to his city as he has too much affection for him.’

So she sent me food mixed with poison. Therefore you go and pacify her. I will think of some plan.”

The prince heard the words of the minister’s son; praised him and said-

“Truly you are wisdom incarnate!”

At that time they heard some people shouting with distress-

“Alas! Alas! The king’s youngest son has died.”

The minister’s son became happy by hearing that and said to the prince-

“Lord! Go to Padmaavati’s house tonight; you get her drunk with liquor so much so that she loses consciousness and is almost paralyzed like dead. When she is in such a swoon, heat the edge of a trident and brand her on her waist; take away all her ornaments; climb down to the garden as before using the roped-seat and come off. I will later on do something to make everything alright.”

He got a trident made for that purpose and gave it to the prince.

The prince took the trident ‘which was made of heavy iron and crooked like the minds of his beloved and friend’, in his hand; went that night to Padmaavati’s house; thinking that ‘the advice of a minister of pure heart should be accepted by the king without a second thought’, he made her get drunk; branded her on the hip with the trident; took away all her ornaments; returned to his friend; told him everything that he had done and showed him the ornaments.

The minister’s son was satisfied that his plan was moving on very well. Next morning he went to the cremation ground dressed up as an ascetic and got the prince to act as his disciple.

He said to the prince-

“You select the pearl necklace among these ornaments; take it to the gold-smith and try to sell it. If the patrolling soldiers catch you then tell them- ‘My guru gave this to me for selling.’”

The prince took the pearl necklace as advised by his friend; went to a shop for selling it; and was caught by the soldiers. They were searching for the thief who had stolen the ornaments of the dentist’s daughter and had caught the prince. They took him to the chief of the city.

The chief saw that the soldiers had caught an ascetic and so he asked politely,

“Sage! Where did you get this pearl necklace? This was actually stolen from the daughter of the dentist.”

The prince replied –

“Good ones! My Guru gave this to me and asked me to sell it. So please question him yourself.”

Then the chief went to the cremation ground and met the minister’s son dressed as the ascetic Guru. He asked him-

“Sage! How did this pearl necklace get into the hands of your disciple?”

The clever son of the minister took him aside and said-

“Good man! I am a man of penance. I wander here and there.

By some act of god, I saw at night an entire group of Yoginees (female ascetics) coming here to this cremation ground where I stay. One Yoginee among them offered ‘a prince whose heart-lotus had burst open’, to Lord Bhairava. She was drunk and intoxicated.

Using her magical powers she took various forms with different faces and tried to grab away the garland of beads which I use for my penance.

Seeing her arrogant behavior I got angry and took my trident; recited some magical chants; branded on her hip region; and took away this pearl necklace from her neck. Being an ascetic I could not keep it; so I sent it with my disciple to sell it.”

The chief of the city went and reported all that had happened to the king. The king saw the pearl necklace; sent an old lady who was trustworthy to Padmaavati’s house; got the information that Padmaavati had a burnt mark of a trident on her hip region; thought that his son had been eaten by the evil spirit; went to the minister’s son who was dressed as an ascetic; asked him what punishment should be meted out to Padmaavati; and according to his suggestion punished her by sending her out of the country, though her parents were crying hard. Padmaavati thrown out of the country and wandering in the forest with torn clothes, did not give up her body knowing very well that the minister’s son was responsible for everything. At the end of the day, the prince and his friend removed their ascetic costumes; rode the horses and found Padmaavati wandering in the forest and crying alone. They took her to their own country. The prince lived happily with her thereafter.

The dentist thought that his daughter has been eaten up by some wild animals and died grieving about her. Later his wife also died.

END

Vetaala finished the story and questioned the king-

“King! Who gets the sin for the death of the dentist and his wife-the prince, or the minister’s son or Padmaavati?

You look the best of the intelligent men. So clear my doubt.

If you know the answer and yet do not talk to me, your head will burst into hundred pieces. If you give the correct answer, then I will again jump from your shoulder and again will go to the shimshapaa tree.”

The king answered the spirit like this-

“Hey Lord of Yogis! What is not known to you? Yet I will answer you.

None of the three named by you are sinners.

The king Karnotpala alone gets the sin of their death.”

Vetaala asked him-

“What is the fault of the king? Those three alone did all the wrong actions leading to the death of Padmaavati’s parents.

If the swans eat off the grains, what is the fault of the crows?”

The king replied-

“All three of them did not do anything wrong.

The minister’s son fulfilled his master’s wishes; so he is not the sinner.

Padmaavati and the prince were burning by the arrows shot by the god of love and had no proper sense of anything; so they pursued their own selfish ends; and they are not the sinners.

The king was well-versed in the administration science; he did not find out the true facts through his spies; he did not know the actions of the cheats; he punished the girl without enquiring about the true facts. So he is the sinner for sure.”

Vetaala heard his answer.

The very next moment, it flew back to the shimshapaa tree through its magical powers wanting to test the mental strength of the king. The king went back to the tree to get the corpse without losing his patience in the least.

STORY TWO

King TrivikramaSena again went to the shimshapaa tree to bring down the corpse possessed by the spirit. He reached the tree and saw all around. He found the spirit (corpse) lying on the ground and making weird noises. The king placed the corpse with the spirit on his shoulder and started to move fast towards the mendicant silently.

The spirit spoke to him through the corpse’s mouth-

“King! You are undergoing an unnecessary strain. So let me entertain you with a story. Listen-

There is a Brahmin’s colony named BrahmaSthala on the bank of River Kaalindi. A Brahmin named AgniSwaami who was well versed in Vedas lived in that colony. A daughter named Mandaaravati who was extremely beautiful was born to him. Lord Brahma who created such a fresh and unseen beauty must have felt disgusted with the divine damsels of the heaven as his failures, after he saw the excellence of his talent in her creation. She grew up to be a pretty maiden crossing her childhood state. Three young Brahmins who were equally endowed with all virtues came from KaanyaKubja to ask her hand in marriage. Each one of them begged the Brahmin separately for the hand of his daughter.

The Brahmin would not think of offering her in marriage to any other person other than those three even at the cost of his life. He decided to choose one among them as his son-in-law. The girl was afraid of hurting the other two by choosing one and so did not consent to the marriage.

Those three remained there itself watching her moon-like face day and night taking on the vow of a Chakora bird (which lives on the rays of the moon).

Suddenly the girl was stuck by a high fever and suffering by the heat of the fever, she died. The three Brahmin youths saw her dead body and were very much distressed. They decorated the body with flowers and ornaments; took it to the cremation ground and offered it to the fire.

One of them built a hut upon those very ashes and lived there on alms. The second one collected her bones and went to the River Ganges to deposit them in the waters. The third one became an ascetic and went away aimlessly to wander in the foreign lands. As he wandered once he went to a village name Vajraaloka and remained as a guest in some Brahmin's house. He was worshipped by that householder and offered food. As he started to eat, the householder Brahmin's child started to cry loudly. It did not stop its crying though it was consoled in many ways. Then the lady of the house took the child in her arms and threw it into the blazing fire with anger. That child of delicate limbs instantly turned into ashes. The ascetic youth was shocked and his hairs stood on end as he watched that horrifying scene.

He said-

"Alas! Fie! Ah the suffering! I have entered the house of a BrahmaRaakshasa (a Brahmin demon). This food is the form of direct sin. I will not eat any more."

The Brahmin householder said to his guest-

"Brahman!

See the power I have obtained by mastering the science of MRTA-SANJEEVINI (making the dead alive)!"

He opened a book; brought out the 'magic learning'; recited some chants; sprinkled some water on the ashes. The moment the water drops fell on the ashes, his son stood there alive and healthy. Then the ascetic ate the food happily. The Brahmin householder hung the book on an elephant tusk stuck on the wall. He also ate food along with his guest and slept in his room.

When the man of the house was fast asleep, the ascetic youth got up quietly and wondering whether his beloved Mandaaravati could be made alive again, removed the book from its place. Immediately he left the house unknown to the Brahmin host; walked night and day; and reached the cremation ground.

He saw the second youth who had gone to deposit the bones into the River Ganges. He then went to the third youth who was sleeping on the ashes and living in a hut there.

He said to him-

"Get away from the hut, brother. I will make our beloved alive again."

As the other two started asking him questions, he just took the book out; opened the page of chants; recited the chants; and sprinkled the water over the ashes. The moment the water drops fell on the ashes, Mandaaravati stood there hale and hearty.

Having come out of the fire she shone more beautiful now with a golden hue. Seeing her alive all the three were stuck by passion and started to fight with each other, wanting to marry her.

One of them said-

“She has been made alive by me uttering the magical chants. So she has to be my wife.”

The second one said-

“I have visited sacred places and offered prayers. She became alive by the merits I have acquired. So she must become my wife.”

The third one said-

“I have kept her ashes safe; that is how she could be brought back to life. So she is fit to be loved by me as a wife.”

END

Vetaala said-

“Hey king! You alone are capable of solving their dispute. Then tell me, for whom should she become the wife? If you know the answer and yet do not talk to me, your head will explode into hundred pieces. If you give the correct answer, then I will again jump from your shoulder and again will go to the shimshapaa tree.”

The king replied-

“He who made her alive by chanting the hymns becomes the father by giving her life. He who went to deposit the bones in the river becomes the son by such an act. He who lived in the cremation ground hugging her ashes alone takes the place of a lover and becomes fit to marry her.”

The spirit along with the corpse flew back to the tree immediately. The king again walked towards the shimshapaa tree to fulfill the promise given to the mendicant.

प्राणात्ययेऽपि महासत्त्वाः प्रतिपन्नमर्थं असाधयित्वा न निवर्तन्ते ॥

Men of noble character do not ever leave the work they have undertaken without completing it, even at the cost of their lives.

STORY THREE

Again the king went to the shimshapaa tree to bring the corpse possessed by the spirit. He placed the dead body on his shoulder and silently started walking towards the fig tree where the mendicant was waiting.

Then the Vetaala spoke to him again-

“King! You are suffering a lot by moving to and fro in this forlorn ground at this night time. I will entertain you with a story. Listen-

There is a renowned city named PaataliPutra on this earth. There lived once a king named VikramaKesari (A lion among brave men). Lord Brahma had bestowed him gems equaling his virtues too. He owned a male parrot named ‘VidagdhaChoodaaMani’ (Crest jewel of wisdom) which was in that form because of a curse. It had divine knowledge and was well-versed in all the scriptures.

The king’s son named Shashee (handsome like the Moon) married ChandraPrabhaa (beautiful like the moonlight) the daughter of the king of Magadha country, as advised by the parrot. She also owned a female magpie bird named Somikaa (Moon) which was very wise and well-versed in all the sciences just like the parrot owned by the prince. Both the parrot and the magpie lived in the same cage in the king’s palace.

As days passed, the parrot developed a desire for the magpie’s company and said to the magpie-

“Good lady! Please give me company always while sleeping, sitting and eating and playing.”

The magpie said-

“I do not like the company of any male member. The men folk are always wicked and ungrateful.”

The parrot contradicted the magpie by saying –

“Men are not wicked. Only females are wicked and cruel-hearted.”

A dispute started between them. Both of them decided that the loser of the dispute will become the slave of the other and approached the prince to give the judgment.

The prince who was seated in the king’s court questioned the magpie-

“How can you say that men are ungrateful? Tell me the reason!”

Then the magpie related the story depicting the wicked nature of men to prove her point of view and said-

“Listen Prince!

{STORY TOLD BY THE MAGPIE}

“There is a city named Kaamandakee. There lived a rich merchant named ArthaDatta. He had a son named DhanaDatta. After the father died, young DhanaDatta became completely wayward spending his time in gambling etc. Many wicked youth joined him and led him to his ruin.

दुर्जनसङ्गतिरेव व्यसनवृक्षस्य मूलं ॥

The company of the wicked alone is the root cause of all vices.

Soon DhanaDatta lost everything by a life given to vices. He was moneyless and poor. Feeling embarrassed to live in the same country as before, he left that country and went to live in a city named ChandanaPura.

He entered a merchant's house there to eat some food. That merchant saw the young man; enquired about his family name; felt satisfied that he was from a good family; offered him food etc with affection; thought that it was the play of the divine destiny that such a young man of a good family came to his house; gave his daughter Ratnavati in marriage to him along with some money. DhanaDatta after marriage stayed in his father-in law's house itself.

As days went by, he forgot all the sufferings of the past; again was desirous of the old vices; and wanted to return to his country.

That rogue somehow convinced his father-in-law who had no other progeny than the daughter; got his permission to visit his country; made Ratnavati wear all ornaments; and along with her and an old lady to serve his wife, left the home and started for his country.

By evening they reached a forest on their path. He told his wife that there was danger from thieves and made her give him all the ornaments.

Observe O King! The heart of those ungrateful men interested in gambling and prostitutes are sharp like the edge of the sword.

That wicked sinner only intent on gaining wealth wanted to kill his good wife and threw her into a hollow pit along with that old lady. He ran away immediately feeling assured that they both would be dead in no time. The old lady died the moment she fell into the pit. Ratnavati held on to some grass roots grown in that pit and somehow managed to climb out alive. Wounded all over her limbs, crying pitifully, asking passersby for the correct route to her city at every step, she returned to her father's place.

“How did you get into such a horrible state?”- enquired her parents looking at her pathetic condition.

The devoted wife of DhanaDatta hid the true facts and replied-

“We were robbed by some thieves on the way. My husband was taken away by them. The old lady was pushed into a pit and she died. I am alive somehow by the grace of God! Some kind passerby lifted me out of the pit.”

The parents consoled her with great concern; and Ratnavati who loved her husband as her life, stayed in her father's house.

As days passed, DhanaDatta lost all his money in gambling once again.

He thought- *'I will go again to my father-in-law's house; bring some money; I will tell my father-in-law that his daughter is safe and happy in this country.'*

He reached again his father-in-law's house. Ratnavati, the devoted wife saw him coming at a distance; ran towards him; fell at that wicked man's feet; told him about the false story she had related to her parents.

The minds of devoted wives do not change their affection even if the husband is proved to be wicked. Now the wicked man entered his father-in-law's house without any apprehension and saluted the father-in-law. The old merchant welcomed his son-in-law heartily; was very happy that he had escaped from the thieves and returned home alive; celebrated the event with great festivities along with his relatives. Then DhanaDatta happily lived there in the company of his wife Ratnavati enjoying the riches of his father-in-law.

Oh! What that wicked soul did on that night, I feel is too horrible for words; yet I relate it to you so as not to bring a break in the story.

Listen, O Prince!

At that night he murdered his wife Ratnavati, took all her ornaments; ran away to his country unseen by anybody."

That is why I say that these men are wicked and ungrateful."

The prince laughed aloud when he heard the story related by the magpie. He said to the parrot- *"You tell your story now."*

The parrot said-

"Lord! Women are cunning, characterless and sinful creatures. Listen Prince, I will tell you a story proving my point.

{STORY TOLD BY THE PARROT}

“There is a city named Harshavatee. There lived a renowned merchant named DharmaDatta. He owned wealth equaling millions. He had a daughter named VasuDattaa. She was unparalleled in beauty. She was dearer to him than his own lives. She was offered in marriage to a merchant’s son named SamudraDatta living in the city of TaamraLipta. He was equal to her in wealth, age and family. He was very handsome, oozing nectar of moonlight for the eyes namely the pair of Chakora birds.

VasuDattaa had once come to visit her parents leaving her husband in his own city. She chanced to see a handsome young man near her father’s house. That wayward lady was stuck by passion the moment she set her eyes on him; sent her maid to bring him to her secretly; and hiding him in her room, she enjoyed his company. Infatuated by that youth, she spent every night in his company in this manner.

After some days, her husband visited his in-laws and pleased them with his good behavior. The day was spent in festivities. At night, her mother decorated her with all ornaments and sent her to her son-in-law’s room to give him company. Her thoughts lost to her paramour, the girl refused her husband’s requests for her company and pretended to fall asleep. The husband engaged himself in drinking liquor; soon fell asleep exhausted by the journey to his in-law’s place.

Everyone in the house had finished eating and drinking and fell asleep soon. At that time a thief entered that house making a hole in the wall. The merchant’s daughter heard her paramour calling her from outside. She secretly left the house without seeing the thief in that house. The thief was disappointed at heart.

He thought-

“I had come to loot the ornaments of this girl and she is going elsewhere now wearing those ornaments. I will follow her.”

He followed the girl unknown to her.

VasuDattaa was accompanied by her friend carrying a basket of flowers and fruits. She soon entered a garden nearby.

She was in for a shock. Her paramour was hanging dead from a tree. The police soldiers had captured him roaming alone at night; had mistaken him for a thief; punished him by tying a noose around his neck and killing him.

VasuDattaa screamed-*“Ha! Alas! I am ruined!”*

She cried aloud; fell on the ground and wept pitifully.

She got the dead body of the paramour down; and sitting next to it decorated the dead body with perfumed pastes and flowers.

Stuck by passion, she lifted his face by her hands and tried to kiss him.

At that moment a spirit filled with passion entered the dead body, and bit her nose with the teeth.

She was shocked again and ran away from that place; yet wondering
“Oh! Is he alive by any chance?”

She returned again and saw the dead man lying on the ground motionless without the spirit-possession; decided that he was dead for sure; returned home with slow steps, humiliated and frightened.

Unseen by her and hiding behind some tree, the thief saw all that had happened.

He thought-

“Alas! What has this wicked woman done! Ha! How terrifying is the heart of a woman! What will she be doing next?”

Curious to see what she would do next, the thief followed her from a distance.

That wicked lady started crying loudly the moment she entered the house.

She said-

“Save me! This enemy in the form of my husband has bit off my nose though I am innocent and did not do any mistake.”

Hearing her screams and shouts everyone in the house got up to see what was the matter. Her husband also got up. Her father came there; saw her wounded nose; got angry with his son-in-law and tied him up in ropes. The son-in-law remained silent not knowing how to face that situation. He did not say anything. Everyone slowly heard from her what had happened; the thief who knew the true facts disappeared from there.

In the morning the merchant’s son was dragged to the king’s court by the father-in-law. VasuDattaa with the broken nose also followed him.

The king heard about the events that had occurred at night; decided that the merchant’s son had acted against his wife; ordered the merchant’s son to be killed.

The poor innocent son of the merchant was getting dragged to the place of punishment along with the drummers who were announcing his cruel act.

The thief came there and told the king’s men-

“Lord! Why are you taking him to punish him when he has not done any wicked act? I know the true events that happened. Take me to the king. I will tell him everything.”

The king’s men took him to the king’s court.

The thief reported to the king every thing that had happened at that night and said-

“Lord! If you do not trust me, check the corpse lying in the garden and you will find a piece of nose stuck in its teeth.”

The king sent his soldiers to the garden where the corpse was lying. They found the piece of nose stuck in its teeth. The thief's words were proved to be true. The king released the innocent merchant's son; got VasuDattaa punished by her cutting off her ears also; punished her by throwing out of the city also; punished her father by taking away all his wealth; appointed the thief as the chief of the city."

"Prince! That is why I say women are by nature wicked and deceitful."

So saying the parrot turned into the king of Gandharvas (God-like beings) named ChitraRatha and freed of Indra's curse flew away to the heaven with a lustrous form.

The magpie also turned into the divine damsel Tilottamaa and freed of the curse flew away to the heavens. Their dispute never got solved in that court.

END

The spirit possessing the corpse finished the story and questioned the king -

"King! Tell me please!

Who are more wicked- men or women?

If you know the answer and yet do not speak, your head will burst into hundred pieces."

The king heard the words of the Vetaala and answered the spirit who was a master of Yoga thus-

"Vetaala! May be sometimes some man might have acted wicked like that; but usually women are always seen and heard as filled with deceit."

The moment the king broke his silence, Vetaala disappeared from his shoulder along with the corpse. The king again walked towards the shimshapaa tree to bring the corpse.

STORY FOUR

King TrivikramaSena again went to the Shimshapaa tree in the night; climbed the tree; saw the corpse possessed by the spirit. Vetaala was laughing aloud and making weird noises through that corpse. Without fear the king placed the corpse on his shoulder and started walking towards the tree where the mendicant stayed. Vetaala which was on the shoulder spoke to the king who was walking silently.

“King! Why are you straining yourself to fulfill the wishes of that wicked mendicant? I do not see any wisdom in your wasteful enterprise like this. Any how, because I like you, I will entertain you with another story to remove your fatigue of walking. Listen!

There is a city named Shobhaavatee beautiful as its name suggests. It was ruled by a king named Shoodraka who was highly valorous and was extremely courageous and brave. He was always victorious in wars; the fire of his valor blazed high fanned by the wind blown by the chowries held by the wives of enemies who were imprisoned. The earth filled with all sorts of wealth became more prosperous by the unswerving righteous behavior of the king so much so that she forgot even kings like Rama.

The king always welcomed brave men to enter his services. A valorous man of the Kshatriya (warrior-class) named Veeravara once came to him from the city of Maalava to join his services. He had a wife named Dharmavati; a son named ShaktiDhara; a daughter named Veeravati. He had only three things as his tools for the service- the dagger tied to his waist; a sword held in the hand; a shield in the other hand. With this much of alone as his weaponry for fighting he requested the king to give him daily five hundred gold coins as his salary. The king was impressed by his personality shining with valor and agreed to give him the salary he desired. He arranged some spies to follow him to find out what he did with so much money.

Veeravara arrived early in the morning to the palace; offered his respects to the king; stood all through the day at the main gate with his sword; took the salary of five hundred gold coins; gave a hundred to his wife for house-keeping; with another hundred he purchased things like clothes, pastes to apply on the body, Taamboola etc. He bathed and used up another hundred in the worship of Vishnu and Shiva. He distributed the left over two hundred coins among the poor and the Brahmins. In this manner he spent of daily five hundred gold coins. After that he finished his Fire-rites; ate food and again went back to the main gate of the palace and spent the night guarding it all alone holding the sword in one hand and the shield on the other. This was his daily routine.

The king heard all this through his spies and felt very happy. He told them not to follow Veeravara any more. He felt that the Veeravara was of an outstanding character and deserved to be honored in a special way.

As days went by, rainy season arrived and clouds covered the sky like a screen, day and night; rains poured heavy and hard. The highways near the palace were all deserted.

Veeravara stood at the palace gate alone and under the pouring rain. Evening came. The skies were dark. Rains were pouring down without a break.

The king wanted to check the loyalty of Veeravara. He climbed up to the terrace in that night and shouted-

“Who is there at the main gate?”

Veeravara heard the king’s voice and shouted back-

“I alone am here.”

The king thought-

‘Aha! This Veeravara is very honest and respects me a lot. I should definitely promote him to a higher post.’

Then he climbed down the terrace; entered the harem and went to sleep.

Another night, when the skies were pouring heavily, as the earth was covered by dense darkness, the king wanted to check the loyalty of Veeravara; climbed up the terrace and shouted –

“Who is there at the main gate?”

Veeravara heard the king’s voice and shouted back- *“I alone am here.”*

At that time the king was surprised to hear from a distance, a pathetic weeping sound of a woman.

The king thought-

‘Who is crying pitifully like this as if stuck by some great tragedy? In my country no one harasses anyone. No one is poor or suffering. Who is this woman then?’

He was moved by compassion and ordered Veeravara who was standing below him under the terrace-

“Hey Veeravara! Listen! There is some lady crying far from here. Go and find out who she is and why she is crying.”

Veeravara said-

“As the king commands.”

He tied the dagger to his waist, took the sword in the hand and went in search of that crying woman. He did not bother about the hail stones falling along with the heavy rains and the dense darkness created by the freshly gathered clouds with their flashing ‘lightning-eyes’. Observing that he was going alone in that dark night, the king moved by kindness and curiosity climbed down from the terrace, took a sword in his hand and followed him unknown to him.

Veeravara followed the sound and was soon at the outskirts of the city and reached a lake. He saw a woman in the center of the lake inside the waters crying loudly –
“Ha, brave one! Ha, kind one! Ha, charitable one! How will I live without you?”

Veeravara was surprised and feeling apprehensive asked her-
“Who are you? Why are you crying?”

She replied-

“Hey Veeravara! Know me to be the Mother Prithvee (Earth)! The righteous king Shoodraka is my Lord now. Third day from today the king is going to die. I do not know how I can get another Master like him. That is why I am distressed and crying like this.”

Veeravara was shocked by her prediction and asked again-

“Goddess! Is there any remedy for that? Is there any way our king can be saved?”

The Goddess of Earth answered-

“Son! There is just one way to save the king! Can you do that?”

Veeravara said-

“Goddess! What is it? Tell me quickly! Let me do it fast. Otherwise what use are our lives?”

Goddess Earth said-

“Son! Who is greater devotee of our Lord than you? Then listen to what I say! Near the palace there is the temple of ChandikaaDevi built by this king. If you offer your son to her then the king will not die and live for hundred years more. If you do it today itself, it will be good; not otherwise!”

Veeravara told her-

“I will go Goddess! I will do it today itself!”

Goddess said- *“May you be blessed!”* and vanished from sight.

The king who had followed Veeravara unseen by him heard all this.

The king wanted to know what Veeravara would do now, and followed him as he hurried towards his house.

Veeravara woke up his wife; told her what Goddess Earth had said. His wife heard all that and told her husband-

“Lord! If it is all for the good of the world, then wake up the child and tell him everything yourself.”

Veeravara then woke his son up; told him everything and said-

“Son! If you are offered to Devi Chandikaa, the king will live; otherwise he will die on the third day from today.”

The boy did not show any anxiety and with a behavior well-suited to his name said to his father –

“Father! If the king lives by my giving up life, I am blessed indeed! I would have paid back the food given by the king and be freed of the obligation. What are you waiting for? Quickly take me and offer me to the Goddess. Let the inauspiciousness waiting for the king, vanish by my death.”

Veeravara felt very happy by his words. He praised him saying-
“Good! You are a son befitting your father!”

Veeravara placed his son on his shoulder and started walking. His wife Dharmavati and his daughter Veeravati followed Veeravara and ShaktiDhara to the temple of Goddess Chandikaa. The king also followed unseen by them.

In front of the statue of the Goddess, ShaktiDhara the personification of courage, got down from his father’s shoulder; saluted the Goddess; and with folded hands said-
“Goddess! Accept my head as an offering and let this king rule the kingdom for hundred more years without any problem.”

As he remained praying, Veeravara took the sword and sliced off his son’s head; took the head in his hand and placed it at the feet of the Goddess and said-
“Let the king live by the offering of my son’s head.”

At that moment a voice rose from the sky-
“Who can be a better devoted servant of the king than you? Hey Veeravara! You have given life and kingdom to the king by taking away the life of your one and only son of such a noble character!”

The king was watching all this and hearing all that.

Veeravara’s daughter Veeravati clasped the sliced off head to her bosom; was blind with grief; her heart broke; next moment she collapsed on the ground dead.

Then Veeravara’s wife Dharmavati said to him-
“Master! The king has been saved. Now I tell you; you saw how our daughter died of grief; when both the children are dead what for should I hold on to life? I was an idiot; I should have offered my head to the goddess to save the king before you killed our son. At least give me permission now. I will immediately enter the fire.”

As she spoke these words pained by the death of her children, Veeravara said-
“Do that only! What happiness can there be in a life where the pain of the children’s death lingers on! You said – ‘Why did I not offer my life?’ But do not worry about that. If there was any other way to save the king, would I not have offered my own life? So wait for a few minutes. I will collect some wood and light a fire for you.”

The fire was made ready; it was blazing with high flames; Dharmavati saluted her husband by falling at his feet; she saluted Goddess Chandikaa and prayed-
“Goddess! In the other life also, this Veeravara alone should become my husband. Let all the good be there for the king Shoodraka by my son.”

She said this much; entered the fire burning with high flames and offered her body to it.

Then Veeravara started thinking-

“I have done my duties to the king. The voice from the sky proved it. I have repaid well for the food eaten by serving the king. I am not obligated any more. Then what is there for me to live for?

When the very family for whom I earned by serving the king is gone, it is not right that I should continue to live alone any more. Why don't I please the Goddess by offering my own life?”

Veeravara thought like this and offered prayers to the Goddess before he killed himself.

*“Victory to you!
 O Slayer of Mahisha demon!
 You help us cross this worldly existence!
 You are the slayer of all demons!
 You hold the Trident!
 You give joy to the Gods!
 You are the support of the three worlds!
 You are the best of Mothers!
 Victory to you!
 Your feet are worshipped by the world!
 You are the shelter for me!
 You bestow good on your devotees!
 You are Kaali, the dark hued Goddess!
 You hold the human skull as a bowl in your hand!
 You wear the bones as your garland!
 You are the auspicious one!
 Salutations to you!*

Accept my head as an offering and bestow all the good on King Shoodraka!”

Having recited the hymns in this manner, he immediately sliced off his head with the sword.

The king, who was watching all this hiding in a corner, was shocked; grieved and worried.

He thought-

“Alas! I have never seen or heard such a thing. This good man has performed a very difficult deed along with his family.

In this amazing worldly existence which other person is equal to this brave man! He has offered the lives of his children and his own too for his king. If I do not do something to redeem his sacrifice, then what is the meaning of my being a king?! What use is there living like an animal? Because of this incident my fame will be tainted always!”

Having thought like this, the king pulled out the sword from its sheath; went near the statue of the Goddess and said-

“Goddess! I am always in your shelter. If you are pleased now by my offering of the body then bestow your grace on me. Let this Veeravara filled with many virtues who sacrificed his life for me become alive along with his family.”

Having said these words, he raised the sword to slice off his head, then immediately a voice spoke from the sky.

“Son! Do not do such a terrible act of valor. I am pleased by your greatness. Let Veeravara become alive along with his family.”

As soon as the voice subsided, Veeravara stood there alive along with his wife, son and daughter unhurt in the body.

The king immediately hid himself in a dark corner. His eyes were filled with tears of happiness. He could not believe himself and looked at them again and again with joy.

Veeravara got up as if from sleep; saw his wife, son and daughter alive; was puzzled in his mind. He asked each of them –

“How did you become alive after dying? Or am I hallucinating?

Aha! Or is it a dream? Or is it sorcery? Or is it the grace of the Goddess?”

When he talked like this, his wife and children said to him-

“We are all alive by the grace of the Goddess!”

He also agreed thinking that is how it could be explained; saluted the Goddess; feeling satisfied with all that had happened, he took his family home; left them there; reached the main gate on that very night and stood there as usual.

King Shoodraka saw all this; returned to the palace unseen by them; climbed the terrace; and shouted-

“Who is standing guard at the main gate?”

Veeravara answered back-

“Lord! I, Veeravara am standing here. As you ordered me, I went in search of the woman who was crying. She was some demoness. As soon as she saw me, she ran away.”

The king was very much surprised by his words as he had actually seen what had truly taken place. He thought-

“Aha! Wise men who are courageous and have minds deep like the ocean, never talk about their deeds even if they have done something far above the level of an ordinary man.”

The king thought like this; climbed down the terrace; went back to the harem; and slept the rest of the night peacefully.

Next morning, Veeravara came to visit him as usual. The king felt happy by seeing him and told all his ministers and courtiers all that had happened the previous night. All were surprised and bewildered by the account given by the king and praised

Veeravara – *“Well-done! Well-done!”*

Later the king and Veeravara lived happily with the kingdom equally divided between them.

END

After recounting the story of Veeravara, Vetaala asked TrivikramaSena-

“King! Who is the greatest among them all? If you know and yet do not answer, you will be the victim of the curse which I mentioned already!”

Hearing the words of the Vetaala, the king said-

“O Divine being! King Shoodraka alone is the greatest among them all.”

Vetaala said-

“King! Why not Veeravara? There is no one equal to him in service!

Why not you commend the wife as the greatest? She did not lose her courage even when her son’s head was sliced off!

Why is not the son ShaktiDhara the greatest? Being a small child, he showed such courage! Why do you say that only Shoodraka is the greatest of all?”

The king said-

“Veeravara was of a noble family; yet he was not the greatest! It is his duty to protect the king with his lives, wife and children; his wife was of a good family, a devoted wife, loved her husband like her lives; she did only the duty of a wife by co-operating with her husband. ShaktiDhara, their son also did what a son had to do; because the cloth has the same character as the threads.

King Shoodraka was ready to sacrifice his life for his servants who saved him by sacrificing their own lives. So he is the greatest among them all.”

Vetaala vanished immediately from his shoulders and flew away to its place on the tree. The king unmoved by its magical powers started walking back towards the Shimshapaa tree to bring it back again.

STORY FIVE

Raajaa TrivikramaSena again went to the Shimshapaa tree; climbed the tree; cut the rope from which the corpse was hanging; got it down; placed it on his shoulder; ignored the weird noises made by the spirit through the corpse; walked silently without fear, in that dark night, in the cremation ground, only intent on fulfilling his promise to the mendicant.

Vetaala said to him again-

“King! You are a man of determination; you are good-looking too! So let me entertain you with one more story. Listen!”

There is renowned city of Ujjayini ruled by a king named PunyaSena. A Brahmin named HariSwaamy endowed with all the virtues worked for the king as a minister. He had a son named DevaSwaamy from his wife who was very much devoted to her husband. He also had a daughter named SomaPrabhaa who shone with the beauty of the moon as her name suggested and her beauty and charm were well-known among all.

After passing the childhood, SomaPrabhaa blossomed into a pretty young maiden and she was very proud of her charming beauty. Through her mother she told her father and brother – *“I should be offered in marriage to a brave man, or a man of wisdom, or a man of great talents. Otherwise if you offer me to anyone else, I will not live.”*

The father tried searching for such a bride-groom for his daughter and felt very much worried that no one was up to the mark. Meanwhile he was sent by King PunyaSena as a messenger to some king of the southern region to convey some important message.

After his work was finished, he was met by a Brahmin youth who had heard about the wondrous beauty of his daughter. The young man approached him and asked for his daughter’s hand.

HariSwaamy said to him-

“My daughter does not want to marry any one other than a brave man, or a wise man or a talented man. To which category do you belong? Tell me!”

The Brahmin youth said-

“I am highly talented.”

HariSwaamy said-

“Then show me what talent you have.”

That talented youth immediately constructed a chariot that could fly in the sky; made HariSwaamy get seated in that chariot; flew that chariot to great distances; and showed HariSwaamy worlds like heaven etc; brought him back to same room where he was staying as a guest of the southern king. HariSwaamy was very much satisfied by all this. He promised the youth his daughter's hand; fixed the date of marriage after seven days.

At the same time, another Brahmin youth approached DevaSwaamy, the son of HariSwaamy and asked for the hand of his sister. He also informed the youth that his sister will not marry any one other than a brave man, or a wise man or a talented man. That youth introduced himself as a man of great valor. He showed DevaSwaamy his expertise in handling many weapons; his excellence in many types of fights and so on. DevaSwaamy was very much satisfied by his valorous personality and promised his sister's hand to him. He consulted an astrologer and fixed the day of marriage after seven days, without even informing his mother.

At the same time, another Brahmin youth approached the wife of HariSwaamy and asked for the hand of her daughter. She said to him-

"Son! My daughter does not want to marry any one other than a brave man, or a wise man or a talented man. To which category do you belong? Tell me!"

He said- *"I am a man of wisdom."*

Observing his knowledge in predicting the future and past events, she promised to offer her daughter in marriage to him and fixed the day of marriage seven days after that day.

Next day, HariSwaamy returned home and told his wife and son, how he had selected a suitable bridegroom for his daughter. They both told him their stories also. HariSwaamy felt apprehensive about three prospective bridegrooms arriving on the same day to marry his daughter.

On the seventh day all the three youths presented themselves promptly at HariSwaamy's house. At that time SomaPrabhaa was not there. She had gone out on some errand.

The wise man heard about this and immediately said-

"She has been kidnapped by a demon named DhoomaShikha (one with smoke like hair) and has been carried away to his abode in the Vindhya forest."

HariSwaamy was frightened by this news and asked the talented youth what to do about it. He immediately constructed a flying chariot equipped with all sorts of weapons.

HariSwaamy, and all the three youths sat inside the chariot and reached the Vindhya forest within seconds. The wise man told them where the demon was hiding.

HariSwaamy and the brave youth reached there immediately. The demon came out angrily when he heard them making noise. The brave man started to fight with him fiercely.

The great battle between the man and the demon using various types of missiles and weapons reminded one of Rama and Raavana's battle in the past fought for the sake of a woman.

The brave man fought fiercely though the demon was more powerful than him and cut off the demon's head with his sharp sword shaped like the crescent at the edge. After the demon died, they all reached back to Ujjayini city with SomaPrabhaa in the flying chariot.

After reaching HariSwaamy's house, a great dispute arose among the three youths.

The wise man said-

"If I had not used my knowledge, how would we have found out the hiding place of the demon? So she should be given to me only."

The talented man said-

"If I had not constructed the flying chariot, how could we have reached there within seconds like gods? How could the fight have ensued with the demon who came in the chariot otherwise? So she should be given to me only."

The brave man said-

"If I had not killed the demon in the battle, then would you have brought her home even if you had tried hard? So I alone deserve this girl."

As they quarreled like this, HariSwaamy stood there bewildered and silent, not able to take any decision.

END

After telling this story Vetaala asked the king-

"King! Tell me who deserves to marry SomaPrabhaa! If you know the answer and yet do not speak out, then your head will burst into hundred pieces."

The king broke his silence and said-

"She must be given to the brave man only. He risked his life; defeated the demon by the power of his shoulders; and rescued the girl. Other two were just helpers for him ordained by the Creator. Tell me!

Did not the astrologer and the carpenter just help the other man?"

Vetaala vanished immediately from his shoulders and flew away to its place on the tree. The king started walking back towards the Shimshapaa tree tirelessly to bring it back again.

STORY SIX

Then the king again went to the Shimshapaa tree; took the corpse possessed by the spirit and silently started walking towards the tree where the mendicant was sitting.

Vetaala again addressed the king and said-

“King! You are a wise man! You are man of determination too! I will entertain you with another story, Listen!”

Once there lived a king named YashahKetu (one who had the flag of fame flying high). His capital city was named Shobhaavati. One excellent temple of Goddess Gouri was there. On the southern side of the temple, there was a sacred lake named Gouri-Teertha. Every year people from various countries came there to take a holy dip on the fourteenth day of the full moon phase in the month of ‘Aashaada’.

Once, a washer man named Dhavala (white) from the village of BrahmaSthala came there to have a holy bath. That young man happened to see there a beautiful girl named MadanaSundari, the daughter of some one named ShuddhaPata (Clean garment). Looking at that pretty girl who was charming like the moon, he lost his mind to her. He found out her name, family etc. and returned home restless burning with passion. Without her company he felt restless; stopped consuming food even. When questioned by his mother, he confided in her everything and continued to suffer the same way. She reported all this to her husband by name Vimala (taintless).

He approached his son and saw the emaciated condition of his son and said-

“Son! Why do you suffer like this? What you desire not difficult to attain. When I meet ShuddhaPata and request him, he will surely give his daughter in marriage to you. By family, wealth or deed, we are in no way lower than him; I know him and he knows me. It is not a difficult thing to do.”

Having consoled his son like this, he made him eat some food. Next day Vimala went to ShuddhaPata’s house accompanied by his son. He asked for the hand of the girl for his son Dhavala. ShuddhaPata felt happy and promised to give his daughter to Dhavala. On an auspicious day ShuddhaPata got his daughter Sundari married to Dhavala.

After marriage Dhavala who became attached to her just by sight, felt that his life was fulfilled and went to his father’s house with her. They were happily living together when once his father-in-law’s son and MadanaSundari’s brother visited them.

After mutual enquiries about the welfare of both the families, he was embraced with great affection by his sister. He rested for awhile and then said-

“I have been sent by my father to invite my sister MadanaSundari and his son-in-law to our house. There is some religious festival to be conducted at our house.”

All the people there agreed to send Dhavala and his wife to the father-in-law’s house. They pleased him by offering food and drinks.

Next day Dhavala left for his in-law's house along with his wife and brother-in-law. As they entered the city of Shobhaavati, Dhavala saw the huge temple of Goddess Gouri and told his wife and brother-in-law- "*Let us offer our salutations to the Goddess.*"

Then he said-

"First I will go and finish my worship. You both wait here till I return."

He entered the temple; saluted the Goddess. He contemplated on the Goddess who destroyed all the demons with her eighteen mighty shoulders and who was keeping her lotus foot on the defeated demon Mahishaasura.

By the act of the Creator a strange thought rose in his mind-

"This goddess is worshipped by all by offering various types of animals. Why not I please her by offering my own life and attain the greatest merit?"

Having thought like this, he entered the sanctum sanctorum; took the sword from there; and as no one was around there to stop him, he cut off his head and made it fall at her feet. Next moment, worried by his delay, his brother-in-law also entered the temple; saw the dead husband of his sister with his head cut off. Shocked by the sight, he took the same sword and cut off his own head too.

When he also did not return, MadanaSundari felt worried and entered the temple hurriedly. She saw the dead bodies of her husband and brother with heads cut off.

"Ha! What is this? I am ruined!" crying like this she collapsed on the ground unconscious. Again within moments she got up; and crying for the untimely death of her husband and brother she thought- "*Why should I live anymore?"*

She decided to give up her life and prayed to the Goddess-

"Goddess! You are the sole controller of the good fortune of the people and their good characters! You have taken away half the body of Shiva the slayer of Manmatha! You are the shelter for all the women! You are the remover of all sufferings! How did you get my husband and brother both killed at the same time? What you have done is not fair! I have worshipped you with devotion all these days! I have taken shelter in you! You are my only support! Listen to my one pleading! I will discard this body stuck with misfortunes here itself! Goddess! Wherever I get born again, let this husband and brother both bear the same relationship to me."

Having prayed in this manner, she recited hymns on the Goddess; saluted her with devotion; tied a rope on the Ashoka tree in that temple premises.

As she tied the noose to her neck, a voice spoke from the sky-

"Daughter! Do not do such a daring act! I am pleased by your devotion though you are so young. Throw away the rope. Join the heads to the bodies of your husband and brother. Let them both get up alive by my grace."

MadanaSundari threw away the rope; was senseless with happiness; hurriedly went inside; without observing properly joined the head of the brother to her husband's body

and the head of her husband to the brother's body. Then both of them got up and stood there as if woken up from sleep without any wounds on their body. Then they all recounted their experiences to each other; saluted the Goddess and started for their house. As they both walked in front, MadanaSundari saw her mistake in joining the heads to the bodies and remained confused.

END

Vetaala finished the tale and asked the king-

“King! Tell me who now should be her husband? If you know and yet do not answer, the curse as before will be on you.”

The king said-

“That body to which has been joined the head of the husband, that person alone will be her husband. Among all the limbs a man has, head is the most important limb which gives him identity.”

As he broke his silence, Vetaala flew back to the tree and hung there as before. The king undaunted walked back to the Shimshapaa tree to bring it down again.

STORY SEVEN

The king again went to the Shimshapaa tree and placed the Vetaala on his shoulder and started walking. Vetaala addressed him and said-

“King! I will again relate you a story for your entertainment, Listen!”

On the western coast of the ocean there is a city named TaamraLipti. It was ruled by a king named ChandaSimha (a lion in valor). He was averse to the wives of other men; but not to the battle-fields. He destroyed all the enemies; but not the wealth of other men.

Once, a prince named SattvaSheela (man of good-character), who was favored by all the people arrived at the gate of the king. He pleaded with the king about his poverty-stricken state and asked for help; but the king sent him away without responding to his pleas.

Then he thought-

“When I am born in the royal family, still why should be so poor? Even when I have no wealth, why did the Creator filled my mind with such high ambitions? I have been serving the king for so long; I am wearing tattered clothes; I never have enough to eat; yet the king disregards me like this!”

As he was lost in thoughts like this, the king left for hunting.

The ‘prince in tattered clothes’ ran at the front holding a club; the king followed him accompanied by many horse-men and foot-soldiers.

As the king kept searching for animals to hunt, he saw a wild boar and followed it immediately and went into the deeper regions of the forest. The boar entered some bushes and disappeared. The king was very tired and did not know which path led towards the city. Only the ‘prince in the tattered clothes’ disregarding his own lives had ran behind the king riding the horse which was moving with the speed of the wind and was tired, hungry and thirsty.

The king saw him, and feeling relieved asked him gently-

“Good man! Do you know the path we should take to go back?”

The ‘prince in tattered clothes’ folded his hands and replied-

“Lord! I know the path. But the Lord should rest for a while here. The ‘lover of the lotus’ (sun), the ‘central gem adorning the upper- garment of the sky-bride’, has increased the heat of his rays and is burning fiercely.”

The king decided to follow his advice and said-

“Then search for some water here.”

The ‘prince in tattered clothes’ replied- *“So be it!”*

He climbed the tallest tree there; looked all around from its top; saw a river nearby; got down from the tree; took the king there.

He also removed the harness of the horse, gave it some grass and water and allowed it to rest.

Meanwhile the king finished bathing and came out of the river. The prince took out some gooseberries tied to the end of his cloth; washed them well; and offered those tasty fruits to the king.

The king asked him-
“Where did you get them?”

The prince folded his hands and said-
“Lord! For the past ten years I have been living on this much salary only. Serving His highness, I follow the life-style of a Sage where food is not available daily.”

The king said-
“SattvaSheela! Your character proves your name! What shall I say!?”

The king felt very remorseful and ashamed of himself. He thought-
*“Fie on the kings who do not know the difficulties undergone by their servants!
 Fie on his attendants who do not inform the king of everything!”*

The king somehow took just two gooseberries after getting requested many times by the prince. He ate them; drank some water and took rest for some time along with the ‘prince in tattered clothes’ who also ate some gooseberries and drank water.

Then the ‘prince in tattered clothes’ got the horse ready to ride for the king; guided the king in the correct path; sat behind him on the horse as ordered by the king. Soon they were met with other soldiers. They all returned to the city together.

The king praised the ‘prince in tattered clothes’ in front of everybody; gave him lot of wealth. Still the king did not feel satisfied. He appointed him as his close attendant. SattvaSheela now got rid of his tattered clothes and lived happily, with all his wishes fulfilled.

Once, the king sent SattvaSheela to the Simhala Island to ask for the hand of the princess in marriage for himself. SattvaSheela worshipped his favorite deity and started on the journey in a ship along with some Brahmins appointed by the king. The ship sailed to the center of the ocean without any trouble.

But suddenly from the middle of the ocean an elephant came out shocking everyone on the ship. The elephant was very huge; its head touched the sky; it was made of pure gold; it was adorned by moving flags with varied colors. Immediately huge clouds appeared in the sky and poured waters heavily. A heavy storm started to blow.

The elephant was dragged forcefully as if by the elephant-driver and got stuck to the ship's mast. The elephant started to sink along with the ship into the ocean turbulent with waves. Then those Brahmins started cursing their king ChandaSimha with bad words.

SattvaSheela unable to bear the insulting words spoken against his master, tied up his garment well; took the sword in the hand; without seeking help from anyone else, jumped into the ocean where the flagpole was sinking with the elephant, intent only on taking revenge on that elephant.

As he disappeared into the waters, the ship was tossed by the stormy winds to a great distance and it broke into pieces; all those who were in it were drowned and eaten by the ocean creatures.

SattvaSheela went deep inside the ocean and to his amazement saw a beautiful city there and not the ocean waters. He saw the houses shining lustrously with gem-studded pillars; a beautiful lake with stairs made of excellent gems and beautiful gardens there. A temple of goddess Kaatyaayini shone there standing tall like the golden Meru Mount. Its walls of stone were all studded with excellent gems of various hues. A flag flew high on top of the temple.

SattvaSheela entered the temple; saluted the Goddess; recited hymns; worshipped her; and sat there itself in front of the Goddess, wondering what magic it was all.

The door of the temple opened at that time. Some beautiful girl with the eyes of the lotus, with the face like the moon, with the smile like a flower, with a body delicate like the lotus-stalk, along with thousands of her maids, entered suddenly the inner sanctum sanctorum of the temple and also SattvaSheela's heart.

She worshipped the goddess and went out of the sanctum sanctorum; but not from the heart of SattvaSheela. And she disappeared inside a forest of lustrous sphere.

SattvaSheela also followed her. He saw there a mansion which appeared as a model for all the wealth and pleasures that were there in the world. There he saw that girl sitting on a bed made of precious gems; approached her; sat next to her with his eyes fixed on her face as if he was just a painted picture.

The maid who was standing there saw him looking at the pretty girl with love-lorn eyes and suffering from the pangs of passion; and understanding his plight well, she said to him- "*O Good man! You are our guest now. Accept the services offered by our Mistress! Get up! Take bath! Eat some food!*"

Feeling hopeful, he reached a pond in the garden as guided by her; got inside the waters and dipped himself fully; and when he came out of it the next second he found himself in a pond in TaamraLipta, the city ruled by ChandaSimha.

Amazed by all the happenings he thought-

“Aha! What is this? Where is that divine garden? Where is that sight of that girl equaling the essence of nectar? And what is this poisonous experience of her separation, the very next moment? Is it a dream? No! I am not sleeping! That maid has deceived me and has given me this illusion!”

So thinking, driven insane by the separation of that girl, he ran here and there lamenting loudly, stuck by passion. The yellow pollen floating everywhere in the garden fell all over his body making him appear as if he was burning in the blazing fire of separation. Seeing him in that condition, the garden-keeper reported this to King ChandaSimha.

The king feeling worried came there; saw him; consoled him and asked-

“Friend! What is this? Where did you go? Where did you reach? Where did you stay? Where did you fall?”

SattvaSheela told him everything that had happened.

The king thought-

“Alas! This valorous man went to fulfill my mission and is now stuck by passion for some girl. Time has come now for me to show my gratitude for him.”

He thought like this and said to him-

“Friend! Stop grieving like this! I will take you to the very same place in the ocean and make you meet that demon-girl.”

The king made him take bath; fed him food and got him rested well.

Next day the king left the minister in charge of the kingdom; and journeyed in a ship along with his friend; reached the very same place as guided by him; and saw the elephant with the flag rising out of the ocean there.

SattvaSheela said to the king-

“Lord! The huge elephant with divine powers has risen out of the ocean. I will dive into the ocean here; you follow me.”

SattvaSheela went near the sinking flag and dived at the place where the elephant was sinking. The king also dived into the ocean following SattvaSheela. Both of them went to the city under the ocean. The king was surprised very much by seeing that. They both went to the temple, saluted Goddess Paarvati. Then that girl, who was like a form made of light, came out of the sphere of luster accompanied by her maids.

SattvaSheela said-

“This is that girl with the beautiful face.”

The king understood that SattvaSheela was deeply in love with her.

She also saw the king who shone with extraordinary features belonging to his royal status; and thought-*“Who is this extraordinary man?”* and entered the sanctum sanctorum of the temple to worship the Goddess.

The king purposely disregarded her and went off to the garden with SattvaSheela.

The girl finished her worship of the Goddess; prayed the Goddess to grant her a good husband; came out of the temple and said to her maid-

“Friend! Find out who that great man I saw today is and where he stays! After finding him, invite him to our palace and say- ‘Accept our hospitality. We want to entertain you.’ Whoever he is, that excellent man has to be worshipped by us”

The maid searched for the king as ordered by her Mistress; found him in the garden and told him what her mistress had said and invited him to the palace.

The brave king disregarded her words and said-

“O Good lady! Words are enough; no other hospitality is needed!”

The maid went back and reported this to the demon princess. The princess understood him to be a noble person of extraordinary character.

Though the king was a human, he had expressed no desires for the pleasures of the palace. Attracted by his courageous disposition, the demon princess thought that her prayer for a good husband has been fulfilled by her Goddess; and went to the garden herself; approached the king; and humbly requested him to accept the hospitality.

The king pointed out SattvaSheela to her and said-

“O Good lady! I came here to visit the temple of the Goddess informed by him about this place. Following the path shown by the wondrous flag, the Goddess has been seen and also you.”

The princess said-

“King! Then, why don’t you see our amazing city which is like the three worlds put together and satisfy your curiosity?”

The king laughed aloud at her words and said-

“He told me that also and also about that bathing pond!”

Embarrassed, the princess said-

“Lord! Do not speak that way! I am not a deceitful person. How can I cheat a person who is so noble and worship-worthy? I have become your servant because of your noble qualities. Please do not disregard my request.”

The king said- "*Let it be so*" and entered the sphere of luster along with SattvaSheela, as guided by her.

A door made of light opened. When they entered inside, they saw another amazing divine city inside. It was filled with all the fruits and flowers of all seasons. All the buildings were constructed by using gold and diamonds. The city shone like the summit of Meru Mountain.

The princess made the king get seated on a diamond throne and worshipped him duly offering Arghya etc. She said-

"O Noble one! I am the daughter of the great demon Kaalanemi. Lord Naaraayana killed him with his discus and sent him to the heaven. These two cities were built by the divine architect VishvaKarma. Any thing one wishes for can be had here. No one suffers here from old age and death. Now you are the Lord of the two cities along with me."

As she expressed her surrender to him completely, the king said to her-

"If that is so, then you are my daughter now. I offer you to this SattvaSheela who is my close friend, my relative and a very courageous person."

That good maiden, accepting the king's words as the boon obtained by the Goddess, said- "*Let it be so.*"

She was married off to SattvaSheela who felt highly satisfied. The king made him the lord of the entire demon clan and said to him humbly-

"Friend! I have repaid the worth of one gooseberry I ate that day; still I owe you the repayment for the worth of another gooseberry."

He told the demon princess-

"O good lady! Show me the way back to my city."

The princess gifted him a sword named APARAAJITA (undefeatable) and a fruit which would free him of old age, death and re-birth when eaten.

The king took them, went to the pond shown by her; dived inside and came out of the pond in his city. He attained success in all undertakings and lived happily forever.

SattvaSheela also lived happily with the demon princess and ruled the demon kingdom.

END

Vetaala finished the story and asked the king-

“King! Who was braver between these two when they dived inside the ocean?”

The king remembering the curse predicted by the Vetaala, answered-

“SattvaSheela alone is the braver of the two. He jumped into the ocean, without any desire as such, and he had no idea of what fate awaited him. The king jumped into the ocean behind him only.”

The king broke his silence; Vetaala was back in the tree the very next moment; the king tirelessly treaded again towards the Shimshapaa tree to bring back the corpse.

न हि प्रारब्धे असमाप्ते धीराः शिथिलीभवन्ति॥

The brave ones never become dis-heartened by the difficulties met in completing the tasks which they have undertaken.

STORY EIGHT

The king again went to the Shimshapaa tree; placed the Vetaala on his shoulder; and started walking to where the mendicant was.

Vetaala addressed him again and said-

“King! I will entertain you with a story; listen!”

In AngaDesha, there is a city named Vrikka-Ghata. There lived a Brahmin named VishnuSwaamy. He was famed for performing Sacrifices; and was very rich.

He had a devoted wife and three sons.

The three youths were sent by their father to catch a tortoise to complete his Sacrifice.

They caught one tortoise in the ocean and got ready to carry it back to their father.

The eldest son said to the younger ones-

“One of you carry this tortoise to our father for his Sacrifice. I cannot bear the raw smell of the flesh and I cannot hold its stinking shell”

The younger brothers said-

“Brother! If you feel disgusted by its contact, won’t we also feel the same?”

The eldest brother said-

“You both should hold the tortoise. Otherwise because of you both the Sacrifice of our father cannot be completed; and surely you both along with our father will go to hell.”

The other two laughed at his words and said-

“Brother! You know about rules to be followed by us both; but not by you?”

The eldest said-

“Don’t you know that I am very particular about the quality of the food I eat? I am a person who is an expert in determining the quality of food. How can I touch this disgusting thing and eat again?”

The middle one said-

“I am particular about the quality of the girl I touch. How can I touch this creature and seek the company of a woman?”

The eldest one said to the youngest-

“You are the youngest of all. You carry this tortoise.”

The third brother lifted his eye-brows and said-

“Fools! I am particular about the quality of the bed where I sleep. I cannot sleep with the stink of the tortoise in my hand.”

A heavy dispute rose among the three. Each one was intent on proving that he was the most talented one. They threw away the tortoise; decided to get judged by a king named PrasenaJit and went to his city named VitankaPura. They informed the king about their arrival through the door-keeper. The king permitted them to present their case to him.

The three Brahmin brothers reported all that had happened. The king told them that he will give judgment only after testing their talents. All the three agreed to that condition and stayed in that city.

The king invited them for food; made them sit along with him in special seats; and got them served with very tasty food having all the six fine essences and made especially for the royal family. All ate the food happily except the one who was fussy about foods. His face showed disgust and he did not touch any food served on his plate.

The king was surprised and asked him-

“How are you not eating anything though the food is fragrant and delicious?”

Then that young man said hesitatingly-

“King! The cooked rice smells of the smoke coming from a burning corpse. I do not want to eat it even if it is delicious.”

The king invited many experts and asked them to smell the cooked rice. Everyone commented that it was the rice named ‘Kalama’ and was extremely tasty. But the food-lover held his nose tightly not even able to smell the food and turned his face away. The king sent his men to search for the fields from where the paddy was brought. They reported to him that the paddy field was situated next to a cremation ground.

The king was surprised and said-

“Hey Brahmin! You are indeed an expert on food.”

He offered him some other food prepared by a different type of rice.

After food the three brothers were sent to the guest rooms to rest. The king arranged for the prettiest girl among his maids to be sent to the second brother who had boasted of his special talent in finding the qualities of women. That girl adorned with the most beautiful ornaments went to the room where he stayed, along with the king’s men. The moment she entered the room, the young Brahmin covered his nose and averted his face. He shouted with disgust- *“Get her out of here quickly; or else I will die. She smells of a goat.”*

The king’s men were surprised by his behavior and reported his conduct to the king. The king called for that Brahmin and asked him-

“Hey Brahmin! This girl has applied on her body, the most wonderful pastes and perfumes. She is the prettiest of the women here. Where is there the smell of a goat?”

Still the Brahmin would not even look at her.

The king sent his men to enquire about the details of the girl and found out that she had lost her mother when she was born and had been fed goat's milk all through her childhood. The king was surprised and praised the Brahmin very much.

Next he sent the third brother to sleep in his room. Seven mattresses made of very fine cotton were placed one on top of another. A very fine soft silk blanket covered the bed. The Brahmin lied down on the bed ready to sleep. But within half an hour, he jumped out of the bed; pressed his hand on his side; screaming with pain ran out of his room. The king's men found a deep mark of a hair on his side. They reported his odd behavior to the king. The king asked them to search the mattresses thoroughly. They did likewise and found piece of hair at the bottommost layer of all the seven mattresses and showed it to the king.

The king matched the hair to the mark on the Brahmin's body and found that it fitted exactly. The king was surprised that a small piece of hair under the seven mattresses could wound the Brahmin like this.

Next morning the king called the three brothers to the court and honored each of them by giving one lakh gold coins and praised their talents in front of all. The three brothers were happy by getting the money; but they also got the sin of making their father's sacrifice incomplete as they had completely forgotten the tortoise that had to be given to him.

END

After completing the story, Vetaala asked the king-

"King! Remember the curse I already pronounced on you and tell me who the best among the three is."

The wise king said-

"I think that the one who has the talent in finding out the qualities of the bed is the best of the three. The deep mark of the hair on his body was directly seen by all then and there only. The other two could have got their formation before itself."

The moment he finished answering, Vetaala went back to the Shimshapaa tree. The king tirelessly treaded his way towards the shimshapaa tree.

STORY NINE

The king again went to the Shimshapaa tree; placed the Vetaala on the shoulders; and the Vetaala started to talk as before-

“King!

Why are you suffering like this in the cremation ground at these dark hours? Don't you see how terrifying is this cremation ground where all fore-fathers get burnt to ashes; where ghosts wander with abandon; where mist covers the terrain like the smoke from the burning bodies; and the night is so fearsome? Just because that mendicant requested you to do this task, why do you tire yourself like this?

At least listen to this story now and answer my question...!

In the country of Avanti there was a city named Padmaavati in the KrtaYuga. It was built by the Gods; it was adorned by ashes and riches and was in an elevated place like the form of Shiva. In Tretaa Yuga the same city was known as Bhogavati; in Dvaapara Yuga as Hiranyavati; and in KaliYuga as Ujjayini.

The city of Ujjayini was ruled by a king named VeeraDeva. PadmaRati was his queen.

The king had no children. So he performed penance on Shiva on the bank of the Ganges along with his wife. After a long time, he heard Shiva's voice from the sky-

“King! You will get a valorous son who will bring fame to your dynasty and a daughter who will be more beautiful than a heaven-damsel!”

The king was very much happy by the boon and returned back to his city with his wife. In his wife named PadmaRati, he had a son named Shooradeva and a daughter named Ananga-Rati whose charms could entice even the God of love.

When the daughter came of age, the king sent invitations to the kings all over the world and invited them to his kingdom, desiring to find a suitable life-partner for her. But he was not satisfied by any one of them.

The king called his daughter near him and spoke with affection-

“Daughter! I do not find any one fit to marry you. Let us arrange for a Swayamvara; you choose and marry whomever you want to.”

The princess said-

“Father! Swayamvara is very embarrassing! I do not want it. If a good-looking youth is there who has mastered a single talent fully, that is enough for me. You can give me ff to him in marriage. I am not much concerned about other things like caste or riches!”

The king searched for talented youths of his country. Hearing the news about this, four valorous talented men from the southern region approached the king. They were welcomed by the king heartily. Each of them reported to him what talent he had.

One of them said-

“I am of a low caste. My name is PanchaPhuttika. I weave five fine garments every day; one I offer to the God; another to the Brahmin; another to myself; another to my would-be wife; and I sell the fifth one and buy provisions with that money. So please offer me your daughter AnangaRati to me as I am highly talented.”

The second one said-

“I am a merchant. My name is Bhaashaajna; I understand the language of all animals and birds. So please give me your daughter.”

The third one said-

“I belong to the warrior class. My name is KhadgaDhara (Sword-Holder). I am well-known for my courage and valor. There is no one who can defeat me in a sword-fight. O King! Give your daughter to me.”

The fourth one said-

“King! My name is JeevaDatta. I am a Brahmin. I can make any dead thing alive immediately. As I am a Siddha, I deserve your daughter.”

All of them were handsome and talented in some special way. The king now wondered about who would be fit to marry his daughter.

END

Vetaala stopped the story at that point and asked the king-

“King! Remember my curse and tell me which young man has to be married to the princess!”

The king said-

“You just want to waste my time and ask such ordinary questions! What profound question is it supposed to be? Anyhow listen! How can a princess born in the warrior class be married to a low-caste man or a merchant? By understanding the language of the animals and birds, what can be achieved? What is that princess with the royal blood do with a man who magically makes alive the dead ones? She must be offered in marriage to the valorous man who wields the sword!”

Vetaala disappeared immediately and hung on the branch of the Shimshapaa tree. The king tirelessly treaded back to the tree to complete his mission.

सोत्साहधने हि वीरहृदये न जातु खेदोऽन्तरं लभते ॥

*A valorous man with enthusiasm never gets disheartened
by the obstacles that appear in his life.*

STORY TEN

The king again went to the Shimshapaa tree; placed the corpse with the spirit on his shoulder; and silently started walking. The Vetaala said to him then-
“King! You are tired! I will entertain you with a story, listen!”

There lived a king named VeeraBaahu. The entire sphere of kings was under his command. He was another Indra on earth. His city was AnangaPura. In that city of AnangaPura, there lived a very rich merchant named ArthaDatta. He had a son named DhanaDatta and a daughter named MadanaSenaa. One day a merchant’s son named DharmaDatta chanced to see MadanaSenaa and became enamored of her beauty. She was an overflowing waterfall of charms. Huge pot-like breasts and the three folds on her waist enhanced her beauty. She was like a pond where the elephant of youth sported with abandon. DharmaDatta was stuck by the arrows of Manmatha (god of love) and lost his senses-

Looking at her standing on the terrace of her mansion DharmaDatta who was passing on the road below thought-
“Aha! This jasmine flower with such a beauty, piercing like sharpened sword, has been made by the god of love only for breaking my heart”; and he spent that day pining for her like a Chakravaaka bird.

MadanaSenaa also saw him and lost her mind to him. She entered inside her house with the heart burning in the fire of passion towards DharmaDatta. The Sun who was attracted (Raaga) by her beauty, (became red (Raaga) in hue by her sight) drowned in the western ocean. The moon who had lost himself by the beauty of her lotus-face, saw that beautiful-faced girl entering her house at night, and slowly came out to look at her.

DharmaDatta went home; was thinking about her continuously; remained on the bed rolling and suffering, hit by the moon’s feet (Chandra-Paada/moon’s feet/rays). His friends and relatives were worried by his depressed state and enquired about what had happened. But he was not able to answer them anything. At night he fell asleep after a long time; saw her in his dream also! How he begged and pleaded with her and how he enjoyed her company is only known to him! In the morning, he went to the garden without anybody’s knowledge and saw MadanaSenaa there waiting for her friend. He wanted to hold her in his arms and rushed towards her; fell at her feet and with love-filled prattle begged her to grace him.

She said-*“I am a virgin; now I belong to someone else too! My father has promised a merchant named MadanaDatta that I will be offered in marriage to him. I will be married off within a few days. So go away please before anyone sees us or there will be trouble.”*

Thus rejected by her, DharmaDatta said-
“O Beautiful lady! Whatever be it, I cannot live without you.”

Hearing his words, MadanaSena was frightened that her virginity might be lost and said with apprehension-

“Please! Let the marriage be over. My father will get the fruit of giving away a virgin daughter, for which he has been waiting for so long. Later I will come and offer you my company.”

He said-

“If my beloved is going to be enjoyed by some one else and come to me, I do not want her! How can a lotus enjoyed by another one can be attractive?”

She said-

“After the marriage, before meeting my husband, I will come to you. After you feel satisfied, I will go to him.”

DharmaDatta made her promise that she will be truthful and allowed her to go. She returned home apprehensive and worried about all that had happened.

Wedding day arrived. After the auspicious ceremony of marriage was over, she went to her husband’s house; spent the day in various festivities; at night entered her husband’s room to meet him; but she did not embrace her husband with love and kept her face averted. He requested her in many ways to give him company; but she did not oblige. She started to cry. He thought that may be she did not like him and said-

“O beautiful lady! If you do not like me, then go to the one whom you like.”

She bent her head and said-

“Lord! You are dearer to me than my lives! But I have one request you should grant! Happily give me the assurance of trust. Promise me that you will not discard me. I will then tell you something which is a very embarrassing matter.”

He promised her his trust. Feeling the difficulty of convincing him, she spoke trembling with fear, shyness and sadness-

“Lord! One day when I was standing alone in the garden, a young man named DharmaDatta, a friend of my brother saw me; and stuck by passion approached me. Trying to avoid a tainted name for me and wanting to preserve my virginity so that my father could offer me in a marriage as a virgin only and get the merit of it all, I pacified that young man who was uncontrollable- that ‘ I will get married first; then I will meet you before I go to my husband.’

Therefore, my Master, please allow me to be truthful and permit me to go and meet him. I will just meet him and immediately return. I have always adhered to truth from my childhood; I do not want to break that virtue now.”

SamudraDatta was shocked by her words as if hit by the lightning weapon of Indra. However as he also knew the value of keeping a promise, he thought-

“Aha! Alas! She is interested in some one else; she has to go definitely. How can I act against the following of truth? Let her go! Who can stop her?”

After such thoughts, he permitted her to go out to keep her promise. She got up immediately and went out of the house.

As MadanaSenaa walked alone on the road, suddenly she was stopped by a thief who came running and held the edge of the saree by his hand. He asked the trembling girl-
“Hey beautiful girl with lovely eye-brows! Where are you going?”

She said-

*“Leave me to go! Why should you bother where I go?
 I have some urgent work to attend to.”*

The thief said-

*“O beautiful girl! How can you escape from my hands? I am a thief!
 I do not let go easily anything so easily.”*

She said-

“Take all my jewelry and leave me.”

The thief said-

*“Hey pretty girl! What need do I have for these stones? You are so beautiful. Your face
 shines like a moon. You are an ornament of this whole world. I will not let you go.”*

MadanaSenaa had no other course except to confide in him everything and after telling him the whole story she said-

*“O good man! Wait for a second. I will keep my promise; meet DharmaDatta and return
 to you quickly. I will never break my promise.”*

The thief trusted her words and left her free. He stood there waiting for her to return. She at last reached the place where the merchant’s son was waiting. He saw the pretty girl of his heart approaching him; felt happy; enquired about her welfare; and thought for a few seconds; and then said-

*“O beautiful lady! I am happy that you kept your promise. You now belong to another
 man. I do not want your company any more. Please go back to your husband.”*

MadanaSenaa felt relieved and started to walk towards her husband’s place.

The thief was waiting for her on the road and asked her-

“Tell me! What happened to you when you went there?”

MadanaSenaa told him all that had happened.

The thief then said-

*“If that is the case, then I also feel satisfied that you kept your promise to me. I do not
 want you or jewelry. Go back to your husband.”*

MadanaSena felt relieved. She had fulfilled her promise and adhered to truth; she had been saved from all harms; her character was untainted. Happy and satisfied she joined her husband. She entered his room without anybody's knowledge and told him everything that had happened.

The husband observed her face which had not lost its luster of purity; her person untouched by anyone; her blemish-less character; her devotion to truth; and her innocent nature. He praised her virtues and felt himself the most fortunate one on earth. He lived with her happily ever after.

END

Having completed the story in the due manner, Vetaala asked the king-
"Hey king! Keep in your mind the curse that I predicted for you and tell me who among the three- the two merchant youths and the thief- did a true sacrifice?"

The king broke his silence and answered-

*"The thief alone should be commended for his sacrifice, not the merchants!
 The husband was not right in letting go of a girl whom he had vowed to protect by marriage. And if he truly belonged to a good family, when he knew that she was interested in another person, how can he take her back?
 And the other one! He was frightened for sure! Or his passion had diminished as time went by and so he rejected her.
 The thief actually was a wicked man who always acted against law. He gave up a beautiful girl along with her jewelry. So he alone did the true sacrifice."*

Vetaala was immediately back on the tree; and the king patiently started walking towards the tree.

STORY ELEVEN

The king again went to the Shimshapaa tree and placed the Vetaala on his shoulder and started walking towards the tree where the mendicant was waiting. Vetaala said to him- *“Hey King! I will tell you a strange story that will relax you, listen!”*

Once a king named DharmaDhvaja ruled the city of Ujjayini. He had three beautiful princesses as his wives and loved them dearly. Their names were InduLekhaa, Taaraavalee and Mrgaankavati. The king, who had conquered all his enemies, lived with his three queens happily.

It was the time of spring festival. He went to the garden to sport with his wives. The garden was very beautiful.

It appeared like the strung bow of Manmatha the god of love, with the row of bees acting like the bow-string, and the creepers bending with the weight of the flowers acting like the bow.

The cuckoo birds perched on the top of the trees sang melodiously as if it was the voice of Manmatha which ordered the king to make love with abandon.

The King like Indra sported with his queens there and consumed wine which could fill life even in Manmatha.

Indu Lekhaa was seated next to him. The king playfully pulled her hair. Then the lotus flower she had placed on her hair slipped and fell on her lap. She was wounded by that flower and started to scream in pain- *“Ha!Ha!”* and fainted.

The king was worried and got some water through the maids to sprinkle on her and woke her up. He took her back to the capital; got her checked by the doctors and treated her with various medicines.

After she was cared for, the king ascended the moon-terrace with his other queen Taaraavalee. As the king was tired, they both slept on a comfortable bed in that room. The queen was lying on the lap of the king. From the window the cool rays of the moon fell on her body. Immediately she jumped out of the bed screaming- *“Ha! I am burnt!”*

The king woke up anxiously and asked- *“What is it?”*
He saw that she had burn-sores all over her body.
He asked her –
“How did this happen?”

Taaraavalee told him that the moonlight coming through the window touched her body and she was burnt by the moon rays.

Seeing her moaning in pain and crying profusely, the king became apprehensive and called for the maids; arranged for a bed made of softest petals of lotus for her to lie down; got her sores treated with cooling ointments and sandal paste.

His third queen Mrgaankavati heard about the accidents that the other two queens met with. She decided to give company to the king and left her private apartment and started walking towards the palace where the king was staying.

The night was silent. Even birds made no noise. But from somewhere far the sound of pounding paddy grains reached the queen's ears. The moment she heard it, she screamed in pain- "*Ha! I am dead!*"! She started wringing the hands and collapsed on the road itself. The maids helped the crying queen back to her apartment and made her comfortably lie on the bed. Anxious, they checked her hands and found that she had sores on her palms like bees resting on a lotus. They reported the matter to the king. The king rushed towards her apartment worried and anxious and asked her how she was wounded. She showed her sore-filled palms and said-

"Lord! When I heard the sound of the pestle, I got these sores."

The king got her treated with cooling ointments and sore-healing medicines.

"One was wounded by the falling lotus; another was burnt by the moonlight; and the third got sores on her palms by hearing the sound of grains getting pounded with a pestle!"

Thus thinking, the King who had three queens to boast about, spent his night alone wandering from one harem to the other. For him the night divided into three 'Yaamas' (measure of time) was like hundred 'Yaamas'. In the morning he arranged for expert doctors to attend to his queens' ailments; got them cured; and spent his days happily with them.

END

After the story was finished, Vetaala asked the king-

"King! Who is the most delicate of these three queens?"

"The queen who got sores in her palms by the sound of the pounding without actually touching the pestle is the most delicate of all; the other two had wounds and boils by the contact of the flower and moon rays; and so are not equal to her."

As the king broke the silence with these words, the Vetaala flew back to the Shimshapaa tree. The King with his determination unbroken walked towards the tree making quick steps.

STORY TWELVE

The king climbed the tree again, got the corpse down, placed the Vetaala on his shoulder and started walking towards where the mendicant was.

Vetaala spoke again-

“King! You are still unperturbed by all this and that is why I like you so much! I will relieve you of your fatigue by entertaining you with a pleasant story, listen!”

A young king named YashahKetu (one with the flag of fame) ruled the Country of Anga. He was very handsome; so handsome that he appeared as if Manmatha instead of getting burnt by Shiva had escaped and had disguised himself as the young king.

He had conquered all the enemies by the prowess of his mighty shoulders.

Indra, the king of gods had Brihaspati to advise him; this king had likewise a wise minister named DeerghaDarshee (far-seeing one) to guide him.

In course of time the kingdom was freed of all problems; and the youthful king slowly started to spend his time in enjoying various pleasures; and he left the kingdom in the care of his wise minister. The king never left the harem and the company of the lovely girls. He was lost in listening to their love-filled songs; had no ears for the advice of the well-wishers. He enjoyed standing near the latticed windows looking at the moon in the company of pretty maidens; he never showed interest in the affairs of the kingdom. DeerghaDarshee carried on the works of the kingdom tirelessly alert at all times.

A rumor rose among the populace-“Minister DeerghaDarshee has made the king interested in vices and is enjoying the riches of the kingdom himself.”

The minister came to know about this and consulted his intelligent wife Medhaavini like this- *“Beloved! The king is happy in his own world of pleasures. I am taking care of the kingdom in his stead. Yet the people accuse me of swallowing the kingdom. The ill-fame affects even the great ones. Rama had to renounce even his dear wife Seeta because of rumors talked by people about her character. So what do you think I should do now?”*

His wife who befitted her name by being extremely intelligent said-

“Lord! Approach the king and request him to permit you to go on a pilgrimage for a few days. Considering your age he will relieve you of your duties towards the kingdom. The people will understand your honest disposition. The king will be forced to attend to the affairs of the country. Slowly he will get rid of his pleasure-seeking habit. When you return, you can again join as a minister and nobody will blame you any more.”

The minister agreed to her suggestion,

He met the king on the pretext of wanting to discuss some important issue with him. After the discussion was over, he requested the king like this-

“King! I am now old and should perform some meritorious deeds. Allow me to go on a pilgrimage for some days.”

The king was shocked and said-

“No! Do not say like that! Other than visiting holy centers, you can do so many Dhaarmic acts like charity etc. Can’t you go to heaven by doing meritorious deeds at home?”

The minister replied-

“Lord! Charity requires that the objects given should be of very pure nature. Holy centers are always pure. When the body is still healthy and capable, the wise one should finish off visiting the holy places. When the life in the body is so unpredictable, there is no saying that it can be done at later times.”

As both of them kept arguing like this, the door-keeper entered and said-

“Lord! God Sun with his countless rays is diving into the waters of the middle-sky. Therefore get up. This is your bathing time.”

The king immediately got up hurriedly to attend to his bath. The minister saluted him and went away to prepare for his pilgrimage. His wife also desired to accompany him. But he stopped her and went away on his journey not even informing his servants.

He journeyed alone and wandered many countries; visited many holy places; and in the course of his wanderings reached the Odra country. He entered the city situated not far from the ocean; saw a temple of Shiva there and sat inside the yard. A merchant named NidhiDatta came there to offer worship to the god. He saw the minister sitting there exhausted by the heat of the sun and by the dusty appearance understood that he had traveled through many countries. He also saw that the minister wore the holy thread of the Brahmins. He invited the minister to his house; worshipped him by offering shelter and food.

When the minister was resting after food, the merchant asked him-

“Who are you? From where are you? Where are you going?”

The minister said-

“I am a Brahmin named DeerghaDarshee. I am from Anga Country. I am on a pilgrimage visiting all holy centers.”

The rich merchant said to him-

“I will be visiting ‘Swarna-Dveepa’ to attend to some business. You stay at my house till I return. You are tired by the journey and you should take rest for some days before you start again on your journey.”

DeerghaDarshee said to him-

“I have had enough rest here! Let me also accompany you to the island.”

The merchant agreed. The minister spent the night sparsely sleeping.

Next morning he left with the merchant. They both reached the ocean; boarded a ship filled with goods to be sold. They crossed the ocean terrifying with turbulent waves and reached the ‘Swarna-Dveepa (Golden Island)’. NidhiDatta was busy in buying and selling commodities. DeerghaDarshee also stayed along with him. Later they started their homeward journey. Then in the middle of the ocean they witnessed an amazing scene.

A KalpaVriksha (Wish-fulfilling tree of the Heaven) rose up suddenly from the ocean waters. It was adorned by fresh sprouts; beautiful branches; shining stems made of gold; fruits made of precious gems; and attractive flowers. On its huge trunk there was a couch made of gems; on that bed sat a lovely girl of extreme charms with a Veenaa (stringed musical instrument).

As the minister was wondering about all this, the girl started playing her Veenaa and sang melodiously-

येन यत्कर्मबीजमुप्तं स निश्चितं तत्फलं भुङ्क्ते।
पूर्वकृतं हि कर्म विधिनाऽपि अन्यथा कर्तुं न शक्यते ॥

*“He who has sowed the seed of Karma (action)
will reap the fruits of that Karma definitely!
The (results of the) Karma of the past
cannot be changed even by the Creator!”*

Having sung the meaningful song, the divine lady disappeared into the water there itself along with the Kalpa tree.

‘What is this wonderful sight seen by me here today? What is this ocean? Who was that divine lady who disappeared along with the tree? If this ocean has such a magical nature always, then why won’t Goddess Lakshmi, moon and heavenly tree of Paarijaata come out of it?’ (They appeared when Gods and demons churned the milk ocean.)

As DeerghaDarshee was lost in thoughts like this, amazed by the magical sights, the boatmen said to him-

“O Good man! This auspicious lady always makes her appearance like this and disappears within a moment. Maybe for you this is a new experience!”

The minister was surprised by their words. He reached the shore along with NidhiDatta. The goods were carried by the servant and the merchant happily reached his home along with the minister. He spent many days happily in the merchant’s house.

Later one day, he said to NidhiDatta,

“Merchant! I have had restful days in your house for long. Now I want to return to my country. May auspiciousness be there with you.”

DeerghaDarshee took leave of the reluctant merchant and left that place with only courage as his companion.

After crossing many countries, he reached his own Anga country. The soldiers who were ordered to search for the minister by king YashahKetu saw him coming towards the city. They reported this to the king. The king who was distressed by the separation of the minister came personally to the city gates to receive him. He approached him affectionately; embraced him; brought the minister tired by the journey inside the palace; and spoke to him when he was rested.

“Minister! Why did you leave us and brought the mind to such a ‘harsh state bereft of attachment along with your body’?

Or, who can fathom the ways of Goddess destiny because of which you wanted to visit many pilgrimage centers!

Tell me now! What all countries were visited by you? What new things were seen by you?”

The minister talked about his tour in detail and told him also about the journey to SvarnaDveepa; the divine damsel who was the essence of the beauty of all three worlds rising from the ocean along with the tree where she was seated, and singing a song.

Hearing about her, the king was smitten by passion. He felt that his life as a king was wasted without her company. He called the minister privately and said-

“Minister! I have to see her immediately. Or know me to have lost my life. I will offer worship to the Goddess of destiny and go to the same place mentioned by you. Do not stop me from going. Do not follow me also. I will go alone secretly unknown to others. You take care of my kingdom. Do not go against my words now. You are to do what I say vowing on my lives.”

He sent away the minister not allowing him to protest in any way.

There was a grand festival arranged to welcome the minister. But the minister was worried still. Which minister can be happy when the king has decided on an impossible venture!

Next day, the king handed over the responsibility of the kingdom to the minister; disguised himself as an ascetic and left the city at night unseen by any one. On his way he met a Sage named Kusha. The king saluted the Sage. The Sage could read his mind and blessed him saying-

“Child! You go to the ocean accompanied by the merchant LakshmiDatta in a ship. You will attain the girl of your heart. Do not be worried.”

The king felt happy by his words and saluted him again.

He crossed many countries and mountains and reached that ocean. On the shores he met merchant LakshmiDatta who was leaving for SvarnaDveepa. The merchant saw the auspicious marks of 'discus' on his feet and agreed to take him along with him.

As the ship reached the center of the ocean, the divine lady came out of the waters sitting on the branch of the Kalpa tree. As the king kept looking at her like a chakora bird at the moon, she sang to the accompaniment of the Veena-

येन यत्कर्मबीजमुप्तं स निश्चितं तत्फलं भुङ्क्ते।
पूर्वकृतं हि कर्म विधिनाऽपि अन्यथा कर्तुं न शक्यते ॥
तस्मात् यत्र यथावत् यस्य यत् दैवयोगेन भवितव्यं।
तत्र तेन भवितव्येनासौ जन्तुर्विवशो नीयते॥

*“He who has sowed the seed of Karma (action)
will reap the fruits of that Karma definitely!
The (results of the) Karma of the past
cannot be changed even by the Creator!*

*Therefore, that which has to happen, wherever, in whichever manner, to whomsoever,
that will surely happen because of destiny
and the man has to experience it powerless to oppose it.*

Looking at her singing a meaningful song like that, the king stuck by passion remained frozen at that moment. He started praying to the God of the ocean-

“Hey storehouse of gems! Salutation to you for you have managed to hide this beauty within you and cheated Vishnu (gave her only Lakshmi)! I have taken shelter in you. Please fulfill my desire.”

As he was praying the girl started to sink into the waters. The king without a moment's loss jumped into the ocean following her. Observing this merchant LakshmiDatta was shocked. He thought that the king was dead and decided to give up his body in the ocean. At that time a voice spoke to him from the sky-

“Do not do such a hasty act! No danger awaits the man who jumped into the waters. He is King YashahKetu disguised as an ascetic. He has come here only for this girl. She is his wife of the previous birth. He will attain her and take her back to his country.”

The merchant lost his apprehension and continued his journey to his desired place.

King YashahKetu who jumped inside the ocean found himself in a divine city. The city had beautiful mansions. The pillars of those mansions were made of lustrous precious gems; the walls were made of shining gold; the windows had the network made of pearls. The gardens were filled with wish-fulfilling Kalpa trees; and pools with steps studded with precious stones.

The king entered every house there and searched for that girl. No one was there. The city appeared deserted. At last he saw a tall mansion made of gems; climbed the stairs; opened the door of the room and entered inside. There was a cot studded with precious stones inside. A girl was sleeping there with her whole body covered by a cloth. No one else was there. He wondered whether she was the same girl he was after. He lifted the cloth covering the face and found out that she was the same girl. He felt like a traveler walking in the desert in the hot summer sighting a river. The girl opened her eyes; saw the handsome king; and quickly got out of the bed. She offered him refreshments. Then she stood in front of him with her feet drawing circles on the ground overcome by shyness. Bending her head she whispered slowly-

*“O Great one! Who are you? Why have you entered the nether world like this?
Your feet are endowed with the auspicious marks belonging to a king.
Then why are you dressed as an ascetic?
O Great man! If you are pleased by me, then answer my questions.”*

The king spoke to her like this:

*“Hey beautiful girl! I am the king of Anga country. My name is YashahKetu.
I heard from my close acquaintance about you being seen here. To meet you I left the kingdom and came here dressed like this. I followed you when you disappeared into the waters. Now tell me who you are.”*

She looked at him lovingly and feeling shy spoke:

*“O Great man!
There is the king of Vidyaadharas named MrgaankaSena. I am his daughter Mrgaankavati. My father left me here alone in this city and went away taking all the citizens with him. I don’t understand why or where. So I come out of the ocean rising up from this deserted city and sitting on the Kalpa tree sing the song about destiny.”*

The king remembered the words of the Sage and conversed with her with love and affection. She also fell in love with him and agreed to accept him as her husband. But she put forth a condition.

*“AaryaPutra! Every month, on the fourteenth day and eighth day of the full moon and the new moon day, for four days I will lose control over my actions and go anywhere.
You should not stop me at those times and not see my actions also.
Understand that there is a reason for all this.”*

The king agreed to her condition. He married her as per the customs of ‘Gaandharva Marriage’ and started living with her there itself.

Once Mrgaankavati said to the king who was happily reclining on the cot-

*“Lord! Wait here! I will be going somewhere for some work. Today is the fourteenth day of the new moon phase.
AaryaPutra! Do not enter the room made of crystals here.
Do not fall into the well also for instantly you will enter the earth-world.”*

She took leave of him and went outside the city. The king was curious and followed her with a sword. He saw a demon coming there who was like the netherworld personified. He had a mouth deep and dark as if made of darkness. The demon pounced on Mrgaankavati with a great roar; put her in his mouth and swallowed her off. The king became angry by this sight. He removed the sword from its sheath like a snake slithering out of the skin; ran towards the demon with anger and sliced off the demon's head where the teeth were biting the lips hard in anger.

As the king stood there in that dark terrifying night distressed by his wife's death and lost to his next course of action, suddenly breaking the cloud-like dark body of the demon, Mrgaankavati came out alive and unhurt like a clear moon personified. Seeing her who had crossed over the danger somehow, the king rushed towards her and embraced her with love saying "Come Come!"
"Beloved! What is this? Is it a dream or a delusion?" he questioned her with disbelief.

She answered him like this:

"AaryaPutra Listen!

This is neither a dream nor a delusion. This was the curse of my Vidyaadhara father towards me. My father had many sons; yet being very much attached to me he would not consume even a morsel of food without me.

I was very much devoted to Shiva and used to come here for worshipping 'Sharva' on the fourteenth day of both fortnights. Once on the fourteenth day of the fortnight I stayed here the whole day absorbed in the worship of Goddess Gouri. My father was waiting for me at home without taking any food. He was angry and annoyed at me. He consumed no food or water. I reached home at night and stood in front of him with bent head feeling guilty about the whole thing. Moved by destiny he cursed me like this-

'As you disregarded me and could not remember the whole day that I was waiting here for you hungry and thirsty, every month on the eight and fourteenth day of the fortnights when you go out of the city for worshipping Shiva, a demon named 'Krtaanta-Santraasa' (Harassing like Death) will swallow you; and you will come out of him breaking his body. But you will not remember the curse or the demon afterwards. You will remain alone in this city from now on.'

I begged him for forgiveness and asked him a way to redeem the curse. Then he said- 'YashahKetu the king of Anga country will become your husband; will kill the demon when he sees you getting swallowed by him. When you come out breaking the body at that time, you will be freed of the curse and remember all that you had forgotten.'

Then, he left along with all the citizens to the Nishadha Mountain and left me here to live alone in this deserted city with me not remembering anything because of the curse.

Today I am freed of the curse. I remember everything now.

Now I will go and join my father at Nishadha Mountain. Since the curse is redeemed, I have regained my divine status; that is the ordained rule.

You be here or return to your country. You are free to do what you like."

Shocked by her words, the king pleaded with her-

“Beautiful lady! O pretty faced beauty! Please stay here for seven more days. Please grace me. I will spend those days in your company in this garden and feel happy. Later you go to your father; and I will return to my country.”

Mrgaankavati agreed to his words. He spent the next days sporting with her in the pools rising waves like the swans and Saarasa birds, pleading her with tear filled eyes not to leave him and go. He tricked her into entering the area where the well which led to the earth was there. He embraced her suddenly and jumped into the well along with her and got out of the pool in his own garden at AngaDesha.

The soldiers guarding the garden were happy to see the king there with his wife. They reported the news to the minister DeerghaDarshee. He immediately came to the garden; saluted the king who had brought off the lady of his heart and took them both to the palace.

‘Aha! How was this divine lady obtained by him? I saw her like a lightning flash just for a second. What is written on the head of a person happens even if it is impossible.’

The minister exchanged his thoughts like this with the other friends of his.

Meanwhile Mrgaankavati found herself in the king’s garden after the seventh day. She wanted to return to her father’s place at Nishadha Mountain and tried to fly back. But she could not remember any thing of the Vidyaadhara knowledge of flying. She felt cheated and sad.

The king enquired about her sudden depression.

“Beloved! Why are you so depressed? Tell me!”

The Vidyaadhari lady said to him-

Though I was redeemed of the curse, I stayed with you all these days being attached to you. Now my diving knowledge is lost!”

The king felt happy that the Vidhyaadhari girl was forever his. He made a great celebration of this good fortune and the city wore a festive look. But the minister was not very happy by what had happened. He returned home at night and died on his bed with a broken heart.

The king took care of the kingdom himself and lived with Mrgaankavati for long, happily enjoying heaven-like pleasures.”

END

Vetaala finished the story and asked the king-

“King!

When the king had achieved what he wanted, why did the minister die of a broken heart?

Was he depressed because he himself could not obtain the divine girl?

Or was he sad because the king took back the ruler ship of the kingdom?

If you know the answer and still do not speak out, then you will be transgressing the path of Dharma and your head will break into hundred pieces.”

The king addressed the Vetaala and said-

“Hey Master of all Yogis!

The minister is of a noble character. None of the two reasons you mentioned could have caused his depression. He must have thought –

‘When the king was infatuated by ordinary women of earth itself, he was neglecting the affairs of the kingdom. Now what would happen when he has the company of a divine lady?! Though I tried hard, the problem has only increased much more.’ and must have died of a heart attack.”

The spirit with magical power immediately left the king on hearing him speak and returned to the tree. The king tirelessly walked towards the Shimshapaa tree to bring back the corpse.

STORY THIRTEEN

The king went to the Shimshapaa tree; placed the corpse with the spirit on his shoulder and started walking.

Vetaala spoke to him again-

“King! Listen to this tiny tale!”

There is a city named Vaaraanasee. A Brahmin named DevaSwaamy well respected by the king lived there. He was very rich. He had a son named HariSwaamy. He had a devoted wife named Laavanyavati. The creator who had become practiced in making divine beauties like Tilottamaa (a girl who is excellent in every atom of hers) had made this girl endowed with extreme charm and beauty.

One night HariSwaamy spent the night in the company of his wife on the terrace bathed by the cool moon light and slept there happily. At that time a young Vidyaadhara named MadanaVega happened to travel along the sky above the terrace on one of his wayward journeys. He saw the beautiful Laavanyavati sleeping along with her husband. He lifted the sleeping girl and carried her away in the sky.

Suddenly HariSwaamy found that his wife was missing and got out of his bed shocked and worried.

‘Ah! Where did my wife go? Is she angry with me? Or is she hiding some where by chance and laughing at me trying to see how I react?’

Wondering in many ways to reason out her absence, HariSwaamy spent the whole night searching her in all the nooks and corners of the terrace. Later he searched all over the house and the garden also and did not find her anywhere.

Burning in the fire of grief he lamented-

“Ha! Moon-faced beloved! Ha! My beloved with the body shining like moonlight!

Ha! My love! My charming wife! Laavanyavati!

Has the night harmed you in any way being envious of you for having similar characteristics (Moon, Moonlight, coolness etc)?

This moon was conquered by you in beauty and he obediently served me with his cool rays. Now because you are gone, he has used up the opportunity to burn me with his rays equaling hot embers and poisoned arrows!’

As HariSwaamy suffered like this, the night slowly came to an end; but not his pangs of separation!

In the morning Lord Sun attacked the deep darkness with his rays and destroyed it; but could not destroy the distress eating the heart of HariSwaamy.

His pathetic cries rose up in the sky hundred fold more than the screams of Chakravaaka birds heard at night.

Though his people consoled him a lot, he was burning by the pangs of separation and could not find peace without his beloved wife.

'She stood here at this lace; she bathed here; she decorated herself here; she wandered here.' He cried like this looking at each place and remembering her with affection.

His friends and relatives said to him-

"As long as she is not dead, how can you kill yourself like this lamenting for her? She will surely return. Have courage! Search for her. There is nothing that cannot be attained by a man who makes effort with bravery."

HariSwaamy slowly regained his composure within a few days and thought like this-
'I will give off everything in charity to the Brahmins and wander the pilgrimage centers; and reduce my load of sins. When my sins get reduced, I will attain my beloved wife sometime or other somewhere in my wanderings.'

He got up slowly and finished his bathing etc.

Next day he performed sacred rites; fed Brahmins with variety of food and drinks; gave off all his wealth in charity to them. With only their blessings as his wealth, he wandered many holy cities desirous of meeting his wife.

As he wandered the summer arrived like a lion with the face of extremely hot sun and burning rays appearing as the mane.

The wind was blowing very hot as if increased in heat by the hot breath of the travelers separated from their wives.

The lakes looked heart-broken with their white dried up insides and all wealth of waters robbed by the heat.

The trees filled with thirsty screams of the birds appeared distressed by the separation of the beautiful spring with their lips dried up as it were by the faded sprouts.

HariSwaamy meanwhile suffering extremely from the heat of the Sun- by the separation of his wife, thirst, and hunger, at last reached a village. There he saw that many Brahmins were getting fed in a house of a Brahmin named PadmaNaabha. He just stood at the door-step silent and unmoving. The Brahmin's wife there saw him in that condition and was moved by compassion. She thought-

'Aha! Hunger is such a strong factor that it makes light of any man! Here this man stands with his head bent desiring some food. He looks like as if he has travelled a long distance. He seems to have bathed स्नातः (learned) also. He looks emaciated. He is fit to receive the charity of food.'

So thinking, that good lady filled a vessel with delicious rice mixed with ghee and sugar; carried it in her hands and offered him humbly and said-

"Go and eat this somewhere near a water-well."

HariSwaamy took that food and went near a fig tree next to a well; and placed it under the tree. He went to the well; washed his hands and feet; eagerly approached the tree to eat his food. At the same time a vulture flew from the sky and sat on the tree branch holding a serpent with its feet and beak. Getting pressed by the vulture, a few drops of poison came out of the dead serpent's mouth. Those poison drops fell into the open vessel of food kept by the Brahmin. HariSwaamy was unaware of this and ate off all the food being very hungry. The poison started to burn him inside.

'Alas! When fate is against one what cannot happen! Even this delicious food mixed with ghee and sugar has turned into poison for me.'

Lamenting like this, HariSwaamy walked with stumbling steps towards the Brahmin's house there and told the lady of the house-

"Brahmin lady! The food given by you has poisoned me. Quickly call for some expert who can treat poison. Otherwise you will incur the sin of killing a Brahmin."

The lady was shocked by all this and quickly brought an expert who could treat poison. But before anything could be done, HariSwaamy's pupils of the eyes moved upwards and he died. Though this was no fault of hers, though she had acted out of compassion only, her angry husband accused her of killing a Brahmin and threw her out. Falsely holding the blame for a faulty event produced by a good action, she felt dejected and went off to perform penance in some holy place.

END

Vetaala finished the story and questioned the king-

"King! Who is responsible for the death of the Brahmin among the serpent, vulture and the charitable Brahmin lady? This case was debated even in the court of Lord Yama.; yet no conclusion was reached.

So King of Kings! You solve this case. Who incurs the sin of killing the Brahmin? My curse will take effect if you hide the answer even when you know it."

The king broke his silence and said-

"Whose is the sin?"

How can the serpent be held responsible? It was helpless and was getting consumed by its enemy!

The vulture was hungry and it did not see anything other than its food. It was also not the cause of Brahmin's death.

The Brahmin couple fed the guest who had suddenly arrived. Together or individually, they are also not responsible for the death. They were acting according to Dharma and do not incur the sin.

I have only this opinion, that whoever accuses anyone of these as the killer without proper reasoning alone incurs the sin of the Brahmin's death."

Vetaala immediately flew back to the Shimshapaa tree hearing the king speak. The king also patiently started walking back to the tree.

STORY FOURTEEN

The king again placed the corpse with the spirit on his shoulder and started to walk. The Vetaala again told him a story.

“Great King! To ease your exhaustion, let me tell you a story.”

There is a city named Ayodhya. It was the capital city of Rama, the death god for the demon-clan. A king named VeeraKetu of mighty shoulders lived there protecting the earth like a fort around the city. In the city ruled by such a king, a merchant named RatnaDatta was there. He had a wife named Nandayati. By propitiating gods they had obtained a daughter named Ratnavati. She grew in her father’s house increasing her charms and beauty day by day. Enamored by her beauty, not only rich merchants but even kings begged her father to offer her in marriage to them.

The girl proud of her beauty, hated all men and would not want even Indra as her husband. She was ready to give up her lives even if her marriage was even mentioned in talks. Because of this her father silently suffered unable to do anything. This news spread all over Ayodhya.

Meanwhile all the people in the city were getting robbed by some thieves and they approached King VeeraKetu and complained like this-

“Lord! We daily get robbed by thieves. We are not able to catch them. The matter rests with the Lordship now.”

The king assured them of immediate action and sent them away. He engaged soldiers to hide at night time in various places to catch the thieves. Yet the thieves were not caught by any of them. The king then took his sword and started to look for the thieves alone at night. Then he saw a man walking alone by the side of the fort-wall, moving carefully without making any noise of the footsteps, looking here and there with suspicion, turning back repeatedly to see that nobody followed him.

The king decided that, that man must be the one single thief who robbed the citizens and slowly approached him.

The thief saw him and questioned,

“Who are you?”

The king said- *“I am a thief.”*

The thief was pleased by this answer and said to him-

“By my good fortune you have become my friend. Come to my house. I will entertain you like a friend.”

The king agreed and followed him.

They both soon reached a house inside the forest situated underground, richly decorated with lustrous gems, shining new as if it was the netherworld ruled by King Bali.

The thief got the king seated comfortably in the outer hall and went inside. Immediately a maid approached the king and said-

“Good man! What made you enter this mouth-hole of death? He is just one single thief living here. He will come out and harm you now. He will betray your trust for sure. So get away quickly before he comes out.”

The king escaped immediately; returned to his palace; brought his whole army and surrounded the thief’s underground house.

The thief understood that he had been caught by his own folly. Ready to face death, he came out to fight the whole army. He showed extreme expertise in fighting and soon cut off the trunks of the elephants, legs of the horses, heads of the soldiers singly with the help of just a sword and shield. With the army in shambles, the king himself faced him in the fight. The king had specialized in sword-fight and tricked him into losing his sword and knife. The king threw away his weapons also and defeated him in a fist fight and caught him alive.

In the morning the thief was led in a procession toward the hanging place to the accompaniment of drums. Ratnavati, the merchant’s daughter saw him from the terrace of her mansion. She saw the wounded and dust covered body of the thief and fell in love with him. She ran to her father and said-

“Father! I have accepted the thief getting led towards the hanging place as my husband. Please get him released by requesting the king. Otherwise I will follow him in death also.”

Her father was surprised by her words and said-

“Daughter! What are you saying? That fellow is a thief. He robbed the citizens of their wealth. He will be soon punished by death. How can I get him released? Why are you acting like this?”

Though chided like this, Ratnavati would not change her mind. The father had too much affection for his daughter; so he approached the king and begged him to release the thief. He was ready to offer anything in exchange. But the thief had robbed many a citizen and moreover the king had caught him risking his own life; and so would not release the thief even when crores of gold coins were offered as a price.

When her father returned failing in his mission, Ratnavati got ready to follow the thief in his death. She disregarded the pleas of her relatives; took bath; sat in a palanquin; and went to the punishing ground where the thief was to be killed. Her parents and relatives followed her weeping aloud. At that moment the thief already stuck on the sharp spear was slowly dying. He saw Ratnavati accompanied by her relatives; heard the news about her; shed a few tears; laughed once and died. Ratnavati the devoted wife of the thief got the corpse brought down and as it was getting burnt in the cremation ground, entered the fire.

Lord Bhairava who lived in that cremation ground invisible to all spoke from the sky-
“Hey devoted wife of the thief! I am pleased by your devotion to your husband whom you chose by yourself. Ask for any boon you want.”

Ratnavati saluted the god and asked the boon like this-
“Lord! My father does not have any son. Let him be blessed with hundred sons so that he does not give up his life when I am gone, as he has no other progeny.”

The God of the cremation ground again addressed her from the sky-
“Good lady! Let your father have hundred sons. Ask for another boon. A devoted wife like you deserves more than a single boon.”

Ratnavati then said-
“Lord! If you are pleased with me then let my husband live and become noble in character always.”

Lord Sharva said-
“Let it be so. May your husband get up freed of all wounds. Let him have noble characters. Let King VeeraKetu also feel happy.”

As the words got uttered by the invisible Lord, the thief instantly got up from the cremation bed alive and unhurt. Merchant RatnaDatta was surprised by all this. He felt very happy. He took his son-in-law and his daughter home; celebrated the happy occasion with lots of festivities grandly. The king was also pleased by the events and appointed the thief as his army commander. That thief also left his life of robbery and deceit; married the merchant’s daughter; was engaged in righteous activities; and lived happily.

END

Vetaala ended the story; threatened him with the curse and asked the king-
“King! Tell me! When the thief was stuck on the spear, as he was dying, when he saw the merchant’s daughter with her father, why did he cry, why did he laugh?”

The king said-
*“The thief was not able to fulfill the wishes of the merchant who had become his well-wisher for no reason; so he cried.
 ‘Why this girl has chosen me to be her life-partner leaving out the noble king?
 Alas! The minds of females indeed work strangely.’
 Surprised like this, he laughed.”*

As the king spoke, Vetaala vanished and appeared on the tree instantly. The king without losing courage followed it to the Shimshapaa tree.

STORY FIFTEEN

The king again went to the Shimshipaa tree; placed the corpse with the spirit on his shoulder and started to walk towards the fig tree. Vetaala again started telling him a story-

There is a city named Shivapura in the kingdom of Nepal. It was once ruled by a king named YashahKetu. He had a minister named PrajnaaSaagara (Ocean of wisdom). The king entrusted the care of the kingdom in the minister's hand and enjoyed the company of his prime queen ChandraPrabhaa (Luster of Moon) always. As time went by he got a daughter named ShashiPrabhaa (Luster of Moon) through his queen. ShashiPrabhaa attracted the eyes of the world like the luster of moon. ShashiPrabhaa grew up into a charming young lady. She on some day of the spring season went to the garden along with her friends to watch the festivities conducted for some worship. Meanwhile a young and rich Brahmin youth named ManahSwaamy (controller of the Mind) also came there intent on watching the festivities conducted at the garden. He chanced to see ShashiPrabhaa when she was plucking flowers for the worship with her hands raised high and her bosom slightly exposed. Infatuated by her youthful charms he lost control of his mind.

'Is this girl Rati, the spouse of Kaama Deva (God of Love) in person plucking the flowers provided by the spring? Or is she the Forest Goddess who has arrived here to worship the God of Spring?'

As he was looking at her in wonder, the princess also saw him. She lost sense of her body and the flowers, the moment she set her eyes on that handsome youth who was standing there as 'Kaama Deva' born anew.

Attracted towards each other as they stood there frozen like painted pictures looking at each other, suddenly there was a lot of screams and shouts all over. They lifted their heads to see what was going on. A rogue elephant had felt the smell of another female elephant; had broken the chains tied to the stake; had thrown away the care-taker; was trampling the trees on the way; and was rushing madly uncontrollably with the sharp goad (Ankusha) still stuck to its neck.

The people who had accompanied the princess ran away frightened of the mad elephant. ManahSwaamy without wasting a moment rushed towards the princess; lifted the frightened and shy princess on to his shoulders and took her to some safer area, away from the path of the elephant. Soon her retinue found her. She returned home burning in the flames kindled by the God of passion.

The youth saw her entering the harem of the palace and thought-

'I cannot remain alive even for a second without her. I will consult the deceitful Guru named Shree MoolaDeva (Master of roots) who is an expert in preparing magical tablets.'

Somehow passing the night in great agony, he set out in the early morning to meet the Siddha; saw him seated with his friend Shashi; saluted him; confided his problem to him. The Siddha agreed to help him.

That deceitful Yogi placed a magical tablet inside his mouth; turned himself into an old Brahmin. He took another tablet and put it in ManahSwaamy's mouth. ManahSwaamy turned into an attractive girl immediately.

The Yogi took him in the form of a girl to the king's presence. He told the king-
"King! I have only one son. I brought this girl from very far by begging, to get married to my son. But my son seems to have gone somewhere. I have to go in search of him. Till I return please take care of this girl. I trust you more than others."

The king consented and called for his daughter ShashiPrabhaa. He told her-
"Daughter! Take this girl to your harem and take care of her. Make her sleep next to you."

The princess took ManahSwaamy in the form of a girl to her private harem. MoolaDeva returned to his place. ManahSwaamy lived in the company of the princess and slowly became a close friend of hers.

One night as the princess was rolling in the bed unable to sleep, smitten by the thoughts of her lover, ManahSwaamy in the form of a girl asked her-
"Friend! You are becoming pale day by day. Your face has lost its luster. You seem to suffer as if separated from your lover. Tell me? What is there to hide from trustworthy friends? If you not confide in me, I will not eat food."

The princess sighed deeply and said-
"Of course I do trust you. Listen, I will tell you everything. Once I had been to the garden to attend to some festivities conducted for some deity. There I saw a Brahmin youth. He was as attractive as the moon coming out of the snow. His very sight was inducing passion. He was like the garden blooming fully at the arrival of spring. As my eyes were drinking the nectar oozing out of his face-moon like chakora birds, a huge intoxicated rogue elephant dark in hue like the untimely cloud of disaster came there roaring; all the guards and friends who were with me ran away; I was frightened and alone; that Brahmin youth lifted me on to his shoulders and took me to a safe place; I do not know what it was like; his touch was so intoxicating like the cool sandal; like the nectar shower. Soon the guards found me and brought me back to the palace. I felt as if I had fallen on the earth from heaven. From then onwards I live in my lover's company in imagination only. I see my lover equal to my life always next to me; I embrace him when on bed. What more to say? I always think of him only. The fire of separation of my lover burns me day and night."

As her nectar like words entered his ears, ManahSwaamy felt very happy. He felt that he had achieved fulfillment in life. He decided that it was the right time to reveal his true identity. He removed the magical tablet from his mouth and revealed his true form.

He said-
"Beautiful girl! I am the same person who saw you in the garden and immediately became a slave of your beauty. I was agonized by your separation. I have taken this form of a girl just to meet you alone. Grace me with your cooling looks and remedy the limbs burning by passion."

The princess for a moment stood there not knowing what to do, being filled at once with all the emotions of shyness; joy; and surprise. They both married as per the Gaandharva custom and enjoyed each other's company unknown to anyone else.

ManahSwaamy appeared like a girl at day time by putting the magical tablet in his mouth; became his original self at nights by removing the magical tablet from the mouth and enjoyed her company.

King YashahKetu had a brother-in-law named MrgaankaDatta. He had a daughter named MrgaankaDattaa. He married off her to the Brahmin minister PrajnaaSaagara's son in all grandeur. Princess ShashiPrabhaa also attended the marriage conducted at her uncle's house along with ManahSwaamy in the form of a girl. The minister's son was stuck by the arrows of the God of love with passion as soon as he set his eyes on the girl accompanying the princess. Though he had with him, his newly wedded wife he felt dejected and forlorn. After going back to his home also, he spent his time always in the thoughts of that beautiful girl. Observing his disinterest in all the festivities of the palace-life, the servants reported the matter to his father. When his father enquired him and assured him of the fulfillment of any wish of his, he confided his love for the girl accompanying the princess and lamented about the suffering he was undergoing smitten by passion.

The king was duly informed of all this. He came there and saw the minister's son's condition and found him to be in the peak point of passion.

He said-

"How can I give him this girl entrusted to my care by the old Brahmin? This young man will die if he does not get her. If he dies, the minister will also die unable to bear the loss of his son. If he dies, the kingdom will surely perish. So what is to be done?"

The king consulted other friends of his about this matter. They all said-

"King! The king's primary duty is to protect the people of his kingdom. That depends on the good advice. That depends on a good minister. If the minister dies, the advice is lost and Dharma cannot be protected.

By the death of the Brahmin-minister along with his son, you will incur sin also.

Therefore you must try your best to prevent this destruction of Dharma somehow.

This girl entrusted to your care by the Brahmin should be given off to the minister's son.

Later when the old Brahmin comes back, we will compensate his loss with some wealth or other"

The king accepted their suggestion and got the preparations made to give the deceitful girl who was ManahSwaamy to the minister's son.

The marriage date was fixed.

ManahSwaamy was brought from the harem of the princess. Then ManahSwaamy in the appearance of the girl said to the king-

"King! I was brought here by someone else for some one else and if you give me to some one else, then your wish has to be obeyed. You are the king. You know the good and bad of things.

But I have one condition to be fulfilled if I have to marry.

I should not be forcefully dragged to the bed to be in the company of the husband. He should finish some pilgrimage tours for six months before such an occasion comes. Otherwise I would have broken my vow like cutting my tongue with my own teeth.”

The king informed about this to the minister’s son.

The minister’s son had no objection to all this. He married the girl of his heart; kept her in the harem of his wife MrgaankaDattaa under one roof; appointed some guards to protect the harem and left for his pilgrimage tour. ManahSwaamy in the female form had to share the same bed with MrgaankaDattaa in her harem.

One night, when all the servants had retired to sleep, MrgaankaDattaa said to ManahSwaamy in the girl’s form.

“Friend! I am not getting any sleep. Tell me a story.”

Then ManahSwaamy in the girl’s form told this story:

“Friend! There was once a king named Ila born of the Solar dynasty. He was once cursed by Goddess Gouri and attained a female form which could infatuate the whole world. Once Budha (Mercury), son of Chandra (Moon) saw her in the heavenly garden and fell in love with her. By their union Purooravas was born.”

After briefly relating the story, the deceitful Brahmin youth said-

“Friend! Like this, by the command of a God or by using some magical herbs or potions, a man can turn into a woman and a woman can turn into a man. Such unions happen even in the lives of great people.”

Hearing this story, that innocent girl confided in him-

“Friend! After listening to the story, I feel a sudden change in my limbs. I feel different as if longing for something. What is it?”

The Brahmin in the female form said to her-

“Friend! These are the signs of passion which you have never experienced before. I know how it feels. Do not feel shy to tell me whatever the matter is.”

She said again-

“Friend! You are close to me like my life. Why will I not tell you? Can you tell me how a man can be made to enter this harem?”

That disciple of the deceitful Yogi told her-

“If it so, then I will tell you a truth. I have been blessed by Lord Vishnu. I can become a man at night. For your sake I will become a man now.”

ManahSwaamy removed the magical tablet from his mouth and revealed his handsome manly form to her. The girl was infatuated by his beauty. ManahSwaamy gave her company at nights as a man and as a woman in the day time.

Some days passed like this.

It was time for the minister's son to return from his tours. ManahSwaamy took the minister's son's wife and ran away to some distant place.

MoolaDeva who knew all this went to the king now accompanied by his friend Shashi and politely requested King YashahKetu-

"Lord! I have brought my son along with me now. Give me back my daughter-in-law."

The king offered him all the worship due to a Brahmin; and frightened of the Brahmin's curse said-

"Brahman! I do not know where your daughter-in-law is gone! Forgive me! I will give my daughter to your son and thus compensate your loss."

He somehow conciliated the angry old Brahmin and got his daughter ShashiPrabhaa married off to the deceitful Yogi's friend Shashi, thinking that he was truly the son of the old Brahmin.

MoolaDeva returned home accompanied by the bride and bridegroom.

ManahSwaamy came there when he heard this news. Shashi and ManahSwaamy got into a violent argument in front of MoolaDeva.

ManahSwaamy said-

"Give this ShashiPrabhaa to me. I have already married her in the harem with my guru's help."

Shashi said-

"Fool! Who are you to her? She is my wife for sure! Her father has offered her hand in marriage to me in the presence of the sacred fire."

Having deceitfully obtained the princess, both of them argued for long without any decision getting reached properly.

END

"So my king! Whose wife is she? Remember my curse and clear this doubt of mine."
Vetaala asked.

The king answered the Vetaala like this:

"I think she is rightfully the wife of Shashi only. She was married to him in the presence of all the people with proper rites in front of the sacred fire. ManahSwaamy attained her through the Gaandharva method of marriage using deceitful methods.

A thief cannot claim the ownership of the property he has stolen."

Vetaala flew back to the Shimshapaa tree when it heard the words of the king.

The king never failing in his effort went to the tree and took the corpse on his shoulders and started walking towards the fig tree.

STORY SIXTEEN

The King was walking taking the Vetaala with him. Vetaala spoke to him.
“King! Listen to a wonderful story now.”

There is this king of mountains named Himavaan, a store-house of all gems. He was the source of both Gangaa and Gouri, the two spouses of Shiva. He is the foremost among the ‘Kula Mountains’. His peak is not seen even by the Sun. He is highly honored and his praises are sung by one and all.

There is a city named KaanchanaPura (Golden city) on its summit shining like the heap of rays collected by Sun. The king of Vidyaadharas named JeemootaKetu lived there like Indra on the Meru Mountain. There was one wish-fulfilling Kalpa tree in his garden preserved there by many generations. JeemootaKetu worshipped the Kalpa tree regularly and by its blessing got a son named JeemootaVaahana who was born of the essence of Bodhisattva; who was endowed with all noble characters; who was compassionate towards all the beings of the world; who respected all the elders and served them with devotion.

He entered the youthful state in course of time. Advised by his ministers, the king consecrated his son of noble character on the throne as the prince.

Once all the well wishers and ministers approached prince JeemootaVaahana and said-
“Prince! This Kalpa tree in our garden fulfills all the desires of everyone who approach it with devotion. You should worship it always. If the tree is pleased, even Indra cannot attack us; who else then can harm us?”

JeemootaVaahana heard this and thought like this-

“Ah ! Wonderful! Even owning such a heavenly tree, my ancestors never obtained any great benefit out of it. Being narrow minded some have only begged for some material gains. They made a mockery of their own status and the divine tree. I will ask for some better thing from this tree.”

He approached his father. He saluted his father and when both were seated comfortably, he said to his father-

“Father! You already know that in this ocean of worldly existence all the possessions including the body are ephemeral like the momentarily appearing waves.

Goddess Lakshmi never stays at one place; runs away as soon as she is obtained; is as unstable as the lightning streak.

Only the action of ‘Helping others’ will remain forever for many ‘Yugas’, bestowing fame and merit. Therefore when everything exists only for so little a time, why should we protect this tree for ourselves?

Those who held on to it saying ‘mine’ ‘mine’, where are they now? Who owns it? Who are they to it?

If you permit me, I will worship this wish fulfilling Kalpa tree and pray for the good of all beings.”

The king agreed to his words.

JeemootaVaahana went near the Kalpa tree and said-

“Lord! You have fulfilled the wishes of all my ancestors. Now I ask you for one thing which no one has desired so far. Please grant that too. Lord! Make the entire earth free of poverty. May auspiciousness accompany you. I have given you off to the world to fulfill the wishes of all needy.”

JeemootaVaahana saluted the tree with reverence.

“You have renounced me. I am leaving” – these words emanated from the tree. The tree immediately rose up high in the sky; poured as rain all over the earth. The land was freed of famine everywhere.

JeemootaVaahana became renowned in all the three worlds for his compassion towards all the beings of the earth.

All his relatives meanwhile who always envied their good fortune of owning the Kalpa tree now plotted against JeemootaVaahana and his father. They thought that the father and son would easily be defeated as the divine tree was not there to protect them. They all decided to attack JeemootaKetu’s kingdom.

JeemootaVaahana came to know of this.

He said to his father-

“Father! If you raise the sword no one has the power to face you in the battle. But which man will be so wicked as to kill the relatives for the sake of the impermanent wretched body and own a kingdom? What use is this kingdom for us? We will renounce everything; go elsewhere and live a life of Dharma. We will then obtain the best of both worlds (living/after death). Let these relatives who are too much attached to material wealth, enjoy the kingdom.”

JeemootaKetu said-

“Son! I want this kingdom for your sake alone. If you not want it, then what should an old man like me do with it?”

JeemootaVaahana thus permitted by his parent, renounced the kingdom; left along with his father and mother; reached the Malaya Mountain; built a hermitage there; lived happily serving his parents with devotion.

In one of his wanderings there he met Mitraavasuu, son of the Siddha King Vishvaavasuu who lived there and became a close friend of his.

Once, JeemootaVaahana saw a temple of Gouri in the garden and entered it. He saw a beautiful girl there.

She- was playing the Veenaa;
 was surrounded by her maid-friends;
 had come there to worship the daughter of Himavaan;
 the deer there were standing still and absorbed in hearing the music flowing from her hands, as if embarrassed by the beauty of the charming (deer-like) eyes;
 she- moving her pupils तारका (weapon) was destroying कर्णमूलां the army led by Karna (the stagnancy of the ear by touching the deeper portion of the ear), like the Paandava army पाण्डवचमू (whites of the eye) with कृष्णां Lord Krishna as support (by the application of black collirium) {her eyes had collirium applied on them; her white of the eye were looking charming where the pupils were moving restlessly; eyes were elongated touching the ears ends };
 was endowed with huge breasts which having not had enough of the sight of her face, were rubbing against each other in their eagerness to have a glimpse of her moon-face;
 was emaciated at the waist which bore the finger marks (triple hair-lines) of the Creator when he made her waist-region holding it within his fist (had thin waist).

As she entered inside him through the eyes, JeemootaVaahana lost his heart to that beautiful girl.

She also saw him - who was adorning that garden; whose youthful looks incited passion; who appeared like the spring season taking shelter in that forest developing dispassion due to Kaama Deva getting burnt (by Shiva's third-eye); and instantly fell in love with him; and looked so woe-begone that her maids became apprehensive about her condition.

Then JeemootaVaahana asked the maid there-

“Good lady! What is the blessed name of your friend? Which family is adorned by her birth?”

The maid answered-

“Good man! This girl's name is Malayavati. She is the sister of Mitraavasus and daughter of the Siddha King.”

The maid understanding his plight enquired the ascetic boy who had accompanied JeemootaVaahana about his Master's name and family and briefly informed Malayavati about him, with a smile.

“Friend! Will you not offer any hospitality to this king of Vidyaadharas? This guest is indeed worthy of worship by the whole world!”

The daughter of Siddha king was overcome by shyness and remained silent with her head bent.

Then the maid said-

“This girl is very shy. Accept the offering through me.”

She offered JeemootaVaahana, a garland along with the Arghya (getting him seated; washing the feet etc). JeemootaVaahana melting in love put that garland on the neck of Malayavati.

Malayavati threw a glance at him for a second filled with love and garlanded him as it were with a garland of blue lotuses. (Her looks were like the garland of blue lotuses.)

As they were standing there gazing at each other performing a silent 'Svayamvara' (selection of bride and briefed groom by one's own choice), a maid approached the daughter of SiddhaRaaja and said-

"Princess! Your mother is calling you. Come quickly."

Hearing this, the princess somehow with great difficulty pulled her love-lorn glance stuck through the arrow of Kaama Deva to the lover's face, and returned home.

JeemootaVaahana also returned to his hermitage with his soul gone behind her.

Malayavati met her mother and tormented by the pangs of separation being away from her Love-Lord, went to her bed-room and collapsed on the bed.

The fire of passion inside was blazing high, tainting her eyes;
limbs were getting scorched by distress;
eyes were watering continuously;
was applied sandal paste all over the body by her maids;
was fanned by fans made of lotus petals;
yet she could not rest peacefully on the bed; or on the lap of her friend; or on the ground.

{Night came :}

Sandhya (twilight) infatuated to the Vaasara (day-time) had gone off with him somewhere; Chandra (Moon) had taken the laughing face of Praachee (eastern direction) in his hand and kissing. Malayavati though 'filled completely' with 'Smara' (passion) was 'completely devoid of' 'desire to live'; could not send a messenger to her lover being overcome by shyness; and spent the night with great difficulty.

JeemootaVaahana also suffering the pangs of separation of his beloved, though lying on the bed, had fallen off into the hands of Kaama (passion); though shining with the newly risen Raaga (attraction/color) was giving out only white shine (had become pale); though dumbstruck by shyness was prattling about the pains of un-satiated passion; and spent the night with great difficulty.

In the morning he got up and eager to see his beloved rushed to the same temple of Gouri in the garden. By the time the ascetic boy had run behind him and tried consoling him, Malayavati suffering from the burns of the love-fire, unable to bear the pangs of separation, left the house all alone and came to the forest secretly to give up her life.

She did not see her lover sitting behind the tree.
Crying profusely she pleaded with the Goddess-

"Devi! If I do not get JeemootaVaahana as my husband in this life by your grace, bless me that he should alone become my husband in the next birth at least."

Having said this much, she tied her upper garment to the branch of the Ashoka tree and crying in front of the statue of the Goddess –

“Hey my Lord! JeemootaVaahana! Though you are compassionate towards the whole world, why I am not rescued by you?”

She was about to tie the other end of the garment to her neck; then an invisible voice rose from the sky-

“Daughter! Do not be hasty in your actions. JeemootaVaahana the future emperor of the Vidyaadhara alone will be your husband.”

JeemootaVaahana also heard the divine prediction; saw his beloved trying to kill herself; rushed towards Malayavati with his friend. His friend consoled her saying that the prediction uttered by the divine voice was true. JeemootaVaahana consoled her with affectionate words and removed the noose from her neck.

Malayavati again overcome by shyness stood there writing circles on the ground with her foot with her head bent. Her friend who had come there by chance to pluck flowers saw all this and came near the princess and said-

“Friend! By the grace of the Goddess your wish is fulfilled.

Only this morning, your father King Vishvaivasu was talking to his son Mitraivasu in my presence-

‘Son! JeemootaVaahana the son of the Vidyaadhara king is greatly honored in the world. He has given away the Kalpa tree itself for the good of the world. He has come to our place. He is fit to be worshipped by us as a guest. There is no one equal to him to adorn the status of our son-in-law. Let us offer him worship by offering Malayavati, gem of a girl to him’.

I heard all this myself being there.

Now your brother Mitraivasu has gone to the hermitage of this great man to fulfill the words of your father. Soon you will be married off to him.

Return home now. Let this great man go back to his hermitage.”

JeemootaVaahana came to the hermitage; heard the request of Mitraivasu; accepted his proposal; told him all the details of his past life. Mitraivasu felt happy by all this; got the permission of his parents also for the marriage; went home; reported everything to his parents; they also felt very happy.

On that very day he brought JeemootaVaahana to his home. He arranged for all festivities and on an auspicious day conducted the marriage of the Vidyaadhara prince and Malayavati. JeemootaVaahana had his desire fulfilled and lived there itself happily in the company of the newly wed Malayavati.

Once, as JeemootaVaahana wandered along with Mitraivasu in the hilly regions of Malaya Mountain curious to see those places, he reached the ocean beach at the base of the mountain. He was surprised to see heaps of bone pieces there. He asked Mitraivasu-
“To which animal do these bones belong?”

His brother-in-law Vishvaivasu said to the compassionate JeemootaVaahana -

“Friend! I will tell you about all this.

Long ago, Kadru, the mother of serpents deceitfully made Vinataa, the mother of Garuda her slave. Though Garuda later freed his mother from slavery he retained his hatred for serpents in his mind. He entered the nether-world and started to kill Kadru’s sons, the serpents (Naagas) and ate them; sometimes just killing them for pure revenge. The Naaga population started diminishing. Worried, the Naaga king Vaasuki made an agreement with Garuda-

‘King of birds! I will daily send one Naaga to the shores of the southern ocean. Please do not ever enter this netherworld. What purpose gets served for you by killing Naagas all at once?’

Garuda agreed to his proposal as he would daily get some food without much effort. From that day onwards, Garuda eats daily a Naaga sent by Vaasuki on the sandy shore of this ocean. In course of time all the bones have collected together like this having the appearance of a hillock made of bones.”

JeemootaVaahana was very much distressed by what he heard. He said-

“Friend! That king Vaasuki indeed is to be condemned, for he offers his own people to the enemy to get killed. He has thousand faces. But is not one face of the cowardly king able to say- ‘Hey Garuda! Eat me first!’? How could he be so cruel to allow Garuda to kill his own people? How can Garuda, being the son of Sage Kapila, being the vehicle for Krishna, do such sinful acts? Alas! Delusion dominates every one!!”

That great man JeemootaVaahana decided within himself-

‘This body has no essence. Let me save one Naaga at least by sacrificing this body.’

At that time a messenger of the king approached them and told them that the king wanted to meet them both urgently.

JeemootaVaahana said to Mitraivasu- *“You go first! I will follow you!”* and sent him away. He stood there itself. After Mitraivasu left, JeemootaVaahana slowly wandered all over the place searching for the Naaga who would be killed that day. He suddenly heard someone crying at a distance. He walked a few steps and saw a sad and handsome youth getting dragged by soldiers and left near a highly risen rock. The soldiers were gone the next moment. But the old woman who had followed the youth was crying loudly. That young man was pleading with her to go away and leave him alone. Curious to find out about them, compassionate JeemootaVaahana hid himself behind a rock and watched them both.

That old lady was weighed down by sorrow and started lamenting-

“Ha! ShankaChuda! Ha! I brought you up bearing so many difficulties! Ha! Good child! Ha! The one and only string left of the family! Son! When will I see you again? Child! If your moon-face sets, how will your father survive after falling into the dark pit of sorrow? Even the rays of the Sun will hurt you; how can you bear the pain of getting eaten by Garuda? The Naaga world is so huge; yet I am truly stuck by misfortune that the Creator and the Naaga king had to choose you, my only son to get killed today! What do they get out of it?”

The young Naaga consoled the lamenting mother and said-
*“Mother! I am already distressed! Why do you make me sadder? Return home!
 This is my final salutation to you. It is already time for Garuda to arrive here.”*

The old lady immediately looked in all the directions and cried loudly-
“Ha! I am ruined! Who will save my son?”

JeemootaVaahana who had the essence of Bodhisattva heard all this. He was moved by pity. He thought-
‘Alas! This is the Naaga named ShankaChuda sent by Vaasuki to be eaten by Garuda. This mother is attached to her only son and so is crying pathetically. If I do not save him by offering my body which will some day or other perish, then fie on my wasteful birth!’

He came out of the hiding place approached the old mother and said-
“Mother of Naaga! I will save your son. Do not cry!”

That old lady mistook him for Garuda and said-
“Taarkshya (Tormenter of Naagas)! Eat me!”

ShankaChuda said-
“Mother! This is not Taarkshya. Do not worry. Where is this man who fills nectar in the heart by his very sight? Where is Taarkshya who beigns fear?”

JeemootaVaahana said-
“Mother! I am a Vidyadhara. I have come here to save your son. I will cover this body with the garment worn by your son and offer it to the hungry Garuda. You take your son and go away.”

ShankaChuda’s mother said-
“No No Never! You are another son of mine! You are so kind to us.”

JeemootaVaahana again said-
“Mother! You cannot stop me from doing what I want!”

ShankaChuda said to JeemootaVaahana who was forcing them to go away-
*“Great man! You have truly shown what compassion is. But I do not want to save my body by yours. Who will lose a gem to save a stone?
 People like me who only care for themselves abound in this world. People like you who show kindness to the world are very rare.
 Hey Good man! I do not want to taint the family of ShankaPaala like the taint of the moon.”*

ShankaChuda objected like this to JeemootaVaahana's offer and said to his mother-
"Mother! Go away from this deserted place. Don't you see the killing-rock of Garuda dampened by the blood of Naagas which is the terrifying sporting ground of Yama? I will now go to the temple of Shiva worshipped by the name of Gokarna, situated on the shore of this ocean and come back quickly before Taarkshya comes."

He took his mother's permission and went off to the temple to offer his salutations to Lord Gokarna.

JeemootaVaahana thought – *"If Taarkshya comes no, my desire would be fulfilled."*

At that time trees started to shake as if avoiding the storm created by the wings of Garuda. JeemootaVaahana understood that Garuda was coming there, and quickly climbed the killing-rock with the purpose of saving ShankaChuda's life. Immediately Garuda pounced on him; made him fall on the rock; took hold of him by his beak; quickly carried the bleeding king to the Peak of Malaya Mountain and started to peck him and eat. On the way, the jewel which adorned his head fell off.

"Let my body get used for others in every birth of mine. A man who does not help others will never attain heaven or liberation."

As JeemootaVaahana thought like this when getting eaten by Garuda, flowers showered over the Vidyaadhara king from the heavens.

Meanwhile the blood-smearred jewel belonging to JeemootaVaahana fell in front of Malayavati. She recognized it as belonging to her husband.

Grief stricken and shedding tears she showed it to her in-laws. They also were shocked to see the jewel and were surprised. JeemootaKetu understood what had happened through his divine learning; and started towards the Malaya Mountain along with his queen and daughter-in-law Malayavati.

Meanwhile ShankaChuda came back after worshipping Gokarna. He saw the killing-rock wet with fresh blood. Immediately he cried out-

"Ha! I am ruined! I am a great sinner! Indeed that compassionate man has sacrificed himself to Garuda for my sake. I will search where he has been taken by the bird now. If I find him alive, then I will not sink in the mire of ill-fame."

Meanwhile Garuda observed JeemootaVaahana while he was pecking him and thought-
'Aha! This person is indeed a rare personality! He seems to be happy while getting killed. He is not dying also. He is getting horripilations in the left-over limbs when I eat him. He looks at me as if grateful for my act. This one is not a Naaga. He must be some great soul. I will ask him and will not eat him any more.'

As he was thinking like this, JeemootaVaahana spoke to Garuda-

"Hey King of Birds! Why have you stopped? I still have got flesh and blood in my body. I do not see you satiated still. Eat your fill."

The king birds was surprised by his words and said-
“Great man! You are not a Naaga! Tell me who you are!”

JeemootaVaahana said-
“I am a Naaga! Why do you ask such a question? Act according to your nature. Which fool will act against his nature?”

By that time ShankaChuda came running there. From far itself he shouted-
“Hey Son of Vinataa! Do not incur a great sin like this. Why are you making a mistake? He is not a Naaga. I am the Naaga!”

He came running and stood in-between them and said to the confused Taarkshya-
“Garuda? What is this delusion in you? Don’t you see my hood and my two tongues? Don’t you see his calm disposition?”

By that time Malayavati along with her in-laws arrived there.
 Seeing the wounded body of JeemootaVaahana, his parents lamented-
“Ha! Son! Ha! JeemootaVaahana! Ha! Compassionate one! Ha child! Ha! You have sacrificed your body for another one! Ha Vainateya! How could you do such an act without thinking?”
 They lamented like this and cried uncontrollably.

Taarkshya began to feel guilty and thought-
“Ha! How was this great man with the essence of Bodhisattva eaten by me foolishly like this? He is that JeemootaVaahana who gives life to all others; who is praised all over the world! If he is dead, I will have to enter the fire to compensate for my sin. Will ever the fruit of the tree of Adharma taste good?”

As he was thinking like this, JeemootaVaahana saw all his relatives who had come there; fell down wounded and bleeding all over; and died.

His parents saw this and started screaming and weeping- *“Ha! Ha!”*

ShankaChuda started blaming himself (for leaving JeemootaVaahana alone on the shore and going to the temple.)

Malayavati with a choking voice looked up at the sky; called for the Goddess who was already pleased with her; and addressing her as ‘Ambikaa’ prayed-
“Mother! You yourself promised that the Emperor of Vidyaadharas will be my husband. But look at my ill fortune now. Your words have proved false.”

Goddess Gouri appeared before her and said- *“Daughter! My words are never false”*.
 So saying the goddess sprinkled a few drops of nectar taken from her ‘Kamandalu’ (water-pot) on JeemootaVaahana.
 Instantly JeemootaVaahana stood up unhurt and shining more lustrous than ever.

Everyone saluted the Goddess. JeemootaVaahana also saluted her.

Goddess addressed him and said-

“Son! I am pleased by your sacrifice of the body for another one. I will now consecrate you as the sole emperor of Vidyaadharas, by my own hands.”

Goddess Gouri sprinkled some water from her Kamandalu on his head.

JeemootaVaahana praised her with many hymns. Goddess Gouri vanished after blessing him. Flowers showered on him from heavens. The sound from the divine drums echoed in all directions.

JeemootaVaahana saluted Garuda.

Garuda said to him-

“Emperor! I am pleased by you who are a man of extraordinary nobility. You have embedded this event in the wall of the Cosmic egg (Brahmaanda) amazing all the three worlds by your overly compassionate act. So order anything. Whatever boon you want I will bestow on you.”

That great emperor said to Garuda-

“Garuda! Repenting for your actions, please do not kill the Naagas anymore and eat them. Let all those who were eaten by you in the past become alive.”

Garuda said-

“Let it be so! I will not eat the Naagas any more. Whoever has been eaten by me in the past will become alive once again.”

By his boon, all the Naagas who were only bones lying on the sea-shore got up alive and unhurt.

All the gods, Naagas, Sages assembled there making that Malaya Mountain look like a collection of three worlds.

By the grace of Goddess Gouri all the Vidyaadhara kings came to know of JeemootaVaahana’s glorious act. They all came there and saluted him who was surrounded by his joyous relatives and who had been consecrated by Goddess Gouri herself. They all took him to the Himalayas.

JeemootaVaahana lived happily for ever as the emperor of Vidyaadharas, along with his wife Malayavati, his parents, his friend Mitraavasus; shining with many noble acts; his court filled with many gem-like personalities equaling ShankaChuda.

END

After narrating this wonderful story, Vetaala asked the king-

“King! Tell me!

Who is great ShankaChuda or JeemootaVaahana?

If you know the answer and yet do not speak, you will know what will happen!”

The King replied-

“JeemootaVaahana was noble because of the merits of many births. So it is not something really great.

ShankaChuda alone is praiseworthy because though he was already freed from the danger of death, he ran towards the enemy who was eating some one else on the peak of the mountain and offered his body.”

As the king broke his silence, Vetaala flew back to the Shimshapaa tree. The king again walked towards the tree to bring him back.

STORY SEVENTEEN

The King again went to the Shimshapaa tree; placed the Vetaala on his shoulder and started walking.

Vetaala spoke to him again.

“King! I will tell another story to relax you in your tiring work. Listen!”

There was once a city named KanakaPura. ‘Kali’ (the deity of the lowest level of Yuga) had not cut off even one leg of Dharma here.

The city was ruled by a king named YashoDhara who as his name suggested was famed all over the earth. He was extremely courageous and protected the earth from devastation like the Velaa Mountain. He pleased everyone by his noble characters yet conquered the entire world with his fierce valor; and appeared as if the Creator had made him joining the Moon and the Sun.

The people knew him as frightened of sin; greedy for fame; eunuch in the presence of ladies who were married to others; valorous and generous in character.

There was a rich merchant living in his city.

He had a daughter named Unmaadini (maddening). Whoever saw that young girl became mad after her instantly.

The merchant who knew the proper way of conduct approached the king and entreated.

“King! I have a daughter who is like a jewel adorning the three worlds ready to be offered in marriage. I do not feel like giving her off to anybody except your Highness. In this world Lordship alone is the owner of all jewels. Please accept her and grace me.”

The king later sent some Brahmins known to him to test her characters properly. Those Brahmins went and saw that girl who was the most beautiful of all females in all the three worlds; and felt distressed. They thought-

‘If the king marries her, he will neglect his duties towards the kingdom. Infatuated with her, he will never ever care for the welfare of the people. Therefore we should not tell the king that this girl is endowed with all good qualities (beautiful).’

Deciding thus, they approached the king and said-

“Lord! She is not endowed with good qualities.”

So the king got her married to his army chief named BalaDhara (strong one). Unmaadini lived happily in her husband’s house.

As time went by, spring arrived with all its glory.

It was like a lion which on its arrival killed –

the ‘elephant of snow season’ which had destroyed the lotus groves and was having tusks of jasmine creepers;

it had manes made out of the pollen of blossoming flowers; nails in the form of mango sprouts; and sported all over the forest.

The festivities of spring were conducted all over the city. The king went to watch the festivities seated on his elephant. The drummers announced loudly to the people that all the married women should move off inside lest they get attracted by the king's handsomeness. But Unmaadini, who had felt humiliated when the king had rejected her in the past, stood on the terrace and showed herself to the king.

The king felt disturbed by seeing her who was shining like the blaze of passion-fire kindled by the winds of Malaya Mountains (sandalwood forests). Instantly he lost his senses as if the winning weapon of God of passion had pierced his heart deeply.

The servants somehow revived him and brought him back to the palace. The king found out by enquiring his people that she was the same Unmaadini who had been rejected by him in the past. The king punished the Brahmins who had mentioned that she was not good looking, by throwing them out of the city.

He spent day and night thinking about her.

'Aha! When her face without any taint exists in this world, this idiot moon (with taint) rises daily without feeling embarrassed!

The pair of golden pots is hard; the pair of elephant heads is harsh; yet nothing can be compared to her huge well-raised firm breasts.

Who will not get infatuated with her 'hip-region decorated by the garland of stars of the silken garment' 'equaling the head of the elephant rode by Manmatha'?

Thus thinking about her always, the king getting baked in the fire of passion, deteriorated slowly day by day. Though hiding his thoughts from all, he was forced to reveal the cause of his distress to some of his close acquaintances.

They suggested - *"Enough of this torment! Why don't you just possess her by force?*

But the righteous king did not agree to that.

BalaDhara the army chief came to know of this. He approached the king; saluted him and said-

"Lord! She is the wife of your slave and so your slave also. She is not the wife of another man as you deem. I myself will offer her to you. Accept her as your wife. Or I will discard her in the temple and go off. Then you can take her into your possession."

Though the army-chief pleaded with him like this, the king replied angrily-

"Being a king, how can I do such an unrighteous act? If I myself transgress the rules of Dharma, then who else will follow Dharma? You are devoted to me; yet are pushing me towards a momentary pleasure which will result in great pains of hells after life!

If you discard the wife married through proper rules, I will not forgive you. How can anybody like me bear such an unrighteous action? It is better to die than see all that!"

The king sent him away chiding him like this.

उत्तमसत्त्वा हि प्राणानपि त्यजन्ति न सत्पथम् ।

The men of excellent characters will give up their lives but not the path of Dharma.

All the people got together and pleaded with him to do the same; but the king would not budge from his righteous stand. Slowly YashoDhara scorched by the heat of passion, lost his health; and lost his fame. (He died). The army-chief unable to bear this tragedy entered the fire.

अनिर्वचनीयं हि भक्तचेष्टितम्॥

The actions of a devotee are beyond words.

END

After ending the story like this, Vetaala on the king's shoulder questioned-
"King! Who is great – the king or the army-chief? Keep in mind my curse and answer."

The King said- "I believe the king to be great."

Vetaala objected to his words and said-

"King! Why not the army-chief be the great one? He was ready to give off his wife whose company he had enjoyed and relished, to his Master! He also entered the fire when his Master died! The king rejected his wife not having enjoyed her company ever. (His loss is not much)."

The king laughed and said-

"Even then what is special about that? The army-chief is of a good family. He did it out of devotion. The servant is supposed to protect his Master at the cost of his own lives. The kings on the other hand are always beyond control like musth elephants and break the chain of limitations ordained by Dharma, being desirous of pleasures. For those 'maddened minds', discrimination flows away like the waters poured on their head at the time of consecration!
The dust of learning obtained at the feet of the elders, flow off like the dust by the chowrie winds!
Truth is kept away like the heat of the Sun by the white royal umbrella!
The eyes blinded by prosperities do not see the correct course to be followed.
The kings like Nahusha and others though were conquerors of the world got into difficulties with their minds stuck by passion.
This king, though was the sole ruler of the earth under a single royal umbrella; though intoxicated by the beauty of Unmaadini like the unstable Goddess of Wealth, he gave up his lives; but he did not swerve from the path of Dharma. That is why his courage is praiseworthy. In my opinion he alone excels."

Vetaala flew back to its place immediately through its magical powers. The king followed it without losing the stability of the mind.

आरब्धे सुदुष्करोऽपि महतां मध्ये विरामः कुत एव इति ॥

*Even if the work that is started proves difficult,
where is the respite for the noble ones in the middle ?!*

STORY EIGHTEEN

The Cremation ground looked terrifying on all sides filled with ‘cremation fires’ protruding their greedy tongues of flames, and the wild flesh-eating birds and animals. The king undaunted by all the gory scenes quickly walked towards the Shimshapaa tree. When he climbed up to remove the corpse he was shocked to see many corpses hanging from all the branches of the tree. He was unable to find the real one.

“Aha! What is this? Is the Vetaala with magical powers trying to waste my time and delay me? I do not know which corpse I should take away! If I do not succeed in finishing my work this night, I should enter the fire rather than get ridiculed by one and all.”

Pleased by his determination, the Vetaala withdrew its magic. There was just only one corpse left on the tree. The king removed it; placed it on his shoulder and started to walk. The spirit spoke through the corpse-

“King! If you do not mind, let me tell you a story.”

There is this city of Ujjayini which was like the third wonderful phenomena after the city of Bhogavati built by Lord Shambu wanting to create an extraordinary abode for Gouri pleased by her penance and the city of Amaraavati , the abode of Indra.

The people who are meritorious enough to live there enjoy so many pleasures that they do not desire even the heaven of Indra.

In that city,

the beautiful women have - hardness कर्कश्यं in breasts (not in words);

restlessness चापलं in the eyes (not in the mind);

bending भङ्गिः in the brows (not in the character).

In that city-

darkness तमः is there at night (not तमः ignorance in the minds of people);

वक्रत्वं (Vakrokti Alankaara) in the compositions of poets (not वक्रत्वं crookedness in the minds);

intoxication मदः in elephants (not मदः arrogance in the people);

coolness जाड्यं was in the pearls, sandal paste and moon (not जाड्यं foolishness in the people).

This city was ruled by a king named ChandaPrabha.

He had a Brahmin minister named DevaSwaamy who was well-known; rich; highly learned and had performed many sacrifices. He had a son named ChandraSwaamy.

ChandraSwaamy went to gamble in some assembly of gamblers which had – dices namely disasters looking like dark black eyes throwing their glances always as to “*Whom shall I catch here?*”;

and high raised voices of players shouting- “*Who is there , whose wealth will not be taken away by me even if he is Kubera the Lord of Alakaapuri?*”

ChandraSwaamy soon lost to the deceitful players all his expensive garments and money while gambling. He gambled for more money and lost that too. But as he could not give the money, the owner of that gambling club got him beaten up with clubs. The wounded Brahmin boy fell down and remained unmoving pretending to be dead. Two days passed like this. The wicked master of those gamblers told the deceitful players-

“*This man is like a stone. Throw into some dry well. I will myself give the money which he owes you.*”

The fraudulent players carried ChandraSwaamy who had not even clothes on his body, outside the club and searching for a dry well to throw him went to the far away forest. One old man among those players then said-

“*This fellow is anyhow dead. Why bother to throw him in a well? Let us leave him here somewhere and report that we have thrown him inside a well.*”

So they threw him there itself and went away.

After they were gone ChandraSwaamy got up. As he wandered, he saw Shiva’s temple and entered it. There he rested for a while and thought-

‘*Ha! What a difficulty! I trusted those wicked players and got cheated out of everything that I had. Now I am stuck here without any clothes to cover me and covered by dust. Where shall I go? What will my father, relatives and friends say? I will remain here itself now. At night I will go out and try to get some food.*’

As this Digambara (naked one- who has directions as cloth) was thinking like this distressed, Sun discarded his ‘Ambara’ (sky) and went off to the western Mountain. (Sun set in the west.)

Then an ascetic whose limbs were covered by ashes; who had performed many austerities, who held a spear in his hand, who looked like another Shiva, came there.

He saw ChandraSwaamy and asked-

“*Who are you?*”

ChandraSwaamy saluted him and confided in him everything.

The ascetic said to him-

“*O Good man! You have come to my hermitage and are my guest now. You seem to be hungry. Get up. Have a bath and share my alms.*”

ChandraSwaamy said to him-

“*Bhagavan! I am a Brahmin. How can I share your alms?*”

Hearing this, the Siddha-ascetic felt compassionate towards the guest; entered his hut; recited the sacred chants of the Goddess of learning who could fulfill any wish.

She appeared and asked-

“What should I do?”

He ordered her-

“Please offer hospitality to the guest in the due manner.”

She consented.

Immediately a golden city rose up there filled with gardens and girls. ChandraSwaamy was amazed by all this.

The girls approached him and said- *“Good man! Get up! Come! Take bath! Eat! Enjoy the company of our Mistress!”*

They took him inside; gave him a bath; applied fragrant pastes on his body; clothed him with beautiful garments; took him to another house.

There ChandraSwaamy saw a very beautiful girl as if made by the Creator using his full talent. She got up as soon she saw him; made him get seated on a throne; offered him various delicacies and fruits and Taamboola (betel leaf with nuts); later he enjoyed her company at night on a beautiful bed.

When he got up in the morning ChandraSwaamy found himself in the temple of Shiva. The girl or the maid or the city was not there at all. He felt distressed and went to the hut where the ascetic lived. He told him what all had happened at night.

“Bhagavan! By your grace, I spent the night happily. But without that divine girl I cannot live.”

The ascetic smiled and said-

“Stay here itself. You will have the same experience at night again.”

ChandraSwaamy remained in the hermitage and experienced the same pleasures every night by the power of the Yogi.

As days went by, ChandraSwaamy understood the value of the magical learning.

Prompted by fate, he pleased the ascetic in many ways and pleaded with him-

“Bhagavan! If you are really pleased with me who has taken shelter with you, then teach me that learning by which all this magic occurs.”

Again and again pleaded like this, the ascetic said to him-

“Good man! This learning cannot be mastered by you. This has to be practiced staying inside the waters. When one is reciting this chant inside the waters, many delusory events will occur disturbing the practitioner so that he fails in his endeavor. The practitioner may find himself born as a child; growing into a youth; marrying; getting a child; seeing enemies, friends and so on. He will forget the present identity and his endeavor to attain the learning in this birth.”

However if one is able to practice the recital of the chant for twenty four years, he will remember the original birth; understand the delusory happenings around him; enter the fire in the delusory life; come out of the water and have the mastery of the learning. This is possible only for a true disciple. If it is taught to a wrong person, Guru also will perish. By my Siddhi itself you are enjoying the fruits of the learning, then why you want to master it? If I lose the power of the learning, then all these experiences of your also will cease to occur.”

ChandraSwaamy said-

“ Bhagavan! I can do everything needed for the practice. Do not worry.”

The ascetic agreed to teach him the sacred chant.

आश्रितानुरोधेन किं हि न कुर्वन्ति साधवः ?

What the good will not oblige with to please those who have taken shelter in them?

ChandraSwaamy went to the river-side with the ascetic. The ascetic said to him-
“Child! As you chant the Mantra inside the water, you will have delusory visions. Then enter the fire inside that delusory life itself when I warn you by my power. I will wait here till you return.”

ChandraSwaamy took bath; purified himself through rites. The ascetic taught him the Mantra. As the Guru stood on the bank, ChandraSwaamy saluted him and quickly entered the water. He started reciting the Mantra. Immediately he was deluded. He forgot his identity as ChandraSwaamy; saw himself born to some other Brahmin; growing; getting the Upanayana (sacred thread wearing ceremony) performed; studying scriptures; marrying; experiencing pains and pleasures; getting children and so on. Getting attached to the wife and children he lived there itself with his parents, and relatives.

As if he was undergoing false life-experiences inside the water, the kind ascetic manifested the learning which could wake him up in time. ChandraSwaamy suddenly remembered his real identity and life in the middle of that delusory life. He decided to enter the fire in that life so that he could attain the fruits of his magical chant in his original birth. His parents and relatives of his delusory life were distressed and tried to stop him from entering the fire. But ChandraSwaamy was after the divine experiences resulting from the chant; so he went the river bank; prepared a fire and got ready to enter it. All his relatives, parents, wife, and children of that delusory world started to weep and cry loudly.

ChandraSwaamy thought-

“Alas! What a problem! If I enter the fire, all these relatives will also die. I do not also know whether the Guru’s words will turn out to be true or false! Should I enter the fire or house? Or how can the words of such a powerful ascetic turn false? So I better enter the fire itself.”

So thinking ChandraSwaamy entered the fire. But instead of the heat of the fire, he felt the fire as cold as the snow. Surprised and freed from the fear of fire, he got out of the waters. He saw the ascetic standing there and saluted him. He told him all the experiences he had under the waters.

Then his Guru said to him-

“Child! You have done something wrong. How could the fire have turned cold? This is an impediment in the mastering of the learning.”

ChandraSwaamy said-

“Bhagavan! I do not remember to have done anything wrong.”

Then the Guru tried to call on the deity of that learning. She did not appear before him or the disciple. Both of them left that place as both had lost the power of the learning.

END

Vetaala finished the story and asked the king-

“King! Clear this doubt of mine.

Though everything was done as prescribed, why did both of them lose the learning?”

The king answered-

“Yogeshvara! I know you want to waste my time through all this; yet I will answer you. The required result is obtained not by performing the difficult task; but by the purity of the mind accompanying the effort.

When the foolish Brahmin boy was woken up from his delusion, he still had doubts and misgivings. So he could not succeed in mastering the learning.

Having taught an undeserving person, the Guru also lost his learning.”

Hearing the king speaking like this, Vetaala vanished and hung on the tree. The king undaunted ran behind it.

STORY NINETEEN

The king again went to the Shimshapaa tree; placed the Vetaala on his shoulder and started to walk. Vetaala again said to him-
“Listen I will tell you an interesting story.

There is a city named Vakrolaka equaling the heavenly city of Amaraavati. The city was ruled by a king named SooryaPrabha equaling Indra.

Like Hari who lifted the earth in the form of the boar सौकर्योद्यतया मूर्त्या and gave happiness to all, the king also held the city on his shoulders with a form risen to give comforts to the people सौकर्योद्यतया मूर्त्या to give happiness to all.

In his country-

Shedding of tears अश्रुपात (through eye-irritation) was there- only when smoke rose up in sacrificial rites (not अश्रुपात shedding of tears due to tragic circumstances).

The talk of ‘Maara’ मार(Manmatha) was there only when engaged in love-making (not the ‘Maara’ मार- ‘beating up’ anywhere).

Golden-clubs हेमदण्ड were there only in the hands of door-guards (not the हेमदण्ड levying of fine of gold in the people).

The king had all the wealth in the world; but only one thing was lacking; though he had many queens, he had no offspring.

Meanwhile there lived a merchant named DhanaPaala in the city of TaamaraLiptaa.

A daughter named Dhanavati beautiful like a curse-bearing apsaraa fallen on earth, was born to him. When she reached her youth, the merchant died. All his wealth was taken away by the relatives with the help of law.

Then, the merchant’s widow named Hiranyavati took some hidden jewels kept with her secretly; and escaped from her home at night along with her daughter Dhanavati afraid of her relatives robbing of her meager wealth.

Filled with darkness inside and outside, holding the hands of her daughter she somehow managed to get out of her city.

As fate would have it, as she was slowly walking in the blinding darkness, she happened to push with her shoulder, a thief who had been punished by getting stuck on the spear.

That thief screamed in pain and said-

“Ha! Who pushed me? I am already hurt. I am more hurt now by your pushing. Who poured salt on my wounds?”

Frightened, the merchant’s wife asked-

“Who are you?”

The thief replied-

“I am a thief. Even now, though stuck on the spear, the lives have not departed from this sinful soul. It is alright, good lady! Tell me who you are! Where are you going in this dark night?”

The merchant’s wife told him her story. By that time the Sun lighted up the face of the eastern direction.

When the directions were filled with light, the thief saw the merchant’s daughter Dhanavati. He said the merchant’s wife-

“Mother! I have one request to make. I will give you thousand gold coins. Give your daughter in marriage to me.”

“What do you gain by that?” asked the lady with a smile.

The thief again said-

“I will be dead soon. But I have no son. A person without a son will not attain higher worlds. If this girl gets any child anywhere else with my permission, he will be my son born in another ‘field’. That is why I made this request mother. Please fulfill my request.”

Greedy for his money, the merchant’s wife agreed to his proposal; brought some water from somewhere and sprinkled water on his hand and said-

“This daughter has been given to you.”

The thief gave permission to the daughter to have a child through another man as he intended and said to the merchant’s wife-

“Go mother! Dig under the fig tree nearby and take the thousand gold coins buried there by me. When I die, perform proper funeral rites for me; deposit my bones in some sacred river; go to the city of Vakrolaka; live there in that city without any apprehensions under the care of the good king SooryaPrabha along with other people who are happy under his ruler ship”.

He felt thirsty and asked for some water. After swallowing a few drops of water he died by the pain of the spear struck to his body.

The merchant’s wife took the gold coins buried under the fig tree as he had said and went to the house of one of the close friends of her husband along with her daughter. With his help she got the thief’s body cremated and deposited his bones in a sacred river.

Then along with her daughter she started for the city of Vakrolaka with hidden money. Soon they reached the city. She bought a house from a merchant named VasuDatta and started to live in that house along with her rich daughter.

In that city there lived a teacher named VishnuSwaamy. He had a disciple named ManahSwaamy who was very handsome. He was well-educated; yet sought the company of a coquettish girl named Hamsaavali in that city. She daily took from him five hundred coins as her wages. Not able to afford so much money, the Brahmin youth became emaciated in the body and worried always.

One day the daughter of the merchant saw that emaciated yet handsome youth from her house-terrace. She was attracted by him. She remembered the words of the thief and said to her mother-

“Mother! Look at that handsome young Brahmin youth and get your eyes bathed in nectar.”

The merchant’s wife understood that her daughter was attracted by that boy and thought- *‘As per the order of my daughter’s husband, she has to marry someone or other to get a child. Then why not request this youth?’*

She immediately sent a maid to fetch him. The maid took him to a lonely place and gave him the message of the merchant’s wife (about wanting to get a child by him).

The pleasure loving youth said to her-

“If your mistress can offer me five hundred coins, then I will spend one night with her.”

The maid reported back to her mistress what the youth demanded. The merchant’s wife sent the required money through the maid to ManahSwaamy. He went to the merchant’s daughter’s house as promised and felt happy by seeing her like a chakora bird by the sight of the moon. He spent the night happily in her company and left their house in the morning and went away. Soon the merchant’s daughter became pregnant.

In course of time, she gave birth to a beautiful son. She was very happy by getting that son. At night when she was sleeping Lord Shiva appeared in her dream and said-

“Along with thousand golden coins take this child to King SooryaPrabha’s palace and leave it in a cradle on the threshold and come off. This will be for your good only.”

The daughter related the dream to her mother in the morning. They both took the child as ordered by the God to the palace and left him there at the gate in a cradle along with thousand gold coins.

Lord Shiva appeared in the dream of King SooryaPrabha also and said-

“King! Get up! Somebody has left a beautiful child in a cradle along with gold on the threshold of your ‘Lion-Gate’. Quickly take him.”

In the morning the door-keepers informed about the child left at the gate to the king. The king immediately went there and saw the child which had the auspicious marks of umbrella and flag on the palms and under-feet.

'This is the child given by Lord Shiva' – so thinking, the king took the child in his hands himself and went to the harem. He arranged for great celebrations and on the twelfth day got the child named ChandraPrabha in an auspicious ceremony.

ChandraPrabha as he grew physically made everyone happy by developing good qualities also. He soon entered the youthful state; was loved by all for his valor and learning; became fit enough to bear the burden of the kingdom.

The old king SooryaPrabha consecrated him on the throne and went off to Vaaraanasee. As his son ruled the country in the righteous manner, the king performed penance vigorously and gave up his life. ChandraPrabha the noble son of the king heard about the death of the king; performed all the due rites and said to his ministers-

"I cannot ever do anything to the king to free myself of the obligation for bringing me up. Yet I would like to do as much as possible to fulfill my duties towards him. I will take the bones to the River Ganges and deposit them in the river. I will go to Gaya and offer rice-balls (Pinda) to all my ancestors. In this way I will be visiting many holy places also."

The ministers then said to him-

"Lord! You should not do this now. The kingdom is having many problems. Even a priest can perform all the rites; the pilgrimage is not going to serve any greater purpose than caring for the kingdom.

Where is the tour filled with difficulties; where is the safety of a king's position?"

ChandraPrabha said-

"Do not stop me from going. I have to do this definitely for my father's sake. I should visit the holy places when I can. Who knows what will happen tomorrow to this ephemeral body? You people take care of the kingdom till I return."

The ministers kept silent. The king prepared himself for the journey.

On an auspicious day, the king took bath; performed the fire-rites; worshipped the Brahmins; ascended a well-equipped chariot; abstained from all pleasures; moved slowly; requested with consoling words all the subordinate kings, princes and people who were following him to return; left the city along with some Brahmins and the chief priest seated on the chariot along with him.

He crossed through many lands, getting entertained by the variety of cultures and languages of various countries. After many days he reached the banks of River Gangaa who was constructing a staircase to ascend the heaven for the Jeevas with her rows of constantly rising waves; who descended from the Himavaan; who had grasped the locks of Lord Shiva being envious of Goddess Gouri; who was worshipped by hosts of Sages and Gods.

The king got down from the chariot; took the holy bath; deposited his father's bones inside the waters of Gangaa. He offered abundant charity to one and all; performed the 'Shraaddha; ceremony conducted for the dead; climbed the chariot; and reached the holy place named 'Prayaaga Teertha'.

There again he performed holy bath; rites; charity and went to Vaaraanasee. He spent three days there; worshiped Lord Shiva and started towards Gaya. Crossing over many forests and mountains he reached the place called 'Gaya-shira'. There also he offered charity to all the Brahmins; performed the 'Shraaddha ceremony' and offered 'Pinda' at the Gaya-well.

Instantly, three human hands extended to receive the 'Pinda' offered by him for the dead father. The king was surprised. He asked the Brahmins there as to whom he should offer the 'Pinda'.

They said-

"Lord! One hand seems to belong to a thief for it holds an iron spike used for digging. The second hand belongs to a Brahmin which holds the sacred grass; the third one belongs to the king wearing the royal ring and bears the Kshatriya characteristics. So we do not know to which hand you should offer the 'Pinda'."

The king was not able to decide also.

END

After relating this strange story, Vetaala on his shoulder asked-

"King! Remember my curse and tell me which hand deserves the 'Pinda'?"

The King said-

"Vetaala! This king ChandraPrabha was born in the 'Kshetra (field)' belonging to the thief. He is the son of the thief only not any other's. He cannot be the son of the Brahmin ManahSwaamy also because that Brahmin was purchased for one night by offering money. He would have been the son of King SooryaPrabha because he brought him up, spent money on him, and educated him but only if he had not taken the gold coins kept along with the baby in the cradle. King SooryaPrabha used up the gold coins for such expenses.

*He in whose hand his mother was offered;
by whose order ChandraPrabha had his birth;
whose entire money was given to the mother;
by which money the Brahmin's seed was bought;
that man who rightfully owned the 'Kshetra' of the girl;
is the thief and he is the true father King ChandraPrabha.*

Therefore he alone deserves the Pinda offered by ChandraPrabha.

{ A woman's womb is considered as the 'Kshetra' ('Field') where the seed of the man is sown and the child is born.

A man who takes her hand through proper fire-rites is usually the owner of the wife's 'Kshetra'.

But if a girl or her family pays him any money or material for his companionship or the 'seed' he sows, then he is not considered a husband and is not the rightful owner of the 'Kshetra'. He does not get the higher worlds through the so-called son. He is like the Brahmin youth ManahSwaamy who got paid for his services.

A man who pays instead money or material to the girl, owns the 'Kshetra'.

As he cares for her maintenance and the child's maintenance, he becomes the true owner of the 'Kshetra'. He alone gets the higher worlds through his son born in the 'Kshetra' belonging to him.

The thief offered whatever wealth he owned to the girl and owned that 'field'. Whoever sows the seed in a field, the owner only gets the benefit of the crop.

A man who takes care of his wife or child by taking money from others also is not the owner of the field. He is just a care-taker and has no rights over the crop. If the king had given off the money in charity or discarded it, he could have become the true father.

Therefore the thief alone is the rightful receiver of the 'Pinda' offered by ChandraPrabha.

{ If the justice of King Vikramaaditya is to be trusted, a man who takes money from either the girl to be married or her family or from others is not considered as the husband of the girl; nor does the child becomes his. He is never eligible for the higher worlds ordained for a man through progeny. }

STORY TWENTY

The king again walked up to the Shimshapaa tree; placed the corpse with the spirit on his shoulder and started walking silently. Vetaala spoke to the silent king-
“King! Why are so adamant? Go home. Have a nice sleep. It is not proper for you to take me to that wicked mendicant. If you are still stuck to that task only, then listen to this story.

There is a city named ChitraKoota. It was ruled by a king named Chandraaloka (Light of the Moon), the crest-jewel of all kings bathing all the people who loved him with the shower of nectar.

The learned spoke of him as the stake which held the elephant of valor; the source-house of charity; the sporting ground of beauty.

Though endowed with all riches, he was apprehensive in his mind because he did not have a wife equaling his greatness.

The king once went to the forest along with his retinue of horses and soldiers to relax his mind. He wandered continuously tearing open the groups of dark boar with his arrows like the Sun tearing open the all the darkness with his rays; making the arrogant fighters namely the lions lie on the arrow-bed; making the young elephants looking like mountains to fall down by hitting them with the spears sharp like Indra’s thunderbolt (Vajra). (Indra had once cut off the wings of the Mountains by hitting them with his thunder-bolt weapon and made them fall on the ground.)

As he hunted vigorously, he hit the horse he was sitting on with his heels too many times in his excitement and whipped it hard. The horse got excited and ran exceeding the speed of the wind ignoring the harshness of the land. It crossed the forest and traversed ten Yojanas in a second.

The king lost his whereabouts and became tired and exhausted. He wandered here and there and at last found a lake. He got down there; unleashed the horse; bathed it; made it drink water; fed it fresh grass; took bath himself; drank the water; rested for a while.

As he moved in that area trying to know his whereabouts, he saw under an Ashoka tree an ascetic girl who was bereft of any ornaments or flower decorations; wearing bark garments; with matted locks; extremely beautiful; and accompanied by a friend of hers. He started wondering-

“Who is this girl? Is it Saavitri who has come here to bathe in this lake? Or is it Gouri separated from her spouse doing penance? I will approach her and find out.”

She also saw him; was attracted by his handsome form; stopped the weaving of the flower garland she had started; and thought-

“Who is this in this forest? Is he a Vidyaadhara? My eyes feel fulfilled today by his sight!”

Thus thinking, glancing at him slightly with shyness she got up; and though her hips were unmoving like pillars, tried to get away from that place.

The king approached her and said-

“Beautiful lady! Leave out the hospitality to be offered to the guest who has arrived from quite far and seen for the first time and whose only purpose now is to see you; but what rule is followed by the person belonging to the hermitage, that you start to run away from here?”

Hearing the words of the king, the other girl made him sit comfortably there and welcomed him.

The king then asked her with politeness-

“Good lady! Which meritorious family is adorned by this friend of yours? What are the letters of her name which will please the ears like nectar? How is it that her body delicate like the flower is made to suffer like this taking the vow of asceticism in this tender age?”

The friend replied-

“Honorable man! This girl is named IndeevaraPrabhaa (beautiful like the night-lotus) born of the divine damsel Menakaa; brought up by Sage Kanva as a daughter. She came to this lake to take bath. The hermitage of her father is just nearby.”

The king was pleased by this news; climbed his horse; and went to the hermitage of the Sage to ask her hand in marriage; tied up the horse outside; entered the hut in a humble manner.

The king saw there Sage Kanva surrounded by other ascetics like trees wearing matted locks and bark garments; gladdening every heart by his luster like a moon.

The Sage welcomed him; offered him the due hospitality due to a guest. After he rested he spoke to the king-

“Child! Chandraaloka! Listen to my advice which is conducive to your welfare. I know what is the ‘fear of death’ experienced by the people in this world. Then why do you hurt these animals for no reason? The weapon in the hand of a Kshatriya (warrior class) was created by Brahma only for protecting those that are frightened. Therefore protect the people through righteousness. Uproot the thorns in their life. Try to conquer the restless Goddess of wealth through means like elephants and chariots. Enjoy the bliss of your royal status. Give charity. Spread your fame in all directions. Renounce this deadly sport of hunting animals where the killed and the killer both are in danger. Why should you engage in such a dangerous sport? Haven’t you heard of King Paandu’s story?”

(King Paandu while engaged in hunting killed a pair of mating deer which were actually a Sage couple and so got cursed that he will die if he ever sought the company of his wife and died when he was with his wife Maadri.)

The king who knew ‘what had to be done when’ apologized and said-
“Bhagavan! I have been properly instructed. A great blessing has been bestowed on me through these instructions. From today onwards I will retire from hunting. Let the animals move in the forest without any fear.”

Sage Kanva said-
“I am pleased by your giving protection to all animals. Ask for any boon you want.”

The king who knew ‘what had to be said when’, said-
“Bhagavan! If you are pleased with me, then give your daughter IndeevaraPrabhaa to me in marriage.”

The Sage consented. IndeevaraPrabhaa, the daughter of the Apsaraa returned after bathing in the lake. He offered her to the king.
 The king married her; was adorned by the auspicious bracelet of marriage; took his wife IndeevaraPrabhaa who was decorated well by the ascetic ladies. IndeevaraPrabhaa took leave of all the ascetics who tearfully bid farewell to her and accompanied her till the border of the hermitage. The king climbed the horse with her and returned to his capital.

Meanwhile looking at the king who was tired by the long journey, Lord of the thousand rays (Sun) became distressed as it were and sat off on the peak of the western Mountain. The night-lady like a girl eager to meet her lover appeared with eyes like deer (with stars named Mrgashira etc); with increasing passion (increases passion in all); covered by a dark garment at night (darkness covering all over).

The king saw on the bank of a small pool an Ashvattha tree which had covered the grass filled dark green ground with its leaves from the branches; and decided –
“I will stay here this night.”

He got down from the horse; fed the horse with grass; made it drink water; drank some water along with his wife and rested.

At that time Moon with the mark of the rabbit शशलाञ्छन filled with love सराग(slightly reddish in color) tearing away the screen of the darkness kissed the face of the eastern direction.

All the directions shone forth without leaving any gap (losing their shyness) pleased by the embrace of the Moon’s hands (rays).

In the meantime, the base of the tree shone forth brightly like the shine of jewel-lamps by the moon rays piercing through the gaps in the groves of the creepers.

The king embraced IndeevaraPrabhaa who was filled with the joy of the new experience of love, and made love to her; loosened the knot tied to her waist-garment like her shyness; bit off her lips like her innocence with his teeth; decorated her breasts like the head-regions of the youthful elephants with his nail wounds as if by a garland of stars made of excellent gems; again and again kissed her cheeks and eyes as if drinking the nectar of charm oozing out of all her limbs.

In this manner that night was spent by the king as if in a minute by having amorous sports with his wife.

In the morning, he got up; performed the twilight rites; and started to leave that place along with his wife wanting to find his lost retinue of soldiers and horses.

Vivasvaan (sun) –

who wanted to kill the ‘Lord of the night (Moon) with his lost luster hiding in the cave of the Astaachala (Western Mountain) feeling guilty of making the lotus pale away at night’ -

extended his arms throwing afar the sphere of the moon, with his reddish rays spreading out all over because of his anger.

{Dawn appeared; Moon set; lotuses bloomed.}

At that time, suddenly there appeared a terrifying BrahmaRaakshasa. He had glittering reddish brown locks; was as black in hue as the collirium; was like a dark cloud descended on earth; wore a garland made of intestines on his shoulders; wore the sacred thread made of hairs; was eating human flesh; was drinking blood from his bowl made of skull.

He laughed boisterously. Then as if spitting the fire of anger addressed the king and spoke in a reproaching manner-

“You sinner!

Know me to be a BrahmaRaakshasa named ‘JwaalaaMukhi’ (splitter of flames)!

This Ashvattha tree is my abode. Even gods do not trespass here. And you have dared to enter this place with your wife and polluted it by having her company.

You have acted wrongly you wicked one!

You will experience the result of your wicked action now.

I will now tear apart your heart blinded by passion and devour it!

I will drink your blood.”

The king heard what he said and looking at that huge terrifying form of the Raakshasa understood that he could not be vanquished. He saw the fear filled face of his beloved and replied politely showing fear-

“I have done this mistake unknowingly. Forgive me. I am a guest seeking shelter in your hermitage. I will give you whatever you want to eat, either a man or an animal to satiate your hunger. Please grace me. Do not be angry.”

BrahmaRaakshasa was pacified by the king's words and said-

“King! If a seven year old Brahmin boy of noble characters and learned should offer himself to you for your sake; if when he is getting killed his mother holds the hands, and father holds the legs and press him hard to the ground; if within seven days you bring such a person and kill him with your sword yourself and offer him to me to be devoured; then I will forgive the insult you have rendered to this place. Otherwise I will kill you along with your wife.”

The king said with fear- *“I will do whatever you say.”*

BrahmaRaakshasa vanished the very next moment.

King Chandraaloka climbed the horse along with his wife IndeevaraPrabhaa and feeling very much distressed wandered here and there searching for his retinue.

“Alas! I was deluded ‘by the craze for hunting’ and ‘by the God of passion’ and have ruined my life like Paandu who died before he completed his life. Where will I get such a food for this Raakshasa? Now I will first reach the capital and see what could be done!”

He searched for long and collected his people together and returned his city ChitraKoota. All the people were happy by the arrival of such a bride of extraordinary beauty and character. Festivities were conducted in all grandeur all over the city, yet the king was very much distressed inside his mind and grieved much unknown to others. Next day he called for all the ministers and told them about the BrahmaRaakshasa and his demands. One of the ministers named Sumati said-

“Lord! Do not worry!

I will search everywhere and find such a food demanded by the Raakshasa. This world is indeed a strange place!”

After consoling the king, the minister got made a golden statue of a seven-year old child studded with diamonds all over.

He sent drummers again and again thousands of times on the roads along with that golden statue and got the announcement made like this-

“Whoever gives his seven year old Brahmin son of all good characters permitted by the parents to be offered as food to be devoured by the BrahmaRaakshasa; he who gets his hands and feet pressed to the ground by his parents when getting killed; for such parents the king will offer this golden statue studded with diamonds along with hundred villages.”

In the Brahmin's colony there was one child of seven years, very brave, very good-looking, always interested in the good of others, a personification as if of all the merits of all the people. He said to the drummers-

“Good men! I will give myself to you for your purpose. Wait here! I will get the permission of my parents and come.”

Permitted by them, he went inside, folding his hands said to his parents-

“Mother! Father!

I will offer this ephemeral body for the good of all the people. Please give your permission. I will give you the golden statue studded with diamonds along with hundred villages and leave along with the king’s men.

In this manner I would have fulfilled my obligations to you as the son and will reach higher worlds after death. You both will be never be poor again and would be able to get many more sons.”

The parents objected immediately saying-

“Son! What are you saying?

Are you ill by any chance? Or some planetary constellation has deluded you?

Why then are you talking like this?

Who will kill a child to obtain wealth?

And which child can bear the pain of getting killed?”

The child answered-

“I am not deluded in any way. Listen to my sensible words.

This body is the field of pains; is a disgusting thing being filled with unspeakable dirt; it will perish some day or other.

If by this essenceless thing some good thing happens, then that is the fulfillment of life, so say the wise.

What is better than helping all the beings of the world?

Even in such a case, if one serves the parents also, then what more can be achieved by this body?”

The brave child fully determined to offer his body for the good of the world, made his parents agree to his words; went to the king’s men and with their help gave the golden statue to them.

Later he followed the king’s men and accompanied by his parents started towards the city of ChitraKoota.

Seeing the boy filled with extraordinary luster, the king felt very happy as if seeing a gem created for his protection.

The boy was decorated with fine garments; applied fragrant pastes all over; garlanded with beautiful flowers; was made to sit on an elephant. The king took him along with his parents to the place where BrahmaRaakshasa lived. Next to the Ashvattha tree an auspicious place was selected; the priest performed worship of the deity; and the sacred fire was lit.

Immediately the BrahmaRaakshasa appeared there.

JwaalaaMukhi, the Brahma Raakshasa was laughing boisterously. He was reciting the Vedic hymns. He was hopping here and there. He was drunk by drinking blood. He was breathing heavily. He was yawning repeatedly. His eyes were emitting fire. He was darkening the entire area by his shadow. He was extremely terrifying to look at.

The king politely saluted him and said-

“Bhagavan!

I have brought the food you ordered to be devoured by you. Today is the seventh day as you prescribed. Please be graceful and accept this offering as you deem fit.”

The BrahmaRaakshasa licking his saliva examined the Brahmin boy who was ready to become his food.

At that moment the boy of noble characters thought-

‘With whatever merit I will get by offering this body today, let me not get the heaven or the wasteful liberation. Let me get a body in every birth which will be useful to others.’

As he was thinking like this, gods showered flowers on him seated in their air-vehicles in the sky.

The boy was placed in front of the BrahmaRaakshasa. His parents held his hands and feet pressed to the ground. The king took his sword and got ready to cut his head.

At that moment the boy laughed so much that all the people there including the BrahmaRaakshasa stopped whatever they were doing; looked at his face; saluted him and became happy.

END

After relating this strange story, Vetaala asked the king-

“King! Why did the boy laugh at the time of losing his life? I am very eager to know the answer. If you do not answer even when you know the answer, then your head will burst into hundred pieces.”

The King said-

“The reason behind the boy’s laughter is this.

Any weak person when he is stuck by fear takes shelter in the father or mother or if they are not there with the king to save his lives. This is the rule ordained by Lord Brahma.

If none of them are there, he takes shelter in a god.

One of them surely will protect him.

But in his case everything went astray.

The parents held his hands and feet by their desire for wealth.

King was ready to kill a child to save himself.

The BrahmaRaakshasa though a supernatural deity was ready to devour him.

All these actions were done by these idiots just to protect the impermanent body which had no essence and which had to die some day or other.

When even Brahma, Vishnu and Rudras are sure to perish in the end, these beings with such perishable bodies were so much attached to it!

What a strange thing it is!

Observing the strange ways of delusion, and feeling the fulfillment of his own wish, the boy was moved by the emotions of surprise and happiness both at the same time and laughed aloud.”

{ The king did not kill the boy; the parents left the feet and leg; BrahmaRaakshasa did not devour the boy or any one else. They all understood their folly and were ashamed of their own actions. }

Hearing the king's answer Vetaala flew away from his shoulder to its own abode on the tree. The king determined to complete his task followed it.

अम्भोनिधीनामिव सतां हृदयमक्षोभ्यं हि ॥

*Like the deep oceans filled with waters,
the minds of the great are always immovable.*

STORY TWENTY ONE

The king again went to the shimshapaa tree; placed the Vetaala on his shoulder and started to move. Vetaala said to the king-
“King! I will tell you a story provoking passion! Listen!”

There is a city named Vishaalaa like another Amaraavati (Indra’s city) created by Lord Brahma for those meritorious ones who fell on the earth from heaven when their merits ended.

There lived a king named PadmaNaabha श्रीमान् सच्चक्रनन्दनः आक्रान्तबलिराजकः (Lord of Shree; holding the discus and pleasing all; who had subdued king Bali) very wealthy; pleasing the circle of virtuous people; who had subdued all powerful kings.

In that city of the king lived a wealthy merchant who had surpassed the Lord of wealth Kubera by his riches, named ArthaDatta.

He had a daughter named AnangaManjaree (blossoms of Manmatha) through whom the Creator revealed to the earth how an apsaraa would look like.

That merchant offered his daughter in marriage to a merchant named ManiVarman of TaamaraLipti city. But being extremely attached to his married daughter, the father did not part with his daughter to send her to her husband’s room. Like a diseased man hates the bitter sour medicine, AnangaManjaree hated her husband. But her husband loved her more than his life like a miserly man loves his wealth-collection.

ManiVarman once felt like seeing his parents and went to the city of TaamaraLipti. Many days passed by.

Summer season arrived blocking the paths of the travelers with the sharp arrows shot by the Sun.

The winds blew carrying the fragrance of jasmine and red (paatala) flowers as if the directions were sighing by the separation of the Vasanta, the spring.

The days were moving slowly like the ‘travelers seeking the shades of the trees scorched by the heat of the Sun’ (and delaying their journeys).

The nights also became emaciated missing the deep embrace of the ‘Hemanta (Snow season) which shone forth white with the rays of the moon’.

On one of these days, AnangaManjaree was seated near the window of her house with her body covered by sandal paste and wearing a light garment. She at that time chanced to see the son of the royal priest named Kamalaakara (collection of lotuses) who appeared like a newly born Manmatha wandering along with his close friend desirous of a girl’s company. Kamalaakara also saw her at the terrace window like a moon in person; felt happy and attained the state of the collection of night lotuses. (Kumudaakara) (happy)

Their looking at each other made their minds attached to each other by the order of Guru Manmatha without the actual use of glue. Kamalaakara filled with passion at her very sight returned home somehow with the help of his friend. AnangaManjaree also feeling attracted towards him found out about him from her friend and entered her room thinking about him only. Wallowing in the bed in his thoughts, stuck by the fever of passion, she never saw anything; nor heard anything.

Two three days passed by.

AnangaManjaree's condition worsened. She was feeling embarrassed; frightened; paled out by the pangs of separation; and lost hope of ever meeting her lover.

One night, as if pulled by the rays of the moon seen from the window, she came out of the house when all the people in the house were asleep; decided to give up her life; reached the garden-well under a tree. There was a statue of Chandi, the Goddess of the family installed there by her father. She saluted the Goddess; recited hymns and said-
"Devi! In this birth I could not get Kamalaakara as my husband. At least make him my husband in the next birth."

After praying like this, in the presence of the Goddess, she tied one end of her upper garment to the branch of the Ashoka tree and tied the other end around her neck like a noose. By that time her friend woke up; did not see AnangaManjaree in the room; searched for her; fortunately found her in the garden; ran towards her shouting *"Don't! Don't!"* and cut off the noose. With the noose suddenly cut, AnangaManjaree fell on the ground distressed and disappointed.

The friend helped her get up; consoled her and asked her why she wanted to give up her life.

AnangaManjaree said-

"Friend Maalati! I cannot ever unite with my lover. I am under the control of my father. There is nothing that will give me more happiness than death."

As she was talking, burning in the fire of arrows of Manmatha and certain about her desires never getting fulfilled, she fainted.

"Ha! The difficulty! The command of Manmatha can never be disobeyed. That is why she has come to this condition."

Lamenting like this, her friend Maalati sprinkled some cold water on her face; made a bed of lotus leaves to cool her burning body; placed a garland of ice-cold flowers on her neck.

Slowly AnangaManjaree came to her senses and shedding tears said-

"Friend! These garlands and other things are not going to reduce my inner fire. If you want to see me alive, then do something and make me meet my lover."

Maalati feeling worried about her friend's condition said-

"Friend! The night is almost gone now. I will go in the early morning itself and bring your lover by hinting about you to him. Now take courage and go back to your room."

AnangaManjaree was pleased by her friend's assuring words and gifted her a necklace, removing it from her own neck.

"We will go home now. Tomorrow you must do what you promised." She told her friend and returned home.

In the early morning, Malatika went out unseen by anyone searching for Kamalaakara's house; saw Kamalaakara under a tree in the garden, burning in the fire of passion, lying on a bed made of lotus petals dampened by sandal paste and his close friend fanning him with plantain leaves.

She thought- *"Is he suffering for the company of my mistress or not?"*

To find out the truth, she hid there behind a tree unable to make a decision.

Then Kamalaakara's friend said to him-

"Friend! Just for a second look around you; see the beautiful garden and feel relaxed. Do not suffer so much like this."

Kamalaakara said to his friend-

"My mind is stolen by AnangaManjaree. This body now has no mind at all. How can I enjoy anything? I now have an empty heart because of Manmatha and pierced all over by his arrows. Do something so I can meet my Goddess of the heart."

Maalati now had no doubt; was happy; came out of her hiding; showed herself to him and said-

"Good man! I have been sent to you by AnangaManjaree. I will give you the message sent by her."

'Is this the befitting conduct of a noble man to suddenly enter the heart and steal away an innocent girl's heart? It is strange; even then that girl of pretty eyes wants to offer her body also along with her lives to you the handsome one. She breathes out hot smoke-filled air rising out of the passion fire burning day and night in the heart.

The tear drops darkened by collirium of the eyes fall continuously like the bees attracted towards the fragrance of the lotus-face.'

So if you want, I will suggest something that will help both of you."

Kamalaakara said-

"Good lady! Your words which reveal the suffering and love of my beloved frighten me and soothe me also. You alone can help us. Tell me what I should do."

Maalati said-

"I will bring AnangaManjaree secretly to her garden at night. You be waiting outside. I will somehow get you inside the garden. In this manner you both can meet."

Kamalaakara felt relieved and happy by her words. Maalati went back and reported everything to her friend.

As the Lord of the day filled with love for the twilight (Sandhyaa) went off with the day; as the eastern direction where Indra resides (Vaasavaashayaa) decorated herself with the Tilak of Chandra (Moon); as the grove of night lotuses (Kumudaakara) smiled with the face fully blossoming in the joy thinking that ‘the Goddess of beauty has discarded the grove of lotuses and has come to me’; that passionate Kamalaakara decorated himself well, and with all excitement arrived at the garden gate of his beloved carefully unseen by others.

Maalati brought AnangaManjaree who had passed the day with much difficulty, to the garden behind the house; made her sit under the mango tree; went out and brought Kamalaakara inside. He entered and saw that AnangaManjaree like a traveler looking at the shade of a huge tree covered fully with leaves growing on the roadside.

As soon as he was seen, AnangaManjaree overcome by passion rushed towards him and embraced him by the neck losing all her shyness.

“Where were you? My mind-thief! I have at last got you”

As she was blabbering such love-filled words, her breath getting choked by the extreme emotion of joy at the lover’s sight, she died and fell on the ground like a creeper hit by the storm.

विचित्रं बत कामस्य विषमः क्रमः ॥

The ways of Passion are indeed strange!

Shocked as if stuck by lightning, Kamalaakara cried-
“Ha! Ha! What is this?!” and fainted on the ground.

Next moment, he woke up; placed his beloved’s body on his lap; embraced her; kissed her again and again; wept aloud; suffering uncontrollably died of broken heart due to excessive grief.

Rajanee (Night), looking at both of them, got emaciated due to embarrassment and fear.

The garden keepers saw the dead bodies in the morning and informed the respective families. Filled with embarrassment, surprise, grief and confusion, all of them came there and stood dumbstruck in front of the dead bodies unable to do anything.

हा। कष्टं कुयोषितः कुलखलीकारहेतवः॥

Alas! Wayward women indeed cause dishonor to their families!

At that time AnangaManjaree’s husband ManiVarman arrived there from his father’s house at TaamraLipti, eager to meet his wife. He went to his in-law’s house; was informed of his wife’s death; came to the garden profusely shedding tears; saw his wife’s dead body in the embrace of some other man; and immediately died burnt by the fire of grief.

As the weeping and lamenting went on, all the citizens came there to see them.

AnangaManjaree's father fell at the feet of Goddess Chandi in that garden, along with his family and prayed-

"Mother! This ArthaDatta has installed you here and has always worshipped you with devotion. Please show your compassion now and save me."

Shankaree the compassionate Goddess ordered-

"Let all three wake up alive with their passions subsided."

By the grace of the Goddess all the three became alive. They were freed of the torment of passion also. All the people assembled there felt happy by seeing all this. Kamalaakara returned home feeling embarrassed and bending his head.

ArthaDatta brought his daughter AnangaManjaree who was feeling embarrassed and shy back to his house along with her husband.

END

After relating this story, Vetaala questioned the king in that night-

"King! Who crosses the limit of foolishness in these deaths due to love? If you know the answer and do not speak, the curse will take effect as I had previously mentioned."

The King replied-

"Yogeshvara! ManiVarman is the most foolish of all. Though seeing his wife dead in the embrace of another person, instead of getting angry, he was overcome by grief being infatuated with her; and died."

Vetaala heard his answer and flew off to its abode on the tree. The king ran after it as usual.

STORY TWENTY TWO

The King climbed the Shimshapaa tree again; placed the Vetaala on his shoulder and started walking silently. Vetaala again spoke-

“King! Well-done! You have a steady mind! Let me tell you another strange story-

There is this city of KusumaPura. It was ruled by a king named DharaneeVaraaha. His kingdom sheltered many Brahmins. There was a Brahmin’s colony there named BrahmaSthala. There lived a Brahmin named VishnuSwaamy. He had a wife named Svaahaa like the God of Fire (having a wife Svaahaa). He had four sons.

VishnuSwaamy died. All his wealth was taken away by his relatives. Then these four sons discussed with each other their future course of action.

“There is nothing here for us. Let us go out of this place.”

Having made a decision like this, they travelled for many days and reached a village named YajnaSthala where their maternal grandfather had lived. But as he was not there, their uncles had to care for them. The boy continued their studies in that place. But as days went by they were disregarded by their uncles and were neglected in the matters of food clothing etc.

Humiliated by the disregard of their relatives they met at night to discuss their plight.

The eldest of them said-

“Brothers! What to do?

Know everything to be the play of fate!

In this world no one can do anything for anyone.

Today I was wandering in the forest worried about all this. There I happened to see a dead man with all his limbs loose and spread out. I wished for such a freedom and thought-

‘This fellow is blessed indeed. He has nothing more to worry about anything.’

I decided to end my life there itself; tied a cloth to the branch of the tree; tied the other end to my neck like a noose; and hung myself. The cloth tore off and I fell on the ground unconscious but not dead. When I woke up I saw some kind man fanning me and sprinkling water on my face to revive me.

He told me-

“Friend! Tell me! You look like an educated person! Why do you grieve and for whose sake? A man who does good actions gets happiness; a man who does bad actions gets pain; that is all. If you are trying to kill yourself due to some suffering, then do good actions. Why do you want to kill yourself and live in the hell after death?”

He consoled me like this and went away. I decided not to give up my life and came here. If the fate decides so, one cannot even die.

Now I will perform penance in some sacred place and burn the body through penance so that I will not be tormented by poverty again.”

His younger brothers said-

*“Aarya! Why should learned men suffer without money?
Is it not a well-known fact that the wealth is as fickle as the autumn cloud? Though stored
and well-protected with effort, it will perish.
Friendship with wicked, love of a prostitute and wealth never last long.
So a man who is capable of sincere effort should acquire some talent by which the deer
called wealth is caught forcefully and tied to the stake brings forth happiness.”*

The eldest felt reassured by their talk and said-

“What is such a talent which will get us wealth?”

They all debated for some time and not able to come to a decision said-

“Let us wander all over the earth and learn something good.”

All of them decided to go in different directions in search of some learning which could earn them wealth. They fixed a place for meeting and all four of them went off in four directions.

Many days passed. All of them returned and joined together at the place decided for the meeting. They asked each other *“What has been learnt by whom?”*

One of them said-

“I have mastered a learning by which if bones of any animal could be collected, I can make it get filled up with flesh and blood.”

Second one said-

“I have mastered a learning by which I can produce the skin and hair of the body of an animal which has just flesh and bones.”

Third one said-

“I have mastered such a learning by which I can produce sense organs like eye etc and also other limbs in any animal which has just bones, flesh, blood, skin and hair.”

Fourth one said-

“I have mastered such a learning by which I can produce life in an animal with limbs.”

All four decided to test their talents. They searched all over the forest and found the bones of a dead lion. They did not know that the bones belonged to a lion.

One of them collected the bones and filled it with blood and flesh; next one produced the skin and the hair; third one filled it up with all limbs; fourth one gave life to that form of the lion.

Immediately a terrifying lion stood there with a huge mane, sharp teeth and sharp nails. It killed instantly all four of them who had made it alive; and ran off inside the forest.

In this manner, the Brahmin boys died by making a lion alive. Who will get any happiness by making alive a wicked animal?

If the fate is contradictory, even talents earned with effort do not help in gaining wealth but lead towards destruction only.

If the divinity which rules all is supportive, the tree of effort पौरुष sprinkled by the water of learning प्रज्ञा ; with the base surrounded by the water pit of 'Good morals' नय may result in good fruits.

END

Vetaala finished the story and asked the king-

"King! Remember the curse and tell me; who has done the worst mistake in making the lion alive?"

The King thought silently-

'This Vetaala is going to fly off again. Let it go! I will bring it back again.'

He said-

"He who filled life into the lion's body is the worst sinner.

The others did not know what animal it was and filled it up with blood, flesh, skin, hair and limbs. They cannot be blamed. But the last one, though knowing that it was the body of a lion was intent only on showing off his talent without bothering about the consequences.

He is the cause of all other Brahmin boys getting killed and incurs the sin of BrahmaHatyaa (Brahmin's murder)."

Hearing his words, Vetaala flew back to the tree. The king again went back to the Shimshipaa tree to bring it.

STORY TWENTY THREE

The king again climbed the Shimshapaa tree and brought down the Vetaala; placed it on his shoulders even as it was making lots of weird noises and gestures; and started to walk silently. Vetaala spoke to him from the shoulder-
“King! You are obstinately clinging on to this task which cannot be completed. Anyhow to relax your mind let me tell you a story.”

There is a city named Shobhaavatee in the country of Kalinga. Meritorious souls lived there as if in heaven. Well-known for wealth and valor like Pradyumna (Vishnu or son of Krishna), a king named Pradyumna ruled that city prescribing proper rules of conduct for everyone.

In that king-

pulling of Guna (string) गुणापकर्ष was in the bow but not गुणापकर्ष decline of character in people;

beating with hand कराहति was in drums but not कराहति taxes levied on people;

Kali was in Yugas but not Kali (deceit) among people;

sharpness तीक्ष्णता was in intelligence but not in the words.

The king had constructed a Brahmin’s colony named YajnaSthala in his city in some corner for sheltering the Brahmins. There lived a Brahmin named YajnaSoma who had mastered the Vedas; who was very rich; who worshipped Sacred Fire; and who worshipped guests.

When he was old, he got a son through his devoted wife. The boy named DevaSoma grew well under the care of the father; was endowed with all good qualities and was very much loved by his parents.

When he was sixteen years of age, that boy who was loved by all because of his learning, politeness and other qualities was stuck by fever and died. YajnaSoma saw the dead body of the son; embraced him and cried *“Ha! Ha!”*

He did not allow the body to be cremated in fire.

The elder Brahmins advised him-

“Brahman! You are learned in all scriptures. Don’t you know that the world is like the illusory city created by Gandharvas?

Even those kings who parade on the earth believing themselves to be immortal, each one of them have climbed the cremation fire carried as a corpse (Preta) followed by the crying people in the cremation grounds; have been burnt by the flesh-burning fire; have been consumed by wild animals or by Time; no one was able to prevent their ends; what to say of ordinary people?

Hey learned man! What will you get by holding on to this corpse? Tell us!”

Somehow they were able to remove him from the boy's dead body. They took the body on a cot and took it to the cremation ground accompanied by drums etc.

There lived some ascetic in that cremation ground. He followed the disciplines of Paashupata cult; lived in a hut; had a body emaciated by excessive age and penance; held fast by nerves which were afraid of breaking as if; wearing matted brown locks; appearing like a second Shiva. He had a disciple who was very rude and arrogant in behavior but helped in begging alms.

When the old ascetic heard the drum noise in the cremation ground, he said to the disciple who was having the food-

"Son! What is the sound outside? Go out and find out the cause of the noise and quickly come back. Why so much noise which has never been heard in the past so far?"

The disciple rudely retorted-

"I am not going! You can go yourself! I have to eat my food now."

Guru said-

"You Fool! Fie on you! Glutton! When only half the hour has passed in the day, what urgency is there for you to eat now?"

The disciple said with anger-

"Fie on you, you old idiot!

I am no more your disciple; you are no more my Guru. I will go elsewhere. You can carry this bowl yourself."

He threw the begging bowl and the stick in front of the Guru and ran away.

The ascetic just laughed and came out of the hut.

At that time the dead body of the boy was brought there. The ascetic saw the people crying and weeping for the young boy. He decided to discard his old body and enter the boy's young body. He went to some solitary place; wept aloud; danced shaking his limbs in various ways. Then the next moment the ascetic desirous of enjoying a youthful body discarded his old emaciated body and entered the dead body of the young Brahmin boy.

Next instant, the boy got up alive from the pyre which was about to be lit.

All the people were amazed by the sight and happily shouted-

"The boy is alive! Alive! By Good fortune he lives!"

The Yogeshvara who was in that body told them-

"When I went to the other world, Lord Shiva gave me new life and ordered-

'You must follow the disciplines of the Paashupata cult'.

So I have to leave now and live accordingly performing penance. Otherwise I cannot remain alive.

You people go home. I will go from here."

He took leave of them all who were happy and sad at the same time; with a determined mind sent them all off them back home. He threw his old body into a hole; and went away to continue his ascetic life.

END

Vetaala asked the king-

“King! Tell me why the great ascetic cried before entering the other young body? Why did he dance? I am very curious to know the answer.”

The King said-

“Listen Vetaala! As his original body was loved and cared for by his parents from birth and as it had helped him attain many Siddhis, he cried because of his attachment to the body. Later he danced in joy because he could perform more penance through the other young body.”

Vetaala heard his words and flew back to the Shimshipaa tree. The king without getting distressed followed it with a determined mind.

STORY TWENTY FOUR

The king ignoring the terrifying Night-demoness with the eyes of the cremation fires and dark hued because of the darkness; went near the Shimshapaa tree in that terrifying cremation ground; placed the Vetaala on the shoulder and started to walk.

Vetaala said to the silent king-

“Hey King! I am tired of going to and fro like this; but you do not appear to be so. So I have got one question to ask. Listen!”

In the past, in the southern region there was a Mandaleshvara (Ruler of twelve kings) named Dharma, the foremost among the noble and with many families. He had a wife named Chandraavatee born of Maalava country. They had a daughter. When she attained the age of marriage, a calamity happened.

The king was overthrown by his relatives who plotted against him. The king escaped from his city along with his beautiful wife and daughter with a store of diamonds. They were on their way to Maalava, the wife’s father’s place. They reached the outskirts of the Vindhya forest on the way. Since his wife and daughter were tired, he spent the night in that wilderness itself distressed and worried.

In the morning Lord Vibhaivasu (Sun) ascended the eastern direction spreading out his hands (rays) which seemed to block the king saying-“Do not enter this forest, the abode of thieves!”

The king, his wife and daughter walked on the forest paths, getting their feet wounded by thorns and stones. They entered a village in that forest which was peopled with Bhillas (hunter-clan) and cruel men who would kill any one for meager gains. The village had no good men even for namesake. The thieves saw from a distance the king wearing expensive garments and ornaments; and rushed towards him to rob him of his belongings. The king saw them and said to his wife and daughter-

“Let these lowly beings not touch you. Escape into the deep forest.”

The frightened queen took her pretty daughter’s hand and entered the deep forest as instructed by her husband. The king who had a shield and sword bravely attacked the hunters who shot arrows at him and killed many. Then by the order of the chief all those men got together and fell on the king; hit him all over; and killed him. They took away the ornaments concealed in his garment and went away. The queen who was hiding inside a bush with her daughter saw her husband getting killed. Grieving for the dead king yet intent on protecting her daughter she ran with her and entered the deep forest.

The sun was in the center of the sky. All the birds and animals were hiding in the shade by the heat of the Sun. Queen Chandraavatee with her daughter Laavanyavati soon reached a lotus-lake. They both tired and exhausted sat under an Ashoka tree near the lake.

At that time, some prominent man named ChandaSimha (Valorous lion) came to that forest along with his son to hunt in that forest. He saw the foot-prints of the queen and her daughter and said to his son SimhaParaakrama (valorous like the lion)-
“Son! If we follow these beautiful foot prints we will soon reach two ladies. Then you can choose one of them whomever you like (and marry her).”

SimhaParaakrama said-

“Father! The one with smaller foot prints looks like my wife. You can take the other one with bigger foot-prints who seems to be older.”

ChandaSimha said-

“What are you saying? Your mother departed for the other world in front of our eyes. When I have lost such a good wife, what desire do I have for other women?”

SimhaParaakrama then said-

“Father! Do not say like that! Without a wife, the householder’s house is empty. And did you not hear what MoolaDeva has said? Where there is no wife with huge breasts and hips waiting for your arrival, which fool will enter that dungeon without chains wastefully called a house? Therefore father, I vow on my life if you do not accept the other one as your wife.”

ChandaSimha agreed to his words.

They both followed the foot prints seated on their horses. Soon they saw the beautiful queen and her daughter sitting under the Ashoka tree. They both approached the ladies. The queen stood up in fear thinking them to be thieves. But the daughter removed her apprehension by saying- *“Let us not be frightened. These two do not look like thieves. They are well-dressed and appear to be peaceful. They might have come to this forest to hunt animals.”*

ChandaSimha climbed down from the horse and said to her-

“Beautiful lady! Enough of apprehension! We have come here to hunt. Talk to us freely. You both look like Rati (attraction) and Preeti (love) the two wives of Manmatha sheltering in the forest when Manmatha was burnt by the fire of Shiva’s eyes! Why have you come to this desolate forest? Your bodies are to be sheltered in bejeweled mansions. Why do your feet deserving to tread the court-yards covered with flowers, walking on this thorn-filled forest terrain? It is strange indeed that the dust falling on your faces by the wind taint our faces instead; the hot rays of the Sun falling on your limbs burn us instead. So please tell us about you both. Our hearts are distressed by seeing you both in this condition. We are not able to bear the distress of seeing you both in this forest filled with wild animals.”

The queen sighed and feeling shy and saddened at heart slowly related all the events of their life. ChandaSimha understood her to be without her husband. He consoled her with sweet words and promised to take care of her along with her daughter.

He along with his son took the queen along with her daughter to his city prosperous like the city of Kubera, the God of wealth.

The queen felt as if she had got another birth; feeling helpless and orphaned and in dire circumstances accepted his words. What can the poor woman (widow) do?

The queen was found to have smaller feet and the daughter had bigger feet.

So as previously agreed, SimhaParaakrama took Chandraavatee the queen as his wife and her daughter Laavanyavati became the wife of ChandaSimha.

Who can break the promise made previously?

Because of the foot-steps being different, the mother and daughter married the son and the father respectively and the daughter became the mother-in law of her mother.

In course of time both had many sons and daughters by their husbands.

END

Vetaala finished the story and said-

“King! The mother and daughter got children from the son and the father. What will be the relationship of these children to each other?

If you know and do not answer remember the curse will take effect.”

The King thought for some time but was not able to answer the question. He walked silently.

Vetaala understood that he had no answer for that question and laughed in its mind thinking-

‘This king cannot answer this question. That is why he is walking silently. He cannot be cheating me because my curse is powerful. I am pleased with the noble characters of this great king. Therefore I will cheat that deceitful mendicant and bestow the Siddhi (result) of this task to this king for the good of the world.’

So thinking, Vetaala said to the king-

“King! Though exhausted by walking to and fro in this cremation ground in this terrifying dark night, you look happy only. You do not feel disturbed in any way.

I am amazed at your determination. I am pleased also by your courage.

You take this corpse and go. I will also leave. But follow my instructions carefully.

That mendicant for whose sake you are taking this corpse is a wicked man.

Tonight he will invite me to manifest in this corpse and will worship me. He will want to offer you to me by killing you. He will ask you to lie down on the ground prostrate and salute the deity. Great King! At that time you tell that wicked man-

“I do not know how to salute. Please show me how to do it.”

When he is prostrate on the ground and shows you how to do it, you take your sword and slice off his head.

The emperorship of Vidyaadharas desiring which he is doing all these efforts will then belong to you. Otherwise this mendicant will kill you and fulfill his desire. That is why I delayed you all this time breaking you silence again and again. May you succeed! Go now!"

Vetaala left the corpse on his shoulder and vanished.

The king understood by the words of Vetaala, the wicked nature of the mendicant and his evil plan to kill him to get his desire fulfilled. Pleased at heart by the Vetaala's timely advice, he walked towards the fig tree ready to face the evil mendicant.

STORY TWENTY FIVE

King VikramaSena carried the corpse on his shoulder and went to the fig tree in the cremation ground where the mendicant ShaantiSheela was waiting for him on that new moon night.

The mendicant was seated inside a circle on the ground built of white bones; blood had been sprinkled all over the ground; pots were kept filled with blood; huge lamps burnt brightly filled with oil; fire for 'Homa' was burning in the center. Other ingredients were arranged in the due manner. The desired deity was getting worshipped.

The mendicant got up as soon as he saw the King. He said-

“King! You have done a great service to me not possible for anyone else on this earth. Who can equal you?

What sort of a great task this is!

What sort of a time and place this is!

It is true indeed when they praise you as the greatest among kings! Who else will neglect one's own comforts and do service to others? This is greatness of the great men that they do not swerve from completing the intended task even at the cost of their own lives.”

The mendicant was happy that his wish was getting fulfilled. He got the corpse on the shoulder of the king down on to the ground. He bathed the corpse; garlanded it; and placed it inside the circle. He then applied ashes all over his body; wore a sacred thread made of hair; covered himself with the cloth which was on the corpse.

Then by the power of meditation, the mendicant worshipped the spirit inside the corpse in the due manner. He offered Arghya (water) from the skull-bowl; flower from the clean new teeth; application of fragrant paste with blood; fragrant smoke from human eye; flesh as food; finished the worship and said to the King who was seated nearby-

“King! Salute this great king of Magical hymns who has manifested in this corpse by falling fully in the ground with all your eight limbs touching the ground. He will give you any boon you desire.”

The King remembered the warning of Vetaala and said-

“Bhagavan! I do not know how to salute in that manner. You please show me how to do it. Then I will do exactly as you said.”

The mendicant showed him the method by himself lying on the ground, prostrate. The King immediately sliced off his head with the sword; tore open his chest and took out the heart-lotus and offered the head and the heart-lotus to the Vetaala.

All the dead spirits praised him with good words.

Vetaala was pleased by the king's action. It spoke to him through the corpse-

“King! This mendicant wanted the emperorship of Vidyaadharas. You will get the same after the end of your life as a king on this earth.”

The King said-

“Yogeendra! If you are pleased, what boon will not be possible for me? Yet I ask you this boon; I know your words will not fail.

Let these twenty four pleasant stories with questions and answers complete with the twenty-fifth one which you told me become famous in the world and become praiseworthy.”

Thus prayed by the King, Vetaala said-

“King! Let it be so! I will tell you more! Listen!

He who tells and listens to these ‘twenty four stories previously told and the last one which fulfills the desires’, with sincerity will be freed of sins. Where these stories are praised, there the Yakshas, Raakshasas, Daakinis, Vetaalas, Kooshmaandas, and BrahmaRaakshasas will not trouble.”

Vetaala said this much; came out of the corpse and went back to its abode through Yoga-Maayaa.

Lord Shiva appeared there along with his groups of Gods pleased by all this. The king saluted him with devotion.

Lord Shiva said-

“Well-done my child! You have killed the deceitful ascetic who wanted to attain the emperorship of Vidyaadharas through ‘HataYoga’. You Vikramaaditya have been created with my essence to subdue the demons who have taken birth on this earth as lowly beings and for controlling the arrogant wicked men. Therefore you will keep in control the entire earth with its islands and nether worlds; later become the emperor of Vidyaadharas. There you will enjoy the pleasures of that world for long and renounce them by your own will and will get absorbed in me at the end. Accept this sword named ‘Aparaajita (unconquerable)’. With the help of this sword you will be able to accomplish whatever I told you.

Lord Shiva gave him the sword. The king offered him flowers of hymns.

Lord Shiva disappeared along with the Gods.

EPILOGUE

After all the work was completed, and the night disappeared, the King entered his city in the morning. The people of his city welcomed him with festivities. He spent the day taking bath; charity; worship of Shiva; music and songs.

Within few days, by the grace of Lord Shiva he brought under control the entire earth with the islands and nether worlds. He ruled the kingdom without any problems. Later he attained the great emperorship of the Vidyaadharas; enjoyed the pleasures for long; and got absorbed in Lord Shiva at the end.

TWENTY FIVE STORIES OF VETAALA ARE COMPLETE

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Narayanalakshmi, also known as Tejaswini in her ascetic life spent most of her life in the Himalayan terrain, engaged in the penance of knowledge. She is well-versed in all philosophies and is a scholar in Sanskrit language. Her mission life is to retrieve the lost knowledge of the ancient Rishis and offer it unblemished to all the seekers of the Truth.