WOMEN IN ANCIENT INDIAN TALES
WOMEN
in
Ancient Indian Tales

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&
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MITTAL PUBLICATIONS
DELHI-110035 (INDIA)
First published in 1987

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Published by
K.M. Mittal
Mittal Publications
B-2/19-B, Lawrence Road,
DELHI-110035 (INDIA)

Printed at
J.N. Printers
DELHI-110007
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Introduction

The tales of ancient Indian women are very fascinating. They depict the life and manners of men and women in ancient India. Women are depicted here in all their forms, upright virtuous women who fight to maintain their chastity, those who were highly trained in the art of erotics, privileged courtesans patronised by the nobility, and bawds and procurresses, who play an important role in getting the lovers united.

The ancient Indian literature, particularly the Prakrit literature, is very rich in ancient Indian tales of women. Women had a brilliant role to play in Vedic and pre-Vedic period. We come across a number of women in the Rgveda, who not only recited the Vedas but were actually the authors of the hymns in praise of deities. They were even allowed to perform the function of a priest at a sacrifice—a privilege denied to women at a later period. Women are represented here as prominent goddesses even today. As Lord Siva, symbolised as ardha-nāriśvāra (half female), is united with his spouse Pārvatī, so is Lord Viṣṇu, the Preserver, with Lakṣmī. Among prominent Hindu goddesses mention may be made of Sarasvatī, Lakṣmī, Uṣas (The Dawn), Indrāṇī (The wife of Indra), Aditi (The Infinity), Pṛthivī and others who are called upon to give strength, blessings, gifts, wide pastures, freedom from dangers and so on. In the Upaniṣadas we are told of a learned lady
Gārgī, an intellectual in the court of King Janaka of Mithilā. She questioned the sage Yājñavalkya about the Ultimate Reality but failed to get a satisfactory answer. The sage remarked, “Gārgī, you mustn’t ask too much, or your head will drop off.”

The Meaning of Chastity

“Chastity is an unknown virtue” among tribal people. The word chastity was not used in the sense of moral purity or abstaining from unlawful sexual intercourse. The standards of sexual morality are considered products of social evolution. Such standards differ widely in primitive and civilised people. In civilised society, chastity begins after marriage when promiscuous free love turns into permanent love. The notions of sexual morality have originated from certain primitive taboos, and these taboos were imposed by women and not by men. Women repulsed sexual intercourse when they were physically unfit for the same. Certain tribes are completely ignorant of morality and cannot imagine that what is natural and necessary should not be done openly.¹

In matriarchical society, the agricultural goddess, having no husband, was called ‘The Virgin’, or ‘The Virgin Mother’, or ‘The Prostitute’. The great goddess of Eskimo is spoken as “she who will not have a husband.”² The Virgin Mary is known as the mother of Jesus, the founder of Christianity. Among Hindus, kumārī-putra means: the child of unmarried woman. The real name of Gautamī-putra was Satkarnī, but he was known by the appellation ‘the son of Gautami’, prominence given to the mother. We read the story of Satyakāma in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad. When Satyakāma inquired of his mother about the family which he belonged to, she replied, “O my child, in my youth when I had to attend to the guests in my father’s house, I conceived thee. I am Jābālā, so you call yourself Satyakāma Jābālā.” Kuntī of the Mahābhārata is another example. Before her marriage, she was to have a child by any god she liked to invoke. She invoked the Sun god, by whom she had a child, known as

2. Ibid., pp. 169, 172.
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Karna. This shows that in the matriarchal society the mother occupied the highest position when the husband entered her mother’s family and the children belonged to her clan.

The Change of Pattern

In the course of time as society developed, man gave up hunting and tending cattle and took up to cultivation of land. He raised crops by tilling the soil and soon became the master of the land. As the land yielded means of survival, it became a security and continuity which helped in pleasing the ancestors. Consequently, a woman, who was so far economically productive, lost her dependence and was subjugated and owned to man. She became a source of sexual pleasures, a means of securing sons and a house-keeper. Man did not stop at that, he started suspecting her fidelity and in order to prove her virtue she was put to strenuous tests. The story of the Cunning Dhansiri, included in the present collection, can be cited as an example. To testify her chastity, the hero in was made to enter a yakṣa temple, but she came out of the temple, proving her innocence. She succeeded in outwitting and defiling her noble father-in-law.¹

A woman was portrayed fickle-minded, treacherous, ungrateful, cunning, intriguing and crooked and therefore it is laid down that she must be kept under control. We are told that Christian monks gathered at the Synod of Macon in 585 A.D. to discuss whether women were human beings. I-tsing, a Chinese traveller of the 7th century A.D. has recorded that Rāhulamitra, a Buddhist monk at Nālandā, never set his eyes on a woman.

As patriarchal society was growing, the position of women was deteriorating, but the question arises as to why women were suddenly clothed in all sorts of vices and evils, particularly in Jain and Buddhist period. The answer is the importance of

¹ The motif of chastity or Act of Truth is traced in world literature. Chastity tests are held by undergoing through various ordeals such as holding red-hot metal in hand, plunging into boiling oil, drinking poison and so on. Rāma’s wife Sītā, to prove her virtue, was made to enter a blazing fire; see Jagdishchandra Jain, Prakrit Jain Narrative Literature—Origin and Growth, New Delhi, 1980, pp. 48ff.
asceticism and self-mortification in ascetic religions. If the lustful ascetics have to be guarded against the feminine charms, something has to done. In this connection the story of ‘Ratnavati—The Princess of Simhaladveepa’ in the present collection, is noteworthy. The minister of King Ratnashekara asks the princess to keep away as the king hates women and would not like to see their face. A dialogue follows between the two in which the princess favours women and condemns men. In this connection the name of Varahamihira (6th century A.D.) is worth mentioning. He was a great upholder of women's cause, he has stated, "To call women fickle, frail and faithless is the height of impudence and ingratitude on the part of men. They are just like clever thieves who first sent away their loot and then challenge innocent persons demanding from them the stolen property."

The stories of Padma, Kirtisenā and Narmadāsundarī, included in the present collection, have portrayed the virtues of chaste women in ancient India. Kadārpiṅga, the minister’s son, enamoured of Padma, the young charming wife of king’s priest, developed a passion to obtain her. But strong-minded Padma, by her skilful design, made the minister’s son as well as the go-between Taḍillatā captive in a pit under the ground. Narmadāsundarī, another virtuous lady, struggled hard to safeguard her chastity. She was put in an underground cell, made to starve for several days and was given a severe beating, but would never submit to accept the profession of a prostitute. Kirtisenā was another devout woman, who suffered physical torture at the hands of her mother-in-law but would never give up. She has been called a resolute woman, who in sufferings surpassed even Rāma’s Sītā. The name of wise Sheelvatī can be added to the list. Thus as matriarchal society was substituted by patriarchal one, woman was deprived of her freedom and the institution of marriage was initiated. The chief purpose of taking a woman as wife was to gain access to the property, to the land which was in possession of a woman earlier. Eight forms of marriage have been recorded in the Hindu Law Books.

1. Ibid., pp. 118f; also see Jagdishchandra Jain, Life in Ancient India as Depicted in Canon and Commentaries, New Delhi, 1984, p. 204.
which represent various stages in the evolution of social system in ancient India. Amongst them, the Paiṣāca, the Rākṣasa, the Gāndharva and the Asura marriages deserve special attention; they are remnants of promiscuous free love prevalent in matriarchal society.

In the course of time, instead of polyandry, polygamy became the rule of the day. A man married a number of women at a time and kept them in his apartment. It was to his economic advantage as he had not to pay them any wages for various types of household and other work. A virtuous Hindu woman was supposed to possess the following six virtues:

"She should act like a maid-servant while doing manual work, a minister while volunteering counsel, goddess of Wealth in charm and beauty, goddess of Earth in forbearance, mother in love and tenderness and a public woman in giving sexual pleasure." Consequently, kings and emperors enriched their royal harem with beautiful charming women, brought from far off countries. The Moghal emperors were known for keeping their majestic zanakhanas (harem). In order to have continuity of the clan, ancestor worship was deemed necessary and the ancestors have to be honoured by performing oblations for which a son was essential. "Failure to provide a son is the great disaster, one of the unfilial acts," says a Chinese philosopher. Among Hindus, son is needed to discharge the father's debt, to attend his funeral rites and offer him the pinda (the ball of rice) after death. It is stated in the Hindu scriptures that a sonless man has no security. The sage Nārada has declared, "A woman has been created to beget a son. She is the field and the man who sows, the seeds. The field should be entrusted to the one who has seed; one who has no seed does not deserve to have field."

In the course of time, a distinction developed between son and daughter in the society. The son obeys and respects his parents and looks after them in their old age. He brings a pretty wife who looks after the household affairs, cooks, sews, brings water, fuel and fodder, sweeps and cleans. Therefore the birth of a son in the family was an occasion of great rejoicing. Such was not the case with daughter. Parents have to be more careful about her upbringing. After marriage she
was to go to another family so she must be taught to be kind, gentle, modest, obedient and self-sacrificing. In fact, “chastity has been enforced upon a woman for economic and religious reasons, since each citizen ought to be authenticated as the son of his proper father.”

Therefore a woman can never be as important as a man, anymore than a soil can be as important as the seed.

**Tales of Courtesans**

Another class of tales, included in this collection, are those of courtesans, harlots and bawds; they are most lively and adventuresome. A courtesan or a *ganikā* is associated with men of rank and wealth. In ancient India often they enjoyed a privileged position in high society recognised by the royalty and honoured with the royal umbrella, fan and golden pitcher. They were considered the ‘glory of the country’ and every prominent city had a courtesan, consecrated into office by a formal ceremony.

There were courtesans of high characters who did not like to flirt with many but yearned to have a man of their choice. In the story of The Loyal Courtesan, Dhammilla, a wealthy merchant’s son, was sent to the courtesan Vasantatilakā for instructions in gentle arts. In the course of time, all his money was spent and he became penniless. As a result he was thrown out of the house as a non-paying lover by the courtesan’s mother. But as soon as Vasantatilakā discovered this, she gave up all her perfumes, garlands, ornaments and make-up. She announced that only her beloved Dhammilla would unite her braid, or else it would be untied by death. The story of The Depth of Kumudikā’s Heart is another such story. Kumudikā offers all her wealth to King Vikramasimha for consolidation of his army, and at the end, in exchange of all her love towards the king, her only desire was that her lover Sheedhar be set at liberty and she returns to him.

2. The most beautiful girl of the noble families of Thales was chosen to be consecrated in the temple of Ammon; George Ryley Scott, *History of Prostitution from Antiquity to the Present Day*, London, 1940, Part II, 61.
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Prostitutes were slightly different from those of courtesans. They were trained in the art of erotics from their early childhood. They considered Lord Siva and Lord Kṛṣṇa as their deities and listened to the romantic tales of Brahmā, Indra, Sūrya, Vāyu, Parāśara, Atri and other sages with intense devotion. A prostitute was versed in the traditional sixty-four arts\(^1\). possessed of sixty-four accomplishments of a prostitute. She was a linguist, versed in local dialects, dressed sumptuously and was an accomplished singer and dancer. Her training commenced at the age of seven and even her father was not allowed to see her when she was five. From her childhood her mother used to give her training in besmearing the body with fragrant cosmetics (abhyanga-kriyā). The mother controlled her diet so that her body may grow beautiful and active. She also got training in the art of amorous play.\(^2\) The instructions imparted by her mother can be summarised as follows: "O my darling, you must always remain alert in guarding yourself as well as the wealth. You must be always cautious in knowing the arts noted in the Vaiśīka as well as seducing people."\(^3\)

A harlot was supposed to be expert in the art of vaiśīka. It is said that in order to master this art, people from distant places approached her. In the story of The Faked Death of Kāmalatā we are told that Aśoka’s father entrusted him to the care of a bawd, named Caṇḍā; she was expert in the behaviour of prostitutions. Aśoka stayed with his teacher for a period of twelve years, studying the different characteristics of prostitutes. After Aśoka completed his study, the bawd handed him over back to his father, assuring him that now his son would never be cheated by a prostitute. In the story of Courtesan’s Monkey when the father of Īśvaravarmā, in order

1. See Kṣemendra (11th century A.D.), Kalāvilāsa, chapter 4.
2. Read the account of Greek Hetaira who obtained their training in various centres of art, learning music, poetry, philosophy and politics. The erotic arts were taught here in various stages. The graduates were admired in these centres for their beauty. The study of every grace contributed to their understanding of the unique art; Sex Life in India by a Member of the Royal Asiatic Society of London, 1952, Section II.
to get his young son trained in trickery of courtesan, visited
the house of the bawd Yamajihvā, she was occupied imparting
instructions to her daughter in the pursuit of the art.
Iśvararvarma stayed in the bawd for a year and after comple-
ting the course of study, returned to his father's house. Courte-
sans played various tricks mentioned in the Vaisika to seduce
their lover. It is advised that if a faked life (jīvita kapaṭa)
does not succeed, one should take recourse to 'faked death'
(marana kapaṭa). It helps the prostitute to bring the rich
paramour back and deprive him of all his wealth. The motif
has been brought out in the story The Faked Death of
Kāmalatā. Kāmalatā employs this trick and taking away
all the wealth of her paramour, drives him out of the house.
Pointing out the secret of the Vaisika Upaniṣad, it has been
stated, "As a man remains cautious from the danger of a tiger
so should a prostitute be in showing her true love to any one.
In this world because of this love a number of paramours have
been cheated." 1 Giving a purposeful advice to the prostitutes
in this regard, Dāmodara Gupta has stated in his Kuṭṭinīmata,
"Keeping aside the arrogance of her beauty, in order to seduce
the lustful lover, a prostitute should behave towards him like
a yogī. She should not mind whether he is old or young, low
caste or high caste, sick or healthy—she should treat them all
alike. Sometimes, like a devoted virtuous woman, she treats
him with utmost devotion, pleases him with flattering loveable
words, prattles of love in dream and picks up quarrels with
her mother for accusing him. The behaviour of a prostitute
towards her lover is compared with the royal policy (nrpa-nīti).
Sometimes she speaks the truth, sometimes tells a lie, some-
times she is harsh, sometimes polite, she is violent, and kind at
the next moment, sometimes she is greedy of money, some-
times generous, she is in habit of spending excessively and she
also receives a large amount of wealth." 2

The prostitutes enjoyed a fame and honour in ancient India.
They were witty, cunning, tricky and seductive, using all

1. Ibid.
2. Read verses 23,93,277,451 and its commentary.
possible wiles to trap guileless young men. There were treatises about prostitutes, directing them to show their love to persons but never really love any one from the heart. By employing skilful means they stripped their lover of all his wealth and then abandon him like a piece of chewed sugarcane.

There were renowned courtesans in ancient India. Ambāpāli was well-known in Buddhist period. She was most treasured possession of Vaisāli. Buddha accepted her invitation to dine in preference to those of the Licchavis. Bindumati was another respected courtesan. She is said to have the Gangā flow backwards by her act of truth. Asked by emperor Asoka as to what caused this wonder, she replied that whosoever gave her gold, whether a nobleman or a Brahman, or a tradesman, or a servant, she regarded them all alike. Ujjainī was a prosperous city in ancient India known for beautiful charming courtesans arrived from Saurāṣṭra, Pātaliputra, Kāśi, Sopārā, Simhala, Draviḍa et al. Greece was known for distinguished harlot, who were recognised for their grace and accomplishments. Asspacia was educated at Mileitus, she delivered speeches on philosophy. She was beautiful and exercised political influence in Athens. Hipparchia was one of the most esteemed authoresses of her time. Gnathia was still another renowned harlot of Athens who was known for her art and humour and elocution that many of her sayings passed into local proverbs and were recorded by famous writers. Lais was known for her high fee to be charged from her customers.

The profession of Japanese Geisha (meaning artful person) is much respected and honoured. She was trained to provide entertainment such as singing, dancing or talking amusingly to people. She is well-versed in flower arrangement and social etiquettes. She can play golf, chess or a game of bridge and drive sports car. She looks attractive, clad in the exotic kimono, while bowing her forehead to the floor to salute her guest. Madame Du Barry, Nivon, John Shore and Nell Guyn can be

1. Caturbhāṣā (a Collection of Four Bhāṣās), edited under Sṛgaraḥāṣa, edited by Motichandra and Vasudevasharan Agraval, Bombay, 1959, under Pādatāṭitaka (the Drama of the Kicked).
2. Sex Life in India, Section II.
mentioned among French and English mistresses whose chambers attracted powerful kings and statesmen.

The bawds (*kuṭṭinī*) and procuresses (*dūtī*) played an important role in these tales of ancient India. The bawds were responsible for training young girls in the art of love making. We have seen how the rich merchants sent their young sons to them for training in the hope of protecting them from deceitful charms of prostitutes. The prostitutes in their old age, unable to carry out their profession, worked as mothers or *kuṭṭinīs* of young prostitutes. They were called *vāiyā* (*Bai* in Hindi), *akkā*, or *avvā*, or *khalā* (in Hindi) and had strict control over the young prostitute girls. The purpose of their teaching was that a young prostitute should be wise not to show any real love to any one. It is stated that when the instructions imparted to her daughter Kāmamaṇjarī, by her mother, did not work and the daughter fell in love with a young paramour, the mother felt extremely sad. She complained a sage about the behaviour of her daughter, saying that she has been negligent in her duties.¹

Pāṭaliputra (modern Patna) was a centre of bawds and procuresses.² There were *kuṭṭinīs* with the names reflecting the nature of their profession. The *Śrīgrāmanjarī* provides us a graphic description of the bawd Viśamasīlā, the mother of Śrīnagāramaṇjarī. She had a protruded nose, the point of her nose was crooked like a parrot, she had a strong liking to seduce paramours, she was deceitful like a cat, was expert in the art of *vāisiṅka*, she played tricks on others but was never cheated herself she scolded her daughter, also showed favour to her, she explained things to her by citing illustrations, she drove her out of the house and stopped her from going astray. The following few names of the *kuṭṭinīs* provide us an interesting reading: Vikarālā (the Dreadful), Kaṅkālī (the Skeleton), Caṇḍā (the Violent), Makara-damstrā (the Aligator-toothed, Yama-jihvā (the Death-tongued), Ekadaṁśitrā (The Onetoothed), Bhujaṅga-vāgurā (the Paramour-catching), Caṇḍa-ghaṇṭā (the Hot bell-possessing) and others.

². *Caturbhāṇi*, op. cit.
There were procures (dūttī) who carried the love message and acted as go-between the lovers. Tadillatā (the Forked Lightening) has been mentioned as a go-between in the story of 'A Pair Of Birds. Besides, a female ascetic, or a female dancer, or a female friend, or a maid servant, or a nurse, or a female carpenter were employed to carry the love message: A female ascetic preached religion to married or unmarried women, she was expert in application of various powders and spells and prescribed various roots, pills, medicines and herbs to love-stricken people. The story of The Cunning Dhansiri mentions a female mendicant, who acts as go-between. Dhansiri smears her hand in black ink and slaps the messenger’s white robes, driving her out of the house. This was a secret message to the lover indicating the place of meeting and the appointed time.¹

Prakrit Jain narrative literature, having the elements of folklore, is extremely rich in popular tales pertaining to real life. Unfortunately, it has not been fully explored or properly rendered into English or modern Indian languages. It contains valuable narrative literature describing the social and cultural life of ancient men and women in different ages and social spheres. It is important as here we get a glimpse of various female characters of different backgrounds and talents, generally not available in Sanskrit literature.

Baḍḍakāhā or Brhatkathā (the Great Fiction) of Guñāḍhya (1st century A.D.), composed in Paśācī Prakrit had been a storehouse of romantic tales, which unfortunately has not come down to us in its original form. The great poet Daṇḍin (6th century A.D.) has declared it a work of ‘wonderful meaning. Several important works in a Prakrit and Sanskrit have been composed on the basis of this ocean-like Great Fiction. Amongst these works, mention may be made of Saṅghadāsagānī Vācaka’s Vasudevahindī, Dharmasenaganī Mahattara’s Majjhimakhaṅḍa (unpublished), both of these Jain works composed in Mahārāṣṭrī Prakrit, and Somadeva’s Kathāsarit-sāgara, written in Sanskrit.

The following are the sources from which the stories are

1. For the motif of Language of Signs, see Prakrit Narrative Literature, pp. 83f.
1. The Loyal Courtesan from *Vasudevahāndī*, (c. 3rd century A.D.); 15 Tales of Vasudeva, Part I and Part II from *Vasudevahāndī*; Part III and Part IV from *Majjhimakhaṇḍa* (c. 4th century A.D.).

2. The Cunning Dhansiri from Jayasimhasūri’s *Dharmopadesamālā-vivarāṇa* (9th century A.D.).


4. Sundarī—The Deceitful Wife from Jinesvarasūri’s *Kahāṇayakosa* (11th century A.D.).

5. Courtesan’s Monkey; 13 Devotion of Kīrtisenā, and 14 The Depth of Kumudik’s Heart—all from Somadeva’s *Kathāsaritsāgara* (11th century A.D.), in Sanskrit.

6. A Pair of Birds from Somadevasūri’s *Yasastilakacampu* (12th century A.D.) in Sanskrit.

7. Wisdom of Sheelvatī and The Faked Death of Kāmalatā from Somaprabhasūri’s *Kumārvālapadādiboha* (12th century A.D.)

8. The love of Message, and Two Immortal Sayings from *Pāiyakahāsaṅgaha* by an unknown pupil of Paumacandasūri (12-13th century A.D.).


I am greatly thankful to Mrs. Margaret Walter, sometime my Hindi student in the University of Kiel (West Germany). In spite of her multifarious activities, she could make it convenient to render the majority of these stories, into English. They were translated by me from Prakrit and Sanskrit into Hindi. I am sure, with the background of Indian culture, Margy has been able to preserve the spirit behind the stories. Quite a few stories have been translated with great enthusiasm from Hindi into English by my daughter-in-law Manju. She has been assisting me in my work for quite some time. She has also grouped and organised
the stories. My son Anil has helped me in arranging and typing the work and giving useful suggestions every now and then. I am sincerely thankful to them for their assistance. My thanks are also due to Shri K.M. Mittal of Mittal Publications for evincing keen interest in publication of this work.

JAGDISHCHANDRA JAIN
The Loyal Courtesan

Dhammill was a young, wealthy merchant of Kushagrapur who devoted much of his time to scholarly pursuits. As soon as he reached maturity he was married to Yashomati, the lovely young daughter of the merchant Dhanavasu. But Dhammill paid very little attention to his new bride, and continued to spend most of his time studying.

Not long after the wedding Yashomati’s mother came to visit. Dhammill’s parents gave her every possible courtesy and attention, but she was extremely anxious to see her daughter and grew inwardly impatient at all the ceremony. Finally she had a chance to be alone with Yashomati, and at once burst out, “Ah, my darling, are you happy with your husband?”

The young girl blushed deeply and hid her face. Her mother smiled, taking this as a sign of her daughter’s shy contentment. But then, to her surprise, Yashomati raised her head with her eyes full of tears.

“What is it? What’s the matter?” the mother cried out.

“Ah, Mother, I don’t know what is wrong,” the girl said, blushing and speaking with difficulty. “He-he leaves me to
sleep all alone! Why, at night he hardly glances at me... he never approaches me. While I watch him from the bed he goes on hour after hour, writing endlessly on his slate, reciting and memorising aphorisms and rules of grammar, as if I didn’t exist. I’m sure he’s terribly learned, Mama, but what am I doing wrong that he doesn’t even look at me?”

After this confession, Yashomati burst into tears.

Her mother was absolutely shocked. She held her daughter in her arms, wondering at her son-in-law’s cold and strange behaviour. She looked at her daughter—yes, she was certainly beautiful. Dhammill simply had to be awakened!

After comforting her unhappy child, the mother went immediately to her son-in-law’s mother and frankly discussed the problem with her. Both women agreed that something had to be done at once to encourage Dhammill to discover love and share wedded pleasures with his young wife. After discussing various possible solutions, they came to the conclusion that it might be best if Dhammill learned something about the art of love from a skilled, experienced courtesan.

After Yashomati’s mother had left, Dhammill’s mother went and discussed the whole subject with her husband.

“Ah, don’t let such a thing bother you!” the merchant replied crossly. “You women don’t understand that it’s good for man’s heart to be engrossed in the noble pursuit of learning. When he needs his wife, he’ll go to her, don’t worry. In the meantime if new wisdom is not continually assimilated, the lamp of knowledge dies out for want of oil: wisdom itself flickers out.”

Dhammill’s mother was not convinced. “It is not good for the girl,” she protested, “nor for our son. One should also enjoy the beauties of life. Besides, what about the duties of creating a family? It is unnatural that Dhammill should act this way at this age. It will bring us a bad name, something must be done!”

The mother kept arguing with her husband for some time. He made light of the problem, but finally out of sheer exasperation he said to his wife, “Go, do what you want! I don’t want to hear any more about it.”
So Dhammill’s mother sent her son to a well-known establishment in the city, in order to make him an expert in the art of love. The beautiful courtesan Vasantatilka took him under her wing, giving him instruction in all the gentle arts. With her help the serious young man who had preferred to study rather than acquaint himself with his own pretty wife, now learned how to sing and laugh and love. The courtesan taught him all these things gradually and with the most persuasive, undemanding manner. Although herself still a young woman, Vasantatilka was a refined and experienced mistress of loving, and she understood her clients at first glance.

However, after a few weeks it became clear to everyone that the situation was not bringing the results expected. Dhammill’s mother, who sent five hundred gold coins to the courtesan every day for her services, soon realized that although the family wealth was being drained away like water, Dhammill was still ignoring his wife. Poor Yashomati was now doubly miserable. What was worse, Dhammill had truly fallen in love with Vasantatilka!

Dhammill’s father was furious. He approached his anxious wife and said, “Look what you’ve done! you have only one precious son. You knew what you were doing when you sent him off to the courtesan. Don’t look so unhappy now! You wouldn’t listen to me, and now you’re reaping the consequences!”

Weeping, Dhammill’s mother replied, “Husband, don’t be so hard! I did it only for the best, but I was so blind I couldn’t possibly foresee how all this would turn out. Ah, I am miserable!”

“You are innocent,” said her husband, trying to console her now. “Children are like that. A man carries a heavy bundle of grass on his head for a great distance, thinking there is a fine purpose to the effort, and he ends up throwing it all in the fire. But listen, nothing will come from worrying about it! You must calm down and collect yourself.”

But things didn’t become any better. Dhammill, totally absorbed in his passionate attachment, soon left his family home and spent all his time with Vasantatilka. Not long
afterwards his parents died from shock and grief, and Yashomati went back to live with her own parents. Just before she left she tied up all her few remaining ornaments and had the small bundle sent to Vasantatilka. The courtesan understood by this sign that her lover was now completely penniless. She sat, her face stricken with worry, for some time. Ordinarily she would have to throw a non-paying lover out of her house without a moment’s hesitation. But Dhammill! She had learned to love him; he was in fact the first man she had ever really loved. Learned, refined, honest, and reserved with everyone except herself, Dhammill had totally won the courtesan’s heart. She decided, therefore, to say nothing to her lover and particularly not to her mother, who kept a sharp eye on their enormous fortune.

But Vasantatilka’s mother had noticed the arrival of the telltale bundle of jewels from Yashomati. That same day, surprised that her daughter had not mentioned anything and had spent the afternoon with Dhammill as usual, the mother approached Vasantatilka and said lightly, “Oh, my pretty one! You know, a bird leaves a barren tree like a swan abandons a dried-up pond. My darling, do I really have to tell you that courtesans like you and me cannot continue our attentions to penniless men? Dhammill has nothing now. He must leave at once, of course.”

Vasantatilka looked her mother straight in the eye. Her beautiful face was flushed with defiant anger. “Mother! I have learned so much from Dhammill,” she said. “For instance, I have learned that wealth isn’t that important—virtue is far more valuable!”

“That’s all very fine to say,” interrupted her mother scornfully, “as long as you can be virtuous on Dhammill’s family’s wealth. But those days are gone! Dhammill himself has never earned a penny, and the last of his family’s wealth came in that little bundle this morning. Be realistic! It’s high time we found you a rich lover.”

“No, Mama,” said Vasantatilka firmly. “I have never met a man like Dhammill and I don’t want to meet any other. I love him, and he loves me, and that’s all that matters. We can certainly live off the fortune we’ve accumulated we can
manage somehow, Mama! I know I couldn't live without him. If you really care about my welfare, then you won't ever mention this subject to me again."

The mother looked at her daughter sharply, but said nothing. Why hadn't she noticed this calamitous development? As long as the money kept coming in, her daughter's feelings were superfluous. But a professional courtesan couldn't afford such feelings.

Nevertheless, the mother knew her daughter too well to risk provoking her when she was angry. Therefore she said, as if sighing in defeat, "All right. Do as you wish. I won't disturb you in your foolish notions."

A few days later Vasantatilka was applying her make-up in front of her mirror. She was in a good mood, full of love for Dhammill and therefore happy with the whole world. She looked at her image and rejoiced in her radiant beauty.

Gaily she called out to her mother to have a servant fetch some fresh red foot dye. The mother obliged, returning however with some old faded dye she had found somewhere in the house. This she handed to her daughter without comment.

"Why is this dye so faded?" Vasantatilka exclaimed. "I can't use this old stuff on my feet?"

"As with faded dye, so with impoverished lovers," replied her mother calmly.

Vasantatilka started, looked at her mother with a flash of anger, and then was silent. Then she said, "But can't we use this dye for something else? It needn't go to waste."

"No, it's useless," replied the mother, and quickly left the room.

But Vasantatilka took the faded dye, pounded it into a fine powder, and used it for painting festive designs on the ground.

Some days later a bundle of sesame was delivered to the house. As she was putting it away in storage, Vasantatilka noticed that all the seeds had dropped from the plant.

"Mother!" she cried. "Just look at this! See, not a single seed in the whole bunch! What cheat brought this stuff here?"
Her mother replied, "Just as the seeds have fallen from this bundle, so has Dhammill's wealth fallen away."

Vasantatilka made no comment. Instead she threw the bundle of stalks into the fire, and afterwards carefully collected the caustic acid residue left from its burning. This acid she used for washing her clothes.

The situation was growing intolerable for Vasantatilka's mother. Her beautiful daughter, who with a glance of her eye could again bring fabulous sums into the house, was really serious about this despicable Dhammill! In a fit of fury, she again approached her daughter.

"You, child," she accused, "look what you're doing to us! Is there really nobody else available to you that you have to run after that impoverished body?"

"Mother!" retorted Vasantatilka, "you are breaking your promise to me. And you are very ungrateful besides. Just think of all Dhammill has given us! And don't you care at all about my happiness?"

"You may be happy now, but I have to worry about our future," grumbled the mother. But she knew she was defeated. She would have to think up some very clever plan to get Dhammill out of the house and her daughter's mind on someone else. Her daughter's talents, particularly at an age when they could be so very lucrative, were not going to be thrown away for nothing if she could help it!

Shortly thereafter Vasantatilka's mother arranged for a grand festival, to which all the prominent prostitutes and courtesans of the city were invited. Dhammill came too, but he had eyes only for his lovely Vasantatilka, and indeed she shone like a bright jewel among her finely clothed friends. They all began drinking sweet wine, dancing, and laughing. Vasantatilka's mother saw to it that Dhammill's glass was constantly refilled.

It wasn't very long before Dhammill, who was not at all used to drinking alcohol, became so drunk that he fell into a stupor. The mother quickly grabbed her opportunity, and while her daughter was being diverted she had Dhammill quietly carried out of the celebration. She ordered him to be brought far out of the city limits and dumped without respect into a roadside ditch.
The Loyal Courtesan

Her orders were carried out promptly and Dhammill was roughly shoved into a ditch. There he lay for several hours, until the cold night wind began cutting through his intoxication had his head started to clear. His first thought was that he was cold and miserable. His second thought was the bitter realization that he had been betrayed and kicked out of the courtesans’ party in the most shameful manner. Shivering and groaning with pain, it seemed to Dhammill for the first time that his attachment to Vasantatilka had been a folly. If she really loved him, how could she have allowed this to happen? Why, probably it had been her idea as well! She was so clever at putting people in their place.

“Ah,” Dhammill moaned, “how could I have fallen in love with a courtesan, whose very profession demands constant betrayal? I, who have read and learned so much, should have known better! And to think how devoted I was to her!”

This is traditional with prostitutes.
A snake, a serpent, a wild tiger, death, fire, a prostitute,
which is more delightful?
They are greedy for wealth; they care not for the glory of beautiful Lord Vishnu.
For the sake of money they offer their mouths for kissing, even to their enemies;
who can be dear to those
Who even hate their own selves?

After reflecting on the sad truth of this verse, Dhammill climbed out of the ditch and painfully made his way back to the city. He didn’t turn in the direction of Vasantatilka’s house but around daybreak he walked down his old street, looking fondly at the family home he hadn’t seen for so long. How could he have forgotten this house, his dear parents, or his young wife? Dhammill blushed when he thought of Yashomati. He didn’t know how his mother had drained the family fortunes for his passion, but he did realize that he had been a cold and unfriendly husband to Yashomati. He wiped his aching face with the torn edge of his silk shirt. Yesterday evening he
had been dressed in his finest attire, but now he looked like a hungry beggar after a drunken night in a ditch.

Nevertheless he approached his old house with his heart beating fiercely. He knocked on the door rather loudly. A strange doorkeeper opened the door slightly and eyed Dhammill suspiciously through a crack, without a word of welcome.

“Brother!” cried Dhammill, hurt. “Whose house do you think this is?” “Whose house do you think it is?” retorted the doorkeeper.

“Dhammill’s,” replied Dhammill.

The doorkeeper snorted with disgust. “That good-for-nothing! I hope you’re no friend of his! Last year his mother and father both died of grief without the ungrateful son ever even knowing about it. The lustful boy spent the entire family wealth in the house of a cunning prostitute!”

Dhammill turned pale when he heard this, and suddenly fell to the ground as if struck. When he came to his senses he was lying on the street outside his house. The doorkeeper must have thought he was mad.

He got up and wandered about the city. “Perhaps I have gone mad,” he thought to himself. “What other than madness could have brought me to this? I run to a prostitute and am deserted by her, I have been the death of my parents, and have wasted the entire family fortune. What’s the use of my living any more? I have ruined everything, including my good name. I have no home, no wealth, no family, no love. And it’s all my own fault!”

Grievously sick at heart, Dhammill decided to kill himself. He went into a wild, enclosed garden and made three attempts. First he tried to stab himself with a sharp sword, but at the critical moment it was taken from his hand by some divine being. Then he made a fire and stepped into the blazing flames, but the fire was magically pacified and did him no harm. Irritated, he ate some deadly poisonous berries, but his stomach seemed to absorb the poison as fast as a hot fire devours dry grass. After this third attempt Dhammill cried out, “Oh God, I can’t even kill myself!”
That same day Dhammill walked out of the city, without money or provisions, and set out to try his luck in distant lands. He never dreamed he would return to the city of his birth in triumph and riches, only a few years later.

On the day after the party, the same day Dhammill abruptly left the city Vasantatilka awoke from a deep sleep and was surprised to find Dhammill nowhere in the house. She immediately suspected her mother of something foul. Her mother avoided her, hoping that her daughter would soon recover her spirits, forget Dhammill, and be kind to one of the many wealthy young men eager to know her.

But the mother underestimated her daughter. When Vasantatilka realised that Dhammill had left for good (for she had the whole city searched, and he was nowhere to be found), she solemnly coiled up her beautiful long hair, declaring, "I hereby announce that only my beloved Dhammill will untie this braid of mine, or else it will be untied by death."

And Vasantatilka, who despite her profession had discovered the power of an enduring love, immediately gave up all her perfumes, garlands, ornaments, and make-up. Her mother was horrified and despaired of her daughter, but the girl remained firm in her resolution.

Eventually Vasantatilka left her mother’s establishment and sought out Yashomati in her parent’s home. She humbly begged to be allowed to live there, in the hope that Dhammill would one day return to his legal wife. Despite their great differences in background and character, the two women grew to love each other like sisters. They did household chores together and talked endlessly of Dhammill. Yashomati confided everything to Vasantatilka; moreover, she felt strangely proud that this beautiful courtesan had given everything up for the sake of her husband. For several years they lived peacefully together.

When, after many successful adventures and lucky pursuits of fortune, Dhammill finally did go back to his in-law’s house to fetch his first wife, he could not believe his eyes when he recognised Vasantatilka also there, dressed in the simplest of clothes. At first he did not want to greet her;
instead he behaved very warmly towards Yashomati and most politely towards her parents. But finally Yashomati herself brought Vasantatilka forward. "If you take me, you take her too, for she has always loved you," she said.

Then Vasantatilka bowed her head in overwhelming happiness while Dhammill tenderly undid her heavy plait of hair. The three of them were now reunited and bound together by ties of suffering and love, and pledged to remain true to one another.
In the city of Vasantpur there lived a proud, wealthy merchant by the name of Jitshatru. He had a beautiful young wife whom he had only recently married. One day this merchant’s wife went down to the river to bathe. A good-looking young man by the name of Sudarshan caught sight of her there, and he was astounded by her slim, graceful figure and her spirited eye. “How blessed is he who can enjoy such unmatched beauty!” He thought to himself.

Brashly Sudarshan called out, “Oh beloved! Oh, one whose thighs resemble the soft trunk of a drunken elephant! Here is the luscious river, these are the verdant trees, and here I am reverently saluting you.”

Without hesitation the merchant’s wife replied, “Let the river be beautiful, let the trees live a long life on the gentle river bank, I also am in search of the questioner to make him my own.”

Sudarshan was struck with love by these words. He attempted to address the lovely girl again, but she lowered her eyes and ignored him. There were some small boys playing in the sand nearby. The young man gave them some coins
asked them the name of the striking figure now bathing in the river.

"That is Dhansiri, the new wife of the merchant Jitshatru, the richest man in town," they answered. Sudarshan also learned where she lived. Without another look he made his way back home.

That same afternoon Sudarshan sent a go-between in the form of a female mendicant to the home of the merchant. The mendicant was politely offered a seat by the merchant's wife, and according to custom was asked, "O noble one, have you seen anything extraordinary of late?"

The mendicant replied, "He whom I have seen will shortly be yours."

"Was it some young man?"
"Yes, certainly."
"What sort of man?" The merchant's wife asked eagerly.

"Oh, who could describe his virtue and beauty?" The mendicant exclaimed, "He is an expert in all the arts, well-bred, intelligent, polite, spirited, disciplined, handsome, and kind-hearted. His name is Sudarshan and he is the son of a merchant in a neighbouring city. And he worships you!"

The merchant's wife was excited and flattered upon hearing this fine description, she was a young girl who thrived on compliments. But she also was a newly-wedded wife, and she knew her role. She decided to teach the go-between a lesson. Suddenly smearing her hand in black ink, she slapped her palm on the back of the mendicant's white robes, crying out, "Oh, you wicked charlatan! Do you know you have dared to lead a girl of noble family to her downfall? Don't think you can arouse me with such talk, you shameful woman!"

To herself Dhansiri said, "If he is worthy of me, he will understand me."

The go-between heartily disappointed with the failure of her mission, returned to Sudarshan's home. Wordlessly she showed him the imprint of the five fingers inked across her back. Sudarshan immediately understood that he was being called for the fifth moonless night. But try as he might, he could not
discover any sign for the meeting place. So he sent the go-between back to Dhansiri's house, although the old woman complained that the merchant's wife was not "suited to romance."

Dhansiri saw the female mendicant approaching once again, and she smiled to herself. But to her visitor she showed only impatient anger, "What, you again?" she said rudely. Without another word she took the woman to a nearby grove of Ashok trees and then roughly told her to go away and not come again.

The mendicant returned to Sudarshan and said, "Oh you poor boy! That woman, pretty as she is, doesn't even want to hear your name! She just dragged me to the forest of Ashok trees and then sent me away without a word!"

Again Sudarshan understood. On the fifth moonless night he entered the beautiful forest of Ashok trees and, trembling with love, waited for the merchant's wife. Indeed, Dhansiri soon appeared, having first made sure that her own husband was fast asleep. They embraced each other joyfully and spent the night in amorous delight.

As the day was beginning to dawn, it so happened that Dhansiri's father-in-law got up and left the house to go to the toilet. He went into the nearby Ashok forest, and there he chanced to see his lovely daughter-in-law nestled up by the side of a strange young man. He was horrified and furious, but he did not make a sound. So that he might not later be taken for liar, he carefully removed one of his daughter-in-law's anklets from her foot.

Soon afterwards Dhansiri, happy in the fulfilment of mutual passion, gently awoke her lover and told him to flee. She herself quickly returned to her husband's side in their house. She found him tossing and turning in his sleep, so she awakened him and whispered, "Come, darling, it's much too warm in her! Let's go into the Ashok forest where it's cooler!" The merchant agreed and they both went into the forest and fell sound asleep. But after some time Dhansiri woke her husband up again, and with great surprise and sorrow in her voice she exclaimed, "Oh! Since when is it the custom that the-
father-in-law of a good woman removes an anklet from her foot while she is peacefully sleeping with her husband?"

"What?" The merchant replied. "Are you talking nonsense? Why should my father do such a thing?"

"I don't know," Dhansiri answered. "But I think I saw him here a while ago, and see, my anklet is gone!"

"We'll see about it in the morning," her husband said sleepy.

"It's not the anklet I'm worried about," Dhansiri assured him. "But I would feel terribly ashamed if your father talked about it!"

In the morning the merchant's father secretly went to his son and said, "Oh son, your wife is ruined! Just look, I took one of her anklets as proof while she was sleeping in the forest with another man!"

Angrily the son replied, "Father, what in the world has got into you? I myself was in the Ashok forest to escape the heat last night. Are there no ties anymore between us, that you suddenly want to unjustly accuse my own wife of adultery?"

"You think I'm a liar, but I saw it with my own eyes, I swear!" insisted the merchant's father.

Their argument was interrupted by the sound of loud grievous wailings. Dhansiri could be heard clearly crying out, "Ah, until I have been cleared of this dreadful slander, I won't accept a drop of food or drink."

Her loud cries attracted a crowd of people, who began to collect in front of the merchant's house. The city elders declared, "To prove an accusation such as this, the girl must be taken to the temple and tested there by the yaksha."

Dhansiri readily agreed, and accordingly she bathed, dressed herself in fine clothes and ornaments, and proudly made her way to the temple. The news had rapidly spread throughout the town, and already streams of people were also heading towards the temple to witness the yaksha test.

Sudarshan was among the crowd. As soon as he had heard the news, he had reacted quickly. Dressing himself in tattered clothes and smearing ash all over his body, he made out as if he were possessed by some spirit, and carrying a
broken staff in his hand, he approached the temple. There he reverently greeted the men and embraced all the women indiscriminately, according to his role.

In this guise, the young man knew he could watch all the proceedings carefully without being suspected by anybody, and if necessary he could heroically rescue his beloved.

But the merchant's wife was far more clever than he thought. When her disguised lover began to embrace her as he had all the other women, she shrank back in obvious horror and immediately declared her intention of bathing. The town's people thought she had gone mad, since it was the custom to be embraced by those poor souls possessed by spirits.

After a short while the merchant's wife returned from her bath. Without hesitation she presented herself in front of the yaksha image and declared for all to hear: "Oh powerful yaksha! If I have left my wedded husband to come to you, and left this poor spirit-afflicted man to bathe, then if I should have ever touched any other man, seize me now!"

Hearing this, the yaksha spirit himself was at his wit's end. According to the cunning woman's words, he was powerless to act against her. In the meantime the merchant's wife had straightened up and resolutely passed beneath the yaksha figure unharmed.

Cheers and happy shouts were heard on all sides, "Bravo! Here is a truly chaste woman! Who could slander such an innocent, good bride? Shame to her scheming father-in-law!" Accordingly the father-in-law, outraged and embarrassed, quickly withdrew from the angry crowd. The merchant and his beautiful young wife were honoured by all.

Soon after this incident the merchant's wife resumed her secret love affair with Sudarshan. After her triumphant deception of the yaksha, nobody could think of suspecting Dhansiri of anything, and she enjoyed the respect and praise of everyone. Her father-in-law, however, remained in disrepute until he died.
In the city of Benares there once lived a gentle merchant named Kamalshreshthi. He had a beautiful young daughter named Padmini, who was so virtuous that her parents believed her the most angelic creature in the world. One day it so happened that a poor, good-hearted young merchant happened to come to the town. Because of his simple and happy disposition, this young merchant caught the fancy of Kamalshreshthi. In a short while it was arranged that the beautiful Padmini would be married to the merchant, whose name was Chandan.

From then on Chandan resided in his father-in-law's home. He was respected both for his piety and his fairness in trade, and soon the young man became both the master of the household and manager of the family store.

Padmini, however, was secretly bored by her new husband. She had no children and arranged her life so that she could at least go and come as freely as she choose. At home she was the model of virtue, playing the role of the submissive adoring wife to perfection. Once outside, she put on make-up and spent her time flirting with the handsome youngmen of the
town. Her deceit would have astonished even the most cunning thief, because her character remained so pure in her own home. The truth of the matter was that Padmini's parents and husband would not have imagined in their wildest dreams what the lovely girl was up to.

After a few years of such a life, Padmini, to her surprise and dismay, finally became pregnant. Eventually she gave birth to a son. But when the infant was placed in her arms, she refused to nurse him. With downcast eyes she explained to her husband, "I made a sacred vow in my childhood never to let any other man touch me except my husband."

Chandan was overwhelmed with new admiration of his wife. "My wife is so chaste," he thought to himself, "that she won't even let her own infant son touch her full breast!"

One day Chandan was sitting in front of his tore when a young Brahmin came walking by. He was dressed in beautiful flowing robes and bore sandalwood paste on his forehead. Carrying a bouquet of sacred grass in his hands, the Brahmin was strewing the road as he walked. Everybody recognized him as a religious man and greeted him reverently as he went by.

Chandan happened to be selling some whole-wheat grain to a customer when a straw from one of his grain baskets was whisked away by a sudden gust of wind and became tangled in the passing Brahmin's matted hair. Chandan quickly rose to remove the straw from the holy man's hair.

The Brahmin, however, interrupted Chandan by saying, "No, wait a moment, I will cut off my head instead! My head has committed the theft of your straw, and since I have never done injustice to anyone before, I will now punish my head!" So saying, the Brahmin picked up a large knife and made ready to use it. It was only with great difficulty and pleading that Chandan managed to stop him.

The young merchant was deeply impressed by the Brahmin's unusual adherence to truth and the extreme measures he was ready to take in defense of his honour. Chandan's respect and simple admiration for the young Brahmin moved him to invite the man to his home, where he was offered food and betel.
At Chandan’s repeated request, the Brahmin continued to live with them in their home. The entire family admired the guest’s beautiful manners, grace, and pious thoughts. Chandan felt he was the luckiest man on earth—his in-laws were kind and generous, his wife the pinnacle of virtue and beauty, and a holy Brahmin blessed his merchant home!

Some months after the Brahmin had moved in with them, Chandan decided that it was his duty to go abroad, like other ambitious young merchants, and earn a large amount of wealth for his family. He first told the young Brahmin about his intentions, asking him if he would look after the home in his absence. The Brahmin at first tried to refuse the request, insisting that such a responsibility was far beyond his simple abilities, but finally he bowed to Chandan’s praise and pleading and agreed to stay.

Having said farewell to his beloved family, Chandan set out for Patna with his goods. After a tedious journey he finally encamped just outside the city. Exhausted by his travels, he cheered himself up by thinking of his virtuous family and their delight in seeing him return safe and enriched. While he was thus lost in happy dreaming, he happened to notice a small bird sitting expressionless on a branch of a nearby tree. When the other birds in the tree left their nests to look for food, this little bird would rapidly fly to their nests and eat up the unguarded eggs and young ones. Before the other birds returned, it would fly back to its lonely perch and sit quietly.

Chandan was mortified when he saw this. He had never seen such cold-hearted deceit in his whole life.

Soon he was a witness to something much worse. Not far from his resting spot there was a holy sadhu standing in meditation, his hands hanging limply at his side. A pretty young princess came walking by, and the sadhu caught her attention by preaching to her about the virtues of truth and renunciation. To Chandan’s horror, however, the sadhu interrupted his sermon and ripped the young girl’s jewels off her body strangled her, and threw her into the roadside ditch. Chandan was frightened out of his senses. The sadhu, however,
took no notice of the trembling merchant and simply resumed his silent meditations.

Suddenly Chandan felt extremely restless and wanted to get home. The world seemed an evil place indeed, and his home was the only unpolluted spot. The next day he managed to sell all the rest of his goods in the city, after which he immediately set off for home.

The young merchant made his homeward journey in record time. His heart beating with joy and apprehension, he reached Benares at midnight and hurried to his houses. Quietly he entered the familiar rooms and lit a candle lamp at the bedroom window. What he saw shocked him. His wife and the young Brahmin, entwined in each other's arms, were sleeping peacefully in his bed!

He stared at them, crushed with sorrow. Just a few short weeks earlier he had felt himself so blessed and lucky! Bitterly, he recited to himself:

The woman does not kiss her own child,
the Brahmin prepares to cut off his own head,
the bird sits expressionless as a piece of wood,
the sadhu preaches non-violence to a princess;
Ah! I have seen these four wonders with my own eyes.
And now tell me, can anyone be trusted?
Sundari—the Deceitful Wife

In the city of Kaushambi there lived a beautiful young girl by the name of Sundari. She was the daughter of a wealthy merchant, and when she was still young she was married off to the son of another rich merchant, Yashovardhan.

Young Yashovardhan was extremely ugly. He had sunken eyes, protruding teeth, a flat nose, haggard cheeks, and a long skinny neck. He had the ook of a flea-bitten rooster. The graceful Sundari, who loved all things lovely and delicate, found her new husband abhorrent. But she was afraid of the awesome punishment she would receive if she in any way rebelled and in obedience to the rigid tradition of discipline in her family and she kept helplessly quiet.

One day not long after their marriage, Yashovardhan informed his wife that he intended to travel abroad to earn a great deal of wealth through lucrative trading. He wanted Sundari to come along with him. But Sundari, who hated even the sound of her husband’s name, quickly replied “I’ve had acute stomach pains lately. Why, I toss and turn like a fish all night long! How could I endure such a strenuous journey?”
The young merchant reluctantly agreed to set out alone. Within a few days he had gathered his goods and at an auspicious moment he sailed out of the city harbour, vowing to himself that he would return to his wife with the added attraction of a glorious new fortune. As soon as Yashovardhan had left, his father said to himself, “It is not right that my young daughter-in-law should remain alone without her husband. It would be very bad if she did something improper in his absence, and yet, if I tried to stop her, she wouldn’t like it. It’s a bothersome business! And poor Yashovardhan would be truly broken-hearted. Oh, why couldn’t she have gone with him? Then I wouldn’t have to worry about the dignity of the family name!” Burdened with such unpleasant thoughts, the old merchant sat unhappily for some time. Suddenly his face brightened. “But the girl is not in good health,” he reminded himself. “In this case isn’t it most appropriate to send her to her mother’s house for the time being? Then they will be responsible for her. Yes, I think that’s definitely the best thing to do.”

Yashovardhan’s father then immediately sent word to Sundari’s father, explaining that his daughter was not in the best of health and would probably appreciate an extended visit with her own family. Soon afterwards Sundari was fetched and she returned to her old home.

There she spent many peaceful hours on the balcony outside her childhood home. She was happy to be free of her bothersome husband, but soon Sundari began to grow a bit bored. One day she was standing by the window combing her beautiful long black hair in front of her large looking-glass. Just then a handsome prince by the name of Tosali came walking by. Both caught sight of each other and were immediately attracted. After glancing up at Sundari, the prince smiled with open and easy charm and said pinedly, “What’s the use of a woman living who has no man of equal worth and virtue? She’s just as good as dead.”

Sundari retorted with a toss of her lovely head. “A man without merit doesn’t know how to enjoy acquired wealth.
But a heroic man is able to enjoy the wealth of others,” she said.

The prince, having perfectly understood the meaning of her words, slowly walked off.

Towards evening Sundari’s maidservant arranged flowers, betel, and incense in her mistress’s room before leaving. Sundari then locked the door, and leaving the window open, she lay down on her bed.

Only a short part of the night had passed before the handsome young prince entered through the open window, and stealing up to Sundari, he covered her eyes with his hands. Sundari exclaimed, “Don’t you know that you have already stolen my heart? Now under the pretext of shutting my eyes you want to truly bring down darkness? But today I will throw my arms around your neck in unhesitating embrace. Either remember your household gods and leave, or else show me your valour!”

In the amusement of such talk the two lovers spent the night full of amorous dialogue and physical delight.

The prince left Sundari’s house before daybreak. Sundari fell into a deep, peaceful sleep. When her maidservant came into the room bearing her mistress’s morning toilet articles, she saw that the beautiful lady slept on unawares. The servant began to think to herself, “The husband of this lovely woman is far off in some foreign land. It is not a good sign that she is sleeping on so long.” Then she sat down by her mistress’s bed.

After Sundari finally awoke, the maid exclaimed, “My lady! Why on earth did you sleep so late this morning? Sundari yawned and pushed her loose hair away from her face.

“The pain of separation from my beloved husband kept me awake the whole night,” she said. “I only fell asleep around dawn.”

“But my mistress, what is wrong with your lips?”

“They are only chapped by the cold.”

“But my lady,” the maidservant insisted. “Why is your eye make-up smeared?”
Sundari sighed and tried to cover her irritation. "Because I was crying for my husband all night long, that's why," she said.

"And my mistress, if I may so ask, what are all these signs of nails, thin and fine as the scratches of a parrot beak, that I see all over your body?"

"Oh, without my husband," replied Sundari desperately, "I was so lonely I had to embrace myself."

"I should have slept with you then, my lady, and we could have embraced each other," the maidservant interrupted.

"Shush! That's improper for chaste women! What are you saying?"

"But my lady! Why is your hair all open and loose?"

"Really, sister!" cried Sundari. "You're being awfully cunning with all these questions. What deceit, what suspicion! Without my husband my bed is nothing more than a pile of warm sand. It was only in my restless tossing and turning the whole night long that my bun became loose. Why do you want to blemish my husband's noble family by asking such questions?"

"Oh heavens, my lady, I don't mean any harm," the maidservant quickly replied. "How could you say such a thing? No, I think that the honour of your husband's family will not be blemished by your distress, but rather brightened by it." With these words she left the room.

That night the prince came to Sundari's room again. Sundari approached him and immediately said, "If you really want me, then we must flee from here. The secret is out. My father-in-law will see that the news gets to the king, and he'll keep a strict watch on us. Our only chance is to flee!"

The prince immediately sent for two swift horses. Sundari mounted one, he the other, and together they set off to some unknown land.
A rich merchant by the name of Ratnavarma lived in the city of Chitrakut. He had one son, named Ishvaravarma. When the boy was on the verge of manhood his father decided to send him to a trained procuress, so that he might learn the tricks of courtesans and never be deceived by them.

In the same city there lived a well-known procuress by the name of Yamajihva. Ratnavarma went to her about his son, and as he entered her luxurious house he overheard the woman instructing her beautiful daughter: “Oh my darling! In this world people are valued only by their wealth. A courtesan must be particularly careful to show love without sincerity, when it is necessary, just like a well-trained actress stimulates joy or sorrow on command. First she must gain the man’s affections; only then can she extract all his wealth. When he is ruined she should finally abandon him. And most important, my dear; a courtesan of true worth must act exactly as charming towards wealth in any form, be it a young man, an old man, a handsome man or an ugly man.”

The merchant was impressed by the procuress’s shrewd speech. Here was a woman who could warn his son
about female wiles! He was pleasantly welcomed and offered a seat. Ratnavarma came to the subject at once: "If you can teach my son the trickery of courtesans, I will give you one thousand dinars." Yamajihva's eyes sparkled at the mention of this large sum. She bowed her head gracefully in acceptance of the offer.

Soon afterwards Ishvaravarma moved into Yamajihva's house. He was a serious, well-meaning boy and he applied himself earnestly to the study of courtesans. After one year Yamajihva was satisfied with his progress and sent him home to his father with her approval. "The boy is not exceptionally clever," she said to herself, "but one year is long enough for a thousand dinars. Besides, I can always manage to get him out of trouble if the need arises."

Not long after he had returned to his father's house, Ishvaravarma announced that he would like to undertake a journey to foreign lands and add to the family fortunes. Ratnavarma was pleased with this idea, and giving his son five crores as starting capital and a great deal of practical and fatherly advice, he saw his son set out on an auspicious day.

Ishvaravarma passed through a pleasant town named Kanchanapur, and feeling somewhat weary, he set up camp in a garden there. In a nearby temple he happened to catch sight of a gorgeous dancing girl who was performing for a small crowd. Her lithe beauty took his breath away; he had never seen such creatures at the home of Yamajihva! He was so enamoured of the girl that he completely forgot all the instructions and warnings of his former teacher.

When the dance was over Ishvaravarma sent a friend of his to solicit the girl, whose name was Sundari. She sent a notice back to him that she would be highly favoured by his presence.

Trembling like an inexperienced child, Ishvaravarma entered the girl's house and was welcomed warmly by her mother, an energetic woman who made a good business of her daughter's career. At nightfall the sleeping chamber was decorated with fresh flowers and the beautiful bed was canopied with silk and flashing jewels. Ishvaravarma was led to
the room, his body was annointed with oils and sandalwood paste, and the beautiful Sundari was brought to him. He spent the night lost in passion.

Within two days Ishvaravarma had presented the dancing girl a fortune in precious gems and expensive gifts. Sundari never showed the slightest interest in these presents, however. "I have received much wealth from many men," she would say "but never have I found a man like you. Now that I have obtained you I need nothing else!"

After some time the girl said to him in private, "My darling, you are the only man in my life now. I am going to entrust you with my entire fortune." Ishvaravarma was convinced by this that Sundari truly loved him, and in a rush of joy he gave her the enormous sum of two crores.

Only a few weeks later Ishvaravarma's childhood friend, also a young merchant by the name of Arthadatt, came to the town of Kanchanapur on business. He visited Ishvaravarma and immediately took in the whole situation. "My friend!" he exclaimed in utter astonishment. "What in the world has become of you? You used to be the most sensible of all of us, and now you are wasting your father's money on a simple dancing girl and her greedy mother? Has all that expensive training acquired at home been in vain? Ah, your father will die of shame when he hears of this! Come with me at once, you must by all means leave this place. A courtesan's love is a desert mirage!"

Ishvaravarma was hurt and bewildered. "I know what you say is generally true," he said. "But Sundari is so different from the courtesans I learned about! There is not one bit of cunning or deceit in her, she is all loving kindness! And you should see her dance—she is a great artiste. Besides, she would die if I deserted her, she has said so herself."

Arthadatt was amazed to see how completely his friend had been taken in. He realized he could not force him to leave: he would have to prove his point and save his friend with subtlety. "Let's just leave for a short time, as an experiment," he suggested.
Reluctantly Ishvaravarma agreed. "But if you really think I must leave," he added, "then you go and talk to Sundari yourself. I don't want her to think it was my idea!"

Arthadatt went and spoke to Sundari in the presence of Ishvaravarma and the girl's mother. "I know you entertain an extraordinary love for my good friend Ishvaravarma," he began. "But for the sake of his career he really should join me on my lucrative trip to Suvarnadvip, where I know we can both earn a great deal of wealth in a short time. Please allow him to accompany me! After acquiring his fortune he will return here to live with you happily for the rest of his life."

Sundari immediately burst into tears as she heard this. She rushed up to Ishvaravarma and began pleading with him not to go, "I can't be separated from you for so many days!" she cried. "What if something should happen to you? I will waste away like the shadow of the moon!"

Her mother, however, tried to console her. "My daughter!" she said. "A refined woman knows how to control herself. Your lover is only doing his duty, you must understand that. He will return to us like a king, laden with riches and gifts."

"All I care about is his love!" Sundari wept.

Ishvaravarma held the girl in his arms and begged his friend to release him from his pledge, but Arthadatt remained firm. Ishvaravarma had to be content in soothing the girl with promises of an early return.

As the time for Ishvaravarma's departure drew near, Sundari became stricken with grief and took very little food or drink. She showed no inclination for singing or dancing, and was pale and dispirited. Ishvaravarma noticed this and was moved, consoling her and showing his intense love for her when they were together.

At last the day of parting came. Ishvaravarma set out from Sundari's house after prayers had been made for his successful return. Sundari followed him, weeping loudly and accompanied by her mother until they reached the outskirts of the city. When they approached near a well, Ishvaravarma came forward to bid his beloved farewell, and lo! She flung herself into the well! The mother uttered a loud cry, and the female slaves
and attendants also, began shouting and lamenting Ishvaravarma was so grievously struck that he lost consciousness.

Crying and lamenting, Makarkati asked her servants to go down into the well and fetch her daughter’s body. They brought Sundari up of the well, looking as still and limp as death. Miraculously, she somehow survived the fall, and when Ishvaravarma also regained consciousness and became fully aware of Sundari’s attempted sacrifice, he was more than ever convinced of her total and sincere love for him. He felt as if he had obtained the real meaning of life in the company of Sundari. Then and there he gave up the idea of journeying to a foreign land, and made up his mind to remain in the house of his beloved.

His friend Arthadatt was disappointed to see all this. Once more he approached Ishvaravarma and said, “Don’t forget yourself on account of this infatuation! Don’t rely on Sundari love simply because she flung herself into a well. The treacherous schemes of a courtesan cannot be fathomed even by God. And what will your father think of you? Please go, it will be some good even at this late date if you at least leave this place!”

But this time the merchant’s son did not pay any attention to his friend’s speech. He continued living with Sundari and within a month he had spent another three crores.

When Ishvaravarma was soon after stripped of all his money, Makarkati seized him by the neck and turned him out of her house. Angry and disheartened, Arthadatt returned to Chitrakut and narrated the whole story to his friend’s father.

Ratnavarma was deeply grieved to hear of his son’s ill fortune. He hurried over to Yamajihva’s house and told her angrily, “Is this what you taught to my one and only son? Enough skill so that he can be stripped of all his wealth by an ordinary prostitute?”

After hearing the whole story in detail, Yamajihva consoled the outraged father and assured him, “Don’t you worry, I will get all your wealth back from her.”

Ratnavarma sent Arthadatt to the city of Kanchananpura in order to make Ishvaravarma return home. Arthadatt went to
his friend and said, "Look, Ishvaravarma! I advised you again and again, but you never paid any attention to me. Now you have your own personal experience about the great love of courtesans. What did you actually achieve after spending your five crores? You were seized by the neck and thrown out of the house! Now you might be able to grasp that just as there is no oil in sand, so there can never be true love in courtesans. But my friend! You cannot be completely blamed. It is all right if one just doesn’t fall within the range of female dallings. Well, now forget what has happened and return to your father."

Arthadatt brought Ishvaravarma back to Chitrakut, where Ratnavarman welcomed him kindly and took him to the house of Yamajihva. There Arthadatt narrated the whole story down to Sundari's flinging herself into the well. Yamajihva remarked, "In fact I am the one to blame, because I forgot to teach this trick to Ishvaravarma. Look, Makarkati had stretched a net in the well, and that's why Sundari did not perish. But still there is a remedy."

Yamajihva brought a monkey named Ala, and gave the animal one thousand dinars, asking it to swallow them. The monkey was trained to swallow money, and so he did so. Then she told him to give 20 dinars to one man, 25 to another, 60 to a third, and 100 to a fourth. The monkey took out the money from his mouth exactly as demanded, giving it to the correct persons all around.

Then Yamajihva told Ishvaravarma to take the young monkey and go once more to the house of Sundari.

Before he went, Ishvaravarma's father gave his son two crores, and then Ishvaravarma and his friend set out with the monkey for Kanchanapur. After reaching the city, Ishvaravarma at once went to the house of Sundari. The girl gave her lover a warm welcome, embracing him around the neck and showing him her love.

Having thus gained the girl's confidence, Ishvaravarma asked Arthadatt to bring the monkey. The smart little animal was brought, and Ishvaravarma said to him, "Oh my son! Give me 300 dinars to cover the costs for our food and drink,
and 100 to pay for betel and other expenses. Give 100 to our mother Makarkati, 100 to the Brahmins and the rest of the thousand to Sundari." The monkey, who had already swallowed the money beforehand, gave it out of the different people exactly as ordered. In this way Ishvararvarma supplied enough money to cover their expenses for a period of fifteen days.

Seeing this, Sundari and her mother began thinking. "This monkey is indeed a wishing-stone, giving out 100 dinars every day the way he does. We must try to get him by some artifice or another."

Once, when Ishvararvarma was happily seated with her, Sundari said to him, "If you are really pleased with me, give me Ala." But Ishvararvarma replied, "No, I really can't do that. He belongs to my father, so how could I give him away?"

Sundari offered five crores for the monkey but Ishvararvarma said, "Even if you should offer me all your property, I would not part with the monkey."

Sundari was sharply disappointed by Ishvararvarma's firmness. "All right," she said, "I'll give you everything I possess if you'll let me have this monkey." Saying this, she fell to Ishvararvarma's feet. At this point Ishvararvarma agreed and gave the monkey to her. Sundari was full of delight, and the two spent a very pleasurable day together.

The next day Ishvararvarma secretly made the monkey swallow two thousand dinars. Then he took all Sundari's wealth as payment for his monkey and quickly went off to Suvarnadvip for trade.

The monkey gave Sundari a thousand dinars upon demand on the first and second day. But the third day he would give nothing at all.

In a rage, Sundari struck the monkey and began beating him. At this the animal sprang up and scratched the faces of Sundari and her mother. Then he ran off and left the woman alone to ponder their fate.
A Pair of Birds

In the city of Varanasi there once lived a misguided, dissolute young man named Kadarping. His father, Ugrasen, was an important minister to the king, but Kadarping simply spent his days loitering about with friends and seeking pleasures in the great city.

One day, while returning home with his companions, Kadarping happened to catch sight of Padma, the beautiful young wife of the king’s priest, Pushya. Kadarping was a handsome youth and wore the most gorgeous clothes, but Padma hardly glanced at him. The woman’s incredible beauty and absolute unconcern made Kadarping almost lose his senses. To his dismay he realized that he had fallen deeply in love with her at first sight.

Kadarping went at once to an extraordinary woman by the name of Tadillata, who was renowned as a go-between for passionate young men and inaccessible ladies. His good looks, charm, and wealth won Tadillata, and she agreed to help him. Conceding that the task before her was an unusually difficult one, Tadillata nevertheless insisted that it was only talent which was needed to unite two already loving hearts. “If anyone in this city has such talent, I do,” she added.
Tadillata was a cautious woman, however, and before taking any steps in the matter she first went to consult Kadarping's father. She narrated to him the whole story. Ugrasen, who had spent much of his life spoiling his only beloved son, was delighted by Kadarping's boldness. At the same time he was secretly pleased by the idea of making things difficult for the priest. "Pushya and his wife have such a reputation of virtue that the king favours them above all others," he thought, "and it wouldn't be so bad if my son secretly taught them a small lesson or two!"

Ugrasen thus encouraged Tadillata to help his son fulfil his desires. Soon afterwards the woman set out for Padma's house, carrying with her a decorated idol of the goddess Parvati. Addressing the mistress of house, the she recited:

Like a string of pearls,
like the Ganges carried by Shiva's head,
those women are lucky who are enjoyed by men.

After listening to this verse, Padma reflected, "Certainly this woman is offering an invitation to be unchaste." But she innocently asked Tadillata the meaning of the verse.

Tadillata replied, "If you are not hard-hearted, you can understand its meaning well enough."

Padma was silent for a moment. "I am indeed hard-hearted," she thought to herself, "but I'm not going to be shattered by her hard hit!" Aloud she again asked that the verse be explained. Tadillata smiled, and said:

A wise man and a wealthy man
should disclose their heart's secret
before only two types of persons;
he who does not disappoint one who
asks him for something,
and he who makes himself favourable
to the heart of the man who begs of him.

After listening to this verse and pondering over its meaning, Padma said to herself, "This woman has some plan, and I fear
she simply wants to corrupt my pure husband, like clogging the pure sky with mud."

Nevertheless Padma said with a smile, "Oh noble lady! I am prepared for both types."

"Ah," thought Tadillata, "this woman is an easy case. Whatever she says is favourable."

Tadillata then narrated various romantic tales from the Puranas, to influence Padma's mood. Quite some time was spent in intimate conversation, and Padma seemed to become more and more pliable. Suddenly Padma remarked, "You know, I think you are perfectly right. As someone said:

Although the body of a woman is sold off to someone by her relatives, with fire as my witness, only he alone can really be considered her lord who gives her satisfaction.

Delighted Tadillata decided to reveal everything, and she exclaimed, "Ah! If that is how you feel, my dear, then just listen. One day you were happily going towards your palace. Just then Kadarping, the handsome son of our minister Ugrasen, happened to pass by and was immediately struck by your charm, which radiated about you like moonlight. Ever since that moment he has been desperate. I can't describe how he's suffered from his longing for you! His body is hungered from unfulfilled love, and his mental condition has so deteriorated that some fear he has been possessed by an evil spirit. He grows thinner and more desperate by the day, and spends his lonely hours dreaming only of you. Have pity on him, let him convince you of his sincere passion, and you will know what love is all about!"

Padma listened quietly to this outburst, and then replied, "Yes, how can such a thing be hidden?"

"It is impossible," the intermediary replied quickly.
"There is nothing wrong in it," said Padma.
"So when are you free?" Tadillata countered.
"Whenever you say," Padma answered.
Tadillata was thoroughly pleased by this conversation, and soon she politely took leave of Padma and went home. With the help of the minister Ugrasen she conspired to devise a scheme in which Padma’s husband would be sent out of the city for some time.

One day Ugrasen approached the king and said, “Your highness! We have heard of a marvelous bird called Kimjalpa, who is richly coloured and can speak like a human. The possession of this bird has a magical effect on the owner’s fortune. He obtains immediate prosperity and all his enemies are destroyed. I advise that we get hold of Kimjalpa as soon as possible!”

“Where could we find him?” the king asked.

“He is only to be found in a certain cave near the Ratnashikhandha peak in the Himalayas,” the minister answered. “Your priest Pushya would be the best person to go, and I shall accompany him if necessary.”

As he expected, the king objected to Ugrasen’s going on such a strenuous journey at his age. It was decided that the priest, who was young and strong and afraid of nothing, would undertake the search alone.

Upon receiving these orders, the priest Pushya went home to prepare for the journey. Sadly he told his wife about the king’s instructions.

“It sounds very strange,” he said, “but of course I must fulfil the king’s request. How I hate to leave you!” Pushya looked at his young wife tenderly.

Without hesitation Padma replied, “My husband, I have my suspicions about this so-called expedition, although I’m sure our good king is blameless. Please do as I say! Make a great show of your departure tomorrow morning, but return secretly and quietly tomorrow night. Nobody should see you except myself: you must remain unnoticed until the time is ripe, several days at least. Please trust me! I will see to the rest.”

Pushya, who knew and valued his clever and beautiful wife above all others, was surprised by her words, but he agreed to her plan without asking questions. He knew she never did anything without a good reason.
As dusk was falling the next day, Tadillata brought Kadarping over to Padma’s house. The young man was trembling with excitement and glowing with confidence at his wonderfully easy victory. He was dressed in his finest clothes and had anointed his body with rare perfumes.

Padma, also dressed in her finest, received them both at her door. She smiled kindly and brought them to her room, where she politely asked them to sit on a low cot strewn with bright cushions. But as soon as the two sat down, the cot collapsed and they fell to the bottom of a deep, secret pit with a loud thud. They struggled frantically to get out, yelling and cursing as loud as they could, but to no avail. Padma then covered the hole with the cot, rearranged the cushions, and left the room.

Tadillata and Kadarping remained in the pit for three days. At appropriate times Padma provided them with left over boiled rice from the household kitchen. Otherwise she totally ignored them, spending her time with her husband in the inner rooms of the palace.

On the fourth day Padma decided that the two had suffered long enough in the uncomfortable pit. To the royal officials she announced that her husband, due to his wonderful magical powers, was already returning home with a pair of Kimjalpa birds. The king and the town people rejoiced, eagerly awaiting Pushya’s victorious return.

Meanwhile, Padma had her two captives bound and brought out of the pit. Then she began to paint the young and the intermediary with various bright colours and decorated them with masses of bright large feathers from various birds. The disguise complete, she placed both of them together in a large wooden cage.

At night this cage was removed to a nearby wood. Then it was made known that the priest had finally returned from his long journey. Padma, accompanied by her friends and several royal officials, went to receive him. The cage was mounted on a ox-cart and drawn to the royal palace.

Respectfully the priest Pushya addressed the king: “Your highness! Let Your Majesty behold the pair of excellent Kimjalpa birds which I have obtained a male and a female!”
The king rose and scrutinized the strange pair for a long while. The two "birds" were silent and held their heads low in shame.

"I don't see any marvelous bird at all", replied the king at length. "I see only Kadarping and the bawd Tadillata dressed up as ridiculous birds in a cage."

Padma, with laughing eyes, looked at her husband.

"I'm sure the situation can be cleared up by your minister Ugrasen," Pushya said quietly.

Ugrasen was immediately called to the king. He took one look at the "birds," another look at Padma and Pushya, and suddenly he became very nervous. He fidgeted with his hands and stared at the floor, unable to face the eyes of the king.

After a short silence the king began to praise Padma in a loud voice, calling her a woman of extraordinary virtue and skill. He honoured both Padma and Pushya and gave them rich presents. He dismissed the three conspirators with a stern royal warning, and then sent Padma and her husband home in a gorgeous chariot drawn by Brahmans, expert in Vedic lore.
The Wisdom of Sheelvati

Ajitsen was the son of the rich merchant Ratnakar of Nandanpur. When his son was of age, Ratnakar wanted to marry him to a girl from a good family, but he could find no proper match.

Then one day a merchant friend came to visit Ratnakar, and after discussing business this merchant happened to mention the name of Sheelvati, the daughter of a wealthy man in the city of Kayangala. The girl was supposedly not only beautiful but also highly trained in the fine arts and already much sought after by the prominent families with marriagable young men. Ratnakar was pleased with this information, and after making inquiries he successfully managed to arrange the marriage between Ajitsen and Sheelvati.

The new daughter-in-law indeed graced Ratnakar’s house with her charm and numerous capabilities. Ajitsen immediately realized his young wife’s worth and fell quite in love with her. Ratnakar, however, always suspected that his daughter-in-law was somewhat too willful, and he kept a sharp eye on her.

Once it so happened that Sheelvati left the house with a large earthen pot at midnight, and returned only after several
hours. Her father-in-law soon came to know of this and was immediately suspicious, "How could she leave our house so late at night, completely alone?" he thought angrily. "A woman subject to intense passions can easily follow the wrong path and lose her good qualities, putting both families to disgrace."

Worried about such behaviour, Ratnakar finally became so upset that he advised his son to send his wife home to her parents for a while.

"But why, father?" asked Ajitsen. "She is very happy here."

"No, she should go to her own parents. It is only proper," insisted Ratnakar. Finally, with great reluctance, his son agreed.

Ratnakar decided to accompany his beautiful daughter-in-law on her journey. He would not feel safe until he saw her under the control of her family. On the way they came to a wide river. Ratnakar asked Sheelvati to take off her shoes to wade through the water. But she did not heed his advice, and boldly forged the river with her shoes on. Ratnakar was annoyed, but did not say anything.

Further on they came to a field of ripening beans. The father-in-law remarked to Sheelvati, "Ah, how nice it is: The owner of this farm will certainly make good use of such a yield."

"Yes," Sheelvati replied, "provided it is not eaten up first."

To himself Ratnakar thought, "How foolishly she talks! I wonder why she had such a reputation for cleverness?"

Further on they entered a busy city. "How beautiful it looks!" Ratnakar exclaimed.

"Provided it is not destroyed," said Sheelvati in return.

In the city they met a wounded nobleman. "How brave he is!" said the father-in-law.

"Only if he is not beaten," replied Sheelvati.

After going some distance further, Ratnakar sat down to rest under the shade of a banayan tree. He asked his daughter-in-law to also relax under the tree, but she went and sat down
at some distance from him. "She is willful child, disobedient and silly," thought Ratnakar. "Lucky thing I am saving my son from her presence!"

After some time they continued their journey, and finally they reached a village, the home of Sheelvati's maternal uncle. He invited both of them for a meal. After eating, Ratnakar rested on his chariot. But Sheelvati sat outside, in the chariot's shade.

Just then a crow sitting in a nearby tree begain crying. Listening carefully, Sheelvati exclaimed, "Don't you feel tired crying all the time?" Then she added, "For one fault of mine I had to leave my house. Now if I commit another one I will have to be separated from my beloved for ever."

Surprised by this outburst, Sheelvati's father-in-law asked her the meaning of this.

She explained: "Please listen! Due to its fragrance, sandalwood is cut and pounded, and due to its colour the madder is cut to pieces and ground. In the same way my virtues have turned out to be my enemies, since unfortunately I understand the language of birds."

Ratnakar, who had listened with astonishment, looked at her questioningly. "Has the girl gone mad?" he thought to himself. But he continued to give his daughter-in-law his full attention.

"Yes," Sheelvati went on, "but then there are some advantages to understanding animals. The other day I understood the call of a she-jackal and knew that a dead body was floating on the river, and moreover it possessed valuable ornaments. That fateful night I set out to the river with a large jar. First I went into the water and retrieved the body, which was exactly where the jackal had described it. Then I removed all the ornaments, put them in the jar, and left the body for the jackal. Oh, my father-in-law! This is how, through one small fault of mine, I have come to this state and earned your distrust!"

Ratnakar looked at his daughter-in-law with wonderment. Her eyes were full of tears and she looked truly distressed. But her story was so strange!
Before he could reply, however, Sheelvati said, "My animal friends even help me when they can. Listen, do you hear that crow crying in the tree above? He is saying that under this very tree a wealth of over ten lakhs is buried."

Ratnakar immediately began digging, and when he felt the riches with his fingers, he looked at his daughter-in-law with great respect and admiration.

"I believe you," he said, "and I am sorry I misjudged you."

"Please! Let's go home!" Sheelvati begged.

The two then got back into the carriage and made the long journey home in the best of spirits.

On their return trip they once again passed by the banyan tree.

Ratnakar asked Sheelvati, "Tell me, why didn't you sit under the shade of this tree?"

"There is always the danger of snakes around the root of a banyan tree," Sheelvati answered, "and the fear of thieves as well. Moreover, the birds in the branches may unwittingly soil one's clothes with their excrement."

Ratnakar laughed and said, "I have to agree with you there!"

Later on he asked her about her comment on the nobleman.

"One who is hit cannot be called brave. But on the other hand a real hero does not strike first."

Then about the city she said, "What use is it to stay in such a city where guests are not honoured?"

About the farm Sheelvatī said, "Only if the owner of the farm makes good use of the money earned with his crop can the crop itself be called useful."

Ratnakar was fascinated by her comments and asked further about the river.

"While going in wild waters," she replied, "there is always the fear of dangerous water animals and sharp stones, and I'd rather get my shoes wet than my feet hurt."

"You are a practical girl, besides being clever," mused her proud father-in-law.

Soon the two travellers arrived home. Ajitsen was delighted by his father's new attitude towards Sheelvati. His young wife
was highly praised and honoured and made mistress of the household. Sheelvati was glowing with happiness at having won her father-in-law's respect and being back with her beloved husband. She and Ajitsen got along extremely well and the household was run in harmony.

A short time later a great announcement was made in the city: The king had 499 ministers but no capable Chief Minister, and he was searching for the right person for this enviable post. With the beat of drums the king's massegers walked the city streets, announcing that whoever could answer the king's question most suitable would become the royal Prime Minister. Ambitious men from every profession, including Ajitsen, were eager to hear the question and try to answer it. The question was: "What kind of punishment does kicking the king deserve?"

All of the contestants immediately answered, "Ah, undoubtedy he or she deserves the most severe punishment for such an act!"

Ajitsen, however, did not answer right away. He asked for some time to think the matter over, and when this was granted he hurried home to Sheelvati.

His young wife laughed when she heard the question, and whispered something in her husband's ear. Immediately he thanked her and quickly made his way back to the court.

"Your Majesty!" Ajitsen said firmly. "Except for your beloved no one else would ever dare to misbehave with you in this manner. Therefore there should be no punishment whatsoever, and she must be shown due honour and respect."

The king was highly pleased with Ajitsen's answer, and he immediately appointed him Prime Minister. From that day on Ajitsen and Sheelvati lived luxuriously in the royal compound, and with his clever wife to advise him. Ajitsen became a famous minister, renowned throughout the kingdom for his wisdom and wit.
The Love Message

In the ancient city of Ratnapur there lived a rich merchant named Dhansar. Although his wife Premavati was the mother of seven sons, she was unhappy most of the time. One day Dhansar asked his wife, "My beloved, why do you go around looking so unhappy? Tell me if anyone has dared to disobey your command! Or have I perhaps offended you unknowingly?"

"No, no," Premavati protested, "don't utter such words! Could the calm moon ever emit sparks of fire?"

Then what is the cause of your sadness?" her husband inquired.

In a faint voice, her head lowered in embarrassment, Premavati replied, "My love! I very much long for a daughter."

From that day on Dhansar began worshipping the family deity.

In the course of time the deity appeared in person and granted the good man a boon. Consequently a baby girl was born in the family, and with much rejoicing was named Sundari, the beautiful.
Sundari rapidly grew up to be a lovely young girl. Furthermore, she seriously applied herself to her studies. She quickly acquired mastery in grammar, logic, metrics, speech, poetry, drama, music, and painting.

Despite these serious pursuits Sundari was an impulsive and romantic girl. While still young she had heard about the virtuous life of the handsome king Vikram of Ujjayani and had immediately fallen in love with him. She then made up her mind that if she should ever marry, it would only be king Vikram and nobody else. If she could not have him she would sacrifice her life by throwing herself into fire.

Oblivious to his daughter’s dreams and plans, Dhansar was fixing up his daughter’s engagement to Nivanag, a merchant’s son. When Sundari heard of this she was horrified, but as on obedient daughter she raised no protest against her father’s wishes.

One day Sundari’s eldest brother, Vacansar, decided to go to Ujjayani on a business trip. As soon as Sundari saw him along she told him in a pleading voice, "Oh dear brother! I have a beautiful leather parrot. When you visit the royal court of offer presents to the king of Ujjayani, will you please give this parrot to him on my behalf?" Surprised, the brother nevertheless agreed to do so.

Vacansar set out on his journey. After finally reaching the great city, he made his way to the royal palace. Placing some gorgeous precious stones on a plate along with his sister’s leather parrot, he approached and offered his gifts to the king.

King Vikram was used to being presented precious jewels and gleaming gems from foreign travellers. But when he noticed the unusual leather parrot he felt happy and curious. Immediately he asked Vacansar about this parrot. Vacansar replied respectfully, "My sister Sundari has sent it to His Majesty as a gift of love."

The king was delighted, and accepted the parrot with kind words.

A wise fortune-teller happened to have witnessed this scene. As soon as Vacansar had left, he predicted to the king,
“Your majesty! This parrot is an indication of your great good luck. There is more to this bird than meets the eye.” He advised the king to tear open the strange gift, upon which he would find an even more precious offering.

Although the king was reluctant to destroy the pretty leather parrot, his curiosity was aroused by the fortune-teller’s words. After slight hesitation he had the parrot torn open. To his surprise there was a beautiful ring and a folded letter inside. The letter read as follows: “O best of the excellent Vikram! I only contemplate your virtues. I impatiently await the moment when my eyes may light upon your person. But my parents have already fixed my engagement with a merchant’s son, and on the twelfth day of the dark half of Vaishakh I shall have to get married to him. But O my lord! This will never come to pass. I have taken a solemn vow that no one else except you will ever touch my body, or else I will give up my life by jumping into the fire. Do whatever you think proper.”

After reading this amazing letter, the king’s heart was overwhelmed with both joy and sorrow at the same time. He thought of the young girl, consumed with her passion and yearning. She who had never even caught a glimpse of him was willing to give up her life if he didn’t save her! The king didn’t doubt the girl’s serious intentions for a moment; the fact that she had had the courage and imagination to address him as she did was proof to him of the sincerity of her feelings.

At once king Vikram made up his mind to undertake the sea voyage to Ratnapur. He invoked the ghost Agnivetāl to help him, but the ghost was unable to travel by sea and couldn’t offer his services. But the king did not give up. At nightfall he changed his clothes and set out for Ratnapur by the long land route, on foot.

He walked and walked until he reached a dense jungle. He felt terribly hungry. Far away in the woods he saw a dim light, and he walked towards it. He knocked on the door of a small hut. A thin old man appeared, and in simple words the king told him that he was very hungry and had a long way to go on urgent business. The old man brought some
kacharis (a fruit belonging to the melon family) for him to eat. Never in his life had anything tasted so good!

After eating the king asked the old man how he could best reach Ratnapur. The old man replied by pointing to a large banyan tree nearby, saying, "There you will find some fairies who will be glad to carry you to the city of Ratnapur by air." Overjoyed, King Vikram climbed up the tree. He held his breath and hid himself; in a short while the fairies assembled there, and within another moment they had carried the king to his destination.

In buoyant spirits, by his luck the king arrived at the city just at nightfall. He noticed that there was a big festival going on. Everywhere there were lights and decorations; not a dark spot was to be seen. A row of beautiful temples, all glittering with precious stones, made a beautiful sight. Musicians were singing songs and playing instruments and drama performances were going on in all the temples. Everywhere people were shouting and laughing joyously.

Vikram was getting more and more excited about seeing Sundari. The festive mood of the city increased his feeling of happy, eager expectation. But only after about an hour of wandering about the city with the crowds did Vikram think of inquiring about the cause of the celebrations.

"Ah," exclaimed the first stranger he asked. "You must be new to this town! We are just beginning to celebrate a glorious marriage between two great merchant families."

"And what is the girl's name?" asked Vikram, with sinking heart.

"She is Sundari, the beautiful and talented daughter of the merchant Dhansar," answered the proud inhabitant.

Upon hearing this, Vikram felt stricken by disappointment. Although he had never met the girl, he had become infected by the force of her passion and was determined to marry her. But how?

Just then the news was brought through the city that the king's favourite royal elephant named Rajavallabha had fallen seriously ill and was lying motionless. Physicians had been called to examine the animal, and they were unanimous in
agreeing that the elephant was suffering from wind in the stomach and would die unless he could be fed kachari mixed in buttermilk.

The question was, where could they find kacharis in the city, particularly now when the entire population had joined the festivities? Royal messengers were sent to search the city, but to no avail; not a single piece of the desired fruit could be found.

Then the king called their merchant Dhansar himself, and asked him to arrange for the fruit. Although in the midst of the preparations for his daughter’s marriage, Dhansar did all he could to acquire some kachari, but he too had no success.

At last, beating a drum, Dhansar had announced that whoever could bring him some kacharis would be given his heart’s desire.

As soon as Vikram heard this declaration he ran up and stopped the drummer. He had been waiting for just such a moment, and now fortune had come to his aid! He still had some kacharis with him left over from what the old hermit had given him. These he handed over directly to Dhansar, bowing respectfully. The fruit was duly mixed with buttermilk and fed to the ailing elephant. The poor animal could empty his bowels and was almost immediately cured.

Crowds of people broke into happy cheers. The elephant’s illness had almost ruined the wedding preparations, but now there were two reasons for rejoicing! Vikram determinedly approached the merchant Dhansar and asked him directly for his daughter Sundari as reward. The merchant was surprised and upset: such a thing was unheard of on a girl’s wedding night! He tried to protest, but the city leaders insisted that the stranger was entitled to Sundari according to the merchant’s own terms. After all, he had brought the kacharis and thus saved the king’s elephant.

As there was absolutely no alternative, Dhansar was obliged to give his beloved daughter to the stranger for the night.

King Vikram passed the night with Sundari, without revealing his identity. The next morning, before Sundari had awakened, Vikram had left the jewelled sleeping chamber
without attracting notice. With the help of fairies he returned to his capital.

When Sundari awoke and found herself alone, and realizing what had befallen her, she began lamenting bitterly. Who was the handsome stranger who had taken her into his arms the night before? Where had he gone? How could she explain her unabated passion for the image of King Vikram? What would become of her now?

Miserable and furious, Sundari decided to commit suicide. She tied a noose around her neck and fixed it firmly. Choked with tears, she mumbled, “May I be joined with King Vikram in the next life and live virtuously!”

But just when she was going to hang herself she noticed the following words, clearly written by hand on the border of her sari with the spit of betal leaf: “After receiving your letter King Vikram came here in the guise of a stranger, and has returned after marrying you.”

Overcome with joy, Sundari threw away the noose and wept happy tears. She stared at the fateful words written on her sari and was full of admiration and love for Vikram’s boldness. Now she belonged only to him, and the thought thrilled her beyond description.

Indeed, after a few days King Vikram arrived in the city with his full train of attendants and heroic ceremony, claiming Sundari as his own. Dhansar arranged the wedding ceremony with great pomp and show, and Sundari began her new life happily as queen of his great king of Ujjayani.
The Faked Death of Kamlata

In the city of Bhadrilpur, there was a rich man called Sunder. His wife was called Laxmi but as fate would have it, the couple was childless. This was a cause of great anxiety and sadness for the merchant because the absence of a child made them feel very empty.

In the same town there was a temple of goddess Ashoka. It was believed that anybody worshipping at this temple with a sincere heart would always be granted his wish. Sunder and his wife Laxmi gave up all their activities and devoted all their time at the feet of the goddess. In the course of time, a son was blessed to them. He was named Ashok after the goddess with whose generosity he had come into this world.

Ashok was brought up with great care, love and luxury. As Ashok stepped from childhood to youth, his father started getting anxious that like many other youths, he will also squander away his wealth over prostitutes and also waste his time and energy. Sunder decided to educate Ashok in this aspect also. He summoned Chanda, an old expert in the behaviour of prostitutes and handed over Ashok to her.

Chanda took Ashok home. She said, "Look my young man, prostitutes are young women dressed up in finery and
only look beautiful but their beauty is only skin deep! By the virtue of physical beauty they capture men's hearts and take away everything and give nothing in return. They are very fickle and greedy by nature. This is why respectable men should keep away from them. They are never to be trusted, do you think a dog can become pure just by bathing in the Holy Ganges."

After this she sent Ashok to Gauri, Lalita, Rambha and Madna. Chanda asked Ashok to study their characters.

First Ashok went to Gauri's house. He saw that Gauri was sitting with a man and as soon as she saw a known person Shiv, she sent out the other man through the outer door. She then took out all her jewellery, flowers and other ornaments and with tears in her eyes welcomed Shiv. Shiv asked Gauri about herself, she replied, "My beloved! How can I be ever alive in your absence! I had prayed to all the gods and made vows for your good-will! Only then have I had the good fortune to set eyes upon you! I am a fish without water when you are away from me!" Hearing such endearing loving words Shiv was very happy and he loaded her with fine clothes, jewellery flowers.

Observing all this Ashok thought, "What a cunning mind. She is the personification of treachery."

After this he turned to Lalita's palace. She had a regular visitor called Dutt. He had even deserted his wife Snehlata, in his fascination for Lalita. Lalita just had to express her wants and they were fulfilled. But Lalita didn't even think twice about him as soon as he turned his back. She had no qualms about going to other men, if and ever Dutt questioned her she would swear by her mother, father and convince him otherwise.

Ashok thought, "How strange are these prostitutes! They swear falsely to please others but are never happy. They control other people by their own wealth but can never be controlled by anyone!"

Deep in thought, he reached Rambha's house. She was in love with a man called Mugdha. She was telling him, "My dear, why don't you stay with me all your life, give my mother
all your wealth and then live in peace." Poor Mugdha got convinced and gave all his wealth to Rambha's mother. One day Rambha summoned the Kotwal (police) of the town and said to Mugdha, "My mother has already accepted my fees from this man, so it will be good if you go away for a day." Mugdha was convinced by Rambha and left. Try as he might, he could not step into the house again.

Ashok was very surprised, "How ungrateful are these prostitutes, they are so greedy that they even forget self-respect."

Last he went to Madna. A poor man called Bhadra was in love with her but she did not care for him because of his poor financial state. He was very upset and went to pray to goddess Ashoka and was blessed by a rare gem Chintamani (a fabulous gem supposed to yield all desires). Madna came to know of it and welcomed him with great fan-fare. As soon as she got a chance she stole the gem and threw Bhadra out without even a good-bye. Seeing this Ashok thought, "How strange are the prostitutes, they have no sense of pity, no fear of society or bad name, nor are they worried about sin! They are just interested in amassing wealth!"

Ashok stayed with Chanda for twelve whole years. After that she took him to his father Sunder and said, "Master now your son can never be cheated by a prostitute." Sunder was very pleased and presented her with one lakh dinars.

Years passed by and Ashok decided to go abroad to earn money and with goods worth ten lakhs left for Gajpur.

In those days there lived in Gajpur a beautiful lovely prostitute named Kamliata. She heard of Ashok's wealth and decided to make it her own by any means. She first sent a messenger to fetch Ashok but when he returned without Ashok, she dressed up in her best and went herself. She said, "Oh, handsome! ever since I have set eyes upon you I have been your captive, cupid's bow has hit me so hard that I cannot think of anything but you. Please grace my house with your presence, I am not hungry for wealth but just thirsty for your qualities." In this way, she kept on insisting so Ashok thought to himself that since she wasn't interested in money there was no harm in going to just visit her.
One day Ashok reached her house. Kamlata said, "Oh I cannot believe my luck. I never thought that you would ever bless my house, come, come." As days went by Ashok became a regular visitor to her house.

One day Kamlata’s friends got together and said to Kamlata, "It looks like your lover has been well trained in the art of prostitutes. We will have to resort to faked death since he cannot be controlled by our faked life."

One day Kamlata said to Ashok—"When you refused to come to my house in the beginning, I made a vow by praying to Gomukh Yaksha that if I got you I would wear clothes and jewellery given by you and offer prayers to him or I shall die in a funeral pyre. Beloved! I am so lucky that I have got you near my heart now, I would like fulfill my promise." Ashok did not react at all hearing this. Seeing this Kamlata said, "Oh, my lord! am I not your beloved and is your wealth more precious to you than me, in a situation like this it is better that I should die!"

Saying all this she got her pyre prepared of chandan sticks. The flames rose high and Kamlata entered the fire. Her maids started wailing loudly. After seeing all this Ashok was very sad. He thought, "she had died for me so she is not like the other ordinary prostitutes. I am so upset that I did not say anything even though I saw her entering the fire."

In this sad state of mind he reached Kamlata’s house, there was a man (prostitute dressed up), who said to him. "I can cure lepers, wake people up even after they have been poisoned, do you think I cannot raise the dead!

Ashok pleaded, "If this is so please bring back my beloved to me!"

The man said, "Oh, that is not difficult at all but you will have to spend a lot of wealth for that!" Ashok agreed.

A big camp was set up and preparations were made at fever pitch. On the seventh day Kamlata was seen approaching the camp. Ashok’s joy knew no bounds. After this Ashok started giving Kamlata whatever she demanded, soon he ran out of all his wealth and Kamlata threw him out of her house.

Ashok’s state was like a monkey who was suddenly dropped from a big tree. He thought, "I am so foolish, how could I
ever believe that a dead body can come alive, I am sure she had used the method of faked death to deceive me. My father spent so much of wealth on educating me but I have remained a fool!" He was too ashamed to return home and continued living in Gajpur.

During this period a traveller reached Ashok’s father Sunder’s house and narrated the whole episode. Sunder immediately sent for Chanda and said, “your importing of education had been inadequate! so my son has lost all his wealth.” Chanda swore by her profession and asked Sunder to accompany her to Gajpur and see the fun.

They reached Gajpur and met Ashok. One day Chanda dressed up as a Dom (a man of low caste living by singing and music) women and accompanied by Sunder reached Kamlata’s house. Kamlata heard her music with great attention and soon even Ashok reached there. As soon as Chanda saw Ashok, she embraced him and started wailing loudly. She asked Ashok, “son where is all your wealth? Why are you in such a bad state?”

Ashok pointed to Kamlata and said, “This wicked woman has robbed all my wealth.”

Kamlata got very scared. She thought, “I have done wrong! In my greed for wealth, I have fallen in love with a Dom. She requested with folded hands that they should not tell anyone. Chanda replied, “Only if you return all his wealth!”

Ashok got all his wealth back and returned home to his father.
In Ratnapur ruled Ratnashekhhar who had a chief minister named Matisagar. Once the king heard of the beauty of a princess named Ratnavati and fell in love with her beauty even before setting his eyes upon her. The chief minister tried to explain to the king the futility of this love which had no name and address, but the king was in no mood to listen to anybody. Eventually, the chief minister promised to find her out in seven months.

Matisagar set off in search of his king's lady love. On the way he was told by someone that in Singhaldweep in a town called Jaipur lived the beautiful Ratnavati. He reached Jaipur and dressed up as Jogini (female ascetic) and entered Ratnavati's palace. He was absolutely taken aback by the princess's beauty. After enquiring about the well-being of the Jogini, Ratnavati asked her from where she had come. Jogini replied, "In the body-like city rules a swan-like king, the city-guard is like the wind. In this city dwells a Jogi who meditates upon Yoga. In one group there are five persons, the sixth one is candala (a man of low caste), he does not leaves the place even though he is driven out, he has made a mess."
Ratnavati inquired about her own house. The Jogini meditated and replied, "In this town there is a temple of Cupid. Whoever is playing dice there and stops you from entering, will be your husband."

After a few days' stay, Matisagar left for Ratnapur. Several months had passed by and today was the last day of the time limit of seven months within which the king was to get Ratnavati. The king had made all preparations to enter the fire and end his life. Matisagar reached just in the nick of time. He related all the story to the king and Ratnashekhar left immediately for Singhaldweep. Upon reaching there, he sat in the temple of Cupid and started playing dice with his minister.

The princess together with her group of friends went to worship Cupid. Seeing the men sitting there, one of the maids said, "Listen our mistress has come to worship cupid and cannot see the face of any man, so please come out of the temple."

Matisagar replied, "My king Ratnashekhar has travelled a long distance and is playing dice here. He does not see the face of any woman so please ask your mistress to stay away."

Hearing this Ratnavati remembered the prophecy of the jogini and even her right eye started flickering and taking this also as a good omen, she very happily entered the temple. Seeing her enter, Matisagar covered the face of the king with a towel. Ratnavati asked as to why this was done and was told, "Our king does not see the face of women."

Ratnavati asked, "What great crime have the women committed?"

Minister replied, "Whatever is said is not enough, they swear and they tell lies and create so many complications and whereas their brain is concerned, it is not even the size of a pea."

Ratnavati replied, "But man drunk with power, youth, wealth and superiority commits sin after sin. He forgets even his parents, friends, mother and even elders are considered nothing."

Minister—"What harsh words are not found in religious books or known to gods those words originate from the mouth of women."
Ratnavati—"But men never consider evil or good, they spoil the good virtuous women and never adopt good ways of living and get irritated when the name of religious men is mentioned."

Minister—"Women are always scheming and get things done from others. They are bound by the chains of traditions and never budge from their thinking and in bad company even leave their religion."

Ratnavati—"Men on the other hand utter harsh words, they cannot understand the base of religion, they blame women of noble family and thus lose their human life and are condemned to hell."

The king was listening to all this discourse and decided to put an end to this before it got out of hand and welcomed the princess inside the temple where he worshipped her and took off to his country. They were welcomed with great pomp and gaiety.
Narmadasundri

On the banks of River Narmada was a town called Narmadpur. In this town lived a merchant called Maheshwardutt who had a wife called Narmadasundari. One day the merchant decided to go abroad on a business trip and earn some money. He made all the necessary preparations and went to meet his wife before departing. He told her to look after his parents well in his absence.

Narmadasundri said, "My lord, how can I live without you! Even the holy scriptures say—

husband is the spirit of woman, he is her life,
without a husband she has to suffer miserably."

Maheshwardutt described the hardships of the sea—voyage but to no avail. Narmadasundari was not ready to listen to one word and wanted to accompany him. Eventually Maheshwardutt agreed to take her along. They all left for Yavandweep with the other merchants. The sea was very rough and there were many occasions when the question of life and death arose but fortunately they reached their destinations without any mishap.
One midnight in the silence of the dark night came the melodious voice of a young man. Narmadasundri liked the song very much and was very fascinated by the young singer.

Maheshwardutt thought that Narmadasundari was falling in love with the young man. It is said.

"Just like flies leave sandalwood and sit on impure things, in the same way also women get fascinated by men of all kinds. They are shy of handsome men, are scared of the educated and learned and love disfigured men."

Maheshwardutt thought, "First she pretended to be love torn in my absence and now she is trying to fool me." It is rightly said that "the depth of an ocean can be measured, a mountain can be weighed but women with their tricky ways can never be measured."

On the way they came across a lovely island and Maheshwardutt left Narmadasundari sleeping under a tree. When she woke up she was very scared. First she thought that he must be somewhere around but when he did not return, she fell into a faint. When she came into her senses, she started wailing aloud.

What a fate! Just at that time Narmadasundri’s uncle came to this island and as fate would have it, met Narmadasundri who was greatly relieved by seeing a familiar face.

The whole convoy went ahead and reached the land Barbaricon. In the city of Barbar ruled Indrasen. He was famous and well-known for his kind treatment of foreign merchants.

In this city was an area where all the prostitutes lived. Here lived Harini, mistress of seven hundred prostitutes and an expert in her field. All the other females would hand over their earnings to her and she would give one-fourth to the king.

When Harini heard of the arrival of Veerdas, uncle of Narmadasundri from Hindustan, she sent her servants with a rich gift of clothes. They reached the merchant and requested him to accept the hospitality of their mistress but he merely paid them eight hundred coins and returned them.

Harini was very annoyed and said, "This merchant is bent upon insulting me. What will people think of me! I invite him and he refuses to come. Go and return his money!"
The maids went to Veerdas and said, "Lord! Our mistress does not need money, all she wants is that you sanctify her house by your presence." But Veerdas did not relent.

This time Harini sent her smartest maid to Veerdas. While she was talking to him, she noticed someone's active eyes. The maid looked at the owner of the eyes and was stunned by her beauty! After much persuasion, Veerdas agreed to go to Harini's house.

When Veerdas reached Harini's house, he was greeted with great respect and a lot of honour and care was showered upon him. They smeared sandalwood paste and gave him a bath and put on expensive and beautiful clothes and put a black dot to keep away the black eye. After this Harini started entertaining him with words.

The maid told Harini about the beautiful woman she saw in Veerdas's apartment. Harini thought of a plan. Harini captured his attention by her talk and soon suggested a game of dice. To keep her happy, Veerdas agreed to the game. The game began. During this period Harini looked very carefully at Veerdas's ring and told her maid to run to the jeweller and get an identical one made.

The maid took the ring and ran to Narmadasundari and said, "your husband has called for you. He is suddenly feeling sick. Look he has sent his ring for you." Narmada without thinking, got dressed quickly. The maid took her in through a back door and locked her up in a dungeon.

Narmada at once understood the situation. She fainted. When she came to her senses she cried, "Is there no king in this place that you have cheated me."

When Veerdas reached home, he looked around for Narmada but could not find her anywhere and no one could tell him of her whereabouts. He even told the king who had an announcement made but to no avail. The award was gold equivalent to her weight! But all this failed to produce any results.

Veerdas was very upset but his fellow-merchants advised him to return home and then come back quietly and then look for her. Finally they all sailed home.
Narmada was in a bad state. She spent the whole night crying. The next day Harini said, "Look your lover has not paid my fees, that is why he has left you here and gone. When he pays up, I will leave you. You know that merchants love money above their father, mother, wife and son. It hurts them to pay money so if he really loves you, he will pay up and I will release you.

Narmada said, "If this is the case, you leave me... I will get you however much you want." Narmada swore to this by raising her left hand.

But Harini said, "I do not believe your promise. If you want to eat then eat, otherwise it does not bother me one bit."

Narmada did not eat. For three days she refused food. Finally, on the fourth day she ate a little.

When Harini heard of the departure of the merchants, she was very happy. She teased Narmada and said, "See your merchants has abandoned you! Shame on a person who values money more than his lover! But you do not worry! You do what I want and you will be happy and well looked after."

Narmada said, "Now you are my everything." Harini brought her into the house out of the dungeon.

One day Harini said, "You know how difficult it is to be born as a human being. Youth is also equally rare and only prostitutes can fully enjoy youth. Just like you taste different kind of food, just like that association with different men is enjoyable. Men become your slaves for your beauty. They will do what you want. Just remember one thing. All the other prostitutes give me half their earnings but from you I will take only one fourth."

Narmada was stunned when she heard this. "This behaviour does suit you people only. I am just not ready for all this! If you want I will do whatever else you want."

Harini replied, "You do not know that it is the biggest religious virtue to give your body to men. The money you earn and donate to a religious work will give you much benevolence."

Narmada said, "Auntie, if you want I will weave yarn or cook different foodstuffs but I am not ready to do this."
Harini was very annoyed, “If you do not listen to me, I will force you to do what I want.”

After saying this, Harini got Narmada beaten up by a young passionate man with thin sticks. For three continuous days, he harrassed her.

There was Karini, a prostitute who felt very sad for Narmada. She said, “Sister, why don’t you listen and do what Harini says. Others will feel better, your pain will be over and Harini will be happy.” But under no circumstances was Narmada ready to do what she wanted.

Karini requested Harini, “O mistress, have you decided to take away Narmada’s life?”

Harini, “She is my life long enemy! because her uncle Veerdas refused to come to my house.”

Karini said “What are you saying mistress? Veerdas is her uncle. If even after three months of torture, she has not relented she will not change. Why do you want to take the sin of her murder on your head? It is my advice that you put her to domestic work.”

Narmada started looking after the kitchen. Once Harini had a terrible stomach-ache. Many doctors were called but she could not recover and she finally succumbed to her illness. All the elders of the city nominated Narmadasundari as the city Ganika.

Once a merry young man went to meet Narmada but was told that she did not see the face of any man. He got very annoyed and went to the king. “My lord, Narmadasundari is the most beautiful woman of your country. If this beauty does not enter your chambers, then what is the use of your good looks, youth and rule!”

The king sent for her at once. Upon receiving the king’s summons, Narmada dressed up in her finery and left for the royal palace. On the way she saw a well and felt thirsty. The guard let her get off the palanquin. But as soon as she reached the well, she slipped and fell down. She shouted and said, “Are these the jewels the king has sent for me?” and she smeared all the muck and mud on herself.

The guard, “Oh mistress, what is this?” He went forward
to pick her up. Narmada said, "What! you want to make the king's queen your queen?" and she threw mud on his face.

Everybody thought she had become possessed and ran off from her. The guard went to the king and narrated the whole episode. The king called for doctors but they only said that the cure is to fulfil all her desires. Upon this, the king announced that even if she committed a crime she was not to be punished and whoever did so will be fined.

Narmada began begging in the streets. She would laugh and cry, smear ash and wear torn clothes and declare, "People think I am mad but I am not, I just like to sing and beg."

After a few days, Veerdas's man Jindas came to sell Ghee (purified butter) and kept it at the crossroads near the palace. Narmada came and threw stones at the earthern pots and broke all of them. Jindas started crying. A huge crowd collected. People said, "Our king is so stupid, he does not throw out this ghost from the city and now because of her behaviour no foreign merchants will come to trade with us."

When the king heard of this, he realised the truth in the people's thinking. Jindas reached the royal court, "My lord, we undertake so much danger to come to sell our products in your country and now we have to return empty handed. How will we show our faces to the creditors?"

The king said, "The woman responsible for all this is mad, What can we do? We cannot pay you for the ghee but yes, if you want to carry the woman off, I do not mind."

Jindas said, "Only if you do not tax my product."

Jindas carried off the shouting, screaming Narmada to his land.
In the city of Gajpur lived a rich merchant called Yashdhawal and his wife Yashdevi. One day Yashdevi said to her husband, "My lord! having so much wealth has no meaning if we do not have a child playing in our courtyard. My life has no meaning."

Seeing his wife's sad state, they both decided to ask the local deity for a child. They both prayed to her with all their hearts and soon the deity was very happy as their wish was granted. Soon a son was born to them and was named Dharamdutt. The child was brought up with great care and taught all the arts. As he entered his youth, he was married.

One day Dharamdutt requested his father, "Father, a person who lives on his ancestral wealth should be considered the lord of shamelessness and one who creates wealth out of the strength of his arms is only worthy of setting foot on this earth. So, please let me be worthy of self-esteem and fulfill my heart's desire."

Yashdhawal said, "My son, the moment you set foot out of the house, the path is full of stones and you have to bear
many problems and cross many hurdles so leave this thought of going abroad.”

Dharamdutt—“It is my desire that I enjoy only the wealth created by the sweat of my brow so please do not stop me and let me go.”

Yashdhawal realised his son’s great desire and relented saying, “Son, if your desire is so great, I will not stop you but remember that in a foreign land in order to get your work done you have to act dumb sometimes and smart sometimes, on occasions you have to keep quiet or speak loudly, at times you have to act poor and sometimes offer money, act scared or brave as the need be and also show anger or drink your humiliation as the occasion demands. Always remember this.”

Dharamdutt accepted his father’s advice and after a few days together with his wife, left for the far off lands.

Dharamdutt made his purchases on the way and continued ahead. On the way he met a Brahmin called Koot. Both of them decided to travel together to Persia. On the way Dharamdutt said to the Brahmin—“Panditji! Tell me an interesting tale so the night passes quickly.”

Koot replied, “I will tell you something of my experience but you will have to pay me five hundred rupees.”

Dharmadutt thought, “God knows what he wants to tell me that he wants so much money. I must hear what he has to say! Money can always be earned again.”

Thinking this he handed over five hundred rupees to the Brahmin. The Brahmin said, “Listen! never keep the company of a low man!”

Dharamdutt laughed. “Is that all! For this you have asked for so much money. What a waste!”

Brahmin, “Dear sir, you have not heard my other experiences but for that you will have to pay one thousand rupees.”

Dharamdutt thought again. “I must hear this also, may be I could utilise it sometimes.”

He handed over the money to the Brahmin, who said, “Never believe in women and if you keep both these things in mind, you will never have any problems.”
In this way, the two went ahead and when they reached Persia Dharamdutt took the address of the Brahmin in case he ever needed him.

Just before departure the Brahmin gave Dharamdutta handful of jowar and said it would grow instantly upon sowing.

Dharamdutta reached the city and presented himself in the Royal Court of the king with a plate full of gems and jewels. The king was happy with the gift and allowed Dharamdutta not to pay taxes. Dharamdutt settled down and earned a lot of money.

Near Dharamdutt’s house, there lived a man called Gangdutta who slowly became friend, with him. Many time during his absence Gangdutta would come and flirt with Dharamdutt’s wife. She would also treat him with food and drinks. Slowly but steadily love grew between the two of them. Love grew to such an extent that Gangdutta grew envious of Dharamdutt.

One day Dharamdutt appeared in the royal court. Gangdutta was also sitting there. The king said to Dharamdutt, “Sethji, you have travelled far and wide, have you never seen a wonder?”

Dharamdutt said, “My lord, you do not have to travel far and wide to see a wonder, I am in the possession of jowar which grows instantly upon sowing!”

Hearing this Gangdutt butted in, “My lord! All this is not true, Dharamdutt thinks that because he has money he can say what he wants. If he can prove himself, then I am ready to part with all my wealth and if he is proved wrong, then I will take anything from his house upon which I can lay my hands!”

The king agreed upon the bet. Gangdutt went hurriedly to Dharamdutt’s house and related everything to his wife. She said, “Yes, we have that jowar but since you have bet all your property, it is only right that you should have them also.” She handed over the jowar to Gangdutt. She also said, “When you win you come over and pick me up with both your hands and take me away and then we will live happily ever after.”

The next day Dharamdutt reached the court with the changed jowar and sowed them. But they just lay inert.
Dharamdutt was very ashamed. He began thinking then the Brahmin had cheated him.

Gangdutt was very happy and said, "Now I will not leave anything that comes into my hands!"

Dharamdutt was very downcast and went to the Brahmin's house. The Brahmin said, "Look you have forgotten both my advices to you. I told you not to befriend low person and not to trust women. Your neighbour is low and your wife characterless. She has handed over the real jowar to him."

Dharamdutt said, "Don't talk like this, my wife loves me." The Brahmin, "You do not understand women, come I will show you."

Dharamdutt took the king and the Brahmin and went to his house.

The Brahmin said, "Look your wife is on the loft, remove the ladder at once!" He then asked Gangdutt to come and take away what he could lay his hands upon.

The Brahmin started looking for his beloved but could not find her. Soon he heard her cough from the loft. He ran towards the ladder and started towards the loft. The Brahmin stopped him saying, "Look Gangdutt, you have laid both your hands on the ladder, now it is all yours, take it away!"

Gangdutt did not know where to look. The king did not understand his foolishness and asked, "Why did you touch the ladder when there is so much of stuff around." The Brahmin explained all and Gangdutt was exiled.

The Brahmin said to Dharamdutt, "It is a pity that even after losing fifteen hundred rupees, you did not learn anything."
Devotion of Kirtisena

Dhanpolit, a merchant, lived in Patliputra with his family. He had a daughter named Kirtisena, who besides being the apple of her father’s eyes was known for her extravagant beauty and grace.

Kirtisena, when she came of age, was married to an extremely humble, gracious gentleman called Devsen. Unfortunately, his mother was an extremely wicked and hard woman. She harassed her daughter-in-law as much as she could. But Kirtisena bore everything patiently. She never mentioned even a word to her husband.

After a few days, Devsen decided to go abroad for business. Kirtisena thought, “If in the presence of my husband my mother-in-law harassed me so much, then in his absence she will definitely kill me.” She decided to tell her husband everything. Devsen heard everything without any reaction.

On the day he was leaving for his business trip he touched his mother’s feet and said, “Mother, I am leaving and now Kirtisena is your responsibility. Keep her with love, do not treat her badly, she comes from a good family!”
As soon as Devsen’s mother heard this, she got very angry and said, “You ask her if I have done anything or said anything! She is longing to separate us and divide the house. As far as I am concerned both of you are same for me.”

Devsen could not say anything and Kirtisena was so sacred she just smiled and moved away. The next day Devsen left for his trip.

After Devsen left his mother slowly threw out all the servants of the house. One day she sent her old maid to Kirtisena, “Mistress, your mother-in-law wants you inside for some urgent work.”

Kirtisena though doubtful could not say anything. As soon as she reached her mother-in-law, she tore her clothes and said, “Sinner, you want to separate my son from me.” Saying this she pushed Kirtisena into the room and locked it. Once a day she would throw half a mud-bowl of rice into the room from far.

The mother-in-law thought, “It is good, she will die and I will tell everybody that she has run off with somebody.”

Kirtisena wondered, “My husband is rich, I come from a good family, married and I have a good character even then my mother-in-law ill-treats me! I just cannot understand what I should do and why this is happening!”

Suddenly she saw a Khurpa (an instrument for weeding grass) lying. When she saw it, she thought the gods had smiled upon her. She dug a tunnel till it reached her room where she dressed up and early morning she left. Kirtisena thought, “In this state it is not right to go to my mother’s house, what will people say? She might not even believe me. It is best that I go to my husband.”

She dressed up as a royal man and acquired some wealth after selling off her jewels. She spent the night at a merchant’s house. The next day she came to know that a merchant called Samudrasen was leaving for Vallabhi with his merchandise. She decided to go with him.

On the way they had to pass a dense jungle. They heard the cry of jackals and thought they were being attacked by robbers. They all got ready to defend themselves. When Kirtisesena heard this she thought, “What a fate! First it was my
mother-in-law who was after my life and now it is these robbers. If they succeed in killing me, my mother-in-law will definitely tell everybody that I ran off with my lover!"

Soon she found a hollow tree trunk and hid herself hoping that she would be saved and re-united with her husband. The robbers came over like dark monsoon clouds and covered everyone and there was a fierce fight. The robbers killed everybody and took away the loot. After spending the whole night, she came out of her hiding place in the morning and started again. On the way she met with a holy woman who told her to have patience and gave her water to drink. As night fell, she again took refuge in a tree trunk hollow. She put a wood across to make a door.

During the night, she peeped through a hole and saw a demoness talking to her children—"See, again there is no food. I have prayed to Bhairav and he has told me to go to Vasuduttapur where there is a rich king called Vasudutt. He is the one who looks after this jungle and levies tax on merchants and saves them from robbers. Once he went for hunting and slept in the jungle and a earbug went into his ear. It went into the king's head and laid eggs and gave babies. As a result of this, the king fell ill. He is just a skeleton now. He is lying on his death bed. Bhairav has promised me that we will get the king on his death. We can spend six months on that. But all that is long off. Now what shall I give you?"

One of the children asked, "Mother, how can the king be cured?"

The demoness, "First they must massage the king's head with pure ghee and then make him sleep in the hot afternoon sun. Then they should put a bamboo straw on his ear and the other end on the top of a water-filled vessel where there should be an empty cup. The bugs will be thirsty due to the heat and will come out of the ear, in search of cool atmosphere, through the straw and fall into the vessel. The king will be cured."

Kirtisena heard all this and prayed, "God, save me from this peril. I will go and cure the king. My husband is said to have gone through this route and will definitely return."

As soon as dawn broke, Kirtisena came out of her hiding
place and started for Vasuduttapur. She met a cowherd and they both travelled together.

Upon reaching Vasuduttapur, she dressed up as a man and reached the royal palace. When the gate-keeper heard that he was a unique healer, he took her at once to the king.

The healer examined the king. The king promised, “If you heal me, I will give you half my kingdom.”

The treatment was started. First the massage was done and then the king was told to sleep in the sun. When the king got up after his afternoon sleep in the sun, he claimed to be already feeling better. The next day with the help of the bamboo straw, the earbug was taken out. After this with the help of a nutritious diet, the king was hail and hearty again.

The healer was honoured and there was joy everywhere. The king gave several villages, elephants, horses and silver-gold to Kirtisena.

After a few days, Kirtisena heard that her husband had returned from Vallabhi. Her joy knew no bounds.

Seeing her husband after such a long period, her eyes just welled up with tears and she fell at his feet. It did not take long for Devesen to recognise his beloved through her disguise. His heart melted as he saw her beautiful face.

When the king heard the whole story, he declared, “The devotion that my life-giving sister has shown has proved even stronger than Sita’s devotion to Ram.”
The Depth of Kumudika’s Heart

VikramSingh ruled the city of Pratisthan along with his wife Shashilekha. Once he was attacked by neighbouring king. VikramSingh tried his level best to avoid actual conflict but to no effect. Eventually he had to wage war. Both the sides got ready for war and the king rode on an elephant and left for war. His army was outnumbered so they began retreating. The ministers advised the king to stop the war.

The king and the ministers disguised themselves and reached the city of Ujjaini. In this city lived a prostitute called Kumudika. The king and the ministers both entered her house. Looking at VikramSingh, Kumudika at once realised that he must belong to some royal family. She welcomed both of them with open arms and put all her elephants, horses and treasury at their disposal.

VikramSingh and his minister started living in Kumudika’s house and fully utilised her wealth. Kumudika also showered all her love upon the king. VikramSingh was very impressed and mentioned this to his minister. Said the minister—“Never trust a prostitute, their love is never genuine, I am sure there is something behind her show of love.”
But the king said, "This is not always true, I am sure she will even give up her life for me."

The minister replied, "Let the occasion arise, we will see who is correct."

Vikramsingh decided to test Kumudika. [He lessened his intake of food, everyone started feeling that the king's days were numbered. One day it really looked as if the king were dead. The people put him in a carriage and took him to a crematorium. When Kumudika heard of all this she was very upset and made preparation to sit on the funeral pyre. People tried to console her but she was bent to go on and sat on the pyre with Vikramsingh's head on her lap. Just as the pyre was lit, the king woke up with a loud yawn. Seeing this the crowd gathered around, gave a loud cheer. Kumudika returned home with great fan-fare.

The king said to the minister, "Did you see Kumudika's love, she sat on my pyre without a thought." The minister said, "There must be some secret behind this."

After a few days the minister said to the king, "We must disclose our true identity so that we can take our army and reoccupy our land." Spies were sent to the city of Pratishthan to find out the situation there. The spy returned and said, "My lord, "The enemy created havoc in the whole country, the people are very unhappy, even the queen has committed johar by entering the pyre." Vikramsingh was very sad to hear of the death of his queen, Shashilekha.

Kumudika consoled the king, "My lord! all my wealth is yours, you consolidate your army and recapture your city."

The king gathered his army and defeated the enemy and regained his kingdom. Kumudika started living with Vikramsingh. One day he said, "I am very happy with your true love, tell me what do you want?"

Kumudika, "My lord, for many days one thing has been sticking in my heart like a thorn and I have never mentioned it to you."

The king, "What is it?"
Kumudika said, "In the city of Ujjaini, there is a Brahmin called Shreedhar. He is my lover. For an ordinary crime the king has imprisoned him. Please get him released."

The king got Shreedhar released.

VikramSingh thought, "How does one reach the depth of prostitute's heart?"
Tales of Vasudeva

PART ONE

(The hero Vasudeva has recently been married to the beautiful Somasiri, and has spent several happy seasons with her in the royal palace of her parents. Vasudeva is the narrator.)

One evening, exhausted by sexual pleasures with my lovely bride Somasiri, I fell into a deep sleep. When I awoke it was still dark, but my beloved wife was not in the bed. I was immediately anxious about her, for she never left my side.

I got up and asked the maidservants if they knew where the mistress had gone, but they were only surprised to hear she had disappeared so late in the night. I began to think that Somasiri was angry at me for some unknown reason, and was hiding on purpose. Miserable and dejected, I somehow passed the night.

In the morning Somasiri's parents were informed. An extensive search was made all through the royal palace and the pleasure gardens, but Somasiri was nowhere to be found. The king suggested that his daughter had perhaps been
kidnapped by some divine being with magical powers. I had to agree with him, since I too suspected something of the sort. "Some stupid scoundrel must have carried her off," I said angrily, "who was covetous of her unmatched beauty and unaware of her fine character and high station."

Nevertheless I couldn't help continuing my search in the gardens and in the homes of Somasiri's girl friends, thinking that perhaps she was indeed playing a joke and simply not answering my anxious calls.

The whole day I still found no trace of her, and with heavy heart I visited our favourite spots; a romantic arbor, a garden house with latticed windows, and a plaintain bower where we had dallied together on warm spring days. Tears streamed down my face as I roamed about these memorable places.

The maidservants caught sight of me in this state and tried their best to reassure and comfort me. But I was too miserable to respond to their well-meant efforts. I could not eat or drink, and the king and his family also refused to take any food, so that the royal palace soon took on the aspect of dreary mourning.

Somehow I lived through two bitterly unhappy days and nights. On the third day I was sitting in the ashoka garden, dreaming of my beloved and hopelessly searching for ways I could possibly find her again. Suddenly, to my great astonishment, I caught sight of Somasiri herself standing in the garden quite near to me! I rushed up to her, overcome with joy, and tried to embrace her. But she just smiled calmly and held me back. "Everything is all right," she assured me. "I was taken away by a yaksha whom I had propitiated before our marriage I had promised him that if I was united with you I would offer him a drink from my own hands. But after our marriage I never fulfilled this promised vow, and so he secretly took me off to Kubera’s court for justice. I was allowed to return only with the strict avowal of fulfilling the old vow. To do so we must perform all the wedding rites with all due ceremony and detail."

I agreed to everything without question. The king and queen also received their daughter with tears of joy, and preparations for the nuptial ceremonies were immediately begun.
Very soon we were circling the sacred fire and the marriage rites were completed with all the necessary observance. We returned to the palace and entered the flower-bedecked sleeping chamber. There Somasiri worshipped the yaksha deity with fragrant white flowers and sweets, and fulfilled her vow by offering the deity a drink. The night approached rapidly, full of romantic delights. I took Somasiri in my arms, and in my passion it seemed as if she were a virgin-bride once again.

Intoxicated with love and happiness, a few blissful days passed. Then one night I happened to wake up long before dawn. Tenderly I turned to look at the face of Somasiri sleeping beside me, but to my astonishment I discovered a totally different woman slumbering peacefully in my bed! Slowly I sat up and studied her face. I considered whether a goddess or goblin had bewitched my wife and was now waiting to deceive me, but since the lady looked so calm and virtuous, I discarded the idea. Then I thought perhaps it was a neglected young lady of the harem who somehow managed to slight my beloved and thrust herself here beside me.

In anger I wanted to roughly wake the woman and demand who she was, but a second glance at the gentle sleeping face held me back. She was startlingly beautiful. Her glossy black hair was strewn with flowers, her long eyes fringed with thick curved lashes, and she had a smooth curved nose and lovely soft lips, as fresh as a bimba fruit. Without disturbing her sleep, I admired the rest of her full young form and examined her feet, which were as tender as the lotus and covered with auspicious marks.

Such a woman, I realized, must be a noble lady of character. I was certain that she must be some princess who had been brought here unknowingly; since a woman of such unmarred beauty could not possibly be a wicked imposter. At this point in my thoughts the young woman woke up and cried out in the voice of Somasiri, "Oh noble one, why are you staring at me so strangely?"

Then she started, and suddenly jumped up off the bed. She took a water pitcher and poured the contents over her body. I saw that the water didn't leave a single drop on her, nor could I see where the water had gone. The strange woman
then folded her hands and solemnly gazed up into my face. I stood there, dumbfounded, for I didn’t know what sort of being I was confronting. “Listen to me!” She demanded, and I obeyed.

In a quiet voice she said, “In the southern region of Vaitadhya in the city of Suvarnabha there rules an excellent vidyadhara king by the name of Cittavega, along with his good queen Angaravati. They have a strong son named Manasavega and a daughter named Vegavati, I am that daughter.”

“But how is it—what about Somasiri?” I interrupted.

“I will explain everything,” Vegavati replied, “Know that your beloved Somasiri: spends her days remembering your virtues!”

I was silent, so she continued.

Vegavati’s Story

My father the king, indifferent to worldly pleasures, handed his inherited wealth and power to his son Manasavega, giving a part of the kingdom over to me. He also instructed the family elders as follows: “My daughter Vegavati should be brought up well, and if her brother refuses to give her the magical spells she deserves, then she should be brought to me.” Then he went off to lead an ascetic life in a faraway hermitage.

I was brought up as instructed, but my brother would not let me have the magic spells. I insisted upon visiting my father, who bestowed the magic upon me himself. Soon afterwards my brother seized a beautiful earth-dwelling woman and kept her in his private pleasure garden. But Manasavega was afraid to touch her against her will, since it is long known that any vidyadhara who siezes another man’s wife by force can be deprived of his magic spells. Therefore my brother left Somasiri (for it was your wife he abducted) in peace until he could think up some plan to make her yield to his desires.

Soon he approached me and begged me to help him. “Oh Vegavati!” he explained, “Explain to this earth-dwelling woman that while she is here she should show her love to me!”

So I went to the woman, who was pining away like a trapped bird in my brother’s garden. I approached her and
said, “Oh noble lady! Don’t continue in this manner; you have been chosen and brought to the vidyadhara world the way a person is taken to heaven by his meritorious deeds. I am the king’s sister Vegavati; the man who yearns for you is my own brother. He is known throughout the whole vidyadhara world for his noble birth, expertise, and good looks. In the prime of his youth, he is already the object of praise and adoration. What is your earth-dwelling husband in comparison to him? Even if a woman belongs to a low caste she is held in high esteem by the world if she is chosen by a prominent person! And you, you are of noble birth and rare beauty, what do you have to worry about? Take my sisterly advice, enjoy the pleasures being offered to you here, accept my brother’s advances, and you will enjoy what is difficult for most ordinary humans to attain.”

Somasiri listened to me with bowed head, but when I had finished talking she looked me straight in the eye and replied in a firm, impassioned voice, “Oh Vegavati! I had heard from your brother’s maidservants that you were wise and good but what you say brings me the keenest disappointment. Perhaps you are only blinded by prejudice for your brother; I hope that is the only cause, otherwise I could have no faith or trust in you. Listen, when parents give their daughter a husband—be he handsome or ugly, virtuous or deceitful, wise or stupid—she must serve him with single-minded devotion, just as if he were a god. Only then can a woman attain a good name in this life and a good life in the next world. This is the duty of a respectable woman.” Somasiri paused, and then continued; “You praise Manasavega, but what you say is basically wrong. One who sticks to his royal duties and is truly born in a noble family would never kidnap a sleeping woman from her husband’s side. You tell me whether this should be called bravery or cowardice on his part! Had he first wakened my husband and then tried to kidnap me, he would not have gotten away alive.”

Again she paused, and her voice became warm and fervent as she said, “You have told me that your brother is handsome. But let me tell you that as there is no one brighter than the moon or more brilliant than the sun, so there is no human
being or heavenly god who could be called more beautiful than my own husband. No one is more virtuous or brave than he. Vasudeva can defend himself against impossible odds, he can control wild elephants in rut, and he is known throughout the land for his great wisdom. His family descends from royal lines, and he himself is the height of all that is noble and pure. Oh Vegavati! How could you suppose for a moment that I, the fortunate wife of such a man, could even think of another person as lover? Just as precious jewels are possessed by only a few countries, so it is rare that all the virtues are united in one man, but in my husband it is so. Don't try to tempt me the way a child is tempted by showing him an empty fist! You only aggravate me and disgrace yourself by uttering things unbecoming an Aryan."

I was thoroughly shamed by her words. "Oh noble lady!" I cried, "I am aware of popular conduct, and I know what my brother has done goes against our family traditions. It is not right that he kidnapped the wife of another man. Whatever harsh words I have spoken were said only in devotion to my brother, so please forgive me. I shall not utter them again."

We embraced and I stayed there with her, sharing her sorrow and anxiety. Then I said to her, "Don't lose hope, I am a vidyadhari and with my magic powers I can easily reach your parents' home. If I were to take you there yourself it would be considered direct defiance of Manasavega's will, but I can go there and try to bring Vasudeva back here to you."

Trembling with joy, Somasiri said softly, "Oh Vegavati! If you can fetch my husband here I shall be your slave forever! Go—I wish you a safe journey."

So in practically no time, with the aid of my magic arts, I managed to arrive here, where I quickly saw that you were in a most dangerous depressive state of mind. I thought that if I told you the truth, you would not believe me and might die from your excessive attachment to Somasiri. Further, I thought to myself: "Such an excellent person as Vasudeva cannot really belong to himself, or to her, or to me; fate must take its course!" It was then that I decided to assume the form of Somasiri myself. My love grew upon meeting you,
we celebrated a real first wedding night, and you were infatuated by my beauty, if you will excuse me for saying so. And that is the true story of how I came here.” (End of Vegavati’s Tale).

After Vegavati finished speaking, I took her hands and said to her, “Oh fair lady! You are not to be blamed for what you have done: you gave me back my life. If you hadn’t arrived when you did and shown her beautiful form to me, I wouldn’t have lived much longer.”

The rest of the night we passed telling each other the story of our lives. In the morning the maidservants caught sight of Vegavati in her own form, and were struck with wonder. They began talking among themselves, and then they went to the queen, to whom they reported: “There is some beautiful lady staying in the sleeping chamber, and she is not the lady Somasiri.”

Vegavati was then brought before the king and queen, and to them too she told her story just as she had told me. Rather than rebuke her the king announced, “Oh lovely child! This is your own house, you may stay here as long as you like. In you we shall be able to see our own daughter.”

And so it came about that Vegavati and I began to live together in blissful union as man and wife. Her wit and beauty continued to delight me, and my in-laws were delighted by her graciousness and nobility. Thus for some time there was nothing wanting in my enjoyments.

PART TWO

(After the events related in Part One Vasudeva is Kidnapped by Manasavega and after a victorious adventure in another country he is married to a lovely vidyadharı princess named Mayanavega. Their idyllic love is marred only by Vasudeva’s slip of the tongue one day when he calls his new bride “Vegavati.” Mayanavega is furious and goes off in anger.)

After a little while my gracious lady Mayanavega appeared again. But then a great confusion was heard in the palace. We heard someone shout that the palace was on fire, and
indeed in a few moments I saw a multitude of flames spreading rapidly with the help of a strong wind. Mayanavega grabbed me and flew rapidly off into the air.

Then I caught sight of Manasavega stretching his arms out towards me also as if trying to grab me, and I was dropped by Mayanavega, who lunged for Manasavega and began whirling him around in the air. I saw that he managed to escape, and then I felt myself falling through the air with a great whizzing sound. Luckily I landed on a large pile of straw and was unhurt by the fall.

I assumed I must be in some vidyadharma region new to me. Not far away I heard a man singing the praises of a king Jarasandha. I got down from the pile of straw and asked this man where I was and the name of the area’s ruler.

“This area is known as Magadha,” he replied, “You might have heard its extraordinary virtues mentioned in stories. The nearest city is called Rajagriha and is as beautiful as a paradise. Jarasandha, son of Bribhadratha, is our ruler, and his footstool glitters with the reflected rays of gems studding the crowns of feudal lords who bow down before him. Where do you come from that you are unaware of the country, the city, and our ruler?”

“That’s none of your business,” I answered. Then, realizing that I was not in some vidyadharma region after all, I thought it best to enter the city openly. So I washed my hands and feet in a pond and walked into the city, observing its splendour and fine houses. I walked straight to the prominent gambling house. There the city’s rich ministers, merchants, caravan leaders, priests, city guards, and officers were playing dice, surrounded by heaps of gems, silver, and gold. I approached them. They looked at me in amazement, then they welcomed me, asking to take a seat and play the game if I liked.

Since I had no money with me I staked my ring instead. Experts examined it and estimated its diamond as very valuable. The bets were made and I very rapidly gathered a fortune in gems and gold. Then I called the proprietor of the house over to me and announced, “Go and call the poor of the city, the
paupers and orphans. I want to distribute my money among them."

The declaration was made throughout the city and in no time a large crowd of unfortunates turned up. I distributed the money among them. The people were amazed and many remarked, "He cannot be a man. He must surely be a Yaksha who stays in the house of Kubera, someone has no regard for gold and gems and considers them heaps of grass!" And the people praised me saying, "This divine god will rule the earth!"

Suddenly I was surrounded by official palace guards. "Come," they told me, "the king has called for you." I went along with them, followed by a great crowd of admiring people. We disappeared into the magnificent palace, and all of a sudden the guards placed me in ropes and I was rapidly carried off to some unknown place. "Tell me what wrong I have committed to deserve such treatment!" I demanded of my captors. "Don't I even get a chance to plead in a court of law? What kind of a country is this anyway?"

The guards restrained me and one of them spoke. "Our King," he said, "was told just yesterday by the palace astrologer that the father of his enemy would come here today. The king asked how he could recognize him, and astrologer prophesied that this person would openly distribute money to the people after winning a great sum in gambling. Of course the king's people were placed in gambling houses. You gave away your winnings to the poor and fulfilled the astrologer's prophecy: this is your fault."

I was angry at myself for getting caught in a troublesome situation. If I had only been more careful and asked around the city before showing myself so openly, I would certainly have caught wind of this prophecy. I could have turned tables on the king and escaped all danger, but now I had fallen stupidly into a trap. However, my anger quickly vanished, for I soon realized that there was no reason to be sorry, since there is no way of escaping the consequences of previous karmas. If I were to be killed then it was my fate and the result of accumulated past actions.

Without protest I let myself be put into a leather bag, and
I felt myself being thrown into carriage and taken far out of the city. The guards then took me out of the carriage and I heard one of them remark, "The astrologer himself should be held responsible for this great impropriety—he is to blame for the death of such an excellent person as this one." They placed me on the steep ridge of a high mountain and gave the leather bag a push. "I am being carried by destiny!" I thought, and I saluted the liberated souls and saviours in my mind as the leather bag fell of the ridge.

To my surprise I had the distinct feeling that I was being carried through the air in my leather bag. Then I felt a slight thumb, and I knew I was on solid earth once again. I came out of the leather bag like a snake from its skin. There I noticed a pair of feet which I had seen before. I looked up, and was dumbfounded to see Vegavati!

She was crying. I went to her and embraced her, and she cried out, "Oh, noble one! Oh master of many women like me! Now I am yours, oh lord! Oh what violent karmas you must have gathered in your previous life that you have endured this suffering!"

I consoled her by saying, "Dearest one, don't sorrow. Monks have told me that I am going to achieve liberation in the near future. The words of the sages are to be honoured. I must have hurt somebody dreadfully in a previous life, hence I have come to this suffering. These are the fruits of karmas: happiness produces fear and in fear kindness arises. A wise man in a calamity should never feel sorry for himself. One who does not plunge in happiness and is not grieved by adversity is a real man; the others are useless."

Then I asked her, "How did you know me? How was it that we have been separated for such a long time, and how did you come here just at this point in my destiny?"

Vegavati wiped her tears and said, "Oh master! On that unlucky morning when I woke up and saw you gone from our bed I knew something terrible had happened to you. We searched all over for you, we were sick with anxiety. Then the queen came to me and remained me of my magic powers, urging me to use them to find out about you. I did so, and was able to report to the king and queen: 'The noble one is in
good health. He was carried away by my brother Manasavega. Fate has it that he has been taken up by the vidyadharas and married to the princess Mayanavega."

"I stayed with the king and queen for some time," Vegavati continued, "but I could hardly eat or sleep and I felt like a lonely cakravaka bird kept mateless in a tiny cage. After some time I could not stand it any longer, and I obtained their reluctant permission to go and search for you. Without difficulty I reached the city where you were living with Mayanavega. There I happened to overhear you call her my name, which annoyed her and brought me great joy. My noble lord remembered me, still thought of me! I felt bathed in happiness. Mayanavega went away angry, and just after that I saw how the wicked queen Shurpanakhi started a fire in the palace. She then assumed the form of Mayanavega and carried you off into the air under the pretense of saving you, but I knew she intended to kill you as revenge for your victory over the kingdom. I was deathly frightened and fled. That awful woman possessed for more magic arts than I. But the thought of losing you was even more terrible, and I stretched my arms out towards you. I made myself look like Manasavega with the aid of my magic. But Shurpanakhi was infuriated at the sight of me and let go of you to fight with me.

"I was frightened and I fled into a Jain temple for shelter, but before I could get there that wicked woman caught me and hit me. "Now try to protect your dear husband as much as you like!" she screamed, and with these words she destroyed my magic arts and flew off with a terrible noise.

"Although I was injured and had lost my magic, I immediately started to search for you. But it seemed hopeless: you had left no trace. I roamed about aimlessly, and was too miserable to eat or drink. When I was just about to give up hope I heard a voice in the sky say to me, 'Here is your lord, falling down from the ridge of a mountain, give up your sorrow!' Suddenly I saw the leather bag in front of me, and you emerged unhurt. Although I have lost my magic powers, destiny has brought us back together!"

After Vegavati had finished her tale we went together to a nearby hermitage situated at the confluence of five rivers. We
bathed and paid obesiance to the liberated ones. We received delicious fruits and fresh water from the hermits, who treated us like kinsmen and offered us shelter for the night.

The next morning we left the hermitage. The hermits watched us go, their eyes bright with amazement, for they assumed we were some heavenly couple who out of curiosity had assumed a human form for some time.

As we wandered we enjoyed the beauties of wild ponds and mountain peaks, green forests, and rushing rivers. To Vegavati I said, "This is a good life! We can go wherever we want, and pass our days without disturbance. I will always be happy with you by my side."

Vegavati replied, "If I am deprived of my magic arts by protecting your life, it is a joy for me. Custom has it that a wife should love her husband even more than her own life. As long as I am with you our past struggles are unimportant."

PART THREE

(This richly colourful chapter is a logical continuation of the characters and theme described in Part One and Part Two, although it is completely missing from the Vasudevahindi. The source is quite another work, but there is strong evidence that the entire tale belongs together. Again the hero Vasudeva is narrating. He has recently been betrothed to the next in his long series of wives, Piyangusundari, when the story begins.)

It was the time of spring, during the celebration of the great moonlight festival in honour of Indra, and I adorned my body with garlands and fine ornaments. Then I sported with my beloved wife Piyangusundari, and in the evening we happily fell asleep sated with sexual pleasures.

Suddenly I was awakened by strange maiden's voice crying out, "Oh, how sad!" Half asleep, I thought to myself: that sounds like the voice of some girl who is noble-minded and clever. Then I heard the sweet voice declare, "Oh, the love of the pure, nectar-like Somasiri is in vain, how can she hope to take him away from this Piyangusundari, who is a real demoness of a woman!"
Hearing this, I awoke fully, opening my eyes wide and noticing a lovely young woman in the distance, shining like a streak of lightening. I could see that her reddish lips resembled the bimba fruit, her beautiful face looked like the full moon celebrated at Indra’s festival, and her eyebrows arched like the bow of the God of love. I stared at her beauty fixedly, and felt I was losing my senses.

The maiden beckoned me with a delicate forefinger and said, “Oh Prince, come, and everything will be yours!”

I thought to myself, “This woman is inviting me at this hour, and moreover she is alone! If my spirited wife wakes up now and notices me leaving her, she will give me a good deal of trouble.” Since I was entwined in Piyangusundari’s silken garments, I was afraid that if I moved I would certainly wake her.

The maiden noticed my hesitation, but she told me to remove the garment and let Piyangusundari go on sleeping. I followed her instructions and was able to get up, following the maiden as if drawn by some strong fragrance, the way the cakravaka bird following its mate. She was so beautiful that I wondered if she was a heavenly nymph appearing before me. Looking at her soft arms which embraced her body, I thought for a moment how lucky I would be if I could enjoy her, a pleasure hard to obtain even by divine beings!

The young woman sat down in a room of the palace and faced me. There was a frown on her forehead and her face was delicately flushed. Somewhat angrily she addressed me: “Oh, the noble lady Samasiri is undone! She is no better off than a drunken soul who feels thirsty again the moment after having a drink. She deserves compassion, she who thinks of nothing her beloved being devoted to some other woman!”

When I heard the name Somasiri mentioned, my heart stood still. In a short while I recovered myself and asked her “O fair lady! Tell me where my beloved Samasiri is!”

The maiden’s beautiful forehead wrinkled into a frown at the word “beloved,” and with her eyebrows restlessly moving about she answered, “Listen, O Prince! In the southern region of Vaitadhyya there is a city named Suvannamanjari. There
rules a vidyadhara king named Pavanajava, who is accomplished in magic arts."

"I am not asking about Pavanajava, but about my beloved Somasiri!" I interrupted impatiently.

Angrily the fair lady tossed her head and said, "O you censurable one! How shameless you are to declare your love now to that poor woman! You cheat, isn't it enough that you have given your love to someone else? But enough! Listen was I born of Sammata, the queen of Pavanajava. No sooner was I born than the whole house shone with a radiance like lightning, and hence I was called Prabhavata (the Radiant one). An astrologer predicted that I would become the wife of Vasudeva, the father of Krishna. In course of time I grew up and was given possession of the magic arts.

In the neighbourhood of our country there is land called Asadha, with its capital at Suvannapuri. King Manasavega rules there. Vegavati, the king's sister, is a good friend of mine.

"Once I flew to the city of Suvannapuri to visit Vegavati. But when I got there, her attendants informed me that she had own Vasudeva as her husband and was staying in the city of Mahapura in the north. I was also told that the wife of an earth-dwelling prince had been abducted by King Manasavega, and this woman was being held against her will in the king's pleasure garden.

"After hearing all this, I myself went to the pleasure garden and caught sight of your one-time wife, the poor Somasiri. She looked like Sita imprisoned in the pleasure garden of Ravana! Her eyes were full of grief and wet with tears.

"Somasiri had come to know my name from Vegavati's attendants, so from a distance she called out to me, 'Come, O daughter Prabhavati!'

"I was annoyed to hear this common expression from her lips. Somasiri at once read my feelings, and in conciliatory tones said, 'O Prabhavati! Don't be angry with me. Just as you are a princess, so am I. Moreover I am the wife of a prominent person, and elder in age to you. Since you are aware of my sufferings, you are in position to console me!'"
“Hearing these words, I could not but help approaching Somasiri with compassion. She welcomed me and offered me a chair, and my heart was moved by her tenderness. Then she began telling about you, intermixing her narration with detailed descriptions of your many virtues. Although sorely afflicted with sorrow and the long separation from you, while speaking of you her face brightened like a lotus blossom in full bloom. In this way the whole day passed so quickly.

“After sunset I returned home. Soon after, on the day of the moonlight festival in honour of Indra, I adorned my body with jewellery and examined my beauty in the mirror. To myself I said, "Oh, what's the use of my life if this beauty and charm is not appreciated by the right person? With this thought in mind, I flew to Suvannapuri and once again approached Somasiri. I said to her, "My friend, today I want to do something for you. Tell me whatever you want!"

"Immediately Somasiri replied, 'Just tell me with the power of your magic art what my beloved is doing right now!'

"So I invoked my magic art and inquired after Somasiri’s husband. The deity replied, 'At the moment he is dallying with Piyangusundari and is careless about his wife.'

"Somasiri wept aloud when she heard this. After recovering herself, she said to me, 'O friend Prabhavati, can you make me live for the night?'

"Tell me what to do," I answered.

"Fetch the prince to me, if you care for my life", she said.

"And if he doesn’t want to come because he’s enjoying his own pleasures?" I asked.

"'Then let it be,' she answered. 'If upon hearing my name he does not immediately want to come to me, then I will not talk any more about him. And if he is willing to come, bring him to me after he has enjoyed the princess.'"

"So," Prabhavati concluded, "that is my tale. Now you know why I have come to you. Tell me whether you want to come back with me or not! What should I say to Somasiri?"

I replied without hesitation. "O fawn-eyed lady! I will go with you at once, take me to my beloved Somasiri!"
Prabhavati answered, "My mission is now fulfilled." Then she looked at me with her large amorous eyes and held her hand out to me.

Thinking that she was dallying, I said with some impatience "O fair lady! Take me at once to Somasiri!"

Prabhavati's eyes narrowed in annoyance, and she said to me, "Prince, are you still there?"

I looked around me, and to my surprise I caught sight of the royal palace far below us. I was astonished to see that we were already up in the air without my noticing. I thought to myself, "Even the touch of her hand is enough to bring me out of my senses!"

I travelled through the air, enjoying Prabhavati's delicate touch and the charming view of the city and its scenery. There was a delightful full moon and below I saw crowds of worshipful people engaged in their prayers. Then Prabhavati lightly embraced me, joined hands with me and carried me thrice around a celestial tree which was emitting a bright light like a burning lamp. Soon afterwards she pointed out an image of Rama and Sita in the forest. "O Prince, look how lovely they are!" she exclaimed. At another spot she pointed out Indra forcibly abducting a demon's daughter. Here she remarked "O Prince, can girls of noble family, blessed with beauty, youth and fortune, be abducted?"

I replied, "If there is passion, it is possible."

Still further Prabhavati showed me a woman who had performed auspicious rites and was propitiating the deity so that she might not be separated from her husband in the next birth. "That's a sign of real devotion," Prabhavati remarked.

On and on we went, enjoying the night of the full moon and watching throngs of young couples moving joyously below. Then Prabhavati pointed out a rasa dance being performed by cowherdessess. We watched a charming, richly ornamented cowherdess disappear into the thick forest. Soon a handsome cowherd appeared, wearing decorative ointment on his face and a wreath of flowers on his head. The two of them embraced each other and began enjoying sexual pleasures.

Prabhavati turned and looked at me, asking, "O Prince, do you know what they are doing?"
I replied, "O lady with jasmine-like teeth, don't you know yourself? Even the earthly sages who practise austerities yield to the sublime pleasures of happiness! And tonight there is such pleasant moonlight!"

"Yes," Prabhavati answered, adding, "But after all, they are forest dwellers."

Further on we saw some mighty elephants fighting. Here Prabhavati showed me a female monkey on the back of a magnificent elephant and said, "O Prince, see that excellent elephant being driven by that low-class monkey? In the same way there are men under the influence of ardent passion, who are controlled by low women!"

Hearing this, I said to myself, "This woman is comparing me with the elephant and Piyangusundari with that female monkey! She is just making fun of me."

A bit further Prabhavati showed me a beautiful lake with calm water and blossoming lotuses. She asked me to appreciate its charm and beauty. I said, "O fair lady! The tranquil waters are lovely, as pure as your heart; the two banks are like your beautiful buttocks, its deep pool like the cavity of your navel, the lovely trees growing on its banks like your delicate hands. The beautiful waves are like your virtues, the fragrant blue lotuses like your words, charming with loving birds like your breasts; moreover one can rest here happily, as with you."

Prabhavati approved of my words with a nod, and sighed deeply while looking at me. We waited there for some time, while Prabhavati gazed out over the lake. I knew that she was growing more and more excited. But again she just gave a long sigh and we left.

Prabhavati carried me quickly through the sky, which was glittering with the bright rays of the full moon. I observed the way she looked at me, her replies to my questions, her amorous absorption, her laugh, her biting of the lip, her sighing, and the whole range of her gestures—and I reflected, "Has this strange-hearted Prabhavati fallen in love with me? Why is she betraying such passionate gestures? Is she perhaps only being flirtatious?"
I pondered this question for a while. But it didn’t take me long to come to the following conclusion: undoubtedly she loved me. Why? The reasons were many: first of all, she told me about her noble birth and the astrologer’s prediction that she was going to become my wife. Then she took me around the celestial tree, which indicated a marriage with me. During our air-borne journey she showed me varied examples of passion and love—Indra abducting the demon’s daughter, the lady praying for the same husband in her next life, her arousal by the secret union of the cowherd couple, her scorn while pointing out the female monkey on the fine elephant. “All these episodes are enough to indicate her love,” I thought, “but furthermore, she woke me up with the words ‘Ah, how sad’ while I was sleeping with my beloved. And most of all, how can a young girl cling to the body of a man without any passionate feeling, and that while carrying him all alone in the night on a long journey! No, without a doubt she has fallen in love with me!”

Such was the procession of my thoughts. But I decided that nothing could be done about satisfying this passion while travelling through the air. In order to test Prabhavati’s love for me, I thought about asking her for some drinking water. “If by her magic power she manages to fetch some water here, then I shall take it she does not really love me. But if she takes me down to a lovely spot for water, then I will understand that she wants to accept me as her husband,” I concluded.

So I told Prabhavati, “O fair lady, I am feeling so thirsty! How I would like a drink of water!”

“You will get some,” was her immediate reply. She then pointed out to a pond below, surrounded by fine trees. In no time we had descended to its banks; Prabhavati skilfully filled a lotus leaf with water and made me drink. Although I really wasn’t thirsty, I drank the water with delight, since it was offered to me by her own hands. After drinking I praised the water for being cool and tasty, and then we sat on the bank of the pond for a while.

Soon Prabhavati went off and could not be seen. I started searching around for her. At last I found that she had entered a thickest of trees and was seated in the shade of a lovely
blooming Saptaparna tree. Its fragrant flowers made the tree look like a royal king decorated with garlands, and the nearby shady slab of rock appeared as if it were there only to invite us to sexual pleasures.

I approached Prabhavati slowly. She looked like the goddess of fortune seated on the spotless lotus, as beautiful as the sylvan deity descended in person. Enamoured of her charm, thinking of how to enjoy her, I stood still looking up at the bright autumnal moon in the clear sky. Seeing me standing there motionless, Prabhavati asked me, "O Prince what are you thinking of?"

"I am thinking of love," I replied.  
"Is there any reason why?"

"Yes," I said. There are two reasons for love: the moon is free from clouds, cool and pure with its bright rays, and the water is fragrant with lotuses. What better reason could there be? O lady with thighs like the soft trunk of a young elephant! This bank is beautiful, touched by the rays of the autumnal moon, lovely with fragrant flowers, giving delight to lovers and worthy of enjoying pleasures. If you have some desire, why not fulfil it here?"

Prabhavati smiled gently and replied, "At the moment I have no other desire than to carry out the mission of my friend."

"Do you know me?" I demanded.  
"Yes, you are Vasudeva, the moon in the sky of the Hari line."

"I did not ask that!"

"Then what are you asking?"

"Do you know that I am longing for one divine delicious taste of you?"

Hearing this, Prabhavati's lotus-like eyes bloomed and her face lit up like the lake, beautiful with moonlit lotuses. She replied, "O Prince, I have never heard such pleasing words in my life. Any young lady who even has pretended sexual enjoyment with you is lucky, and has fulfilled the object of her life—butf to be asked directly by you is certainly the deepest joy!"

"Enough of this fooling about," I said, "tell me honestly whether you love me or not!"
"I have never heard pleasant words as those contained in the end of your sentence," she replied.

"If that is so, then come, get on this bed of flowers and propitiate the god of love!"

"O Prince!" She cried. "You know I am a virgin, my parents are both living, and it is not proper for me to behave in this manner before we are married!"

"But then why did you just tell me how unpleasant it was to hear the words 'you don't love me'?" I demanded.

"Whatever I said was just a joke," Prabhavati said hastily.

"Do you really think all that nonsense was true? It was all fun; I don't love you."

To myself I thought, "Ah, women are so unpredictable and fickle! All the signs of passionate love were clearly visible on her, and now she has dropped them all in a single moment!"

I told her, "O lady of jasmine-like teeth! If it is true, then swear by your virtuous deeds that you don't love me."

"I swear that I do not love you," she answered.

"Swear by your magic art!"

"I swear by my magic art."

"Then swear by me that you don't love me!"

At this Prabhavati frowned and said angrily, "Does this high judge esteem the truth so much that he must impose such conditions? Or tell me who am I to you that I should swear to you!" And she turned her head aside scornfully.

But I read her mind and said lightly, "Swear by your beloved!"

Hearing this, Prabhavati turned away her face slightly like a lotus bowing before the wind, and a bashful expression flooded her features, accompanied by a shudder and sigh. She closed her eyes for a moment, I knew then that she was sorely afflicted with love.

I began to embrace her, but knowing my passion and thinking likewise of her future, Prabhavati restrained me by crying out "O Prince, O Prince, don't hurry so! Listen to me, control yourself, O master!"
With great difficulty I resisted the overwhelming force of my passion. I felt as if my life had fallen in danger and had been lost in vain. I looked at Prabhavati unhappily.

Bashfully she said, "It is a shame to my noble birth that in such an ideal place, having obtained the beloved of my heart, I could not fulfill the object of my youth and beauty!"

I did not say anything. Prabhavati went on, "But do you know why I resisted this temptation? It is because of that poor Somasiri, who is terribly afflicted by your separation and infidelity. She must be waiting for you now, while all the others are sleeping. It is she who now lives constantly in my heart, and is preventing me from fulfilling my own desires. Did you know that while I was taking leave of Somasiri and coming to fetch you, she told me specifically not to be like Vegavati, who had stolen you for herself while on the same errand? And I, foolish girl, unacquainted with your beauty and youth, told her that I was not Vegavati but Prabhavati, and that I would never betray her. But it would not be fair on my part to violate my solemn vow and leave my promise to her unfulfilled. Such a thing befits an ignoble person. Moreover, it is against the norms of citizenship. And besides... there might be some other occasion when I can fulfill your wish."

I was intrigued. I asked, "O petal-like eyes, what is then citizenship?"

Without hesitation Prabhavati replied, "Restraint of oneself, following the will of others, straightforwardness, tenderness, compassion, courtesy, generosity, and benevolence are the main characteristics of citizenship; one is not called a citizen simply by dwelling in a city."

To myself I said, "Oh, she is clever!" I was very impressed by her.

Resigned, I said, "O fair lady! Take me now to Somasiri."

Prabhavati smiled, and holding me by the shoulders she flew off quickly into the air. Prabhavati reminded me of the verse:

They are excellent who even at the time of death give no trouble to others;
But the small people, over-anxious in their own concerns, never are concerned about others.

Prabhavati carried me straight to the city of Suvannanabha. She pointed out Manasavega’s house to me, the home of Vegavati’s brother and my worst enemy. Then she set me down in his pleasure garden, where Somasiri was being kept. Hiding me behind a tree, Prabhavati sought out Somasiri.

Although it was late at night, poor Somasiri was awake and anxiously awaiting Prabhavati’s arrival with her eyes fixed towards the sky. I was astonished by the sight of her feeble body and plain, unornamented dress. How afflicted she had been in my absence! She looked like the bright flames of fire enveloped in thick smoke. The full load of her lustrous hair, tied up in a permanent braid, burdened her head. She looked like a female hermit, her body emaciated by severe penance.

Prabhavati approached Somasiri and said, “The prince is passing his time happily in the company of Piyangusundari, who is like a wife to him, and he does not want to return.”

When she heard this, Somasiri was stricken with new anguish and began to sob loudly.

Prabhavati tried to comfort her. “O friend, what can we do? In spite of my conveying your request to him, he felt himself bound in chains to his new beloved, and he was simply unwilling to leave. Enough of this crying! If Manasavega hears you, he will get terribly angry.”

Somasiri wiped her tears and said, “But what’s the use of living if long-cherished love shatters like this in no time at all? Ah, the noble one has turned away from my love, even though it was founded in a previous life.” Again Somasiri began reciting Vasudeva’s life history.

“Enough, enough my friend!” Prabhavati interrupted. “You must not violate your vow to me now! You told me that if Vasudeva did not return with me immediately upon hearing your name, you would no longer speak to him.”

“Ah,” Somasiri retorted, “I could never forget him—with or without speaking! My feelings resemble the apprehensions in the heart of a thief, or a poor child delighted with passion.
And sister, you could not be happy if I simply kept silent! But when I talk, I can talk of nothing but Vasudeva."

Prabhavati could not repress a smile, and at this Somasiri cried out in wild hope, "O friend, you do harbour some secret happiness! All of a sudden you have no anxiety for my sorrow; your eyes bloom like lotuses, your face is cheerful. Before, you shared your tears when I wept—now you stand there smiling! Why, why are you tormenting me this way? O cruel one, show me my beloved!"

Laughing, Prabhavati mentioned to me and I came forward. As soon as she saw me, Somasiri fell to my feet with loud cries. I too was moved. I took the girl in my arms and embraced her tenderly. Poor Somasiri could not stop crying; Prabhavati had to scold her for her tears, which were a sign of ill luck at such a happy moment.

"After all, we know why you are crying," she added.

Somasiri ceased her sobbing and announced, "But the real reason for my grief will only be appeased when the noble Vasudeva splits Manasavega's body and shows it to me gushing with blood! Only then will I be free from sorrow!"

Immediately I consoled her, promising that I would fulfill her wish with pleasure.

But Somasiri then collected herself and replied, "Oh, forget Manasavega for the moment—I have a far more pressing sorrow at present! The Noble One is now single-handed, unarmed and the vidyadhara here under Manasavega are very powerful. For my sake alone you have entered the home of your most treacherous enemy! I tremble to think what might happen."

Prabhavati interrupted her and said, "Somasiri, there's no cause for fear, I shall arrange everything in such a way that no harm will befall him, I promise you."

Somasiri's anxious face immediately showed happy relief. She trusted Prabhavati's powers implicitly. But while looking at her I reproached myself with a heavy heart, reflecting, "Shame on me, that while this true-hearted woman suffered so miserably, I was happily enjoying pleasures with another!"

Prabhavati then disappeared, and Somasiri took me by the hand and led me to the corner of the garden where she
had been dwelling. There I saw a small wooden seat, a pair of simple sandals, an earthen water jug and a small lamp containing only a little bit of oil. This is how Somasiri had lived, she who had been brought up a princess in a high royal family! After showing me her few things, Somasiri asked me if I was happy.

"I am happy in meeting you again," I replied.

"O Noble One, tell me, did you ever think of me?" she asked.

"No," I answered honestly. "Never. I am telling you the truth."

A great sorrow passed over Somasiri's face, and she said softly, "Oh, shame on me for hanging between two worlds! Am I not living in false hopes even now, by assuming that my beloved should always remember me? Ah, but if you did not remember me, what's the use of my living?" Somasiri sat down, deeply oppressed.

I became serious and said, "Come, why are you so objected? Who else could be dearer to me than you, whom I shall always remember? One who slips from the heart needs to be remembered, but one who is always there cannot be remembered!"

Somasiri drank in my words happily, and her eyes began to bloom like a spring lily touched by the southern wind. Then she showed me her heavy braid of hair, which she had kept tied ever since Manasavega had abducted her and brought her there. While I was carefully untying the braid, I suddenly noticed the magical appearance of a beautiful house, which arose like a palatial residence before us. Nearby there were more wonders to behold: a lovely deep pool with soft banks, inviting us to sensual pleasures. There was a tender white pillow and a jewelled footstool, vessels of gold fragrant flowers, unguents, special drinks, gleaming fruits and plentiful amounts of delicate food. I gazed at Somasiri as well, for she too had lost her emaciated look, and was suddenly adorned in fine soft cloth with rich ornaments, appearing like the beautiful goddess of fortune descended in person.

"Whose power is this?" I asked in wonderment.
“Prabhavati has arranged it all,” Somasiri replied, and she gracefully moved to offer me a nectar-like drink.

“No thank you, I don’t drink”, I said.

“And why don’t you drink? Because you haven’t had a drink in such a long time? Come, take it!”

I protested, “But Vegavati, assuming your lovely form, made me drink deceitfully; otherwise I never drink without the permission of the elders.”

“So, my dear, you have learned to tell a lie!”

“No, truly,” I insisted. “Having taken on your beauteous form with the help of magic, Vegavati really did force me to take a drink and bring me out of my senses!”

“Yes yes, I know all this,” Somasiri said. “But did Vegavati steal you of all your endurance with that one drink? Come, take this drink, I am offering it to you with my own hands!”

So I took the drink, which was full of a deep fragrance and as brilliant as lotus blossoms. I also made Somasiri drink. Then we enjoyed each other in close embrace, and plagued with the thirst of a long separation, we passed the night in amorous, passionate sport.

We woke the following morning to the sound of the enemy’s drum. I went down to the lovely pool to wash my mouth, and as I did so I saw Prabhavati’s reflection in the water before me. Surprised, I beckoned to her and asked what she was doing there.

Beside me Somasiri asked, “O Noble One, whom are you talking to?”

“To Prabhavati,” I answered. “She is my devout well-wisher. See, she is protecting me from entering the water.”

Somasiri laughed and said, “My dear, that is not Prabhavati. You are looking at your own reflection in the water!”

“How can that be?” I cried.

“O Noble One, just look at the splendour of your own body, and you will see what I mean.”

I looked at myself and was shocked to see that my body had assumed the appearance of Prabhavati.

“How has this come about?” I demanded.
“It’s very clear,” Somasiri answered. “In order to protect you from the enemy, Prabhavati has given you her from. You are perfectly safe now!”

I felt ashamed to see myself in the form of a woman. For a while I sat there quite disturbed.

Then at sunrise, Manasavega’s attendants appeared in the garden to pick flowers. In a loud voice Somasiri called out to me, “O princess Prabhavati! Welcome, come, take your seat by me here on this shady rock!”

I went and sat down by her side.

Naturally assuming that I was Prabhavati Manasavega’s attendants showed respect to me and reported my presence to their master. Soon they returned with this massage: “King Manasavega conveys his greetings, and is delighted that the princess Somasiri is happy in the companionship of her friend. The fair lady may stay here with the permission of her elders for some days, so that the princess Somasiri may continue in good spirits.”

I replied, “I shall see what is proper.”

When we were alone again, Somasiri began to talk about her experiences since the fateful day of her abduction. She described how Angaravati, the mother of Manasavega and Vegavati, had tried as best she could to soften her son’s harsh temper and violent desires. This good woman had also convinced Somasiri to take food, and had been extremely kind to her whom her son had abducted and her daughter had betrayed. Both knew that Manasavega’s lust for Somasiri was only held back by his greater fear of the ancient vow: a vidyadhara would lose his magic art if he forcibly possessed another man’s wife. But only now, after my arrival, did Somasiri feel relatively safe from Manasavega’s grasp, and again she emphasized that she would only be completely satisfied when Manasavega was destroyed for good.

Thus Somasiri and I talked openly together, enjoying the attentive service of Manasavega’s best servants and the security of my female disguise. At night the assumed form of Prabhavati disappeared, and I came into my own. Once more I enjoyed manifold pleasures with my beloved Somasiri, and in
the morning I woke up to find myself again in secret enjoyment, and the word spread that the earth-dwelling princess looked vastly improved in the delight of her friend's company.

Then, one morning Somasiri woke up before I did awakening me from a deep sleep with her bitter crying. I got up and asked her what was wrong. She cried out in anguish, "O Noble One! Ah, there must have been some terrible negligence on Prabhavati's part, look—you are still in your own body!"

I looked, and indeed I still had my own form. But I told Somasiri not to worry, since I was able to crush Manasavega single-handed anyway.

"But you are alone, and unarmed, and have one to protect you!" she cried. "The vidyadharas are so many and so powerful! Oh, what unworthy act have I committed to ever have you brought here, what foolishness and vanity it was! My beloved, I alone will be cause of your ruin! You will be killed here in front of me, and I will be a helpless spectator, ah!" With these words she fell into a fit of sobs and lamentations.

It was very difficult to console her, but I finally managed, saying, "My beloved Somasiri, have faith in me! You yourself don't know my power!"

Soon it was morning, and the sun rose in the sky. The maidservants of Manasavega entered the garden. When they caught sight of me they began whispering among themselves. One of them remarked, "Well, take a look at that! Here she is with her vow and her obstinate refusal of the king, and just look how she's making up to that strange man! Ha, it is truly difficult to grasp a woman's nature!"

Another remarked, "I have never seen such a handsome man, he looks like a divine prince!"

A third said, "They seem very happy together. Let her enjoy him, and we won't inform Manasavega or anyone else. May they pass their time in happiness!"

But these whisperings were overheard by a maidservant of Manasavega hiding nearby. She immediately went and reported that a strange man had entered the pleasure garden and was sporting with the princess Somasiri.
Angaravati, Manasavega’s mother, also heard the news and went directly to the pleasure garden. She offered me her blessings and wished me a long life, saying that she had known of my presence through her magic art, and her heart had been full of both joy and sorrow ever since. She warned me of her son’s oppressive wrath and unaccountable temper.

When Somasiri heard this, she once more broke into tears. Angaravati and I tried to console her. Then I uprooted a big tree from the garden, and said I was ready to fight the enemy. But Angaravati fell to my feet and cried out, “O child! I am sure you will be killed if you attempt to fight single-handed! I am your elder, listen to me. Give up the idea of fighting, and for heaven’s sake let go of that tree! This is neither the time nor place to show your valour; you need your wits. If you have to face some trouble it might be good for you. But don’t start fighting against impossible odds!”

“O queen,” I replied “I am beyond the reach of Manasavega or anyone else. But since you ask me, I will give up the idea of fighting now.” So I abandoned the tree, and watched as the vidyadharas began approaching in multi-coloured war dress. Manasavega also was coming, surrounded by attendants and I saw his eyes flaming with the fire of his violent wrath.

Then Angaravati, standing up, addressed her son: “O my son, pardon this man. He is your own sister’s husband who has come to our house. Listen to me, I beg of you! I am your mother requesting you with folded hands.”

Manasavega did not reply, and he only ordered that I be tightly bound. His attendants began lamenting bitterly, fearing that I was about to be killed. Then Manasavega ordered some vidyadharas to take me out to a lonely place and chop off my head.

Immediately Angaravati fell to her son’s feet and cried, “O my foolish son! Vasudeva is prominent personality, he cannot be easily slain! Don’t you realize that his death would cause instant enmity with the many vidyadharas related to him? Pacify yourself, my son! Free him! If you cannot do this, then just bind him, but don’t kill him!”

Manasavega reluctantly followed his mother’s advice, and announced, “All right, let him stay here tightly bound!”
I was to be guarded by terrible-looking vidyadharas for three nights, and during the whole time Somasiri would not leave my side for a single moment.

Manasavega, however, could not control his jealous wrath. In the deep of night he came with a sword to kill me. Seeing him, Somasiri uttered a loud cry, calling out, “O Vidyadharas, run, run quickly! My own blameless husband is being killed by your king! Stop him somehow, this is horrible injustice!”

Then she called out to Vegavati’s mother, “O Angaravati, protect my husband! It is at your advice that he has been left bound and helpless. His death will bring you infamy!”

Angaravati quickly appeared on the scene before Manasavega had a chance to strike. Angrily she scolded her son, “Ah, you impudent scoundrel, you ill-born coward! Your behaviour contradicts not only the standard norms of a king but also those of a common man! You are devoid of manners, devoid of self-respect! Enough of this shameful conduct, you must guard the honour of your family! You must not kill this man!” Saying this, she threw her body over mine.

Manasavega put down his sword and said, “O mother, you are unfair! This evil earth-dweller has committed a great crime against me, and I have the right to put him to death.”

Angaravati replied, “O child, the people also allow a king to go free when he is found not guilty, even though he is supposed to have committed a barbarian act. But if you are determined to kill him, you must first produce the offender before the court of elder vidyadharas. Only then will your honour be restored and justice served.”

Again Manasavega agreed, tempering his wrath with his mother’s good sense. Tightly bound, I was led to the great vidyadhara court on the mountain. Somasiri followed me, as well as Vegavati’s attendants. All over people were crying, “Oh, what a pity! Things happening which were unheard of before! Ah, the kings are of no use—just look at this noble person being led off like that, through no fault of his own!”

After some time we reached the great jewelled court, with its image of Dharana, King of the Nagas, placed in the centre on a magnificent alter of gems. In the assembly hall
there was a large drum decorated with garlands of fragrant flowers. Manasavega approached this drum and quickly struck it. At the sound of the great drum vidyadharas began streaming in from all directions. In a moment’s time the court was filled with the noise of the crowd as the vidyadharas found their appointed seats. The sound resembled the roaring of an agitated ocean.

Then the noble Vauvega appeared, lord of the vidyadharas and high judge of the court. With due pomp and ceremony he occupied his golden throne. Manasavega also took his seat beside him. The court proceedings commenced; the crowd became still, and Vauvega was the first to speak. "Who has struck the drum?" he asked in a deep voice. "I did," Manasavega replied. "I caught this earth-dweller brashly violating my harem. After his guilt is proven to you, I will punish him. Look into the matter!"

Vauvega turned to me and said, "O prince! Tell us whether Manasavega is speaking the truth!"

At first I did not know what to reply. Suddenly I felt shy, the way a young son of noble family might feel when suddenly thrown into difficulties for the first time. But Somasiri, astonished by my silence, cried out to me, "Why are you so distressed? Why don’t you give a reply? All your training will go to waste! Have confidence, you know you did nothing wrong. On the contrary, there he is the abductor of a sleeping woman!"

With her words I felt all my strength returning, and reminding myself how wise it was to first judge one’s strength against the foe’s before plunging into battle, I took courage and said, "Is somebody putting a question to me?"

"The court is putting a question to you," Vauvega replied. "To be frank," I said, "I don’t find the characteristics of a real court here."

"Ah, hear the audacity of that man!" Manasavega cried out. I replied:

There is no court without the elders;
They are not elders who are not virtuous;
There is no virtue without truth;
There is no truth which contains deceit.
Where virtue is destroyed by vice,
Where truth is destroyed by lies,
There a case cannot be judged fairly;
The members of the court are powerless.

Do not enter such a court,
Or mention how it took place!
In spite of this, if one is strong in virtue,
No harm can be done.

After reciting this, I added, "Just look at the conduct of
this court! The accused has been bound by the opponent
and must sit on the floor, while the opponent is given
a place on the throne. Tell me, who is insulting the impartiality
of the court? Is it he or I? Only you know whether
this can be called a great court, but I certainly have no power
to insult it!"

Vauvega said, "He is right. After all, he is a prince. Both
should be treated on an equal footing until guilt is proven.
Relieve him of his bondage, and let Manasavega leave the
throne."

But Manasavega protested, "How can an earth-dweller be
treated as an equal to me? This is unheard of! Besides, he
has violated my sister Vegavati, and married her without the
proper consent of her elders. It's no use even putting him on
trial. He deserves severe punishment at once!"

"What have you to say, O prince?" Vauvega asked me.

I answered, "Listen! The complainant abducted my own
wife while she was sleeping in her own palace, stealthily and
against her will he brought her and confined her in his pleasure
garden, which is no harem. I came to see her and was staying
with her in the garden, when Manasavega discovered me,
threatened to kill me at the spot and was finally persuaded by
his mother to bring the case to court. If I have violated his
harem, then you alone dare say it! Regarding his sister
Vegavati, I need not explain the whole story. Your Honour
can view the true state of affairs with the help of your magic
power. You do justice! I am not afraid of Manasavega or
anyone else. He never defeated me in battle. Only at the
request of his mother did he bind me. I am a Ksatriya. I am least frightened of him! Let me go free, and then you will see a true fight between a vidyadhara and an earth-dweller! I will destroy him and his followers in no time."

Here Vauvega motioned me to keep still, and said, "O Manasavega! You have heard the prince's words. He is an excellent person, beyond the reach of anyone. Abandon your seat and take your place beside him!"

"Yes, I have heard enough," Manasavega replied. "And I shall reply to him right here from my seat."

"I cannot allow you to violate the law," said Vauvega firmly.

"Let's see who can stop me!" cried Manasavega.

"The law will stop you," said Vauvega.

Furious, Manasavega jumped up and shouted, "And this is how you are going to behave? The man violated my harem, I bound him and brought him here! Enough of this court, here I cannot expect to find justice! Now I will kill him."

"The law will prevent that", Vauvega repeated. "If you were so determined to kill him, why did you bring him here at all before the sacred court of the vidyadharas? You should have killed him outside court.... ."

"That's just what I'm going to do!" Manasavega shouted, and with a cry he ordered his vidyadharas to catch hold of me and kill me at once. But Somasiri uttered a loud cry of terror, which moved the hearts of the vidyadharas. They hesitated, staring at the lovely woman who had dropped in a faint beside me.

Vauvega spoke, saying to Somasiri, "O princess, recover yourself! This is no assembly of frightened cowherds, this is after all the court of the vidyadharas, who have established certain civilised norms. One who violates those norms will be taught a lesson, never fear!"

With these words Vauvega turned and asked his vidyadharas to attack Manasavega. A great tumult arose in the assembly hall as the vidyadharas on both sides prepared to fight.

Above the noise Vauvega could be heard addressing Manasavega: "Don't you know that this court was instituted
by my own forefathers, and that the miraculous image of Dharana has been installed here in its very centre? Don’t you realize that he who creates disturbances during a case must suffer severe consequences?"

But Manasavega, paying no heed to Vauvega’s warning, drew his sword and rushed to kill me himself. At the same time Vauvega, sword in hand, jumped to my side to protect me.

Just then a miracle occurred. Dharana, the King of the Nagas, broke out of his own image with a great noise like fresh thunder, in a moment covering the sky with his expanded hood, emitting sparks of flickering fire, terrifying the whole vidyadhara assembly with his flashing pair of tongues, and rushing out into the air with a deafening roar.

"O wicked Manasavega!" Vauvega cried out. "Nothing can protect you now!"

Manasavega was trembling in fear, and he and all the vidyadharas bowed down beneath Dharana’s terrible hovering form. Then I felt the king of the Nagas sweeping me up, and in a moment I was being carried far off into the air. Before I knew what had really happened, we had arrived in the north; the Great Deity was taking me to the world of the Nagas! I was gently placed in a blossoming forest on the top of a golden mountain.

Immediately I tried to bow down to Dharana, but all of a sudden I saw Prabhavati standing there before my eyes! I was confused, thinking that perhaps the deity has assumed the form of Prabhavati for a particular reason. Again I bowed down, but this time I felt a woman’s hand on my shoulder and Prabhavati’s voice saying, "No, oh no, Noble One, please rise!"

I looked at her in astonishment. She was as beautiful as ever, her body adorned with all kinds of rich ornaments. Quickly she knelt down and relieved me of my painful bondage. Then she fell to my feet, crying "Oh! All your suffering was due to my own negligence! Will you ever pardon me?"

Gently I said, "O fair lady, you are not to be blamed. You have given me my life!"
Then I held her in my arms, and made her sit on my lap, and asked her to tell me all that had happened since we had last met.

"After reuniting you with Somasiri," she explained, "I returned home. It was still night, and my heart was full of repentence in thinking of you. How I despised myself for not having been faithful to you by satisfying your love immediately! I passed a few days in distress. Then one night, unable to sleep and full of longing, I lay awake the whole night. I fell asleep only near morning, and thus did not rise at the usual hour. That is why you awoke in your manly form. My negligence, arising in sorrowful passion, was the cause for all your pain and trouble! In the meantime you had fallen into the enemy's hands. When I finally awoke I rushed immediately to Suvannapuri, but I found out that it was too late. You were already bound and Somasiri was lamenting your fate while Vegavati's mother was pleading for your life, I cried, despised myself, and went away.

"Then I invoked Ahogini with my magic art and asked her about you. She told me that after three nights the case would be filed in the Vidyadharab court. Therefore I had to wait three dreadful nights before attempting anything for you. I guarded you secretly these three nights, and then you were brought to the court.

"I watched the court proceedings, and listened to Manasavega insult you. When a fight finally ensued and Manasavega rushed to kill you, I quickly assumed the form of Dharana, King of the Nagas, and brought you here to this mountain. But you must know that there is an ancient tradition which forbids a vidyadharab to assume the form of the Great Deity or any of the gods; the penalty is the loss of one's magic art. I knew that what I schemed to do would cost me my magic art and thus ban me from the vidyadharab world, but to save you I gladly abandoned my kingdom, family and magic art."

After telling me all this, Prabhavati added that Angaravati had brought Somasiri back home with her from the court. Made aware that I was safe from all danger, Somasiri was happily staying with Angaravati.

I was amazed and touched by Prabhavati's story. Again I
embraced her, and realized how happy I was to be alone with her. Then, thinking that after all we had already gone through the marriage ceremony by circling the burning lamp three times, we enjoyed each other passionately. Thus the time passed in happiness.

Prabhavati said, “Although I am deprived of my magic art, I am delighted to wander by your side about these mountains. But that we cannot fly away from here is my own fault; and for your sake I feel sorry.”

I simply held her in my arms and consoled her by saying, “O fair lady! This is all not your fault; it is destiny, over which no one has any control.”

And we remained together on the beautiful mountain.

PART FOUR

(After wandering through the mountains with Prabhavati, and having various adventures and escapades, Vasudeva is accidentally separated from Prabhavati. Alone, he begins to yearn for Somasiri once again.)

Longing for my poor Somasiri, I decided to make my way to Suvannapuri and snatch her out of Manasavega’s clutches as quickly as possible. Gathering my brave and loyal followers about me, I told them of my plan and we prepared ourselves for a great battle.

Followed by the imperial troops of the vidyadharas, we advanced towards Suvannapuri. My wives and attendants gathered around the glorious soldiers, the air was full of shouting and the musical clang of armour. Like a darkening rain cloud we descended upon the enemy.

Manasavega had heard of our approach and had already gathered his fearsome forces behind him. The battle began almost at once. The uproar was deafening, and all of a sudden brave warriors were falling like saplings under the axe, and torrents of crimson blood flowed on both sides.

Never had I seen such frightful carnage. Repelled by the sight of so many innocent deaths, I tried to restrain my warriors. But then I remembered my promise to Somasiri:
“You must capture Manasavega!” She had said with glittering eyes. “I want to drink the blood gushing from his head.”

I whispered to myself, “My dear, this is for you,” and assuming the magical form of countless mighty warriors flashing with deadly weapons, accompanied by thundering elephants and chariots, I made a frontal attack on the enemy troops. Manasavega’s warriors became confused and they began to flee in terror.

To myself I said, “Ah, this is violation of a warrior’s duty.” But in order to fulfill my promise to Somasiri, I ran after Manasavega and caught him by his hair while he was trying to escape the holocaust. I held him like a wild bull, keeping him at arm’s length, and brought him to Somasiri while on all sides the victorious vidyadharas sent up songs of praise for my valour. Manasavega, knowing his end had come, obeyed my orders and sat on the ground before me, Somasiri stood by him, pale and trembling with hate for her captor. I told her, “The head will now fall to the ground, be ready to drink his blood!”

I drew my gleaming sword from its sheath and raised my hand for the blow. But just then Manasavega’s gentle mother rushed onto the scene, accompanied by her son’s loyal queens; with piteous wailing these women begged for the son and husband.

Tears flowing down her cheeks, Angaravati said, “I know my son was wicked: you yourself, O Noble One, are witness to my many attempts of restraining him. But he is my son, child of my womb, have compassion for a mother’s love! And remember, he is your wife Vegavati’s own brother, the playmate of her youth! Have compassion for your wife’s tender memories!”

I let my hand fall to my side, and I bowed to the noble Angaravati. “Although your son has assailed me and kidnapped my wife,” I said to her, “and although I have more than enough power to kill him on the spot, your words and my respect for Vegavati cause me to pardon him.”

Hearing this Angaravati fell to my feet with cries of praise. To my great joy Somasiri also fell to her knees and embraced Angaravati.
I paid my respects to both women, saying, "Compassion has won over revenge. That is the real victory."

Knowing that I was able to crush the pride of their most powerful vidyadhara, yet aware that I was related to royal vidyadhara families through multiple marriage ties, all the vidyadhara kings who had gathered to witness the great battle made ready to celebrate me and elevate me to the highest royal splendour. One by one the kings fell at mine and Somasiri's feet. We each blessed them with raised hands and faces radiant with peaceful joy.

Finally Manasavega rose to his feet at my command. His imminent death and miraculous pardon seemed to have transformed him. With all humility and respect, he led me into his besieged city, and with my approval he arranged for the orderly transfer of power in the vidyadhara camps. Unable to treat this great man as a simple captive, I followed him to his home and accepted his hospitality. Somasiri, safe and happy at my side lost her fear of Manasavega and even began to respect him for his gracious acceptance of defeat.

The battle over and devoid of all enmity, Manasavega and I became good friends. We passed our time talking and enjoying delicious food and good music. Vegavati, who also joined us, was beside herself with joy. "I never would have thought such a friendship possible between my husband and brother!" She exclaimed. "I didn't dare dream of such a happy development! How lucky that this great unfulfilled desire has been miraculously answered!"

After some days the vidyadharas organized a great celebration and honoured me with complete sovereignty over the entire vidyadhara kingdom. In doing so they named Somasiri my chief queen. My darling Somasiri, who had suffered so much in my absence and who had defended her purity with such vigour, now sat at my side on my royal throne. Dressed in gorgeous regal gowns, she shone with incomparable beauty, winning the love and respect of all her subjects.

All my other wives were also gathered at the great palace. I
paid attention to all of them, but most of my time was spent with Somasiri, Vegavati, and Prabhavati. Devoted and courageous companions in times of distress, they were delightful and virtuous wives in times of joy.
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