

Chapter 7. The Bridge

Suka, the messenger

Looking at the sea, Rama asked how to cross it. Many monkeys suggested means and methods. At last, Vibhishana rose and addressed Rama, “Lord! The ocean owes its origin to your forefathers, Sagara and his sons. It is the family ‘preceptor’ of your line. If you just resolve that it should be crossed, the monkeys can easily go across.”

Meanwhile, a messenger sent by Ravana was seen by Vibhishana, and the monkeys bound him and took him to Sugriva. Sugriva ordered his limbs to be cut off, but when the monkeys prepared themselves for the execution of that order, the fellow raised a hue and cry. He shouted in his pain, “O monkeys! I swear by Rama! Don’t cut off my nose and ears.”

Lakshmana heard his pathetic cry and asked that the demon be brought to his presence; he spoke softly to him and admonished the monkeys for torturing a messenger deputed by Ravana. Lakshmana wrote a letter and placed it in messenger’s hand, with the words, “Give Ravana this missive and repeat to him the words I now utter: Oh, demolisher of the fortunes of your own clan! Change your heart at least this day, and fall at Rama’s feet. Rama will pardon you. Don’t decimate and destroy the demon tribe in order to prop up your wiles. Know that no other means are available to you to avoid the death that is imminent.”

With these hard and heavy warnings, the messenger was sent back to his master! The fellow was overjoyed to escape alive; he shouted, “Victory (*jai*) to Lord *Ramachandra*,” fell at Rama’s feet, rushed home.

Suka talks to Ravana

At Ravana’s court, Suka related the events that had ensued and started describing with uncontrollable delight Rama’s majestic charm. He gave Ravana the letter Lakshmana had entrusted to him.

Ravana asked about his brother, Vibhishana, and how he fared. “Fie upon him,” Ravana ejaculated, “his days are numbered; death will swallow him soon. He is a pest, bred in this granary. He left Lanka and joined my enemy. Misfortune will haunt him until he dies.”

Ravana turned to the fellow and asked him, “Under this pretext, you visited their camp. Didn’t you tell them of our military might and adamant resolve? Tell me what you learned about their resources and capabilities.”

The messenger, Suka, stood before the throne with folded palms and said, “Lord! I pray that you extend some grace to me and listen calmly and with forbearance to what I say. The very moment your brother sealed friendship with Rama he was crowned emperor of Lanka by Rama! Knowing that I reached their camp as your messenger, the monkeys caught me and tortured me in various ways. I swore in Rama’s name and called upon him to save me, so they let me come away unmutilated, with my nose and ears intact.

“Had I a thousand tongues, I couldn’t describe the might of those monkey armies. What a galaxy of heroic warriors they are! There are monkeys of many different colours, of all ages and grades, of gigantic stature and strength. One shakes in terror when one looks at them; why, even to picture them in the mind or think about them

is a terror-striking experience. Imagine the might of that one monkey who killed your son and reduced the city to ashes! It is all the result of their being reflections and echoes of the invincible might of Rama himself. Even the tiniest brat among the monkeys becomes, by that token, a horrifying monster.

Some monkey warriors are endowed with the strength of many herds of elephants. Dwivida, Mainda, Nila, Nala, Angada, Vikata, Dadhimukha, Kesari, Kumuda, Dwaja, Gavaksha, Jambavan —these are the generals. Every one of them is equal in might and military skill to their ruler, Sugriva. And there are hundreds of thousands more of them of equal might. Their number is beyond calculation. Their fury and ferocity can destroy earth, heaven, and the nether regions as if these were but heaps of straw. Lord, I heard that their number is 18,000 billion (18 *padmas*), and each *padma* has a valiant general at its head. Emperor! I didn't find a single monkey, from the highest to the lowest, who doubted victory; nor was there anyone who had the least trace of nervousness on the eve of the march. They are all tightening their muscles to pound this city; they are waiting only for Rama's signal, which so far he hasn't given.

“Whether the ocean yields to them and gives the right of way or not, they are determined to build a causeway of stones and to succeed in their venture. They are baring and gnashing their teeth, boasting that they would squeeze you out of shape and reduce you to a handful of pulp. Fear strikes everyone who listens to their exultant roar and challenging call. The instant they hear the name Ravana, they get so enraged that they pluck giant trees—root and branch—and brandish them in angry demonstration of hate. They are swaying and swinging, surging and shouting, in their eagerness to consume this city. There are also equally redoubtable bears among them.

“And, to crown all, they have Rama as their leader, capable of overwhelming millions of ‘death-deities’. Hundreds of thousands of divine serpents (*adiseshas*), each of which is blessed with a thousand heads and tongues, cannot do full justice, if asked to describe the heroism and military skill of Rama. With one arrow shot from his bow, he can even dry up the ocean.”

Ravana's reaction to the spy's and messenger's report was a peal of wild laughter. “Fie on you! Listening to the pratings of that arch coward Vibhishana and the monkeys that surround Rama. You are extolling that fool so high. It's sheer nonsense to describe the strength and heroism of mere monkeys. Enough, Enough! Can monkeys be so strong! I heard enough, long ago, of the power and might of this Sugriva; and what can this poltroon Vibhishana, his minister, do? Can he contribute wealth, victory, or resources to Rama?”

The messenger could only pine within himself and bewail the lack of intelligence exhibited by Ravana. He folded his palms in obeisance and stood silent.

Ravana tore open the envelope containing Lakshmana's missive and, after perusing it, handed it to his minister. He said, “You are like the partridge, afraid that the sky will fall upon its young fledglings! Poor thing! It covers the little ones holding its head over them as a cover! Can the sky ever fall and kill birds? Can these anchorites, these ritual-ridden priests, who try to frighten me by a shower of words, ever succeed?”

Suka, the messenger, watched Ravana's heroics for some time. Then he interrupted with the words, “Lord! What I just said is the full truth. Read that letter carefully and act without any sense of resentment or pride. Listen! Give up the hostility you have developed. Rama is very tenderhearted and compassionate. He is the master of the three worlds. If only you would approach him, he would take you under his protection and guard you from harm. He would pardon all your wrongs. Surrender Sita to him. Give heed to my prayer.” The envoy pleaded plaintively for Ravana to save himself from ruin.

While Suka was pouring out his pleas, Ravana's eyes reddened with anger and shame. He roared in protest, "What! Do you take me for a criminal! Did I send you, you fool, to surrender at the feet of those prattling babies of the forest? Audacity and impertinence cannot go further." Rising from the throne, he kicked the fellow out of the hall.

Suka fled to Rama's camp and sought refuge. Seeing him again in their midst, the monkeys were moved to revenge, but they restrained themselves and awaited Rama's orders. Sugriva led Suka to Rama. Suka prostrated before Rama and related in detail his story and fate. He prayed that he might be accepted as Vibhishana was accepted and be protected by his new master.

Rama, as the very embodiment of compassion, called the leaders of the monkeys and directed them to welcome their new brother, Suka. Suka was overcome by gratitude and declared that his life goal had been reached.

The ocean shows the way

Rama asked Lakshmana to bring him the bow and arrow. When he brought them, Rama said, "Haughty people deserve no kindness; mischievously cruel people deserve no softness; misers by nature deserve no moral teaching; egotistic persons deserve no advice, greedy people cannot benefit from insistence on renunciation; people stricken with anger deserve no counsel on being at peace; lust-crazy victims deserve no scriptural readings; saline fields deserve no seeds of grain. So too this ocean, which does not yield to soft request, deserves no mercy." So saying, he fitted an arrow to his bow.

Lakshmana was afraid of the consequences for the ocean, which was rendered hot at the mere preparation to shoot the arrow into its depths. The denizens of the deep suffered extreme agony. As if terror-stricken, the waves began screaming. Wave after wave rolled toward Rama, gently lapping his feet, as if praying for mercy. Suddenly, a voice was heard as if from the sky, "Lord! Two generals in the camp, Nala and Nila, are targets of a curse pronounced by a sage. That curse can now be used as a blessing. Listen; the story can now be told." The ocean communicated the details of that dire incident to Rama.

"Many hermits lived on a river bank in cottages. As boys, Nala and Nila entered these hermitages and, while the sages were immersed in deep meditation, seized the holy icons called *saligrams* that they worshiped and cast them into the river. The sages were enraged at this sacrilege and cast a curse on them, in this manner. 'Boys! May all things that you throw on water never sink; may they float instead. And may they remain just where you have thrown them, even if the waters flow fast in floods.' Therefore, every rock they throw will float at the very place.

"Have your name inscribed on every slab and rock. Your name is light, not heavy at all. Thus, even huge mountain peaks when thrown would float and form a bridge. I will also contribute my share of help, for when the search is for truth, all nature must serve the seeker."

Rama decided not to let go the arrow he had fitted; but since His arrow, once fixed, had to find a target, he aimed it at a forest area in the far distance; as a result, the area became a dry desert.

The bridge over the ocean is built

Rama called his ministers together and directed them to construct the bridge across the ocean. Hanuman said, "Lord! Your name is the bridge that can safely transport man across the ocean of life. Which bridge can be stronger and safer than that?"

Jambavan, the aged general, said, “Lord! Your prowess, which is a raging conflagration, can dry up this mass of water; it is sure to be filled to the brim again by the tears of the women widowed in Lanka during the coming battle with Ravana and his armies.”

Rama smiled at the simple sincere loyalty and valour of these devotees. Jambavan reminded Nala and Nila of the assurance given by the unseen source, which was no other than the ocean itself, about the use that could now be made of the curse they had drawn upon themselves while young. He told them to install Rama in their hearts and throw hills, hillocks, mountains, and rocks into the sea.

The monkey heroes ran in all directions and brought back entire hills on their heads and shoulders, as if they were as light as balls used for games. They stood in one long line and passed the hills from shoulder to shoulder, all the while repeating Rama’s name aloud. Off and on, they uprooted huge trees and passed them onward to the bridge site, where Nala and Nila were casting the materials into the water.

They worked the whole day without rest and with no thought of food or sustenance. They built a length of 202 kilometers (14 *yojanas*) in one day. Refreshed by a good night’s sleep, they rose before dawn, during the sacred early morning (*Brahma muhurtha*), and resumed work. They acclaimed with cheers, “Victory to *Sri Ramachandra*, our Lord,” and hurried to the various corners of the land in search of hills and mountains. They brought them to the shore and piled them there for Nala and Nila.

The second day, the bridge was extended by another 288 km (20 *yojanas*); the next day, 302 km (21 *yojanas*); the fourth day, 316 km (22 *yojanas*); and the final day, 331 km (23 *yojanas*). Thus, they completed the 1440-kilometer (100 *yojana*) bridge in five days.

Thus, Nala and Nila, unconcerned with exhaustion or the need for rest, intent on fulfilling the task assigned by Rama, were able to announce to Rama that the bridge was ready, because his name and form were ever before those who toiled for its completion.

The Govardhana Hill is consoled

Rama and Lakshmana were pleased at the devotion and sense of duty of the monkeys, who had finished the job so soon and so well. Rama told the ruler of the monkeys, Sugriva, to pass along the long line of monkeys the order that each should put down the hill he was transporting right where he stood and to take a little rest before returning to base. Sugriva conveyed the order to those who were engaged in passing the boulders and peaks from shoulder to shoulder.

Hanuman was at that moment transporting a huge hill from the far north. When he heard Rama’s order, he cast it down, near Brindavan, where he was at the time. He was surprised to hear a loud wail from the fallen peak. “Alas,” it cried, “I have lost the chance to be of service to Rama.” It could not be consoled or comforted.

When Hanuman brought its condition to Rama’s notice, Rama smiled in appreciation. “Ah! Even mountains are yearning anxiously to participate in this task!” He expressed joy at their enthusiasm. He told Hanuman, “Go console the hill. Tell it not to be sad. During the coming *Dwapara* age, I shall hold that hill high on my palm for seven days and nights. On hearing this, the peak will be happy.” That assurance made it the Govardhana hill, which the Lord held aloft, as promised in the *Thretha* age.

Rama installs a lingam

On the fifth day, Rama sat on the seashore and was delighted when he saw the bridge. “O monkeys! Your devotion and skill in service are beyond description. By your sense of dedication you have won my heart.”

Vibhishana came to Him and said, “Lord! We have to enter Lanka tomorrow, so I have a prayer to place before you.”

Rama replied, “What is it? Tell me.”

Vibhishana continued, “Ravana is a devout worshiper of Siva. He has intense attachment toward that aspect of the Godhead. Yet, he will certainly meet death at your hands. To commemorate his devotion to Siva, I pray that you may, on the eve of moving over this bridge toward Lanka, install a Siva *lingam* here, so that in coming centuries, when people enter Lanka along this route, they can worship the Siva *lingam* and remember these events. They would indeed be fortunate to have such an experience. The *lingam* would be extolled by them as the idol installed by Rama. Even when the bridge is eroded and crumbled by time, the spot could be identified by future generations by means of the idol.”

Rama was happy at the suggestion. He said, “I shall fulfil your wish. You are the future ruler of Lanka, and in order to please you, I am ready to carry out your wishes, whatever is involved.”

Sugriva directed the monkeys to gather the requisites for the installation; he procured an impressive *lingam*, sending Hanuman himself for the purpose. Rama performed the ceremonial ablution for the *lingam* with water from the sea and invoked vitality and grace into it. Rama’s words had the effect of a *mantra*, so nothing more was needed to sanctify the *lingam*. The monkeys sang hymns, and their ecstatic shouts echoed from the heavens. Amidst the “hurrah, hurrah (*jai jai*)” of the monkey hordes, Lakshmana and Sugriva helped Rama to plant the *lingam* in position and to complete the ceremony of consecration.

A bad omen for Ravana!

The monkeys started marching over the bridge in regular formation, with Rama’s picture in their minds and His name on their tongues. The scene was inexpressibly sublime. Rama and Lakshmana stood on the bridge and looked at the sea surging on both sides. The presence of Rama, the ocean of compassion, raised the spirits of the ocean of water below. Waves rose to catch a glimpse of Rama; the denizens of the sea peeped over the waters and frolicked in joy at the sight of Rama. They discarded their natures and stared long and hungrily at His divine form.

The monkeys had prepared a camp on the Lanka end of the bridge, so when the vanguard reached the heights, the news spread throughout the island. Soon, Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva, and Vibhishana, who crossed at a slow pace, also reached the main gate of the fort of Lanka. Accepting Rama’s orders, the monkeys plucked entire trees and, dancing in joy, they ate the fruits and cast the branches and twigs over the battlements into the city. They heaved huge boulders over the wall and dropped them into the streets beyond. They sought out demons moving about alone outside the fort; they teased and tormented them, threatening to wring their necks. The monkeys’ pranks could not be restrained.

Soon, news reached Ravana that the enemy was at the gate. So far, Ravana was using only one of his ten throats to communicate with others, but now he roared through all ten in anger and hate. He did not remember that it was a bad omen to speak through the ten throats! A curse had been laid on him long ago: when he spoke through all ten, his end would draw near. Within a few seconds of the roar, he recollected the curse and became frightened. But however much he attempted to control his throats, his voice came out of all ten.

The demons who noted this strange occurrence inferred that his destruction was imminent, now that Rama and his monkey armies had entered Lanka. They sat amidst their wives and children and lamented that their lives would end that day or the next. They decided to use the little time they had at their disposal in merry-making and pleasure. When calamity approaches, discrimination departs, says the proverb.

Even when he knew that the curse was coming true, Ravana tried to dismiss the warning and told himself that nothing evil would happen to him. He moved into the queen's apartments, for he was afraid the ministers might read from his fallen face that he was overcome by the awareness of the curse. Ravana sank within himself through anxiety and agony. "Will they, as when my sister fell into their hands, slice off my ten noses and ears? Or will they slice off the heads themselves?" These fears haunted him.

Mandodari tries again to persuade Ravana

Ravana saw Mandodari, the queen, in the apartment. She saw that Ravana had become forlorn. She decided to administer wise counsel to him. She held his hands in hers and, in a soft, smooth, sweet voice, said, "Lord! Please listen to me. Give up your anger; pay heed to my words. Think them over carefully. We shouldn't plan to win over by hatred and opposition those whom we can win over by reverence and devotion. In such circumstances, we have to resort to intelligent reasoning. It won't do any good to oppose such sacred people. You can't achieve victory if you fight Rama; the glow-worm can't vanquish the sun.

"Listen to me. Take Sita, at least this moment, and, while returning her safe, prostrate before him and pray for pardon. Don't ruin your life and destroy Lanka and sacrifice the lives of its women and children. Persisting in your resolve to fight is not in line with the devotion and dedication to God for which you are so famous. If you hold fast to this horrid decision, even Siva, whom you have pleased hitherto, is sure to give you up. Good deeds alone can win the grace of God; how can God reward and appreciate such heinous acts?"

Mandodari spoke in this strain for a long time, trying to mend his ways and save him from destruction. "Lord! You are as dear to me as my own life. Pay heed. Rama is no ordinary human prince. He is the very person who destroyed Madhu and Kaitabha come again! He killed Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu. He is the Lord who trampled on the head of Emperor Bali. He demolished the pride of the thousand-armed Karthaviryarjuna. Then why boast of the prowess of your mere twenty? He is worshiped by the entire world; he is of the most auspicious form.

"A long time ago, you yourself told me that Brahma told you that God would incarnate as Rama in order to relieve the earth of the burden of cruelty and vice. Don't you remember? Aware of all this, how can you not recognize the truth and give up this path? Return Sita, the acme of chastity, the diadem of the virtuous, the incomparable jewel of beauty, to Rama. Then let us crown our son as emperor of this realm and spend the rest of our days in peace and plentiful joy in Rama's presence.

"Ah! How fortunate your brother is! He is moving in the cool shade of Rama's grace. It is not too late. At this very moment, hasten to Rama, who is at Lanka's very entrance, and fall at his feet, praying for pardon."

Mandodari was in tears. She rolled at the feet of her lord, appealing to him to be warned in good time and to take immediate measures to rescue himself, his empire, his people, and his fame.

Ravana raised her to her feet and wiped her eyes. He said, "Dear one! Why are you so agitated? Wherefrom all this fear, this lack of courage? There is no one more powerful than I in the world. The rulers of the eight direc-

tions have been defeated by the might of my arm. Death dare not step near me. Don't yield to fear. You are extolling that weakling Rama in my hearing, unaware of the depth and extent of my might." With these words, he left the queen and entered the audience hall, where he promptly sat on the throne.

Mandodari noticed his movements and the trend of his thoughts and said to herself, "What a fool! This is the inevitable fate of people who don't give up their false pride. Good counsel cannot enter their minds. When one is suffering from fever, sweet things taste bitter. He now has the poisonous fever of pride, so he rejects nectarine counsel as if it were poison. What more can I do now?" She pictured in her mind the calamities and sorrows that were in store for Lanka. She felt that, before witnessing and sharing in all that misery and grief, it would be better to end life itself. With a heavy heart and with thoughts of Rama filling her, she went into her room and threw herself on the bed.

Prahashta tries to persuade Ravana again

Ravana sent for his ministers and set about making preparations for the imminent battle. "Demons!" he accosted, "The monkeys, Jambavan, and the men who are now attacking us are not even a morsel for our maws. Don't lose courage, hesitate, or argue." "Plunge into the fight. Get ready," he yelled.

But Prahashta stood up and, with folded arms, said, "Demons! Let's not desert the right path. Lord! These ministers of yours speak words that are in line with your desire. But that won't ensure success. One solitary monkey crossed the ocean, came into our city, and performed many a wonderful feat. These ministers and these armies couldn't put an end to his destructive antics. You say monkeys are but morsels for our maws. Well, when that monkey was here, where were those maws? Did they have no hunger? When it burned the city into a heap of ashes, these ministers had evidently no appetite to eat it!

"Lord! The words that fall from the lips of these ministers might appear very pleasant to you now, but they will bring about dire calamities as time moves on. Think about all this in the quiet hours. Rama has struck camp on our Sunila mountain; he came over the sea through a bridge they constructed; he has with him an army of uncounted numbers of monkeys. Can such a person be a mere man? Give up that surmise, if you believe it. Do not prattle as the tongue that is let loose and talks. Do not welcome into your ears the rhetoric of these ministers. Do not also condemn me as a coward, afraid of battle. Believe in me and in the aptness and urgency of my advice.

"Take Sita with you now and surrender her to him, praying for pardon. That step will save us and save Lanka. We can then claim that we have rescued our tribe from destruction. This is the triumph we can achieve. Or else, face defeat and disaster. Get ready this very moment; your renown will last as long as the sun and moon endure. Don't acquire a name that will be execrated as long as the sun and moon endure."

Ravana replied in dire anger and sheer bravado. He was trembling with rage at the unpalatable advice that Prahashta gave him. Raising his voice to a wild roar, he admonished Prahashta in a torrent of abuse. "Fool! Who taught you this trickery? Where did you derive such wisdom? They say sparks originate in bamboo clusters! You are born in my clan." Ravana gnashed his teeth wildly; he shouted harsh and vulgar abuse and, finally, kicked Prahashta out of the hall.

But before going out, Prahashta clarified his stand, condemning his father and his overweening pride, which had rendered him blind. Ravana, he said, would be the cause of the destruction of the dynasty. He consoled himself that for one who is mortally stricken and is awaiting his last breath, no drug can be of any use. "So my good

advice appeared futile to my father,” he told himself.

He went straight to his mother and told her all that had happened. Both agreed that nothing they could say or do would turn him on to the right path. So, they sat together, lost in the contemplation of Rama and his majesty.

A night of waiting

The monkeys made a nice camp for Rama and Lakshmana on the Sunila Hill. They prepared soft rests for them, heaping grass, leaves, and flowers, and made them into nice beds. Rama appeared as soon as they had finished; he sat on it, to give them joy. A little later, he placed his head on Sugriva’s lap and went to sleep. Bows and arrows were kept in readiness on both sides of the bed.

The monkeys were scratching their itchy palms in anticipation of hitting Ravana and killing him. They were holding back only because Rama had not given them the go. Hanuman, the lucky, and crown prince Angada were reverentially massaging Rama’s feet. Lakshmana was standing at the foot of the bed, ready with his bow and arrow, observing Rama’s face with one-pointed attention.

At this moment, Rama looked toward the east. His eyes fell on the moon, which was rising above the horizon. “Friends!” he said, “Look at the moon. There is a dark patch on it —don’t you see it?”

Each one answered about the patch the way he felt, but Hanuman confessed, “Lord! I don’t see any dark patch on the moon. I see it as the reflection of your face, so I don’t see the patch you mentioned, or any other blemish.”

Rama spent the night with the monkeys until dawn, with delightful talk and pleasant companionship. When day brightened, he had his bath in the sea, performing the prescribed rituals on the shore. He called Sugriva’s ministers and other leaders and gave them instructions about the task ahead.

Rama’s envoy, Angada, advises Ravana

Later, they met and agreed unanimously that Angada, the son of Vali and heir-apparent of the monkey kingdom, go as an envoy to Ravana, before launching the siege of Lanka. Rama called Angada forward and told him, “Son! You are strong and virtuous; you must go on a mission from Rama to Ravana and advise Ravana cleverly and cautiously, softly and assuringly, without making him further enraged.” He was given directions about the tone and contents of what to tell Ravana.

He took leave, after prostrating at Rama’s feet. While departing, he said, “Master! Pray bless me with the auspicious look of your eyes. I am indeed fortunate to be entrusted with this work. Whatever might happen to me while executing it, I am ready to offer my very life to you.” Hearing these words, Rama’s heart melted with compassion. Rama clasped Angada to his bosom and placed his palm on his head, showering blessings on him.

Angada moved into the city, with Rama installed in his heart and his form ever in his mind. He pushed aside everyone who stopped him and displayed great self-confidence and courage. He encountered Ravana’s son on the way. The demon prince accosted him and asked, “Here, Oh monkey! Who are you and wherefrom?”

Angada replied, “I am Angada, Rama’s envoy.”

The demon raised his foot to kick Angada. But Angada was too quick for him; he caught foot and, raising him aloft, twirled him and dashed him on the ground! The demons who witnessed this were struck with terror;

they realised that the monkey was of gigantic might and kept discreetly away.

News spread that the monkey that had set Lanka aflame had returned, and this created wide-spread confusion and fear. Angada noticed that, wherever he turned, panic-stricken groups of inhabitants were watching his movements. He had no need to ask any group to clear the path; they hurried out as soon as he was seen!

At last, Angada stepped fearlessly into Ravana's audience hall. One of the guards carried the news of his arrival in hot haste to Ravana. Ravana directed him to bring the envoy to his presence and, accordingly, Angada was taken to the demon emperor.

Angada saw Ravana as a conscious mountain, black in colour. His twenty hands were as the branches of a giant tree. He walked up to him with no trace of fear in his heart. But everyone in that hall shuddered in their heart of hearts as they saw him enter and proceed. They were in a state of stupor.

Ravana asked Angada who he was. Angada replied, "I am Rama's envoy."

Ravana asked him the purpose of his visit.

"O Ravana!" Angada began, "you and my father were friends of old. So, with your welfare in view, I have come at Rama's orders to give you some sound advice." He continued softly and persuasively, "Unable to withstand pride, lust, and greed, you kidnapped the 'mother of all the worlds,' the daughter of Janaka. Well, let bygones be bygones. At least today, at this very moment, if you realise the fact of your iniquity and act as I am telling you, Rama will pardon you. Decide to do as I suggest, without delay. Or else, with your own hand, you will bury your clan and your kingdom in this soil."

Ravana replied, "O vilest of monkeys! You are indeed a fool. Perhaps you don't know that I am a foe of your 'God'. What's your name? What was the relation between me and your father? Don't be blind to the consequences of your speech."

Angada laughed outright at this outburst. "O monarch of demons. My name is Angada; my father's name is Vali. There was friendship between you two."

Hearing this, Ravana was rendered stiff and silent. But he soon overcame the reaction and said, "True, there was, I remember, a monkey of that name in olden days. Are you his son? Hello, Angada! You seem to have been born in that clump as a spark of fire in order to destroy it?"

Angada laughed aloud at the excited reply from Ravana. He said, "Ravana! Your days have come to an end. You will soon reach your old friend Vali. He can tell you there the consequence of opposing Rama. Equipped with twenty eyes, you are nevertheless blind; burdened with twenty appendages called ears, you are deaf. Caught in the thick night of ignorance, you strut in pride, proclaiming yourself great! The tribe you plan to save will be effaced; that is the plan. Sinner! Vile barbarian! Villain blinded by pride! Demon!"

When Angada gnashed his teeth in anger and poured the stream of abuse on his head, Ravana rose from his throne in a trice and shouted, "You monkey, you destroyer of your own race! Since I know and recognise the rules of political morality, I am bearing in silence your impertinence. But beware. There is a limit to my patience." Ravana stared at Angada in fiery anger.

But Angada was not at all affected by that demonstration. He retorted, "O demon monarch! I have heard much of your righteousness, your virtues, your political morality. Consider what wonderful achievements your

righteousness has effected. Kidnaping the wife of another person, devouring the messenger duly sent by your elder brother, Kubera —these are the highlights of your political morality! You boast of these without a trace of shame. You dare talk of your virtues and your morality? You set fire to the tail of the messenger who came to your kingdom, and yet you proclaim without shame that you are bound by rules. Such is the behaviour of demons (*rakshasas*). You have no right at all to utter the word political morality, for you are the vilest sinner.”

When Angada was replying, without break or hesitation, the courtiers who filled the audience hall were aghast with fear, wondering what was in store for them. Ravana resumed his talk. “Listen, monkey! Is there a single hero in your camp who can stand up against me in battle? Your Lord is broken down in sorrow at separation from his wife. He pines and pines every day. And his brother is affected and weakened by the sight of the agony. And, Sugriva? He hates you and is opposed to you, since you are the heir to the kingdom. Like a pair of birds fighting on the edge of a river, you will both drop into the flood some day. Both of you have your eyes on the same kingdom. So how can you fight wholeheartedly and successfully against me? My brother, upon whom you seem to rely, is a coward. Jambavan is too old to be of any use. Nala and Nila are but engineers, unaware of the art of wielding swords.”

Angada interrupted this tirade and cut in with his own. “Ravana! One tiny monkey entered your city and set it on flame. Did any fool believe that it was possible? And now, you, who know it is true, deny that the monkey is a valiant fighter. I’m not in the least affected by anger when you declare that there is no one in our camp who can defeat you in battle. Yes. The texts on morality lay down that either friendship or enmity has to be only with equals. Will anyone praise a lion for destroying a frog? Surely, an attempt by Rama to kill you would be too low for his status and dignity. Killing such a mean contemptible foe would reduce his majesty. The rules that lay down the conduct and characteristics of the warrior (*kshatriya*) caste, to which he belongs, are high and noble. You are a vicious, vile, vulgar sinner, who must meet death at the hands of mere monkeys.”

Ravana burst into desperate laughter. “Nasty monkeys! You dance in glee and jump shamelessly hither and thither, as the person who holds the rope tied round your waist commands. You learn the tricks he teaches and repeat them whenever he orders you, so that he can collect a few coins from the onlookers.”

Angada couldn’t put up with these sarcastic remarks. He ejaculated, “You seem to know only about animals; you haven’t cared to know about the Lord, God, destiny, and fate. Why, haven’t monkeys taught you more than you know? They demolished your parks, they killed your son, they reduced your city to a pile of ash. Yes. They have to perform one more feat, yet. They have to administer proper punishment to you.

“We allowed you to escape the fate that you must meet. I believed that your heart would be cured by down-right advice and harsh truth. But no. You have no sense of shame, no idea of repentance, no trace of morality, no habit of rectitude. What a pity! You are still gnashing your teeth in anger at Vibhishana and calling him names, like coward and traitor. You are burdening the earth by the weight of your body; the sooner you are eliminated the better. You are worse than the dogs that infest your streets. They don’t have the vices you suffer from. You will soon realise that their lives are better than yours.”

Angada poured abuse on Ravana regardless of convention and manners, and Ravana couldn’t digest such fiery admonitions. “Angada! Know that I am the hero, the redoubtable stalwart, who lifted the Kailasa peak by sheer physical power and courage; this Ravana is the person who laid not flowers but his own heads, plucked by him from his body, as offerings at Siva’s feet; this is the devotee whose might has been acknowledged by

Siva himself; this is the warrior whose name strikes terror in the bravest, whose picture spreads panic. Stop your prattle. Stop praising yourself and your patrons.”

But Angada was in no mood to stop. He continued his onslaught. “O you conceited fool! Don’t chatter away like this; use your breath for some good purpose; sing some songs in praise of Rama. Surrender to Him. Or else, His arrow will make your heads leap like balls from the shoulder where they are now resting, and the monkeys will gleefully kick them about, as in a ball game. I happen to be the messenger of Sugriva, our ruler. Unfortunately, I have no orders from Sri Rama. I don’t want to deprive them of the chance, or else I would put an end to your life in a trice and cast your carcass into the ocean.”

Angada grew into a fierce phenomenon as he uttered this threat. Like the lion, he slapped the ground with his palms. The earth shook so hard at the impact of those blows that the crowns on Ravana’s ten heads shook and fell on the floor. Ravana rolled from his throne, but he recovered balance very soon. Angada collected four of the ten and threw them with such great force and sure aim that they fell into Rama’s camp, right within His presence. The monkeys there were struck with wonder at the strange articles and described to each other the excellences and beauties of the jeweled crowns. Rama knew what they were; he said that, while coming over, they appeared like Rahu and Kethu, which cause eclipses.

Ravana commanded, “Bind this monkey; don’t allow him to leave; eat him up,” and he retired hastily to the inner apartments.

Angada shouted, “Shame on you! Why all this boast of strength and prowess? Go, dip yourself in the depths of the sea and hold your breath until you die. Woman-stealer! Fool! Lust-ridden lout! I’ll pluck your tongue out of your mouth on the battlefield and throw it as food for crows. Be warned.”

Angada gnashed his teeth in hateful anger when Ravana turned back and called on the demons in the hall, “Lift him by the legs and throw him on the floor; splinter his head.” At this, Meghanada rose from his seat and, holding Angada by his legs, pulled him with great force in order to make him fall. Many others rushed forward to help, but however many they were, they couldn’t move the feet even a little bit. They only rolled on the ground, full of humiliation and unable to decide what to do next. The mighty warrior Devakantaka tried various holds to make the feet move, but he also failed ignominiously.

At last, Ravana himself tried the impossible task. He held Angada by his legs and tried to lift him and throw him forcibly on the floor. Angada laughed at Ravana’s foolishness. He said, “Ravana! No, these are not the feet you have to hold. Place your hands on Rama’s feet, in the genuine gesture of surrender; that will liberate you from fear and bondage.”

With these words, Angada shook his feet in order to loosen the hold; the impact of that gesture was so unexpected and so strong that Ravana hit the floor and lost consciousness; his glory and splendour were destroyed. A sense of shame spread over his faces, and he looked like the moon in broad daylight, pale and poor.

Angada felt that he should not continue his dialogue with the coward. Rama, he remembered, had told him only to give Ravana some good advice. “This fellow won’t yield to good counsel, he won’t realise his error and correct himself. He sticks to his vicious nature. War alone can give effective cure.” Deciding thus, Angada left for the sacred proximity of Rama’s feet. There, he submitted a report of all that had happened.

Mandodari pleads once more with Ravana

Ravana entered the apartments of the queens, over-whelmed by shame and fear. Mandodari noted his pallid, crestfallen appearance and said, “At least, now, give up your foolish tenacity. To cultivate enmity toward Rama will bring disaster to the whole kingdom. You could not step across the line drawn by Lakshmana; how then could you hope to defeat them in battle? Your powers and might are but dry leaves before them. Your followers could not overpower their messengers, so how can you hope to overwhelm them when they invade this land in their billions? You couldn’t stir Angada’s feet even a hair’s breadth, and yet, you hope to capture and bind billions of such monkeys!

“I am pained that, in spite of all experience already available, you still hold obstinately to your resolution. Our son was killed. Your city was reduced into a heap of ash. Your parks were uprooted; countless demons were thrown up like balls and killed by the fall. Where were your strength and skills then? Boastful declarations can inflict no harm on these monkeys.”

“Lord,” Mandodari pleaded, “Pardon me for speaking. You are badly mistaken when you consider Rama a mere man. He is the master of the universe; He is an invincible hero. You are already aware of the extent of his might and valour, aren’t you? Recollect quietly, within yourself, the facts told by Angada. Remember! You were seated in the gathering of kings in Janaka’s hall to exhibit your strength and skill, but you failed even to shift Siva’s bow a little. Rama lifted it as if it was a spurt of playfulness and cast it aside in broken halves. You saw this demonstration of might. If you still do not give up your foolish tenacity, it is an indication that your destruction is imminent.

“What could you do when the nose and ears of your own sister, Surpanakha, were sliced off? Aren’t you ashamed to proclaim and boast about your strength and heroism, after all these experiences? Rama killed Vali with a single arrow. Was Vali an ordinary foe?

“Rama has now come with his army of monkeys and is encamped on Sunila hill. Rama is the very embodiment of righteousness and morality —why else would he send an envoy, as he has done, to advise you how you can still save yourself? This envoy tried to turn your mind toward accord with Rama. But you don’t give up your sense of pride; you don’t appreciate the moral sense that moves Rama; you don’t understand the virtues that animate the supremely sacred person who sent the envoy.

“And you are causing the downfall of your own kingdom! What could you do now to throw out Angada, the envoy, who entered the audience hall? In their camp are thousands, nay, hundreds of thousands of monkeys mightier and more destructive than this one. Listen! Give up this demonic passion; go and surrender to Rama.”

These words of counsel, reminding Ravana of happenings in the past, struck his heart like sharp arrows.

Ravana tries to trick Sita

A new day dawned. Ravana entered the audience hall as the very personification of vicious pride and installed himself on the throne. The words of Angada and Mandodari revolved fast and furiously inside his head. Plans, fears, schemes, and surmises rolled inside him, like the earth and sky rotating round him. But none of them was along the right lines, for the day of destruction of the demon clan was drawing near.

Ravana accosted a demon named Vidyujjihva, and said, “Fellow! Use your magic skill and bring Rama’s head before me, as well as his bow and arrows. Sita must believe them genuine and be plunged in grief!”

Vidyujjihva rose from his seat in a trice, moved out of the hall, and made a correct replica of Rama's head and bow and arrows. Ravana was pleased at the exactness of reproduction. He took them himself to the *ashoka* tree grove, where Sita was kept in confinement.

Holding them before her, he said, "Sita! See, these are the bow and arrows, this the head of the very person whom you extoll and pine for night and day. I have annihilated the monkey hordes; Lakshmana saved himself by fleeing from the field. In order to convince you that all this really happened, I brought you this head, this bow and these arrows. Look at them." He placed them before her.

Sita was hit by grief for just one moment, but she reminded herself that no one in the fourteen worlds could pluck that head. She knew that this was a mean trick played just to terrorise her, and she brushed aside the threats. "Ravana! Surely, your destruction has arrived. Or else, such abominable thoughts would not have come to you. You have no courage even to approach Rama; how then could you ever hope to kill him? Even in dream, you cannot realise that hope. This dirty magic trick fails to deceive me." She poured scorn and insults on Ravana.

Meanwhile, loud exultant shouts of "Hurrah (*jai*), hurrah for Lord Rama" were heard from all around. The monkeys had entered the city from all directions! Ravana hurried back into his palace and the audience hall.

The good woman, Sarama, wife of Vibhishana, came near Sita and consoled and comforted her. She said, "Mother! Ravana is a trickster, and all that he does is subterfuge. No one can dare hurt Rama; just now, he triumphantly entered Lanka with his monkey hordes. Our country, Lanka, is being shattered into shreds by the very shouts of the monkeys."