

hermit boy whose name was Śravaṇa,<sup>1</sup> said, "Oh King! What wrong have I done? My parents are sitting thirsty and blind with age, in the hermitage close-by. I, their only son, was dipping the pot to take water to them, when you sent the arrow at me. So, please take some water to them in this pot and console them."

Hearing this, with tears the King drew out the fatal arrow from the body of the boy and with that the boy Śravaṇa said good bye to the world. Daśaratha took water in the pot and went in search of the hermitage in the darkness. With difficulty he found out the hermitage and as he drew near, the aged parents of the boy heard his footsteps and called him eagerly. The King, with tearful eyes told them what had happened. There was loud wailing and crying in the hermitage. According to their wish the King took them to where their son lay. Then the King made a fire and placed the dead body of the boy in it. The aged and blind parents cursed Daśaratha, "You also will die of loss of children". Then they also entered the fire and were burnt along with their son's dead body. (Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa, Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa, Sarga 63).

4) *Marriage*. Daśaratha had three wives, named Kauśalyā, Kaikeyī and Sumitrā.

5) *Kaikeyī given a boon*. There was a great battle in the world of the gods between the asuras and the gods. According to the request of the devas, Daśaratha went to the world of the devas to help them. Kaikeyī also went with Daśaratha. In a severe fight with Śambara, an asura, Daśaratha fell down unconscious. Kaikeyī took him away from the battle-field. When he recovered the King got into the chariot and fought more fiercely than before. This time the wheel-bolt of one of the wheels of the chariot of Daśaratha slipped away. Without informing her husband of this danger, Kaikeyī inserted her finger into the bolt-hole and prevented the wheel from sliding away. The King won the battle. After the battle, when the King came to know of the services rendered by Kaikeyī, he promised her two boons. Kaikeyī told the King that she would ask for them later, when she needed them. Then they returned to Ayodhyā. (Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa, Sarga 9, Kaiṅpa Rāmāyaṇa, Bāla Kāṇḍa).

6) *Administration of Daśaratha*. The capital of Daśaratha's kingdom of Kosala, was Ayodhyā. This city was situated on the bank of river Sarayū. Daśaratha was as famous in Ayodhyā as Indra was in the realm of the gods. There were palaces in Ayodhyā for the kings who brought tribute to stay. In short, as mentioned in Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa, Bāla Kāṇḍa, Sarga 5, Ayodhyā was the heaven on earth.

7) *Ministers*. Daśaratha had eight ministers, Sṛṣṭi, Jayanta, Vijaya, Siddhārtha, Rāṣṭravardhana, Aśoka, Dharmapāla, and Sumantra. (Agni Purāṇa, Chapter 6).

8) *The name Daśaratha*. The real name of Daśaratha was Nemi. Once the unattackable and invincible asura Śambara conquered the throne of Indra. At the request of Brahmā and the gods, this King reached heaven and destroyed the armies of the asuras very easily. Śambara got angry, assumed ten shapes and attacked the King from ten points at the same time. The king confronted the ten Śambaras at ten points, at the same time, and killed all of them at the same moment. Because he faced his chariot to ten points at the same time and fought with enemies on those ten points Brahmā appreci-

ated his valiant fighting and charioteering and gave him the name 'Daśaratha' (one who is capable of driving the chariot to ten points at the same time). Thus his original name was forgotten and he came to be known only by the name given him later. (Kaiṅpa Rāmāyaṇa, Yuddha Kāṇḍa).

9) *Birth of Sons*. Kausalyā was the first wife of Daśaratha. She was the daughter of the King of Uttara Kosala. A daughter named Śāntā was born to Daśaratha by Kausalyā. After this, no sons or daughters were born to Daśaratha for a long time.

At this juncture Lomapāda, the king of Aṅga who was the class-mate and a great friend of Daśaratha, came to Ayodhyā on a friendly visit. He also had no children. So he entreated Daśaratha to give Śāntā to him as a foster-daughter. Thus he took away Śāntā to Aṅga. Lomapāda gave Śāntā in marriage to Ṛṣyaśṛṅga a hermit. (See under Ṛṣyaśṛṅga).

As Kausalyā was childless Daśaratha brought as his wife Kaikeyī the daughter of the King of Kekaya and sister of Yudhājit. Still no children were born to them. He was much disappointed. At last he married again and brought Sumitrā the princess of Kāśi. Of these three, Kausalyā was the chief wife.

Though he had three wives, Daśaratha still remained childless. The King and his queens spent their days in sorrow for a long time. The King remembered the curse he had incurred when he was young. The curse was that as they had died with sorrow at the death of their son Śravaṇa, the same thing would happen to me. So he believed that sons would be born to him.

He performed several devotional acts to get children. Finally he gave up all kingly pleasures and began to lead an ascetic life. He built a temple for his own use and consecrated the idol of Mahāviṣṇu in it. Then entrusting the administration of the Kingdom to his ministers he and his wives engaged themselves in daily devotion and meditation in the temple. Then the King decided to perform the sacrifice of Putrakāmeṣṭi (sacrifice for getting children) by the hermit Ṛṣyaśṛṅga under the guidance of Vasiṣṭha. The King informed Ṛṣyaśṛṅga of his decision. Ṛṣyaśṛṅga could not refuse the King's request as the king was his father-in-law. Moreover Lomapāda and Śāntā also requested the hermit to comply with the desire of Daśaratha. So Ṛṣyaśṛṅga came to Ayodhyā and the sacrifice of Putrakāmeṣṭi was begun. The air vibrated with the recitation of mantras (spells and incantations) and the Veda Sūktas. The hermit uttered the divine spell of Putrakāmeṣṭi and offered oblations in the sacrificial fire. Then a wonderful and luminous figure came out of the fire with a pot containing a pudding of ambrosia, and placed the pot before Ṛṣyaśṛṅga and then disappeared in the sacrificial fire. When the wonderful figure disappeared, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga took the pot of pudding and gave it to Daśaratha with prayer and incantations. Daśaratha received the golden pot and in accordance with the instruction of the hermit, divided the pudding between his first wife Kauśalyā and second wife Kaikeyī, both of whom gave half of their share to Sumitrā. Thus the three wives ate the divine pudding and by and by all of them became pregnant. Kauśalyā and Kaikeyī gave birth to a son each and Sumitrā gave birth to two sons. The son of Kauśalyā was called Rāma, the son of Kaikeyī was named Bharata and the hermit boy was Yajñadatta.

1. In Agnipurāṇa Chapter 6, it is stated that the name of this