

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

CHAPTER 54

He sets fire to Lanka

SURVEYING Lanka, that monkey, having attained his purpose, began to consider what he should do further and reflected in himself:—"What more remains for me to do to afflict the titans? The grove laid waste, those vile titans slain, a part of the army destroyed, nothing is left for me but to demolish their citadel. With their fort destroyed, it were easy to bring my labours to an end; with a little effort I can complete my task and obtain the price of my trouble. The Bearer of Sacrificial Offerings that flames on my tail must be propitiated by me, I shall therefore burn up these excellent buildings."

Thereat, with his tail in flames, which lent him the appearance of a cloud charged with lightning, that great monkey began to range the roofs of the dwellings of Lanka. Glancing round, passing from mansion to mansion, with a calm mind he encircled those stately edifices and gardens and leaping impetuously towards the palace of Prahasta, that one of exceeding prowess in strength resembling the wind, set fire to it. Thereafter the mighty Hanuman bounded to the mansion of Mahaparshwa lighting a fire equal to that at the end of the world. Then that monkey of immense energy leapt on the residence of Vajradanshtra and on those belonging to Shuka and the intelligent Sarana. In the same way that leader of monkeys burnt down the habitations of Indrajita, Jambumalin and Sumali and those of the titans Rashmiketū, Suryashatru, Hrasvakarna, Damshttra, Romasha, Yuddhonmatta, Matta, Dwajagriva, Vidyujjihva and Hastimukha and the dwellings of Karala, Vishala, Shonitaksha, Kumbhakarna, Maharaksha, those of Narantaka, Kumbha, Nikumbha and the magnanimous Yajnashatru and Brahmashatru.

That mighty bull among monkeys thereafter set fire to the accumulated treasure of those affluent titans and having passed

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over the other dwellings that powerful and auspicious one approached the residence of the King of Titans. Then the virtuous Hanuman, emitting loud cries, resembling a cloud at the dissolution of the world, with the tip of his blazing tail set fire to that foremost of buildings decorated with every variety of gems resembling Mount Meru or Mandara, enriched with sumptuous decoration.

Fanned by the wind, the flames spread everywhere, casting livid gleams like the Fires of Time and those palaces, enriched with gold, decorated with pearls and gems, richly bejewelled, toppled to earth, crumbling to dust like the mansions of the Celestials, who have fallen from heaven their merit exhausted. Then there arose a mighty uproar among the titans, who fled in all directions unable to preserve their dwellings, bereft of their treasure, crying out :—“ Verily it is the God of Fire himself in the form of a monkey ! ”

Some of the titan women with babies at their breasts ran shrieking from their homes and some, enveloped in flames, their hair in disorder, fell from the high balconies like flashes of lightning in the sky. And Hanuman saw various metals flowing in a molten mass, mixed with diamonds, coral, emeralds, pearls and silver, streaming from the palaces and, as fire is not sated in consuming wood and straw, neither did Hanuman weary of slaying those leaders of titans nor the earth from receiving their corpses. As Rudra consumed the Demon Tripura so did that impetuous and mighty monkey burn up Lanka and, from the summit of that mountain where Lanka stood, that dreadful conflagration kindled by the intrepid Hanuman shot forth in tongues of flame. Resembling the fires at the destruction of the world, the smokeless conflagration, lit by Maruta blazed up to the skies aided by the wind, feeding on the dwellings of the titans and their bodies like sacrificial offerings and, with the fierce ardour of a million suns, it consumed Lanka wholly as with increasing volume the fire cleaves the mundane Egg with a sound resembling innumerable thunderclaps. That fire of incalculable fury, rising into the sky, with its flames resembling Kimshuka flowers, its clouds of smoke like unto the blue lotus, looked exceedingly beautiful.

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“ Verily this is the God who bears the thunderbolt, Mahendra, the Chief of the Thirty or Yama or Varuna or Anila. This is no monkey but the God of Death himself who has come ! Or perchance it is a manifestation of Brahma’s wrath, the four-faced God who, in the form of a monkey has come hither to destroy the titans or is it the supreme power of Vishnu, unimaginable, unutterable, infinite and unsurpassed, which, by his Maya, has assumed the form of a monkey ? ”

Thus did the chief titans speak, being assembled and, seeing their city suddenly consumed by fire with its inhabitants, horses, chariots, flocks of birds, beasts and trees they began to lament, crying :—“ O My Father, O My beloved Son, O My dear One, O My Friend ! Woe, alas ! O My Lord, our spiritual merit is exhausted ! ” Thus amidst, a frightful clamour, did the titans cry aloud, and Lanka, encircled with flames, her heroes slain, her warriors succumbing to the swift wrath of Hanuman, appeared to have fallen under a curse. In the midst of the tumult Hanuman with pride, surveyed Lanka bearing the marks of that violent blaze and its terror-stricken demons as Swyambhu surveys the final destruction of the world.

Having demolished the grove planted with rare trees and slain those powerful titans in combat and burned that city filled with splendid palaces, that monkey born of Pavana rested.

Having dispatched those titans in great numbers, destroyed the dense woods and spread the fire amongst the titan dwellings, the illustrious Hanuman became absorbed in the thought of Rama.

Thereupon all the Celestials lauded that prince among monkey warriors endowed with immense energy, equal to Maruta in swiftness, that sagacious and excellent son of Vayu. And all the Gods, the foremost of the Ascetics, the Gandharvas, Vidyadharas, Pannagas and Bhutas experienced an exceeding and indescribable joy.

And having devastated the forest, slain the titans in conflict and burnt the great city of Lanka, that mighty monkey, seated on the roof of the foremost of buildings, spreading the rays of his flaming tail like a aureole, resembled the sun encircled with

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a nimbus. Then having consumed the city of Lanka, that great monkey quenched the fire of his tail in the sea.

Beholding Lanka consumed by fire, the Gods, Gandharvas, Siddhas and great ascetics were struck with amazement.

CHAPTER 55

Hanuman's Anxiety concerning Sita

SEEING Lanka consumed by fire and that city with its terror-stricken titans filled with tumult, the monkey Hanuman became thoughtful and a great anxiety invaded his mind.

He reflected :—“ In burning Lanka, I have without doubt done something reprehensible ! Blessed are those great souls, who, in their wisdom extinguish the anger born within them as a fire is quenched by water. What evil is not committed by those who give way to wrath ? In anger one may even slay one's spiritual preceptor ; nor does he who is enraged, refrain from affronting virtuous men. He who gives way to wrath is unable to discriminate as to when it is fitting to speak or when to be silent ; there is no iniquity that cannot be perpetrated by him. He is truly said to be a man, who, controlling himself, subdues the anger rising within him as a snake casts off its slough. Woe is me, wretched and shameless doer of evil that I am, who, forgetting Sita, have slain my lord by fire. Should that noble daughter of Janaka have perished in this conflagration, which has wholly consumed the city of Lanka, I have frustrated the purpose of my master ; Sita having been burnt, I have marred my lord's design. To burn down Lanka is a trifling occurrence, but suffering myself to be overcome by anger I have cut at the very root of my mission. Assuredly Janaki has perished for there remains no corner of Lanka that has not been laid waste, the entire city lies in ashes. Since I have sacrificed everything through my lack of understanding, I shall yield up my life this instant, either I shall throw myself into the fire or into the jaws of Vadava, or give my body to the denizens of the deep. Living, I am not able to face the King of the Monkeys or those two

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tigers among men, having marred their purpose. Through my culpable anger I have manifested my undisciplined simian nature to the Three Worlds. Woe to the unbridled passion, uncurbed and unrestrained, under which I failed to protect Sita when it was in my power to do so. She, having perished, those two heroes will die also and on their ceasing to exist, Sugriva will yield up his life with all his kinsfolk. On hearing these tidings, how shall the virtuous Bharata, devoted to his brother or Shatrughna, survive? Then on the extinction of the illustrious race of Ikshwaku, their subjects will be overcome with grief.

“ Unfortunate am I, whose merits have been annulled through being false to the ties of duty and advantage, suffering myself to be dominated by a corrupting passion, thus becoming the destroyer of creatures ! ”

Immersed in these melancholy reflections, Hanuman recollected certain auspicious signs that he had previously observed and said to himself :—

“ Is it possible that that Lovely One, protected by her own spiritual merit, has happily escaped death? Fire cannot burn fire! Nay, Pavaka would not dare to approach that virtuous one, preserved by her own purity, who is the consort of one of immeasurable glory. That Bearer of Sacrificial Offerings has not burned me owing to Rama’s power and the virtue of Vaidehi. How should she therefore, the object of worship of those three brothers, Bharata and the others and the beloved of Rama’s heart, perish? Since it is the nature of fire to burn, he who reigns invincible as master everywhere yet who has not burned my tail, why should he consume that exalted One? ”

Thereafter Hanuman remembered with wonder how the Mainaka hill had appeared to him in the ocean and he reflected: “ By virtue of her asceticism, sincerity and undeviating devotion to her lord, she is able to consume fire itself but it cannot consume her.”

Pondering thus on the magnitude of the divine Sita’s spiritual merit, Hanuman heard the high-souled Charanas conversing thus :—

“ Assuredly Hanuman has accomplished a difficult feat in igniting a fierce and terrible fire in the dwellings of the titans.