HAṀSASANDEŚA

of

Sri Vedantadesika

An English Rendering

of the

Tamil Translation, Notes and Foreword

by

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Foreword

Life in this material world is called '*saṁsāra*'. Philosophers who have analysed this worldly life opine that it doesn't confer true happiness. However, most people lead their lives with the belief that the pleasures they experience in this world are real. They manage their lives in the midst of several kinds of sufferings, including those caused by the body, mind, society (relatives and friends) and poverty. Scholars say that there are two ways to free oneself from these afflictions; these are mentioned in a Sanskrit verse which translates thus: "In the bitter tree called 'life', there are only two fruits which are tasty; one is the enjoyment of nectar-like poetry and the other association with noble persons"[1]. Those with discernment understand the true nature of all that they see in this world. They do not mistake apparent pleasure for real pleasures or apparent sorrows for real sorrows and are therefore detached from both.

It is a well known fact that, in olden days as well as today, many learned people have been subject to several hardships and poverty. However, they do not lose heart over their situation. On the contrary, they live happily, acquire fame and attain eternal bliss when they depart. This attitude is solely due to their erudition. They consider their troubles to be insignificant, as they experience constant delight in reading wonderful poetry, which is defined thus: 'That which is filled with beautiful words and lofty meanings'[2].

That none of the troubles which afflict most of us, such as those caused by poverty, disease or worries, could ever affect our most revered *ācārya*, Śrī Vedāntadeśika of Tūppul is known from his life-history. It is also seen that he chose to eke out his livelihood by daily alms (*uñchavṛtti*) and led a full life of a hundred and one years with undiminished enthusiasm and joy. Was wealth the reason for this? Or was it the result of various kinds of nourishing foods? Or was it due to a life filled with material pleasures? No, none of these. The secret of his excellent health, long life and happiness were his pure conduct, flawless mind, utter devotion to Bhagavān, his delightful absorption in acquiring knowledge and composing valuable works and his constant association with noble people.

Śrī Deśika, also known as '*Kavitārkikasiṁha*', fully followed the rules of literature which stipulate that it is inappropriate for a renowned poet to compose a poem according to his whims and fancies, without considering the merit or otherwise of a subject[3]. It can be univocally declared that, compared to all other poets, Śrī Deśika has completely reformed the

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[1] '*saṁsārakaṭuvṛkṣasya dve eva rasavatphale | kāvyāmṛtarasāsvādaḥ sangaśca sujanaiḥ saha ||*'

[2] *Sāhityadarpaṇam* (1.3): '*vākyaṁ rasātmakaṁ kāvyam*'

[3] '*kāvyālāpaṁśca varjayet*'

style of composition and of poesy. Further, it can be stated that no one else has enjoyed the delights of poetry as much as Svāmi Deśika.

As mentioned earlier, poetry is considered extremely enjoyable ('*vākyaṁ rasātmakam*') and comparable to sugarcane juice. The compositions of great poets, even if they are about ordinary people or things, are no doubt eminently enjoyable. But Svāmi Deśika invariably focuses only on the noblest principle, the deepest essence in all his writings[1]. Only those works on Bhagavān, Who is described as an 'Embodiment of nectar'[2] and Who is as delectable as filtered and undiluted sugarcane juice, are considered pure and superior to all other poetic works. The poems of Śrī Deśika abound in choice words and profound meanings, akin to gold flowers with added fragrance, and provide endless delight to the readers. Desiring to nourish the world with exquisite poetry, he has described Bhagavān's infinite and incomparable auspicious qualities and various philosophical principles in poetic rhythm[3] and also conveyed the grandeur of poesy through his numerous treatises and devotional hymns[4]. These works of Śrī Deśika are wonderful lessons in prosody and a veritable treasure for the discerning reader, to be enjoyed here and hereafter.

Be that as it may, a doubt could arise in the minds of readers: when there is already a '*Sandeśakāvyam*' (message in the form of poetry), titled '*Meghasandeśa*' (composed by the great poet, Kāḷidāsa), which fulfils all requirements of such a composition, why should Svāmi Deśika compose another one? It is hoped that the explanation given earlier may suitably address this doubt. That Svāmi Deśika had the highest regard for Mahākavi Kāḷidāsa and his works is evident from the fact that he composed the *Yādavābhyudaya* along the lines of the *Raghuvaṁśa* and the *Haṁsasandeśa* in a style similar to the *Meghasandeśa*. While the *Meghasandeśa* and the *Haṁsasandeśa* are both highly noteworthy compositions in Sanskrit literature, there are a few reasons why Śrī Deśika wrote the *Haṁsasandeśa*; these are listed here. Except the beauty of poesy, other aspects of the *Meghasandeśa* are not held in high

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[1] *Śrīmad Rahasyatrayasāra – Sāraniṣkarṣādhikāra*: '*asāramalpasāraṁ ca sāraṁ sārataraṁ tyajet | bhajet sāratamaṁ śāstre ratnākara ivāmṛtam* ||'

[2] *Taittirīya-upaniṣad – Brahmavallī*, 7th *anuvāka*: '*raso vai saḥ*'

[3] The *Haṁsasandeśa*, the *Yādavābhyudaya*, the *Pādukāsahasram* and the *Sankalpa-sūryodaya* contain descriptions of Bhagavān as well as explanations of philosophical principles and are examples of outstanding literature.

[4] Just like Śrī Deśika's poems, his religious and philosophical works also convey the lofty principles of *Vedānta* through alliterations (*anuprāsa*) and rhetoric (*alankāra*). These can be seen in the *Adhikaraṇasārāvaḷi*, the *Mīmāṁsapādukā*, *Śrīmad Rahasyatrayasāra*, the *Daśāvatāra-stotram* and the *Dayāśatakam.*

esteem by illustrious scholars. As mentioned earlier, great poets consider it improper to compose odes on one who is not famous or noble[1]. The hero of the *Meghasandeśa* is an anonymous demigod (*yakṣa*)[2], while the messenger is an inanimate cloud. A truly delightful *Sandeśakāvyam* should have an eminent person as the hero and, as is the worldly convention, another person or any other living being as the messenger. Such a setting will enhance the beauty of the poem. This is what Svāmi Deśika has done; he has chosen Śrī Rāma – Who belongs to a noble lineage, Who possesses unequalled valour and Who is an incarnation of Bhagavān Viṣṇu – as the Hero, with the king of birds, *viz*. the royal swan, as His messenger. Thus, the credit of bringing glory to the genre of *Sandeśakāvyam* goes to Śrī Deśika alone.

However, there are some who feel that Kāḷidāsa composed the *Meghasandeśa*, basing it on the *Rāmāyaṇa*, with the cloud taking on the role of the messenger Hanuman[3]. The practice in earlier days was that, even if a poem was based on a commonplace topic, the inner import would at least include the names of some famous persons and their life-stories. Accordingly, while Kāḷidāsa, the 'emperor of poets', had composed the *Meghasandeśa* with the 'agony of separation of lovers' as its main theme, it also contains references to the much-loved life-story of Sītādevī and Śrī Rāma. Such works belong to a class called '*Vipralambha-śṛngārakāvyams*'[4]. In the *Haṁsasandeśa*, Śrī Deśika has elevated this type of works by choosing the life of Śrī Rāma Himself, *viz*. the period of His separation from Sītādevī, as the primary subject, with philosophical doctrines as the inner purport. Thus he has rightfully earned the fame of having composed a *Sandeśakāvyam* which is thoroughly enjoyable in all aspects.

In the *Meghasandeśa*, the poet Kāḷidāsa uses the phrase '*jātaṁ vaṁśe bhuvanavidite puṣkalāvartakānām*'[5] to accord a special status to the cloud-messenger. In his *Haṁsasandeśa*, Śrī

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[1] The term '*kāvyālāpaṁ*' implies composing poetry in honour of someone who is not renowned.

[2] The first verse of the *Meghasandeśa* contains the words '*kaścit... yakṣaḥ*'.

[3] This idea has been refuted by Pūrṇasarasvatī, the author of the commentary '*Vidyullatā*' on the *Meghasandeśa*. He states that, since Kāḷidāsa has expressly referred to episodes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* as objects of comparison in many places in his work, *viz*. '*janakatanayāsnānapuṇyodakeṣu*' (verse 1), '*raghupatipadairankitaṁ mekhalāsu*' (12) and '*ityākhyāte pavanatanaye maithilī vonmukhī sā*' (101), it is unlikely that he would have (indirectly) suggested a comparison between Hanuman and the cloud.

[4] The class of *Vipralambha-śṛngārakāvyams* describes the pangs of separation of couples when they are away from each other. Such poems also contain expressions of their mutual love and longing.

[5] *Meghasandeśa* (1.6): 'Born in the famed family of clouds' (this refers to the particular cloud chosen by the Yakṣa as his messenger).

Deśika deftly changes the phrase to read '*vaṁśe jātassavituranaghe*'[1], thereby underlining the greatness of Śrī Rāma's lineage and also bringing out His real glory. In the words of the first poet Vālmīki, the exceptionally accessible Śrī Rāma is said to have declared, "I, Rāma, consider myself as a human being, the son of Daśaratha"[2]. To indicate the fact that such a person is the Hero of the work, Svāmi Deśika visualises, in the *Haṁsasandeśa*, Śrī Rāma as saying, "Taking into consideration the greatness of the human race"[3] and "I will mingle with ordinary humans in this world"[4]. As this may still not clarify if the Hero is an ordinary, anonymous person like the *yakṣa* of the *Meghasandeśa*, Śrī Deśika describes Him as 'none other than the Consort of Mahālakṣmī'[5] in the first verse. In the eighth verse, he lists out the immeasurable greatness of Śrī Rāma's lineage, through His own words (in conversation with the royal swan): "The members of the Ikṣvāku dynasty possess the ability to change the world through thought alone; they are inherently superior to the rest of the world. Though I belong to such a lineage...."[6]. Further, Śrī Deśika portrays the Hero as being attentive even to lowly beings because of His approachability and, at the same time, greater than the greatest due to His nobility – as stated in the *Kaṭhopaniṣad* (2.20): '*aṇoraṇīyān mahato mahīyān*' – and firmly establishes that his Hero has none equal or superior to Him in this world.

While Kāḷidāsa had chosen the royal swans to assist the cloud in its endeavour[7], Śrī Deśika has improved upon the idea by making the royal swan itself as the messenger for the Hero. Besides, he has named his *kāvyam* '*Haṁsasandeśa*', thereby further raising the bird's status.

Coming to the composition, the *Meghasandeśa* has been written mainly for the delectation of the readers. The *Haṁsasandeśa*, on the other hand, contains the hallowed story of Sītādevī, the incarnation of Goddess Śrīdevī (Lakṣmī)[8] and Śrī Rāma, the incarnation of Bhagavān

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[1] *Haṁsasandeśa* (1.1): 'Born in the blemishless family the Sun-god' (this refers to Śrī Rāma).

[2] *Śrī Rāmāyaṇa – Yuddhakāṇḍa* (120.12): '*ātmānaṁ mānuṣaṁ manye*'

[3] *Haṁsasandeśa* (1.1): '*mānayanmānuṣatvaṁ*'

[4] *Ibid*. (1.1): '*madhye kecidvayamiha sakhe kevalaṁ mānuṣāṇāṁ*'

[5] *Ibid*. (1.1): '*devaḥ śrīmān*'

[6] *Ibid*. (1.8): '*icchāmātrāt jagadaparathā saṁvidhātuṁ kṣamāṇāṁ ikṣvākūṇāṁ prakṛtimahatām...*'

[7] *Meghasandeśa* (1.11): '*rājahaṁsāḥ sahāyāḥ*'

[8] *Haṁsasandeśa* (2.31): '*yeṣu śreyo bhavati*'. Please see the verse and its translation, which states that Goddess Śrīdevī and Sītādevī possess identical attributes.

Viṣṇu. Hence it is not only a poem[1], but also a work that confers great blessings here and hereafter. This has been declared by the author himself[2]. Through the story of reunion of Śrī Rāma and Sītādevī, this work acts as a beacon for all those souls subjected to the vagaries of worldly life to reach the holy Feet of the supreme Couple, *viz*. Śrī Rāma and Sītādevī.

Moreover, this poem can also be considered as a detailed exposition of devotion (*bhakti*) to Sītādevī, through the medium of a swan-messenger sent by Śrī Rāma, Who was pining for Her. Interestingly, the *Śrīstuti*, a hymn by Svāmi Deśīka on Goddess Śrī, is also composed using the same metre, *i.e*. *Mandākrāntā*, as the *Haṁsasandeśa*. By choosing this metre for both works, the author has underlined the identity of Sītādevī with Śrīdevī and also indicated that both compositions would grant the same benefits when recited.

Reading further, it is seen that the lines '*ambhojānāmuṣasi miṣatām antarangairapāngaiḥ*', '*tanvī tungastanabharanatā taptajāmbūnadābhā*' and '*amṛtalaharīlabdhasabrahmacaryaiḥ*', which are seen in the *Śrīstuti* (verses 15, 11 and 21 respectively), are also found in the *Haṁsasandeśa* (2.29, 2.10 and 2.29). Besides, in the *Śrīstuti*, Śrī Deśika wonders 'whether Goddess Śrī emerged from the ocean or from the sacrificial site on the ground'[3]. By establishing, through these four instances, that Sītādevī and Goddess Śrī are the same, Svāmi Deśika has shown that both these works (the *Haṁsasandeśa* as well as the *Śrīstuti*) would bestow bliss on the readers in this world and the next.

While the last verse of the *Haṁsasandeśa* mentions the benefits of reciting it, *viz*. it rewards the reader with happiness in this world and liberation at the end of his life here, the very first verse of the *Śrīstuti* declares that Goddess Śrī is the only Means to achieve glory in this life and eternal bliss afterwards[4]. It can therefore be said that the outcome of reciting these two works is the same.

It has been said earlier that Svāmi Deśika, deciding to write a *Vipralambha-śṛngāra-kāvyam*, chose the sacred story of Śrī Rāma and Sītādevī as its theme. To add to the greatness of this work, he has incorporated a few philosophical precepts in the narrative. The storyline,

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[1] Please refer verse 2.10 of the *Haṁsasandeśa*. The sentiments of love and beauty, which are an integral part of *Śṛngārakāvyams*, are epitomised in Sītādevī, Who is also celebrated as the presiding Deity of all prosperity.

[2] *Haṁsasandeśa* (2.50): '*śreyasāṁ prāptihetum*'. It is to be noted that, just like the other works of Śrī Deśika, the *Haṁsasandeśa* too has a *phalaśruti*, which states that it bestows prosperity on the reader.

[3] *Śrīstuti* (2): '*āvirbhāvaḥ kalaśajaladhāvadhvare vā'pi yasyāḥ*'

[4] *Ibid*. (1): '*pratyakṣānuśravikamahimaprārthinīnāṁ prajānāṁ śreyomūrtiṁ...*'

together with its spiritual significance, has made the composition extremely enjoyable. By equating the effects of intense love on the minds of couples (in this case, Sītādevī) to the state of *Nirvikalpa-samādhi*, which is the highest state in *yoga* (refer verse 2.22), the poet has implied that, having developed steadfast devotion to Bhagavān, it does not behove people of this world to be interested in any other entity. The way in which Śrī Deśika has used paronomasia to convey this idea will certainly be appreciated by discerning scholars.

Let us take verse 54 of the first section ('*sthitvā tatra kṣaṇam ubhayataśśailaśṛngāvatīrṇaiḥ srotobhedairadhigataguṇaṁ cāruviṣphāraghoṣaiḥ | lakṣīkurvan daśamukhapurīṁ saumya-patraprakṛṣṭo velācāpaṁ śara iva sakhe vegatastvaṁ vyatīyāḥ ||*'). A careful study of this verse shows that it fully reflects the scriptural passage which declares, "The *Praṇava* is a bow, the soul an arrow, the supreme Brahman is the Target; the soul, when despatched through the agency of an *ācārya* towards the Brahman, reaches It and, like the arrow, becomes one with It"[1].

It would be appropriate to compare the above verse with another one of Śrī Deśika, whose meaning is given here: 'The body is likened to the city of Lankā amidst the ocean of *saṁsāra*. It is under the control of the arrogant mind, which has the ten sense-organs and motor-organs as its faces. The condition of the soul, who is imprisoned in the body, is similar to that of Sītādevī, Who was incarcerated at Lankā. She was assured by Hanuman, who knew of Śrī Rāma's sterling qualities, that She would be rescued by Śrī Rāma at the appropriate time. Likewise, the soul is also fully assured by the *ācārya*, who possesses sound knowledge of the (three) realities, that Bhagavān will liberate him at the right time. Finally, like Sītādevī, Who was eagerly waiting to be reunited with Śrī Rāma, the soul, now buoyed up with his *ācārya's* reassuring words, would be longing to reach Bhagavān's Feet'[2]. Those who attentively study the *Haṁsasandeśa* will realise that this principle forms its core.

Here, I would like to refer to one more verse from the first part, which contains the esoteric truths. Let us study the second verse of this work. (The verse is as follows: '*kālye senāṁ kapikulapatestūrṇamudyojayiṣyan dūrībhāvājjanakaduhiturdūyamānāntarātmā | krīḍākhelaṁ kamalasarasi kvāpi kālopayātaṁ rākācandradyutisahacaraṁ rājahaṁsaṁ dadarśa ||*'.) The

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[1] *Muṇḍakopaniṣad* (2.2.4): '*praṇavo dhanuḥ śaro hyātmā brahma tallakṣyamucyate | apramattena veddhavyaṁ śaravattanmayo bhavet ||*'. This passage has again been referred to by Śrī Deśika in the *Sankalpa-sūryodaya* (verse 2) thus: '*lakṣye yatra śrutimitaguṇākṛṣṭilabdhāvadhānaiḥ pratyagbāṇaḥ praṇavadhanuṣā sattvavadbhiḥ prayuktaḥ | madhyevakṣaḥ sphurati mahasā patralaḥ kaustubhātmā padmākāntaḥ sa bhavatu dayādugdhasindhuḥ śriyai vaḥ ||*'

[2] *Sankalpa-sūryodaya* (verse 71): '*darpodagradaśendriyānanamanonaktañcarādhiṣṭhite dehe'smin bhavasindhunā parigate dīnāṁ daśāmāsthitaḥ | adyatve hanumatsamena guruṇā prakhyāpitārthaḥ pumān lankāruddhavideharājatanayānyāyena lālapyate ||*'

yogis and others consider the lotus-shaped heart to be the seat of the mind; a noble and resolute mind is compared to a royal swan. It is generally seen that the mind enjoys utmost clarity in the wee hours of the day. (In other words, the quality of *sattva* or goodness is predominant in the early mornings.) During those hours, Bhagavān's ardent devotees, caught in the shackles of this material world and longing for liberation, practise meditation, with their minds firmly fixed on Him. The phrase '*rākācandradyutisahacaraṁ rājahaṁsaṁ*' denotes a pure and noble mind, '*krīḍākhelaṁ kamalasarasi*' refers to its blissful meditation on Bhagavān, Who is centred in the recesses of the (devotee's) lotus-shaped heart, '*kālye*' signifies the early morning period (*Brāhmamuhūrta*), the term '*kapikula*' indicates the fickle sense-organs, '*dūyamānāntarātmā*' represents the devotee's avid desire for liberation and the words '*tūrṇam udyojayiṣyan*' describe his efforts, through an *ācārya*, to attain liberation at the end of his current life itself. The term '*tanmayātmā*', which appears in the next (3rd) verse, implies the blissful communion that awaits the liberated soul, as a result of the *bhakti-yoga* or *prapatti* that he had performed earlier[1].

By choosing a theme from *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa* of the first poet Vālmīki for his work and by modelling it on the *Meghasandeśa* of Mahākavi Kāḷidāsa, Śrī Vedāntadeśika, the author of this composition, has revealed his profound regard for both poets. Besides, by modifying this *Śṛngārakāvyam* into a work that can bestow both worldly and spiritual benefits, he has shown himself to be a pioneer in the world of poesy.

Having translated the *Meghasandeśa* into Tamil and published it 30 years ago, I was extremely desirous of similarly translating the *Haṁsasandeśa*, which is even more enjoyable. It was my good fortune that I met Sri S S Srinivasaraghavan, one of the owners of Thomson & Co., Ltd., Chennai, and so was able to publish the text, translation and notes of the *Haṁsasandeśa*.

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Vepery, Chennai
Vishu Year (12.08.1941)

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[1] Scholars usually compare the mind to a swan. Taking a cue from Śrī Deśika's *Haṁsasandeśa* – which describes Śrī Rāma's efforts to send a royal swan as His messenger – a poet from Kerala, who was a staunch devotee of Śiva, had composed a work and given it the same name, *viz. Haṁsasandeśa*. In this poem, which speaks of his intense devotion to Śiva, the poet's mind is identified with a swan. He had, for some time, forgotten his devotion to Śiva and so, imagining this devotion (*Śivabhakti*) to be his lady-love, he sends the swan, *i.e.* his mind, as his messenger. [This work was published in 1930 as part of the Trivandrum Sanskrit Series (No. CIII).]

The Kerala poet and commentator, Pūrṇasarasvatī, who is well known for his commentary called '*Vidyullatā*' on the *Meghasandeśa* of Kāḷidāsa, has also written a *kāvyam* titled '*Haṁsasandeśa*'. He has thus paid his obeisance to both Kāḷidāsa and Vedāntadeśika and is said to have declared that, among all *Sandeśakāvyams*, the *Meghasandeśa* and the *Haṁsasandeśa* are the best.

Haṁsasandeśa
Āśvāsa I

1. Bhagavān, the Consort of Goddess Śrī[1], Who had taken birth in the blemishless lineage of the Sun-god to honour the human race, was extremely desirous to locate Jānakī (Sītādevī). As Hanuman had returned that morning[2], Śrī Rāma, with increasing love (for Sītādevī) and having decided the further course of action, spent the night – which seemed like an aeon[3] – with great difficulty, until the next day dawned.

2. Though He had decided to send the army of the monkey-king Sugrīva on the march to Lankā before sunrise, His heart was sunk in deep sorrow due to the great distance between Him and Jānakī. At that time, He saw a royal swan[4], which had come there for the season[5], sporting in the nearby lotus-pond, lustrous like the full moon.

3. As the gait of the swan reminded Him of Sītādevī's movements, its form, the design in Her garments and its notes, the tinkling of Her anklets, His attention was riveted on the bird. Strong though He was, He completely lost Himself thinking about Her and, for a short time, became sad and confused. Looking at this, it seems natural that, when time comes, the control of Kāmadeva (the god of love) reigns supreme.

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[1] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Yuddhakāṇḍa* (120.13): '*bhavān nārāyaṇo devaḥ śrīmānścakrāyudho hariḥ*' – 'You are indeed Nārāyaṇa, the God of gods, the Wielder of the Cakrāyudha and the Consort of Śrī'.

[2] This narrative of sending the swan as a messenger, *viz*. the *Haṁsasandeśa*, begins after Hanuman returns from Lankā.

[3] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Āraṇyakāṇḍa* (64.14): '*jñātipakṣavihīnasya rājaputrīmapaśyataḥ | manye dīrghā bhaviṣyanti rātrayo mama jāgrataḥ ||*' – 'Deprived of my relatives and suffering from the loss of Jānakī, my nights will be sleepless and long'.

[4] Among the species of swans, those whose beaks and feet are red and whose bodies are pure white are considered superior to the others and are therefore called 'royal swans'. Keeping in mind the sentence '*rājahaṁsāḥ sahāyāḥ*' in the *Meghasandeśa* (1.11), Śrī Deśika seems to have imagined Śrī Rāma choosing the royal swan itself to help Him convey a message to Sītādevī.

[5] As per the poet's imagination, this episode of the swan being sent as a messenger occurs in the autumn season, which succeeds the monsoon. It is during the autumn that kings marshal their forces and go to war. Poets describe swans returning from the Mānasarovar to this country during this season and taking up residence in ponds and lakes filled with rainwater (from the previous season). The term '*kālopayātam*' indicates that the swan had come there by chance, when Śrī Rāma was pining for Sītādevī and wanted to console Himself by sending Her a message.

4. The elder Brother of Lakṣmaṇa, Śrī Rāma[1], slowly composed Himself and decided to send a message of love through the swan to Sītādevī to sustain Her. To that end, He paid obeisance to the bird and started worshipping it with lotus petals[2]. Verily, acquiring a messenger is more pleasurable to lovers than embracing their beloveds[3].

5. Śrī Rāma, Who was deeply disturbed (due to Sītādevī's separation), regarded the bird as even superior to Hanuman and began to lovingly entreat it, despite its inability to comprehend His message. Persons suffering due to separation (from their beloveds) are sometimes wont to plead with objects such as cloud, mountain and tree, disclosing their pitiable state[4]. Why, then, should one not explain to a creature capable of understanding joy and sorrow?

6. O swan, the sages extol you as one born in the dynasty of Viṣṇu[5], Who is capable of sorting the ocean-like *Vedas* and Whose body is the entire universe, and also as the favourite vehicle of the four-faced god (Brahmā). Already famous for your gait[6], you have, perhaps, inherited the alluring complexion of Brahmā's consort (Sarasvatī) as well as the ambrosial tones to be enjoyed by the ('taste-buds' of the) ears[7].

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[1] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Āraṇyakāṇḍa* (66.15): '*tvadvidhā na hi śocanti satataṁ samadarśanāḥ*' – 'Brave brother! It does not behove equanimous persons like You, who consider joy and sorrow alike, to lose heart and grieve like this' – these are Lakṣmaṇa's words of solace and encouragement to Śrī Rāma. The phrase '*lakṣmaṇasyāgrajanmā*' here indicates that it was Lakṣmaṇa who helped Śrī Rāma to recover from grief (over the loss of Sītādevī).

[2] Here, it is relevant to note the line in the *Meghasandeśa* (1.4): '*sa pratyagraiḥ kuṭajakusumaiḥ kalpitārghāya tasmai*' – '(The *yakṣa*) having paid his respects to the cloud with big jasmine flowers..'.

[3] *Meghasandeśa* (2.33): '*kāntodantaḥ suhṛdupanataḥ saṅgamāt kiñcidūnaḥ*' – 'For women, the arrival of their beloved's friend (bringing good tidings about him) is scarcely less than an actual meeting (with the beloved)'.

[4] *Ibid*. (1.5): '*kāmārtā hi prakṛtikṛpaṇāścetanācetaneṣu*' – 'It is natural for those smitten by love to bemoan their abject state to sentient as well as non-sentient entities'.

[5] The *Purāṇas* say that, when Brahmā appeared in the aggregate universe (before creation), he did not possess the knowledge (to create the universe). The supreme Being Nārāyaṇa then appeared as a Swan, classified the *Vedas*, taught the principles to Brahmā and helped him create the universe. Śrī Rāma praises the swan as having been born in the lineage of Bhagavān, Who incarnated as a Swan.

[6] The swan is known for its elegant gait. That it is famous for its discernment too is another meaning. (This is conveyed by the term '*praguṇamati*' in the verse).

[7] This is based on the line '*jātaṁ vaṁśe bhuvanavidite puṣkalāvartakānāṁ*' of the *Meghasandeśa* (1.6).

7. Friend, I am one amongst the many ordinary men on this earth, whereas you truly possess the greatness to be the chief of those who travel in the sky of this vast world[1]. Still, it befits you to be a messenger for one who has approached you for help. After all, even Brahmā, the creator of the entire universe, served as a charioteer long ago[2].

8. The descendants of the Ikṣvāku race are naturally capable of transforming the world by their mere thought[3]; they are also inherently very lofty-minded. As even this race is now in such a sad state, it is but proper that you visit Lankā, the capital of demons, which is situated on the Trikūṭa Hill, alternately visible and hidden due to the waves from the surrounding ocean.

9. Dear swan, the southern direction abounds in holy places and noble qualities. It is beautiful because of the lush sandalwood forests; it contains places that are sources for lovely pearls and is the origin for gentle winds. Ignoring its only blemish, *viz*. that it is the abode of demons, please proceed further, for the sake of my love and for the survival of Jānakī.

10. Like indiscreet prattlers who quickly emerge when the learned go away, the peacocks, which had strutted about haughtily when you left for Mount Kailāsa[4], have now shed their feathers and fallen silent[5], since the monsoon season has passed. This sight will delight you much[1].

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[1] The phrase in the poem is '*vyomagānāṁ patistvam*'. The word '*vyomaga*' generally refers to one who flies in the sky. The phrase '*vyomagānāṁ pati*' denotes the royal swan, which is the king of birds. It can also indicate the chief of celestials (*viz*. Indra). Here, the poet has employed paronomasia to equate the eminence of the swan with that of Indra.

[2] The *Purāṇas* say that, when Śiva went to destroy the Tripurāsura (the three *asura* brothers), Brahmā was his charioteer. The *Mahābhārata – Karṇaparva* (24) has these lines: '*tataḥ sa bhagavān devo lokasraṣṭā pitāmahaḥ | sārathye kalpito devairīśānasya mahātmanaḥ | ..... āruhya bhagavān devo dīpyamānaḥ svatejasā | abhīśūn hi pratodaṁ ca sañjagrāha pitāmahaḥ ||*' – 'Then Brahmā, the creator of the universe, its 'grandfather', was appointed by the celestials to be the charioteer of the noble Parameśvara ..... The effulgent Brahmā mounted the chariot and held the reins and the whip'.

[3] This is based on the line in *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Āraṇyakāṇḍa* (64.76): '*sadevagandharvamanuṣya-pannagaṁ jagatsaśailaṁ parivartayāmi*' – 'I will topple the universe, together with its gods, celestial musicians, humans, serpents and mountains'.

[4] Poets aver that, during rains, swans leave this country to go to the Mānasa Lake near Mount Kailāsa.

[5] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa –Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* (30.34): The poet Vālmīki describes this scene thus: '*nabhaḥ samīkṣyāmbudharairvimuktaṁ vimuktabarhābharaṇā vaneṣu | priyāsvasaktā vinivṛttaśobhā gatotsavā*

11. Gathering fresh honey from the red lotuses in the ponds, wafting through the brooks of blue lilies that have blossomed in their season and carrying the droplets of ichor from the wild elephants, the wind too, honourable friend, will shower you with various fragrances and pay its respects to you[2].

12. When ruffled by the wind, the *Bandhujīva* flowers (deep red flowers of the Noon plant, *Pentapetes Phoenicea*) which have grown (blossomed) with you now[3] – and which can therefore be called your 'relatives'[4] – will smear you with their fragrant pollen dust[5], thus living up to their name. You will then be likened to the moon[6] on Śiva's head which, due to the presence of the red dye from Pārvatī's feet and the foam from the river Gangā, resembles a full moon[7].

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dhyānaparā mayūrāḥ' – 'On seeing the clouds in the sky disappear, the peacocks in the dense forests stand forlorn, having lost their lustrous feathers, their desire in their mates and their enthusiasm'.

[1] The *Śakunaśāstram* states: '*manaḥprasādaḥ prathamaṁ prasthāne siddhikāraṇam*' – 'Happiness at the beginning of a venture foretells its success'.

[2] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Sundarakāṇḍa* (1.88): '*siṣeve ca tadā vāyū rāmakāryārthasiddhaye*' – 'The wind blew gently on Hanuman, who was flying to Lankā, wishing him success on his mission for Śrī Rāma'. [The verse of the *Haṁsasandeśa* has an implied meaning as well: The gentle movement of the wind is compared to the languorous wanderings of an amorous man, covered with perfumes, who is imbibing sweet wine, delighting in the company of lovelorn damsels of the 'Padminī' class (the best of the four types of women) and enjoying the glances of their bewitching, dark, wide eyes.]

[3] The word 'now' refers to the autumn season.

[4] Swans become active during autumn. The *Bandhujīva* flowers too blossom in that season. Since both are seen together, the flowers are appropriately described as the swan's relatives. (This is a play on the word '*bandhujīva*', which also means 'kinsman' or 'relative'.)

[5] The poet imagines the application of pollen dust from the *Bandhujīva* flowers to be like that of sandal paste for the swan. The flowers are described as paying respects to their relative, the swan, according to the injunction in the *Dharmaśāstras*: '*pūjayeyuḥ gṛhasthāstu bāndhavān gṛhamāgatān*', *viz.* 'Householders should honour their kinsmen who visit them'.

[6] The swan, whose colour was already yellowish due to the pollen of the *Bandhujīva* flowers, is subsequently anointed, as it were, with the red colour of the petals, making it appear like a large full moon.

[7] After coming into contact with the red dye on Pārvatī's feet and partially covered by the white froth of the river Gangā, the crescent moon on Śiva's head has turned into a full moon, reddish in colour.

13. O royal swan, the autumnal clouds in the sky, gently moved by the favourable wind from behind, shall serve as your parasols, whose ribs are the slender rays of the sun and whose colourful borders are the remnants of the rainbow[1].

14. Dear friend[2], after such an enjoyable travel, you will meet your friend, the noble Sītā, who appeared in the ground when King Janaka ploughed his field. She maintains her frail body, amidst great sorrow[3], only for my sake, and is hence famed for her fidelity.

15. Your lover, the lotus pond, which had shrunk during your absence, has once again become joyful (now that you have returned). Please tell her gently that you will (be going away again and will) come back very soon. I am sure that, in her present (happy) mood and due to her love for Sītā, she will grant permission in this matter[4] through the lute-like, sweetly resonant sound of the bees hovering above the lotuses.

16. You may fly up from this pond and go southward, displaying, for a few moments, your pure white form to the women of the Śabara tribe – who would be enjoying the company of their lovers in their homes – causing them to wonder if there is an untimely full moon. When you notice heavy-winged birds from afar during your flight, please give them sufficient space[5] and continue flying.

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[1] Now that the rainy season is over, the clouds are white. These are compared to umbrellas, with the partly visible rainbow as their multi-coloured fringes and the delicate rays of the sun as their ribs. When a king goes on his rounds, his attendants usually follow him, holding open umbrellas as a mark of respect. Here too, the royal swan is the king and the wind, which 'bears' the umbrellas, is the servitor.

[2] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* (33.61): '*acchalaṁ mitrabhāvena satāṁ dārāvalokanam*' – 'It is not wrong for a guileless man to see his friend's chaste wife'. The author has used the term '*priya sakha*' to indicate this sentiment.

[3] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Sundarakāṇḍa* (59.34): '*sā prakṛtyaiva tanvangī tadviyogācca karśitā*' – 'Already slender by nature, She has become even more emaciated due to His separation'.
Ibid. (40.9): '*asahyāni ca duḥkhāni vācaśca hṛdayacchidaḥ | rākṣasīnāṁ sughorāṇāṁ tvatkṛte marṣayāmyaham ||*' – 'I endure unbearable hardships and excruciating words of these dreadful demonesses only for your sake (in the hope that you will come)'.

[4] This is based on verse 1.12 of the *Meghasandeśa*: '*āpṛcchasva priyasakhamamuṁ*' – 'Honour your dear friend'.

[5] *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* – Act IV: '*atisnehaḥ pāpaśankī*' – 'In the case of close friends, it is natural to fear if any evil will befall them'. Going by this statement, the sender of the messenger (Śrī Rāma) is concerned that the swan should not suffer any harm from other beings. This verse is based on the verse 1.14 of the *Meghasandeśa*: '*adreḥ śṛngaṁ harati pavanaḥ kiṁsvidityunmukhībhiḥ*'.

17. Your lustrous form surpasses even the brilliance of the moon. While flying high, the reflection of your nectar-like, pristine body will be seen in the burnished surface of the Mālyavān Mountain. This sight will be as wondrous as Bhagavān Viṣṇu creating the moon from His mind in the beginning (of creation)[1].

18. Dear friend, Hanuman has described two ways to Lankā. Though the (mountainous) path in the west is nearer to you, it is impassable due to incessant rains. The eastern route, however, is abundant with fascinating scenes. Please restrain yourself from being continuously distracted by them and proceed on your journey for my sake[2].

19. On hearing your sweet voice, rural maidens will eagerly emerge from their homes and, being unschooled in the coquettish gestures of the eyebrows, gaze at your form with attractive eyes, eager to see you. You should quickly cross over these areas, which are marked by forests, mounds, hills and rivers[3].

20. You shall enjoy the playful conversations of women, reposing on tender leaves in the shade of sugarcane groves and guarding their paddy crops. You will also relish a variety of their songs – sung soulfully in a blend of languages of the Karṇāṭaka and Āndhra regions[4] – and their delightfully innocent exchanges on love.

21. Then, to please your eyes, the Añjanādri (Mount Añjanā), also known as Śeṣagiri, will appear before you[5]. As it is the abode of Viṣṇu, supports the universe and has crowns encrusted with gems, it is declared to be Ādiśeṣa himself[6]. The delicate white clouds that surround it will appear like slough just cast off by him.

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[1] *Śukla-yajurveda-saṁhitā* 31.12: '*candramā manaso jātaḥ*' – 'The moon was born from the mind (of Bhagavān)'.

[2] The topic of this verse is similar to that of verse 1.13 of the *Meghasandeśa*: '*mārgaṁ tāvacchṛṇu kathayataḥ*' – 'Listen to the description of the path...'

[3] This verse seems to mention some areas the Central India. The description here is on the lines of verse 1.16 of the *Meghasandeśa* - '*tvayyāyattaṁ kṛṣiphalamiti bhrūvilāsānabhijñaiḥ*' – '(When seen by women who) know that the results of farming are dependent on you (but) who are unacquainted with the amatory movements of the eyebrows...'

[4] This verse describes the outskirts of the regions of Karṇāṭaka and Āndhra.

[5] The Tirumala Hill are also known as Añjanādri or Śeṣagiri.

[6] *Añjanādrimāhātmyam*: '*śuddhasattvamayo hyeṣa sākṣāccheṣātmako giriḥ*' – 'This great mountain, made of pure transcendental material, is verily the form of Ādiśeṣa'.

22. Upon arrival here, both men and gods – who have respectively climbed from below and descended from above – lose their distinction of high and low. Knowing that the fruits of worshipping Bhagavān are the same for all, they offer their obeisance to Him. You should also offer your reverential homage as much as possible.

23. A little further, to the south of Añjanādri, you will see the river Suvarnamukharā[1]. Sand dunes will be seen on its bed, as though inviting you to rest there. It will carry, on its waves – its hands, as it were – flowers from the forests, to be courteously given to the crescent-headed god, Śiva, for him to worship Bhagavān Śrīnivāsa[2].

24. Caressed by the gentle breeze that arises from the sand banks and carries the fragrance of the Vañjuḷa flowers (Indian Willow, *Salix Tetrasperma*), you will delight in the company of the river, making indistinct sounds of pleasure. Later, detaching yourself from this (experience) and taking care that you are not attacked by others or trapped by the Kirāta tribesmen, please leave that place and continue your journey[3].

25. Then, noticing the sacred region called 'Tuṇḍīra', you will reach the place called 'Satyavrata', which is capable of destroying all sins. Here, Viṣṇu, Who is extolled as a 'Bridge' for all souls, assumes the form of a Dam[4] to control the mighty floods of the river Vegavatī, the form taken by Sarasvatī when angry with her husband.

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[1] *Skandapurāṇam – Vaiṣṇavakhanda – Venkaṭācalamāhātmyam* (33.6-7) '*suvarṇamiva lokānāṁ bhāgadheyādiyaṁ nadī | nītā bhuvamagastyena mukharīkṛta diṁmukhā | tasmādyāsyati vikhyātiṁ suvarṇamukharīti sā* ||' – The *Skandapurāṇam* contains the following description of this river: 'Due to the good fortune of the people, Sage Agastya brought this golden river to this world. The resounding noise of its tumultous waters spread in all directions. Its fame too was discussed by people everywhere. Hence this river came to be called 'Suvarnamukharā''. Presently it is known by the name 'Suvarṇamukhī'. Locally, it is called 'Ponnāṟu' or 'Peṇṇaiyāṟu'.

[2] The *Venkaṭācalamāhātmyam* states that Śiva (the presiding deity at Kāḷahasti) worships Bhagavān Śrīnivāsa at Tirumala.

[3] This verse and the previous one are based on the line '*sthitvā tasmin vanacaravadhū*' of the *Meghasandeśa* (1.19)

[4] The little hill in Kāñcīpuram on which Bhagavān Varada resides is called 'Hastigiri'. During the Kṛtayuga, Brahmā performed a sacrifice to invoke the presence of Śrī Varadarāja. Instead of choosing Sarasvatī to assist him in the sacrifice, he chose his other consort, Sāvitrī. Enraged by this, Sarasvatī took the form of a river and rushed down the Sahya Mountain. (Therefore this river came to be called 'Vegavatī'.) When the flooding waters of the river attempted to destroy the sacrificial site constructed by Brahmā, Bhagavān Viṣṇu took the form of Dam and lay down in its path. (Thenceforth, Bhagavān came to be called 'Yathoktakārī'.) As a result, the river could not go further on that path and had to take another route. This episode is mentioned in the literature about Kāñcīpuram

26. There, you will see the city of Kāñcī[1], dazzling with many varieties of precious gems[2], resonant with musical sounds and renowned as the 'girdle' of Mother Earth. (The word '*kāñcī*' also means a girdle.) You will also observe the majestic Form of Bhagavān Puruṣottama[3], Who is seated on the Hastigiri, Who is free from the twin experiences of humans[4], Who always watches over the entire city of Kāñcī and Who is described as 'Satyakāma'[5].

27. This city emerged in the beginning of the Kṛtayuga, according to the wish of Brahmā. So, when you near it, please bow your head in reverence. The sacred dust, caused by the movements of the horse and other carriages of the presiding Deity, Devādirāja, is borne on the heads by the celestials themselves, who consider it a great honour.

28. Then, like a dear friend, the soft, perfumed breeze, emanating from the mango-grove, caressing the lotus-ponds of the Kampā river[6] like a lover and scattering the dew drops from the crescent moon of Śiva[7], will see you arrive and rush to welcome you.

29. Sarasvatī, the beloved of the lotus-born[8] and the deity of water-birds ('*kavi*') like you[1], flows across this region as the river Vegavatī. Just like the seven groups of

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[1] '*ka iti brahmaṇo nāma tena tatrāñcito hariḥ | ataḥ kāñcīti vikhyātā purī puṇyavivardhinī*' – ''Ka' is a name of Brahmā. The place where he installed (*añcita*) Śrī Mahāviṣṇu is hence called 'Kāñcī''.

[2] *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇam*: '*gajavājirathāstreṣu nidhimālāmbaradrumāḥ | śaktipāśamaṇicchatravimānāni caturdaśa* ||' – 'Elephant, horse, chariots, missiles, arrows, treasure, garlands, garments, trees, the weapon '*Śakti*' (a type of spear or lance), the weapon '*Pāśa*' (a kind of chain or rope), gems, umbrellas and palace – among these fourteen items, the best are the gems'. The city of Kāñcī is filled with all these precious things.

[3] This verse contains an inner meaning too: 'The entire city of Kāñcī is the bejewelled girdle of the lady called Bhūdevī (Mother Earth); the sounds of the various musical instruments is the tinkling of the bells on the girdle; and Bhagavān, the best among males, is captivated by its beauty'. This verse is based on the line '*teṣāṁ dikṣu prathitavidiśā*' of the *Meghasandeśa* (1.24)

[4] The twin experiences are hunger and thirst, old age and death, merit and sin.

[5] The term 'Satyakāma' denotes a person who has unlimited, eternal auspicious qualities. It also refers to One Who watches over Kāñcī (or is enchanted by the girdle) and is truly devoted to Bhūdevī.

[6] The river Kampā is one of the tributaries of the Vegavatī and is mentioned in the next verse.

[7] Here, the name of Paramaśiva is 'Ekāmranātha'.

[8] Sarasvatī is the consort of Brahmā (who was born in a lotus).

letters, she too assumes seven forms[2]; her waters are crystal-clear and sweet. This renowned deity of speech (Sarasvatī), in the form of a river, is surrounded and worshipped by various gods on both banks of the river.

30. When, along with the blemishless sages, you take a dip in the holy waters of the pond Sārasvata[3], which is but another form of Sarasvatī and which can remove the faults of humans, your body will become even more radiant. The entire universe will be resplendently reflected in your unsullied mind, which would match your pristine form. Thus you will attain complete, eternal purity, both internal and external[4].

31. O noble swan, on the bank of the river, you will behold the hill which served as the sacrificial altar for Brahmā (to perform a sacrifice) and which transforms the Tamil country into a celestial world. The blessed souls who reside near that hill, upon casting off their bodies, become totally free from (all kinds of) darkness and are eligible to dwell eternally at the supreme Abode of Paravāsudeva[5].

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[1] Sarasvatī is said to be the leader of the erudite ('*kavi*'). This word ('*kavi*') also means 'waterfowl', especially swans; Sarasvatī is regarded as the goddess of this species. As her vehicle is a swan, she is generally considered the head of swans.

[2] Goddess Sarasvatī is said to have taken the form of the river Vegavatī, with seven tributaries – Śuktikā, Kanakā, Sṛprā, Kampā, Peyā, Vañjuḷā and Caṇḍavegā. Sound (also known as 'Sarasvatī') too has seven groups – (i) vowels, (ii) *Ka-varga* or Velars ('*k*', '*kh*', '*g*', '*gh*' and '*ṅ*'), (iii) *Ca-varga* or Palatals ('*c*', '*ch*', '*j*', '*jh*' and '*ñ*'), (iv) *Ṭa-varga* or Retroflexes ('*ṭ*', '*ṭh*', '*ḍ*', '*ḍh*' and '*ṇ*'), (v) *Ta-varga* or Dentals ('*t*', '*th*', '*d*', '*dh*' and '*n*'), (vi) *Pa-varga* or Labials ('*p*', '*ph*', '*b*', '*bh*' and '*m*') and (vii) *Antastha-ūṣmā* or Approximants and Sibilants ('*y*', '*r*', '*l*', '*v*', '*ś*', '*ṣ*', '*s*' and '*h*'). Moreover, Sarasvatī's blessings are necessary to compose lucid, pleasing and uncomplicated poetry. The river Vegavatī is also described as clear, sweet and alluring. As this river is another form of Sarasvatī, it is surrounded and worshipped by many celestials, who have gathered on its banks. This verse uses paronomasia to compare Goddess Sarasvatī and the river Vegavatī.

[3] As the pond is related to Sarasvatī (*i.e.* the river Vegavatī), it is called 'Sārasvata'.

[4] Those who have been liberated from all worldly bondages are called '*muktas*'. Their bodies and minds are said to be as pure as crystal. The implication is that, after the swan has had a dip in the Vegavatī River, it would also become flawless.

[5] A popular verse states: '*ayodhyā mathurā māyā kāśī kāñcī hyavantikā | purī dvāravatī caiva saptaite muktidāyakāḥ* ||' – 'Ayodhyā, Mathurā, Māyā (Haridvār), Kāśi, Kāñcī and Avantikā (Ujjain) are the seven holy cities that grant liberation'. In his *Aḍaikkalappattu* (1), Svāmi Deśika has said that, 'among the seven cities that bestow liberation, the most important is Kāñcī' ('*muttitarum nagarēḷil mukkiyamām kaccitaṉil*').

32. Manifest there is the Cause of creation (Bhagavān Varadarāja), Whose incomparable effulgence is increased by the garlands of tender basil and Who resembles a unique, blue tower of fire[1]. The bluish glow of His Form is further emphasised by the brilliant glances of Goddess Śrīdevī[2], the loving and inseparable Companion of Bhagavān in all His pleasurable activities[3] and in the creation and administration of the universe.

33. At Hastigiri, please do not be afraid[4] on seeing that dark 'Raincloud'[5], Which is green like the emerald, heavy with compassion (like rainclouds weighed down with water) and Which glows due to the presence of the lightning-like Goddess Lakṣmī. For, is He not the same Bhagavān Who is worshipped by the eternally-free souls (*Nityasūris*) – who are pure like you and who are depicted as 'heavenly swans'[6] – and Who, indeed, took the form of a Swan long ago, thus becoming your primogenitor[7]?

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[1] Usually, fire is described as being red in colour. Though Bhagavān Varadarāja is described as 'Fire', this Fire is black in colour. Hence He is an 'unusual Fire' (which cannot be seen elsewhere). The fire-god is called 'Havyavāhana', as he consumes the oblations given during sacrifices. Since Bhagavān Himself accepted the offerings in the sacrifice conducted by Brahmā, He too is called 'Havyavāhana'. Therefore the poet has likened Bhagavān to fire; the already-dark colour of Bhagavān's Form is intensified by the wreaths of holy basil. Śrī Deśika describes Him thus in the *Varadarāja-pañcāśat* (1): '*turagasavana-vedyāṁ śyāmaḷo havyavāhaḥ*' – 'Bhagavān appeared as the dark Havyavāhana from the altar during the sacrifice performed by Brahmā'.

[2] This description corresponds to the line '*namaḥ śrīranganāyakyai yadbhrūvibhramabhedataḥ*' of *Śrī Rangarājastava* (7), which states that the differences between various beings in this world – such as domination and subordination – are created based on the movements of Goddess Śrīdevī's eyebrows.

[3] This refers to the delights enjoyed by the divine Couple in the *Līlāvibhūti* (created world).

[4] Poets aver that swans do not enjoy the monsoon. They become frightened on seeing the rainclouds and hence go away elsewhere (until the rains stop).

[5] The word '*megha*' in the verse denotes Bhagavān. The description here is similar to that of verse 13 of the *Campūrāmāyaṇa – Bālakāṇḍa*: '*..... lakṣmīvidyullasitamatasīgucchasacchāyakāyam | ..... kāruṇyāpaṁ tridaśapariṣatkālameghaṁ dadarśa* ||' – 'The group of celestials beheld the dark Cloud, filled with the waters of compassion and adorned by Goddess Lakṣmī, like a flash of lightning'. Also relevant here is the line 11.12 of the *Mahānārāyaṇa-upaniṣad*: '*nīlatoyadamadhyasthā vidyullekheva bhāsvarā*' – 'Like a lightning flash in the midst of rainclouds'.

[6] The *Nityasūris* who enjoy constant of worship Bhagavān in Śrīvaikuṇṭha are called '*Haṁsas*'.

[7] Bhagavān is said to have taken the incarnation of a swan long ago.

34. That God of gods, Who had fully accepted[1] the essence of the oblations given by your master Brahmā, is declared as the blemishless cynosure of all scriptures[2]. We have been blessed with sight only to look at His Form. As you stand reverently before Him, He will happily welcome you with His glances, which are famous for generously granting boons to His devotees[3], which are comparable nectar in sweetness and which reveal His pleasure.

35. When Bhagavān, the King of the celestials and the Beloved of Goddess Lakṣmī, strolls gracefully in the garden, holding the Devī's[4] perspiring Hand – Which appears like a lotus dripping with honey[5] – in one Hand and a lotus in His other Hand, you may pay your respects to Them by fanning Them with your wings, which are heavy with feathers and resemble a large fan[6].

36. After thus enjoying your service to Bhagavān, you may cross over the middle region and fly towards the Cōḷa country, which will be verdant with luxuriant areca-palm groves and a feast for the eyes even from afar. The lush country is divided into uniform patches, separated by the numerous, fast-flowing tributaries of the Kāverī river, whose waters are slightly obstructed and scattered by the crocodiles swimming against the current[7].

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[1] '*vapāparimalollāsavāsitādharapallavam | mukhaṁ varadarājasya mugdhasmitamupāsmahe ||*' – 'I meditate upon the Face of Bhagavān Varadarāja, Whose soft Lips are delightfully fragrant with ghee (offered in the sacrifice conducted by Brahmā) and Who sports a lovely smile'.

[2] *Mahābhāratam – Śāntiparva* (357.45): '*tvaya vinirmito'haṁ vai vedacakṣurvayotigaḥ*' – 'You have created and endowed me with the eye of knowledge and agelessness'. (These are Brahmā's words about Bhagavān.)

[3] As He is a rare Philanthropist Who grants the boons desired by His devotees, He is called 'Varada'.

[4] 'Devī' is the main name of the Goddess here, Who is the renowned 'Perundēvittāyār'.

[5] The delightful touch of Bhagavān's Hand causes perspiration on Goddess Śrī's Hand, thereby causing It to look like a lotus drenched with honey.

[6] This refers to the episode in the *Hastigiri-māhātmyam* which describes how Garuḍa, the king of birds, once spread his wings and flew over the divine Couple, fanning Them, as They were enjoying a pleasant walk on the bank of the river, in a garden filled with lovely flowers of all the six seasons.

[7] The description here can be compared to that of the 42nd verse – '*srotovegādatha janapadaṁ*'. (The inner meaning of this verse is: Just as a lady with many children bestows her attention equally on all of them, the Kāverī River too nourishes all the regions under its care with its tributaries, which serve as its hands.)

37. O swan, the lotus-eyed ladies in that country will have a sweet voice and will be proud of their youthfulness. With unguents containing turmeric and fragrant powders on their limbs, their beauty will equal that of the crimson sunset; their tresses, adorned with the blossoms of the areca-palm, will give the impression of a tussle between the moonlight and the dark night. The sight of those women happily rocking on swings will immensely delight your eyes.

38. O pristine water-bird, you should cross a place called Varṣam, which is situated to the west of this (Cōḷa) country, which is like a distinct and rare beauty spot for the earth and which is fed by the gushing waters of the river. In that region, you will see a small hill nearby, called 'Śvetādri'[1], looking like a slightly-sunk Kailāsa Mountain and appearing as if (the serpent) Ādiśeṣa is emerging from beneath the earth.

39. In that holy place is a divine Lamp, Whose rays dispel the darkness-like ignorance of devotees[2]. Eternally basking in the love of Goddess Śrīdevī, this self-illuminated Bhagavān is the Source of boundless prosperity and is particularly venerated by the self-realised souls[3]. As you reverently worship that Self-luminescence, He will very soon bestow on you a plethora of prosperity.

40. Then, sauntering in the expansive forest, which is as blue (dark) as Bhagavān, which offers abundant shade and which is guarded by a demigoddess (Yakṣiṇī) called Nīli – and is hence always lush[4] – you will familiarise yourself with the features of the forest[5]. As you explore the area, which is fit to be a permanent place of enjoyment for celestial nymphs, you will think lightly even of the heavenly gardens.

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[1] As the hill is white in colour, it is compared to the Kailāsa. This place is called 'Tiruveḷḷaṟai'.

[2] The Bhagavān here is called 'Puṇḍarīkākṣa'.

[3] This verse explains the statement in the *Śvetāśvatara-upaniṣad* (6.8) – '*parāsya śaktirvividhaiva śrūyate svābhāvikī jñānabalakriyā ca*' – 'His power is stated to be supreme, manifold and inherent; so also are His knowledge, strength and actions'. [The inner meaning of this verse is: 'The wick of this luminous Lamp is made of His (Bhagavān's) auspicious qualities and the oil is the love of Goddess Lakṣmī. Hence the Lamp is capable of removing the darkness of ignorance with Its immeasurable radiance. This Lamp is resorted to by the learned'.]

[4] There is another version that reads '*nīlīpuṣpastabakalalitam*'; this means 'filled with bunches of the flower Nīlī (*Indigofera Heterantha*) and appearing beautiful'.

[5] The literature about the Śvetādri describes this forest to be extremely dense and protected by a Yakṣiṇī named Nīli.

41. There, the wind, weaving through the areca groves, will spread an unusual canopy made of different varieties of pollen dust; it will gently move the spathes of the areca trees like a fan, causing the flower-clusters to fall down and making the ground soft to walk on. By these actions, it will appear to be serving Manmatha as a proper assistant.

42. O noble swan, further on flows the daughter of Sahya, *viz*. the Kāverī river, whose turbulent waters divide the Cōḷa region into many parts[1] and whose eminence eclipses even that of the celestial river Gangā. On the bed of the river, here and there, will be seen heaps of pearls[2] – resembling dense sand-dunes – that have burst forth from the nodes of the sugarcanes which grow in the region and which have ripened in season.

43. When the river Kāverī leaves her father's lap (the base of the Sahya Mountain) and speeds towards the house of her husband, the ocean, she is guided by her brother, the wind. Her friends, the areca-palm groves, shower their honey-laden flowers on her at dawn and birds like you, in the role of priests, convey your blessings and give her a farewell. The areca groves seem to be spraying perfume – in the form of their fragrant nectar – on the river, who appears to be smiling (with all this attention)[3].

44. In that place, you will see the renowned pond Candra Puṣkariṇī, which removed the moon's affliction and restored its brightness[4]. Surrounded by many other holy ponds[5]

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[1] It is to be noted that verse 36 also contains a similar description. The reason for the division of the Cōḷa country is said to be the split of the Kāverī River into various tributaries and demarcation of the area. (The significance of the phrase 'daughter of Sahya' will be understood from the next verse.)

[2] Poets usually say that when sugarcanes of a superior quality mature, they burst open and pearls cascade down from them.

[3] Customarily, after a newly-married woman is blessed by the Brāhmaṇas through Vedic utterances, her brother and other relatives accompany her from her father's house to her husband's house. There, friends and well-wishers adorn and anoint her with flowers and perfumes, thereby delighting her. With a shy smile befitting her youth, she then retires to the inner chambers. The poet imagines this scene being enacted suitably with the daughter of the Sahya Mountain, *viz.* the river Kāverī. (The young girl is the river Kāverī; the Sahya Mountain is her father; the base of the mountain is his lap; the ocean is Kāverī's husband; accompanying her is her brother, the wind; the various birdsongs are the blessings of the priests; the areca groves are Kāverī's friends; the areca-nuts, flowers, honey, etc. that fall from the trees are items given to the bride while welcoming her after the marriage.)

[4] It is said that the moon, which was suffering from consumption, was cured after a dip in this pond.

[5] The other ponds are Aśvattha-tīrtha, Vakuḷa-tīrtha, Āmra-tīrtha, Kadamba-tīrtha and others.

for additional purity, it is rendered fragrant by the tresses of the celestial damsels who sport in it. Its greatness will cause your species to scorn even the Mānasa Lake.

45. Dear swan, please bow down with reverence and devotion to Bhagavān's couch, the Śeṣapīṭham[1], which is situated on the bank of this pond and which is worshipped by the learned. Sages have prophesied that our family Treasure, Śrī Ranganātha, Who has been residing in Ayodhyā from the days of yore, is going to recline there[2].

46. Even as I describe the effulgent shrine called 'Śrīrangam'[3], which emerged by itself[4] from the divine and transcendental Śeṣapīṭham[5], my mind rushes to the primordial God Vāsudeva, Who shines in the shrine like an emerald in a box[6], Who uses His (own) Shoulder as a pillow while reclining on Ādiśeṣa, Whose Eyes are long and bewitching and Who is the Beloved of the Daughter of the ocean (Goddess Lakṣmī)[7].

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[1] Another name for the Śeṣapīṭham is 'Anantapīṭham'.

[2] The *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇam* says when King Dharmavarman performed a penance to please Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, the Latter appeared and assured His devotee, "Within a short time and for your welfare, I will, as Rāma, kill Rāvaṇa; due to Vibhīṣaṇa's effort, you will soon see me in the form of Ranganātha on the Anantapīṭham or Śeṣapīṭham at Śrīrangam". [Here, the poet imagines Śrī Rāma Himself telling the swan about the future installation of Bhagavān Ranganātha in Śrīrangam, upon His (Śrī Rāma's) return from Lankā after killing Rāvaṇa.]

[3] The phrase '*tasya dhāmnaḥ prasangāt*' also means 'Due to the spreading radiance of Śrīrangam'.

[4] The term '*svayamudayataḥ*' indicates that the holy city of Śrīrangam arose by itself. The line '*satve divye svayamudayatastasya dhāmnaḥ*' is based on these lines of the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇam*: '*tasya varṣa-sahasrānte tapyamānasya vedhasaḥ | āvirāsīnmahaddhāma śrīrangaṁ kṣīrasāgarāt || divyaṁ vimānaṁ taddṛṣṭvā svayaṁ vyaktaṁ mahardhimat |*' – 'At the end of a thousand torturous years of Brahmā, there arose from the Milky Ocean a great abode called 'Śrīrangam'. On beholding the divine shrine, which emerged by itself and which was perfectly formed...'

[5] The words '*sattve divye*' also means 'in the divine, pure realm'.

[6] The line '*mañjūṣāyāṁ marakatamiva bhrājamānaṁ tadantaḥ*' is based on the following lines of the *Campūrāmāyaṇa* (14): '*kṣīrāmbhodheḥ jaṭharamabhito dehabhāsāṁ prarohaiḥ kālonmīlatkuvalaya-dalādvaitamāpādayantam*' – 'By the lustre of Bhagavān Viṣṇu's Form, the depths of the Milky Ocean turned dark, like the petals of the water-lilies blossoming during moonrise'.

[7] This verse is based on the following lines of the *Parameśvara-saṁhitā*: '*kāverī virajā seyaṁ vaikuṇṭhaṁ rangamandiram | sa vāsudevo rangeśaḥ pratyakṣaṁ paramaṁ padam ||*'

47. Thereafter, dear swan, quickly cross over the forest that is between the Cōḻa and Pāṇḍiya regions, which abounds with thieves[1] and is filled with the cacophonous cries of crickets. After crossing it, you can utter your sweet notes, for poets (birds)[2] never speak when in the proximity of the wicked.

48. On hearing your dulcet voice, the women of the Pāṇḍiya country – with their eyes resembling dark water-lilies, their flower-decked tresses undone, the curls on their foreheads swaying about, their earrings sparkling, the mark on their foreheads shining with pearl dust – will eagerly gaze up to admire your form and will honour you by their appreciative glances with their eyes shimmering like a blue garland.

49. Then, without delay, you will worship at the holy place called 'Vṛṣabhādri'[3], which is the permanent abode of Sundarabāhu[4], as Bhagavān Viṣṇu[5] is known here, and which is regarded as an embodiment of the blessings of those who worship here. It is onto this hill that the holy water flowed from the anklets of the supreme Soul (Bhagavān Trivikrama)[6], Who defeated Bali and measured the worlds; the sacred waters of this celestial river, untainted by the matted locks of Śiva[7], continue to purify the worlds.

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[1] The area was previously a dense jungle, which was the abode of thieves.

[2] Here, the word '*kavi*' refers to aquatic birds; the swan's white colour denotes its purity and nobility. "It is unsafe for superior birds like you to make a sound in the midst of vile creatures". The term '*kavi*' also indicates learned people. They too do not reveal their erudition in front of wicked people.

[3] *Sundarabāhustava* (verses 21, 2) of Śrī Śrīvatsānkamiśra (Kūrattāḻvāṉ): '*taṁ vande sundarākhyaṁ vanagirinilayaṁ puṇḍarīkāyatākṣam*' – 'I bow to the One named 'Sundara', Who is a Resident of Vanagiri and Whose Eyes are long like the lotus' and '*sundarāyatabhujaṁ bhajāmahe vṛkṣaṣaṇḍamayamadrim āsthitam | yatra suprathitanūpurāpagātīrthamarthitaphalapradaṁ viduḥ ||*' – 'I pray to the beautifully broad-shouldered Bhagavān, Who resides on the mountain dense with clumps of trees; here flows the highly renowned river Nūpuragangā, which is known to fulfil the requests (of supplicants)'. The other names of Vṛṣabhagiri are 'Vanagiri' and 'Tirumāliruñcōlai'.

[4] Bhagavān Sundarabāhu is also known as 'Aḻagar' and 'Kaḷḷaḻagar'.

[5] *Ṛgveda* (1.22.17): '*idaṁ viṣṇurvi cakrame tredhā nidadhe padam*' – The word 'Viṣṇu' indicates the omnipresence of Bhagavān, Who could measure the entire universe in just three of His steps.

[6] The river here is known as 'Nūpuragangā' or 'Śilambāṟu'. According to the *Purāṇas*, when Brahmā washed the Foot of Bhagavān Trivikrama, the water from his water-pot splashed against Bhagavān's anklets and gushed down as the celestial river Gangā onto the Vṛṣabhādri: '*trivikramapadāśliṣṭa-maṇinūpurapūritam | jalaṁ tacchodanādabhrādgirimūrdhni samāpatat ||*'.

[7] As this river was untouched by the tangled tresses of Śiva, it is considered superior to the Gangā.

50. Next comes the Pāṇḍiya country. Long ago, the dark rainclouds were imprisoned by the powerful kings who had received various missiles from the three-eyed God (Śiva). Due to fear, the clouds started providing regular rains to that region which, therefore, will be lush with crops[1]. As you fly over that area, you will enjoy seeing the sacred places as well as the villages and towns which adorn the land[2] and whose beauty rivals that of Alakāpuri (the capital city of Kubera, the god of wealth).

51. Thereafter, you will fly towards the Tāmraparṇī river, whose dunes are made of pearls released by the clusters of oysters (on the riverbed) and which therefore gives the impression of a star-studded sky. As it is close to the place of the great sage Agastya, who drank the (contents of the) deep ocean, its eternally pure waters[3] will free you from all ailments[4] and make you glow like a pearl.

52. After savouring, to your heart's content, the lotus-face of that young damsel, *viz*. the river Tāmraparṇī (the lotuses in the river are likened to the 'face' of the river), and enjoying the loving embrace of the undulating waves, which are (compared to) her shoulders, you may repose on its cool, sandy banks, while being solicitously fanned by the soothing breeze emanating from the dense sandalwood forests of the Malaya Mountain. Thus you may rest there for a while, preparatory to crossing the ocean.

53. As you go a little to the left of the river, you will see the seashore nearby; lush with palm and the dark Tamāla (*Cinnamomum Tamala*) trees, lined by rows of shiny pearls brought in by the waves and with the sand-dunes doubled in size by the pollen-dust of

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[1] The 18th chapter of the *Hālāsyamāhātmyam* has this episode: Long ago, the Pāṇḍiya king earned the wrath of Indra, who stopped the rains to the region, thereby causing a drought. On seeing his subjects suffer, the king of the land performed a penance to propitiate Śiva and received the latter's blessings. The king acquired the power to capture and imprison the clouds that came to the Malaya Mountains. The clouds agreed to give periodic rain to the area, which then became prosperous.

[2] This place is said to be famous for its fertile lands, abundant wealth and a predominance of ethics; just like the towns, the villages and the countryside too were affluent, like Alakāpuri.

[3] The southern direction is stated to be the location of Sage Agastya; it is believed that when the Agastya asterism (named 'Canopus' in the West) rises, all water-bodies become clear and pure. The *Aṣṭāngahṛdaya* (3.51) of Vāgbhaṭa contains the statement '*agastyodayanirviṣam*' – 'In autumn, due to the rise of the Agastya star, the water acquires purity'.

[4] *Viṣṇurahasya*: '*yenoditena pāpāni vilayaṁ yānti cāmayāḥ | tasmai namo'stvagastyāya*' – 'I bow to the great Agastya, whose appearance removes sins and cures diseases' (*q.v. Nirṇayasindhu* chapter 2).

the fragrant screw-pine (*Pandanus Odorifer*), it will be a delightfully attractive place[1] for youthful birds like you[2].

54. Noble friend[3], after a very short stay there (on the beach), fly speedily towards the city of Rāvaṇa like an eminent feathered-arrow shot from the bow of the seashore, whose twanging bowstring is made of the resounding rivers flowing down gracefully on either side of the mountain peaks[4].

55. Dear swan, when you look at the ocean, it will appear like a jungle on fire as it is surrounded by coral reefs, like a crimson sky at dusk, like an elephant with vermilion paste on its forehead, like Bhagavān Viṣṇu clad in yellow raiment, like a raincloud sliced by lightning and like a couple of dark and fair persons sitting closely as one.

56. Long ago, when my ancestors, the incomparably strong sons of Sagara, went in search of the horse which was to be used in the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice and which was (earlier) stolen by Indra, they dug the earth, as a result of which the ocean[5] became extensive

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[1] The inner meaning of this verse is as follows: The seashore, lined with dense woods, is described as 'Śyāmā', a lady of a superior class with admirable characteristics. The rows of trees are her braid; the waves of the ocean are her rich, intricately pleated clothes; the pearls washed ashore by the waves are her ornaments; the pollen-dust of the screw-pine is the scented powder used by her; the sand-dunes, covered by the pollen-dust, form her waist. The seashore is thus portrayed as a vernal woman and it is possible that the young male swan is naturally enamoured by her.

[2] The phrase '*tvatprāyāṇāṁ taruṇavayasāṁ*' can be explained in two ways: 'for beautiful, young birds like you' and 'for young connoisseurs like you'.

[3] Until now, the swan's route was filled with towns and forests, providing enjoyable resting places. But now the passage is across the mighty ocean, which does not have any such amenity. Śrī Rāma addresses the swan as a friend and describes it as noble to buoy the bird's spirit so that it will cross the ocean without losing heart.

[4] The intention is that the swan should hasten towards the target with undiminished energy, like an arrow shot from the bow. (The twin peaks of the mountains are the tips of the bow; the long rivers running down from them are the bowstring; the sound of the gushing water is the twang of the bowstring; the curved seashore is the bow; the swan, with its strong plumes, is the feathered-arrow; the city of Lankā is the target; the swan's flight from the seashore is akin to the arrow leaving the bow.) *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Sundarakāṇḍa* (1.43): '*yathā rāghavanirmuktaḥ śaraḥ śvasanavikramaḥ | gacchet tadvadgamiṣyāmi lankāṁ rāvaṇapālitām ||*' – 'As an arrow shot by Rāghava flies powerfully like the wind, I shall speed towards the city of Lankā ruled by Rāvaṇa'.

[5] When Sagara, a king in the Ikṣvāku dynasty, arranged to perform an *Aśvamedha* sacrifice, the horse which was to be used therein was stolen by Indra, who hid it in the nether regions (Pātāḷa). The sons of

and unfathomable. So, if the ocean instructs the mountains – which are hiding under the water to protect their wings[1] – to offer their hospitality to you, please do not turn down the friendly reception of my kinsman[2], the ocean, even if you are not tired.

57. After relaxing in a pond of golden lotuses on one of the mountains, relishing the bountiful nectar of the lotuses[3] and relieving your tiredness, you may rapidly cover the rest of the route across the sea. In front, you will see the Suvela Mountain[4], whose rocky base on the beach is well polished by the vigorous pounding of the waves.

58. The coral reefs in the seawater near the mountain will look like blood clots shed by the mountain when its wings were chopped and will certainly give the impression of another unusual sunset on the ground; with your reflection in the water resembling the moon and the pearls cast ashore by the waves appearing like stars, the corals will take on varied hues and will be a feast for the eyes[5].

Sagara, who went in pursuit of the horse, dug the earth deep on their way to Pātāḷa and thus created the oceans. This episode is described in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. As the ocean was created by the sons of Sagara, it came to be called 'Sāgara'.

[1] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Sundarakāṇḍa* (1.126, 128): '*pūrvaṁ kṛtayuge tāta parvatāḥ pakṣiṇo'bhavan | te hi jagmurdiśaḥ sarvā garuḍānilaveginaḥ ‖ .... tataḥ kruddhaḥ sahasrākṣah parvatānāṁ śatakratuḥ | pakṣāṁścicccheda vajreṇa tatra tatra sahasraśaḥ ‖*' – 'Earlier, in the Kṛtayuga, the mountains were endowed with wings. As they flew swiftly and harmed the world, the enraged Indra chopped off their wings wherever he saw them'. The ocean is said to be Śrī Rāma's relative or friend as it was dug by His forebears, the sons of Sagara. *Ibid.* (1.116): '*rāghavasya kule jātairudadhiḥ parivardhitaḥ | sa tvāṁ rāmahite yuktaṁ pratyarcayati sāgaraḥ ‖*' – 'The ocean was enlarged by those who were born earlier in Rāghava's dynasty. Since you seek Rāghava's welfare, the ocean has come forward to serve you'. This verse has been cited here due to its aptness for the swan as well.

[2] Śrī Rāma describes the ocean as His relative, as it was created by His ancestors, the sons of Sagara.

[3] This is based on the line '*hemāmbhojaprasavisalilaṁ mānasasyā dadānaḥ*' – 'Drinking the water of the Mānasa Lake which is capable of producing golden lotuses...' of the *Meghasandeśa* (1.62).

[4] This idea is based on verse 4.100 of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* (*Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa*): '*atha dhautopalatalāṁ toyaudhaiḥ sahasotthitaiḥ | velāmāsādya vipulāṁ*' – 'After reaching the rocks which were on the wide seashore and which had been washed and smoothened by the powerful billows...'

[5] This verse can be interpreted in another way: 'The uneven lustre of the corals – which are caught in the midst of the waves and therefore twisted – combining with the glow of the starlike pearls will surely create an impression of another unique twilit sky'.

59. The forest adjoining the hill will look very fertile because of the varicoloured corals that are embellished by the radiance of the pearls and other gems brought in by the waves. Besides, the hill will be very fragrant with the endless flow of nectar from the Kalpaka trees transplanted there by the celestials out of fear of the demon (Rāvaṇa).

60. The city of Lankā, situated on the mountain in the midst of the ocean and beautiful with white mansions, will appear to you to be your pristinely resplendent mate, sitting on a lofty sand-dune in the middle of a river. The city, with its soothing sounds and waving flags, will seem to be welcoming your arrival, trying to fly up to meet you[1].

[1] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Sundarakāṇḍa* (2.17 – 20): '*aṭṭālakaśatākīrṇā patākādhvajamālinīm | ..... giri-mūrdhnisthitāṁ lankāṁ pāṇḍurairbhavanaiśśubhaiḥ | ..... plavamānāmivākāśe dadarśa hanumān purīm*' – 'Atop the mountain, Hanuman saw the city of Lankā with its white buildings and beautiful creepers, seemingly attempting to fly'.

Āśvāsa II

1. In the city of Lankā, you will find that the celestial damsels, abducted and brought there by Rāvaṇa, share similar traits with you. They have a graceful gait; they wear jewellery that sparkle and tinkle; their eyes are as captivating as the arrows of Manmatha (the god of love); their limbs are fair and shapely; they speak pleasantly and are beautiful to look at. You too have an elegant bearing and a sweet voice; you possess well-defined, attractive eyes and a white form; you converse sweetly and are worthy of living in the charming Mānasa Lake. So, as soon as the damsels see you, they will delight you with their presence[1].

2. There, the consorts of the guardians of the world (*lokapālas*) are left untouched by the demon (Rāvaṇa), who feared their terrible curses[2]. These ladies possess the ability to burn fire itself[3] and are as pure as your beloved in conduct. Hopeful that the searing radiance of Maithilī's chastity[4] will protect them, they spend their days incarcerated.

3. Situated on the highest peak of the gem-filled Trikūṭa Mountain[5], the city of Lankā is protected by Rāvaṇa, who has earned fame and name even among the deities of the directions (*dikpālas*). By waving its hand-like pennants, this city, by reason of its immense wealth, seems to be challenging the city of Amarāvatī (the capital of Indraloka), situated on the Meru Mountain, for a face-to-face encounter.

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[1] This description is fully based on the *Meghasandeśa* (2.1) verse '*vidyutvantaṁ lalitavanitāḥ sendracāpaṁ sacitrāḥ*'.

[2] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Uttarakāṇḍa* (17.32): '*yasmāttu dharṣitā cāhaṁ tvayā pāpātmanā vane | tasmāt tava vadhārthaṁ vai samutpatsyehyahaṁ punaḥ*' – 'As you, a sinner, have forcibly defiled me in the forest, I will be born again as an instrument of your destruction'. This was the curse of the female ascetic Vedavatī on Rāvaṇa. *Ibid*. (26.54) '*yadā hyakāmāṁ kāmārto dharṣayiṣyati yoṣitaṁ | mūrdhā tu saptadhā tasya śakalībhavitā tadā ||*' – 'If Rāvaṇa tries to force himself on a woman who does not love him, his head will burst into seven pieces'. This was the curse of Naḷakūbara, the son of Vaiśravaṇa (Kubera).

[3] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Sundarakāṇḍa* (55.28): '*tapasā satyavākyena ananyatvācca bhartari | api sā nirdahedagniṁ na tāmagniḥ pradhakṣyati ||*' – 'Whereas Sītā can scorch fire due to Her austerities, probity and fidelity to Her Husband, fire can never burn Her'.

[4] *Ibid*. (22.20): '*asandeśāttu rāmasya tapasaścānupālanāt | na tvāṁ kurmi daśagrīva bhasma bhasmārhatejasā ||*' – 'O Rāvaṇa, not having received Śrī Rāma's mandate and not wanting to waste my austerities, I do not reduce you to ashes with my brilliance, though you are fit to be incinerated'.

[5] Another version gives the name of the mountain as 'Suvela'.

4. In that city, during the glorious autumn season, which boasts of clear skies and which is (therefore) suitable for your frolic[1], the dazzling moonlight will appear like the supercilious laughter of the lady called 'Night'[2]. The sight of the luminous moon will cause the lovelorn consorts[3] of the celestials to shed tears which, on combining with the water droplets seeping from the moonstone-pillars[4], will resemble a river in spate[5].

5. The city of Lankā that was reduced to ashes[6] by the blaze[7] – which was but an embodiment of the intense heat of Maithilī's sorrow and which had the rare friendship of Hanuman[8] – would surely have been rebuilt by Viśvakarma and other celestial architects, due to fear of Rāvaṇa, to a level that would put to shame the earlier setup.

6. In the middle of the city, you will see the wondrous palace of Rāvaṇa, the king of the *rākṣasas*. The aircrafts used to carry celestial couples will always be waiting there[9].

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[1] The clear skies during autumn, which follows the monsoon season, is said to gladden the swans.

[2] It is customary to describe the night as a woman and the moon as her beloved.

[3] These ladies are lovelorn as they have been separated from their lords (the celestials).

[4] The moonstone (*candrakāntamaṇi*) is said to be extremely cool to touch. Poets aver that it oozes water when the rays of the moon fall on it.

[5] As the rainclouds have disappeared, the time is opportune for the night, portrayed here as a lady, to delight in the company of her beloved, the moon. The poet describes the night as gloating over the denial of a similar pleasure to the celestial ladies, who are imprisoned by Rāvaṇa. The exultant laughter of the night is compared to the rays of the moon.

[6] Another meaning is: 'The city of Lankā was burnt to ashes by the fire, which was Āñjaneya's friend, which could expand sufficiently to envelop the entire city and which was a personification of Maithilī's fiery anguish'.

[7] Please refer the line '..... *yaḥ śokavahniṁ janakātmajāyāḥ | ādāya tenaiva dadāha lankāṁ* .....' – 'Āñjaneya seems to have taken the fire-like distress of Jānakī and burnt Lankā with it'.

[8] The word '*sneha*' has two meanings – 'affection' and 'oil'. (The obvious meaning is that, due to the power of Sītā's chastity, the fire did not burn Hanuman, but showed its affection by being cool to his touch. It is natural for fire to burn higher when oil is poured onto it; the second meaning is that, the fire's friendliness towards Hanuman was the oil that caused it to spread.)

[9] This sentence can be explained in two ways: 'The pilots appointed to chauffer the celestial couples will be waiting there with their aircrafts' or 'The aircrafts of the celestials will be circling in the sky, waiting to carry the *rākṣasa* couple'.

This mansion is where the celestial ladies are being held prisoners. The sight of this (building) will engender mixed feelings of happiness and sadness in your mind.

7. Please proceed towards the grove of trees[1], which is in the garden near the palace and which simultaneously flaunts the features of all the six seasons. There, the wind blows ever so gently, fearing the foolish anger of Rāvaṇa; the sun too will be so muted as to cause a doubt if it is the moon that is shining. The grove will be brightened (only) by the Aśoka trees, with their flowers as red as the fire of Sītā's grief. This was the same grove that was unprecedentedly wrecked by Hanuman leaping hither and thither.

8. Dear bird, if you circle high in the sky with other birds rejoicing in that Aśoka grove, you will see the famous Śiṁśupā tree (*Delbergia Sissoo*), which has been a friend of Jānakī in her adversity and which has thick branches[2], with one of them being a repository for her ornaments[3].

9. Under the tree, my dear, you will be blessed to see a rare gem[4], which was found in the ground that was being ploughed and prepared for a sacrifice, which is inherently blemishless[5] regardless of its location, which was ardently earned by me through my valour and which is the beacon of the Solar dynasty.

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[1] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Sundarakāṇḍa* (15.5): '*sarvartukusumairvṛkṣaiḥ phalavadbhiśca pādapaiḥ | puṣpitānāmaśokānāṁ śriyā sūryodayaprabhām ||*' – 'The garden, with trees bearing flowers and fruits of all seasons and with the Aśoka tree (*Saraca Asoca*), will be as enchanting as the dawn at sunrise'.

[2] *Ibid*. (14.41): '*sa puṣpitāgrāṁ rucirām taruṇānkurapallavām | tāmāruhya mahābāhuḥ śiṁśupāṁ parṇasaṁvṛtām ||*' – 'Hanuman climbed the Śiṁśupā tree, which was covered with young shoots and flowers and which had a dense foliage'.

[3] *Ibid*. (15.39): '*vaidehyā yāni cāngeṣu tadā ramo'nvakīrtayat | tānyābharaṇajālāni śākhāśobhīnī alakṣayat*' – 'On a branch there, Hanuman saw all the jewels that Rāma had described on Sītā's Body.

[4] That Sītā is a veritable gem is established through the paronomastic term '*dinakarakuladyotakaṁ*'. While the sun dims all other lights, this gem called 'Sītā' eclipses not just one sun, but many suns (indicated by the word '*dinakarakula*'); besides, She illuminates the entire solar dynasty. As She appeared in the sacrificial site and was won through inestimable valour at the court of King Janaka, She is truly a rare gem. The *Rāmāyaṇa – Bālakāṇḍa* (68.11) says: '*asmai deyā mayā sītā vīryaśulkā mahātmane*' – 'This Sītā is to be given by me to the noble soul (Rāma) as a reward for his prowess'.

[5] The term '*trāsahīna*', which is used in the verse, means 'unafraid'. It also shows the blemishlessness of the gem. (The word '*trāsa*' refers to a flaw in a gem.) (Though confined by the demon in a fearsome place and hence sorrowful, Sītā did not lose Her courage and was waiting for Rāma to come and rescue Her.)

10. That young lady has bewitching eyes that are shaped like a fish, arched eyebrows and curly locks. Possessing a slender and attractive form, she is slightly bent due to the weight of her firm bosom. Her complexion is the colour of molten copper. Her gait is as graceful as yours and her waist is alluring like (the narrow middle of) a sacrificial altar. She is exquisite in all aspects. In short, she shines as the deity of the glorious treasure called 'romance'. She is verily my eyes[1].

11. When you see her, she may either be in an exhausted faint, or in the process of sending a message to me through the birds, or attentively gazing in my direction, with her eyes blinded by tears of joy due to omens that augur expeditious good news[2].

12. Or, you may see her looking dazedly at her jewels that had been taken off and kept nearby, asking them if they remember the touch of the scion of the Raghu dynasty; or she may be forlornly reminiscing about the long-lost conjugal pleasures[3]. Indeed, it is due to the machinations of fate that she is forced to spend her days in misery thus[4].

13. I presume that Maithilī, who is imprisoned in the demon's house and is (therefore) disconsolate, will seem like a radiant moon in the tenements of outcasts, like a wish-fulfilling creeper planted in a jungle of strychnine trees (*Strychnos nux-vomica*) and like the sweet and wise words of a poet uttered amidst a gathering of fools.

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[1] The version that reads '*sā me diṣṭaṁ*' should be explained as 'she is the embodiment of my fortune'.

[2] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Sundarakāṇḍa* (27.59): '*nimittabhūtam etattu śrotum asyā mahatpriyam | dṛśyate ca sphuraccakṣuḥ padmapatramivāyatam ||*' – 'Her (left) eye, as long as a lotus petal, is seen to throb, heralding that she will receive favourable news'.

[3] This verse contains the entire gamut of meanings found in the following lines: '*prauḍhālingana-cumbanāmitasukhapracchannavedyāntarāḥ prāyaḥ kḷptaparasparādharasudhāpānapraśāntaśramāḥ | prānto kūṇitalocanāḥ pratimuhuḥ kṣāmoktiśītkāriṇoḥ sītārāghavayoḥ samagravibhavāḥ śṛngāralīlā babhuḥ ||*' – 'Filled with mighty embraces and unlimited, delightful kisses, sometimes stealthy and sometimes otherwise, generally tired from having drunk the nectar of each other's lips, with half-closed eyes, giving slight hisses of pleasure – thus shone the magnificent incessant romantic activities of Sita and Rama.'

[4] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Sundarakāṇḍa* (16.3): '*mānyā guruvinītasya lakṣmaṇasya gurupriyā | yadi sītā'pi duḥkhārtā kālo hi duratikramaḥ ||*' – 'If even Sītā, revered by the learned Lakṣmaṇa and the beloved of Rāma, has to undergo difficulties, then the turmoils wrought by time are indeed difficult to overcome'.

14. She will appear like a lotus-pond ravaged by a rainstorm[1], like a word perversely interpreted, like a lotus-plant entangled in a swamp, like a female elephant bereft of her male companion, like the crescent moon hidden by clouds[2], like a wish unfulfilled because of obstacles[3], like a doe trapped amidst ferocious tigers and like a bowstring thrown on the ground.

15. Earlier, to protect herself from the arrows of Manmatha, she used to cling to me. But now, having become very much emaciated and fragile, it would be an effort for her even to wear jewels; applying sandal-paste would also be tiresome. Unable to even tolerate any thought about her predicament, you will see her embracing her mother, the earth, with her limbs[4].

16. She will frequently hold my ring in her lotus-like hand and experience cold shivers all over her body; she will enjoy placing it on her forehead, in place of her crest-jewel; overcome by the agony of separation, she will repeatedly press it against her fevered breasts alternately.

17. Did not the saintly Anasūyā, who is as venerable as my mother[5] and who was appropriately gifted a divine sandal-paste for her penances, apply the everlastingly

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[1] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Sundarakāṇḍa* (16.30): '*himahatanalinīva naṣṭaśobhā vyasanaparamparayā atipīḍyamānā*' – 'Severely beset by a series of misfortunes, Sītā has lost Her splendour and appears like a lotus damaged by frost'.

[2] *Ibid*. (17.21-22): '*rākṣasādhipasaṁruddhāṁ bandhubhiśca vinākṛtām | viyūthāṁ siṁhasaṁruddhāṁ baddhāṁ gajavadhūmiva || candrarekhāṁ payodānte śāradābhrairivāvṛtām |*' – 'In Hanuman's eyes, Sītā, Who has been imprisoned by the demon-king and deprived of Her relatives, seemed like an abandoned cow-elephant surrounded by lions and like a digit of the moon covered by clouds'.

[3] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Sundarakāṇḍa* (15.32 and 58.57) and *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* (114.16): '*vihatāmiva ca śraddhāmāśāṁ pratihatāmiva*', '*rākṣasībhirvirūpābhiḥ krūrābhirabhisaṁvṛtām | māṁsaśoṇita-bhakṣābhiḥ vyāghrībhirhariṇīmiva ||*', and '*bhūmau bāṇairviniṣkṛttāṁ patitāṁ jyāmivāyudhāt*' – 'Like shattered faith and frustrated hope, like a female deer caught in the midst of predatory tigers, like a bowstring felled to the ground by arrows, Sītā is besieged by the demonesses'.

[4] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Sundarakāṇḍa* (19.5): '*asaṁvṛtāyāmāsīnāṁ dharaṇyāṁ śaṁsitavratām | chinnāṁ prapatitāṁ bhūmau śākhāmiva vanaspateḥ ||*' – 'Like a bough that has been chopped off and thrown on the ground, the virtuous Sītā was seated on the bare earth'.

[5] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Ayodhyākāṇḍa* (117.11): '*seyaṁ māteva te'nagha*' – 'O blemishless one! She is like your mother'.

perfumed unguent on Sītā's bosom at one time[1]? Now, Sītā will be sunk in grief and so the sandal-paste would have been washed away by a flood of hot tears[2] falling down onto her shapely breasts.

18. Long ago, when I once braided her luxuriant tresses haphazardly, they unravelled and cascaded around her body, as if attracted by its fragrance. Now, she may have tied up those tresses; or she may resemble a bunch of Kalpaka flowers, which are strewn on the earth by the celestial damsels during their solemn worship of Kāmadeva (the god of love) and are covered by black bees.

19. Just like this upper garment of hers, which has images of your spouse on its borders[3] and which was speedily retrieved by the monkeys from the Ṛśyamūka Mountain[4], she will be clad in a similar, beautiful garment, bright like the rising sun[5], and will appear like another reddish crescent moon at twilight.

20. I have here her right anklet, whose sound is sweet like your voice[6] and which had slipped from her lotus-foot and fallen to the ground, as if to tell me the direction she

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[1] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Ayodhyākāṇḍa* (118.19-20): '*mayā dattamidaṁ sīte tava gātrāṇi śobhayet | anurūpam asankliṣṭaṁ nityameva bhaviṣyati || angarāgeṇa divyena liptāngī janakātmaje* |' – 'Jānakī! This sandal presented by me is worthy of celestials; it fully suits your beauty; once applied on your limbs, it will always remain intact and never fade away'.

[2] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Sundarakāṇḍa* (25.7): '*sā snāpayantī vipulau stanau netrajalasravaiḥ*' – 'Sītā, then bathed Her ample breasts with the stream of her tears'.

[3] This indicates that the borders of Sītā's garment had the pictures of a female swan.

[4] The *Rāmāyaṇa – Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* (6.14-15) says that, while Sītā was being carried away by Rāvaṇa across the sky, She bundled Her jewels in Her upper garment and flung them down to the *vānaras* on the Ṛśyamūka Mountain. This garment and the jewels were later given by Sugrīva and his associates to Rāma – '*evamuktastu sugrīvaḥ śailasya gahanāṁ guhām | praviveśa tataḥ śīghraṁ rāghavapriyakāmyayā || uttarīyaṁ gṛhītvā tu śubhānyābharaṇāni ca | idaṁ paśyeti rāmāya darśayāmāsa vānaraḥ ||*'.

[5] The garment used earlier by Sītā to cover Her Head was the one in which She tied her ornaments and threw down. She was now (in Lankā) wearing another garment, similar in colour and design. Traditionally, women in olden days used to wear two garments; this practice is still followed in the north. *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Sundarakāṇḍa* (15.20): '*pītenaikena saṁvītāṁ kliṣṭenottamavāsasā*' – 'Having covered Her Body in a single, golden cloth which is dishevelled....'.

[6] The phrase '*tvadupamaruteḥ*' implies that the tinkle of the anklet is similar to the swan's calls. *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Āraṇyakāṇḍa* (52.36): '*caraṇānnūpuraṁ bhraṣṭaṁ vaidehyā ratnabhūṣitam | vidyunmaṇḍala-*

had taken. Her left anklet, which I had put around her lotus-like foot when it was placed on my lap, would be on a branch there; you will see her intense grief when she looks at that jewel.

21. Devoid of flower-like ornaments, with her limbs resembling drooping tender shoots, being embraced, as it were, by the creepers that are reflected on her immaculate form and with her glow slightly dulled by her hot breath due to distress, Sītā will look like the presiding deity of the garden[1], who is herself held captive in the demon's house.

22. By controlling all her senses from being distracted by external objects, her mind would have achieved absolute serenity. In accordance with the *Kāmaśāstra* (texts on love), she would have utterly and intensely fixed her consciousness on me alone. (In yogic parlance, this method of devotion is called '*praṇidhānam*'.) With recollection of nothing else (except me) from her past lives, she would therefore have attained a state of sublimity. Her mind rendered gentle as though by deep meditation, she will appear to be undergoing the ultimate yogic experience of *Nirvikalpa-samādhi* (when the practitioner is aware of nothing else, including the self, and focuses only on the object to be attained)[2].

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sankāśaṁ papāta madhurasvanam ||' – 'As Rāvaṇa was carrying off Sītā, one of Her anklets slipped and fell down; overlaid with gems and sparkling like lightning, it sounded very melodious as it fell'.

[1] Since Sītā is compared to the garden's presiding deity, should She not possess the traits of the trees? Her delicate limbs are like the tender shoots; her jewels are akin to the flowers (now that She has removed her jewels, She resembles a tree whose flowers have been shed); the vines in the Aśoka grove are reflected in the natural glow of Her Body, giving the impression that they are climbing a beautiful, lush tree. It seems as though the luxuriant garden itself has assumed the form of Sītā and is held captive by Rāvaṇa, as he has done with other women.

[2] Just as the practitioners of *yoga* direct their attention unswervingly on a deity or a similar entity of their choice, Sītā too was steadfastly thinking of Rāma, to the exclusion of everything else. [*Yoga* refers to the practice of concentrating on only one object, shutting out all others. That state is called '*samādhi*'. Thought-process is said to be of five types – *pramāṇam* (insight), *vikalpa* (imagination), *nidrā* (sleep), *smṛti* (recollection) and *viparyaya* (misconception). The restraint of these five constitutes *yoga*. Practice and detachment are the ways to control the thought-process. The eight limbs of *yoga* are: *yama* (restraints / discipline), *niyama* (observances), *āsanam* (body-postures), *prāṇāyāma* (control of breath), *pratyāhāra* (withdrawal of senses), *dhāraṇā* (concentration), *dhyānam* (meditation) and *samādhi* (union with divine). While the first five are external means, the next three are internal means.] All practitioners of *yoga* should scrupulously follow the prescribed guidelines. When the five sense-organs of ears, skin, eyes, tongue and nose are prevented from comprehending the respective elements of the senses, *viz.* sound, touch, sight, taste and smell, the mind gets disciplined and becomes tranquil. The next step is uninterrupted meditation, like a continuous flow of water, upon a preeminent entity. In the present case, Sītā is described by Rāma as abiding by the principles of the *Kāmaśāstra*, restraining Her senses from all other objects and focusing Her

23. Oblivious of everything in front, her eyes will be expressionless; she will be continually sighing; her lotus-like face will be wan and drooping; her tears will be flowing endlessly[1]; her laments will be about her present ordeal[2]. Subject to intense agony due to an implacable fate[3], (yet) devoted to me alone, Sītā will be even more emaciated and dejected[4].

24. On seeing her pitiable state, you too will be spontaneously overwhelmed by sadness[5]; Indeed, how can any pure-hearted person[6], not belonging to a flesh-eating tribe[7] like that of Rāvaṇa, fail to feel compassion in this matter?

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mind only on Him, Her Husband. In this way, She would seem to be in an unusual trance. The blissful state where the practitioners of meditation experience total identity with the objects of their contemplation is known as '*Nirvikalpa-samādhi*'. The verse indicates that Sītā too was undergoing such an experience with regard to Rāma. The *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Sundarakāṇḍa* (16.25) describes Sītā's state thus: '*naiṣā paśyati rākṣasyo nemān puṣpaphaladrumān | ekasthahṛdayā nūnaṁ rāmamevānupaśyati ||*' – 'She does not see the demonesses, nor the trees full of flowers and fruits. Indeed, Her Mind is focussed solely on Rāma and She sees Him alone'.

[1] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Sundarakāṇḍa* (15.34): '*bāṣpāmbuparipūrṇena kṛṣṇavaktrākṣipakṣmaṇā | vadanena aprasannena niśśvasantīṁ punaḥ punaḥ ||*' – 'With Her face wet with tears, Eyes dull, Her Face dark and weary, She was sighing continuously'.

[2] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Sundarakāṇḍa* (25.10, 11, 15): '*ārtā vyasṛjadaśrūṇi maithilī vilalāpa ha | hā rāmeti ca duḥkhārtā ha punarlakṣmaṇeti ca || bhartāraṁ tamapaśyantī rākṣasīvaśamāgatā | sīdāmi khalu śokena*' – 'Grieving greatly, Sītā cried out, "O Rāma! O Lakṣmaṇa!" and wailed, "Alas! Unable to see my husband, I am languishing like this amidst demonesses"'.

[3] *Ibid*. (37.4): '*vidhirnūnamasaṁhāryaḥ prāṇināṁ plavagottama | saumitriṁ māṁ ca rāmaṁ ca vyasanaiḥ paśya mohitān ||*' – 'O noble monkey! No creature can thwart the forces of destiny. Look at Lakṣmaṇa, me and Rāma, confounded by misfortune".

[4] *Ibid*. (59.34): '*sā prakṛtyaiva tanvangī tadviyogācca karśitā*' – 'Slender by nature, She is (now) haggard due to separation from Her Husband' is referred to here. *Ibid*. (19.21): '*upavāsena śokena dhyānena ca bhayena ca | parikṣīṇāṁ kṛśām dīnām*' – 'Due to fast, grief, brooding and fear, She was greatly wasted, weak and depressed'.

[5] *Ibid*. (16.28): '*sukhārhāṁ duḥkhitām dṛṣṭvā mamāpi vyathitaṁ manaḥ*' – 'My mind too is agitated on seeing the despondence of One Who is worthy of happiness'. (These are Hanuman's words.)

[6] The term '*nirmalatva*' indicates purity of mind. It also refers to the white-coloured, noble-hearted swan.

[7] '*vyāghravat piśitāśānāṁ dayā kā nāma vidyate*' – 'Will those who eat flesh, like tigers, have any mercy?'

25. You may drink some water from the reservoir near the garden. As the demonesses are wont to wander around at night, carefully observe the time of their sleep[1]. Since you will have to convey my tender and loving message[2] to Sītā at dawn, you may spend the night sleeping somewhere to relieve your tiredness.

26. O royal swan[3], with the cool and fragrant breeze caressing you to remove the fatigue caused by your long journey, you may sleep to your heart's content on the sandy dune rendered beautiful by the moon's rays. When woken by the delightful buzz of the bees from inside the lotus buds, you may get up with an awareness of your mission.

27. Thoroughly concealing yourself among the fluttering leaves[4] of the Śiṁśupā tree and softening your voice to sound like the bow of Kāmadeva, revive my forlorn and dazed beloved by first recounting the glory of the dynasties of Raghu and Janaka and instil faith in her[5] before saying as follows.

28. "Devi, with my voice, I herald the arrival of autumn, which is joyfully awaited by the valiant men chosen as husbands by courageous ladies[6]. Know me as a dear friend and emissary of your long-lived Husband, Whose message is an elixir to save You."

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[1] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Sundarakāṇḍa* (30.11): '*niśācarīṇāṁ pratyakṣamanarhaṁ cāpi bhāṣaṇam*' – 'It is improper to talk (to Sītā) in the presence of these demonesses'.

[2] *Ibid.* (30.42, 43): '*ikṣvākūṇāṁ variṣṭhasya rāmasya viditātmanaḥ |... śrāvayiṣyāmi sarvāṇi madhurāṁ prabruvangiram |*' – 'I shall present, at the appropriate time, the pleasing message of the omniscient Rāma, Who is the best in the Ikṣvāku lineage'.

[3] That the swan is entitled to the royal comforts of being fanned by the cool wind, sleeping on a soft, sandy bed and being woken up by the soothing hum of the bees is conveyed through the term 'royal swan'.

[4] The term '*calakisalayāṁ*' is used here to suggest that the rustling sound of the leaves would enable the swan to perch unseen on the tree and also prevent its sound from being heard by others. *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Sundarakāṇḍa* (14.41): '*tāmāruhya mahābāhuḥ śiṁśupāṁ parṇasaṁvṛtām*' – 'The valorous Hanuman ascended the Śiṁśupā tree, which was covered with leaves'.

[5] *Ibid.* (65.15): '*ikṣvākuvaṁśavikhyātiṁ śanaiḥ kīrtayatānagha | sā mayā naraśārdūla viśvāsamupapāditā*' – 'Śrīrāma! Best among men! As I slowly recited the fame of the Ikṣvāku dynasty, She started trusting me'.

[6] It has already been mentioned that soldiers go to war with their enemies in autumn. As the swans also happily call out and take off during this season, their sounds are said to convey to the warriors that this is the right time to embark on their business (*viz.* go to battle).

29. As you cautiously commence your narration about me, the fearful and dejected Maithili will slightly lift her sorrow-laden, lotus-like face and lovingly gaze at you; her eyes, beautiful like the lotuses blossoming at dawn, will be shedding tears of joy[1].

30. When the daughter-in-law of Emperor Daśaratha catches sight of you, with your perfectly white form and pure mind[2], she will be filled with relief and hope; the glow on her face and the courage in her heart will increase like a waxing moon. With a joyful countenance[3], she will be eager to know about me; verily, are not women delighted by news from their beloveds?

31. Then tell her this: "O Mother! Rāma, the flawless King of the Kosala country, is alive only because of Your good fortune; lauding You as a repository of noble qualities, He has enquired after Your welfare[4]. Scholars declare that all the characteristics that are regarded as sure signs of prosperity are present in Goddess Lakṣmī as well as in You".

32. "Devi, when we embraced, I used to feel that even the jewels and unguents worn by you came between us[5]. (These are Rāma's words to Sītā.) As fate has caused you to be taken away to a distant island, Rāma maintains Himself by visualising You in front of Him and has conveyed this message to You through this swan, His friend".

33. "O beauteous Maithili! Our minds are overwhelmed by endless love (for each other). Long ago, our delightful expressions of passion at the beginning of our union, such as

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[1] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Sundarakāṇḍa* (31.17-18): '*unnamya vadanaṁ bhīruḥ śiṁśupāvṛkṣamaikṣata ‖ niśamya sītā vacanaṁ kapeśca diśaśca sarvāḥ pradiśaśca vīkṣya | svayaṁ praharṣaṁ paramaṁ jagāma...*' – 'Sītā lifted Her frightened face and looked up at the Śiṁśupā tree; hearing the words of the monkey and looking around in all the cardinal and intermediate directions, She delighted in hearing about Rāma'.

[2] As the swan possesses a fully white form and an unblemished mind, it is described as '*aśeṣāvadātam*'.

[3] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Sundarakāṇḍa* (35.86): '*cāru tadvadanaṁ tasyāstāmraśuklāyatekṣaṇam | aśobhata viśālākṣyā...*' – 'She looked beautiful that morning, with bright Eyes and a clear Face'.

[4] *Ibid*. (34.2): '*vaidehi kuśalī rāmastvāṁ ca kauśalamabravīt*' – 'Vaidehi! Rāma is fine and enquired about Your welfare'.

[5] *Valmiki Ramayana – Yuddhakāṇḍa* (7): '*hāro'pi nārpitaḥ kaṇṭhe sparśasaṁrodhabhīruṇā | āvayorantare jātāḥ parvatāḥ sarito drumāḥ*' – 'Even a garland was not put (by me) on (Sītā's) neck, fearing an obstruction to our (mutual) contact. But now, mountains, rivers and trees have come between us'.

embraces, caused the nights to pass by in a flash[1]. But now, my sorrow renders the nights overly long, even though they are fragmented by images of our pleasures".

34. "The intense heat of your orb-like breasts had warded off the cool, fragrant breeze (earlier, during our embraces); now, when I am suffering due to your absence, the very same breeze, with increased strength and bearing the fragrance of the Kunda flowers (*Jasminum Multiflorum*), spreads their perfume in all directions and shrivels me and also the lotuses, which are fit to be 'friends' of your lotus-like face"[2].

35. Tell her, "Vasanta, the god of spring, fills all the directions with flowers, which are the arrows of Cupid[3]; the tips of these arrows have been dipped in honey[4]; they are very eager to suck out the lives of lovelorn ladies and never fail to find their mark. Afraid at the sight of these arrows, Rāma did not take up His bow Kodaṇḍa, but instead bowed to Vasanta and beseeched him, 'Please do not approach Sītā'"[5].

36. "There are swarms of bees following the gentle, fragrant gusts of wind that emanate continuously from the Malaya Mountains; scared of the cuckoos that fly alongside, these bees tone down their joyful hum; their bodies are covered by the pollen dust of

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[1] *Uttararāmacarita* (1.27): '*kimapi kimapi mandaṁ mandamāsaktiyogādaviralitakapolaṁ jalpatora-krameṇa | aśithilaparirambhavyāpṛtaikaikadoṣṇoraviditagatayāmā rātrireva vyaraṁsīt* ||' – 'While we softly talked this and that at random, our cheeks resting against one another and one arm of each engaged in a tight embrace, the night itself ended without our noticing how the hours passed'.

[2] The topic here pertains to autumn. It is during this season that the Mādhavī flowers blossom, the lotuses wilt and a cool breeze blows. [The wind that blows during this time is said to be very cold. Even then, it was unable to compete with the warmth of Sītā's breasts. In Her absence, the (vengeful) wind is described as tormenting Her Husband and the lotuses, which are like companions to Her Face.]

[3] Vasanta is said to be the god of spring. He is a very close friend of Manmatha, the god of love. During spring, all trees, vines and plants will be in full blossom. These beautiful flowers are said to be the arrows given by Vasanta to Manmatha.

[4] The word '*madhu*' refers to the nectar of flowers. It also means 'liquor'. Imbibing it causes intoxication. In battle, poison-tipped arrows are usually used against enemies. Here, nectar is the poison that is smeared on the flowers, which are shot by Vasanta on lovers. Hence they are said to unfailingly hit the target.

[5] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* (1.47): '*vasanto yadi tatrāpi yatra me vasati priyā | nūnaṁ paravaśā sītā sā'pi śocatyahaṁ yathā* ||' – 'If the spring season reigns where my beloved resides, she too will be overwhelmed by sad feelings like me'.

the jasmine flowers, on which they had sat (earlier). As I stand in the path of the soft breeze, the frightened Lakṣmaṇa blocks it by standing in front of me"[1].

37. "O beautiful-limbed one! The Aśoka tree nearby is ablaze with red flowers; the white flowers falling from the Karañja trees (Indian Beech / *Pongamia Glabra*)[2] onto these red flowers remind me of your appearance during our wedding[3]; hence, I become sad when I ask myself, 'What reply will I, the unfortunate, give to Emperor Janaka?' or 'What will he, a great *yogi*, say about me?'"[4].

38. "When the wand-like lightning hits the drum-like clouds and produces drum-beats of thunder, the peacock, desiring to dance to the sound, joyfully embraces its mate, which resides, untroubled by the demon, in this mountain filled with the fragrance of the jasmine flowers. The sight of the fortunate peacock[5] refuses to leave my mind".

39. "On seeing me in a state of confusion and anguish, the mass of clouds appear to begin shedding tears, thereby causing your mother earth also to begin crying and wailing, with the rivulets of rainwater being her tears. The sound of thunder echoing among the hills is her lamentation and the heat of the sun is her hot breath of sorrow[6]. Thus the clouds seem to have started a strange weeping on the earth as well as in the sky".

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[1] As Rāma's grief due to Sītā's absence would only be aggravated by the breeze, Lakṣmaṇa stops it from touching Him. (The inner meaning is: When wild elephants are newly captured from the jungle and brought under the control of mahouts, they stop their shrill trumpeting and walk slowly, their bodies dusty and their legs in chains. Seeing them approach, a person cautions his friend to stand away from their path.)

[2] The Aśoka and the Karañja trees normally bloom in summer.

[3] As the white Karañja flowers falling on the red Aśoka flowers resemble the parched rice-grains being given in oblation to the fire during the wedding rituals, the sight reminds Rāma of His marriage with Sītā.

[4] *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* (1.107): '*kiṁ nu vakṣyāmi rājānaṁ dharmajñaṁ satyavādinam | sītāyā janakaṁ pṛṣṭa kuśalaṁ janasaṁsadi* ||' – 'If the righteous and truthful Janaka asks me about Sītā's welfare in the open assembly, what will I say'?

[5] *Ibid*. (1.41): '*mayūrasya vane nūnaṁ rakṣasā na hṛtā priyā | tasmānnṛtyati ramyeṣu vaneṣu saha kāntayā* ||' – 'The peacock's beloved has surely not been abducted by the demon. Hence he dances with his beloved in this delightful forest'.

[6] *Ibid*. (28.7): '*eṣā gharmaparikliṣṭā navavāripariplutā | sīteva śokasantaptā mahī bāṣpaṁ vimuñcati* ||' – 'The earth, scorched by the heat and then inundated by fresh rainwater, seems to be burning with grief and shedding tears, just like Sītā'.

40. "O graceful Jānakī! Though the cruel fate has left you far away, I imagine being near you, enjoying the touch of your body through the gentle breeze that blows from the Malaya Mountain, locking gaze with you through the moon (when we both see the moon at the same time, it is as though our eyes meet), living in the same world, resting on the same ground[1] and having the star-studded sky as our canopy".

41. "O Sītā! The lotus-buds, which were hitherto tightly closed, have blossomed fully and are trying to form kinship with your eyes. The onset of the autumn season seems to inform me that the time has come to march (towards Lankā) with my army. (The lotuses bloom well in autumn. It is during this season that kings plan their military expeditions.) The directions which have been cleared now (in the autumn, after the monsoon) appear to indicate that my claim is righteous and that the route is ready for the armies to cross the land. Hence, this season enthuses me to hasten towards you".

42. "O virtuous one! When, in deference to my father's wishes, I renounced the coronation ceremony in favour of Bharata and left for the forest, you too forsook the life in Ayodhyā and followed me. I frequently and deeply grieve over the fact that you, who deserve to be held close to my chest, have now been abandoned far away".

43. "O beautiful-faced one! Lakṣmaṇa is very shortly going to construct a bridge across the ocean – either with huge mountains or with arrows. Upon reaching there (Lankā), he will hand over the city, like a garland, to the army of monkeys and annihilate the demons. The twangs of his bow will be sweet like honey[2] to your ears".

44. "Devi! After cutting off the demon's heads like a bunch of flowers and ending the enmity, we will reach our country by the Puṣpakavimāna, which can effortlessly and speedily fly in the sky. After achieving the complete results of our efforts and being

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[1] These lines are comparable to the following verses: *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Yuddhakāṇḍa* (5.5): '*vāhi vāta yataḥ kāntā tāṁ spṛṣṭvā māmapi spṛśa | tvayi me gātrasaṁsparśaḥ candre dṛṣṭisamāgamaḥ* ||' – 'O wind, flow from the direction of my beloved. Touch her and then touch me too; it is through you that I feel her body. It is through the moon that I meet her gaze' and *ibid*. (5.10): '*bahvetat kāmayānasya śakyametena jīvitum | yadahaṁ sā ca vāmorūrekāṁ dharaṇimāśritau* ||' – 'I, the passionate one, is able to survive only due to the fact that I and Sītā, with her handsome thighs, share the same earth'.

[2] The phrase '*karṇe śīdhuṁ tava racayitā*' literally means 'will pour honey into your ears'. This implies that Sītā would be delighted to hear the sound of Lakṣmaṇa's bow that would soon vanquish the demons. *Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa – Sundarakāṇḍa* (21.24-25): '*rāmasya dhanuṣaḥ śabdaṁ śroṣyasi tvaṁ mahāsvanam| ... iha śīghraṁ suparvāṇo jvalitāsyā ivoragāḥ | iṣavo nipatiṣyanti rāmalakṣmaṇalakṣaṇāḥ* ||' – 'You will hear the resounding twang of Rāma's bow... Well-designed arrows, with blazing tips and with the symbols of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, will soon fall here like snakes'.

coronated by the revered sages, we will fulfil all the desires that have accumulated in our minds due to the long separation".

45. "Remember that, when I returned from the battle at Janasthāna after vanquishing the demons Khara and others – who were equal to Rāvaṇa in valour, you shed tears of joy, lauded me in a tearful voice and embraced me tightly. The heat of your bosom healed my wounds, removed the pain in my body and energised me"[1].

46. "O auspicious Sītā! You are the reason for my existence. Take care of yourself, recollecting the intense grief experienced by Sacīdevī long ago[2] and also the sorrow of Pārvatīdevī when separated from Paramaśiva[3]. (Both of them eventually reunited with their husbands.) Laudable indeed is the suffering undergone by a woman who behaves in accordance to her husband's wishes and delights him by fulfilling his intentions".

47. O unconditionally affectionate swan! Have you assimilated all the information that I told you and that will help me? Being naturally kind, you will not reject my request. As the news sent earlier by king Naḷa, also through a swan, had a positive effect[4], scholars aver that, for a pure species like yours[5], protecting the distressed is a vow.

48. O noble friend, having thus consoled Sītā with these sweet words so that she stays alive, may you continue to receive the friendship of the famed kings of the Solar

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[1] When a person sustains a wound, the methods of treatment include heat fomentation and washing with hot water. Here too, when Rāma returned from the battlefield, sustaining wounds caused by weapons, Sītā embraced Him. The warmth of Her breasts acted as a poultice and Her hot tears washed His Body, as it were. Her strong embrace allayed His pain and gave Him unlimited pleasure.

[2] Sacī was Indra's wife. Long ago, when Nahuṣa attained the position of Indra, the original Indra lost his place (and went into hiding). Nahuṣa then attempted to molest Sacīdevī, who was thus put through great suffering (of separation from her husband and, later, Nahuṣa's persecution). This is given in the *Purāṇas*.

[3] The *Purāṇas* say that, when Pārvatī was the daughter of Dakṣa Prajāpati, she was known as 'Dākṣāyaṇi'. During a sacrifice which Dakṣa conducted, he insulted Paramaśiva (Dākṣāyaṇi's husband). On witnessing it and on being neglected by her husband, she left him, immolated herself and was reborn as the daughter of Himavān. She then performed arduous penance and once again secured Śiva as her husband.

[4] The *Naiṣadhīya-caritam* describes how king Naḷa sent a swan-messenger to Damayantī and eventually married her only through the successful efforts of the bird.

[5] The swan is naturally white in colour. Here, purity also refers to the bird's flawless, auspicious qualities.

dynasty! May you, with your perfectly paired mate, like Goddess Śrīdevī and Bhagavān Viṣṇu, stroll though all the worlds to your hearts content[1]!

49. After having sent this message, Śrī Rāma, together with the army of Vānaras, built a bridge across the deep ocean; He crossed the bridge, killed Rāvaṇa in battle and rescued Sītā; attaining fame and delight, He ruled over His kingdom that was earlier under the care of His *Pādukās* and made it more and more prosperous. Enjoying a firsthand experience of the resulting fame, He ensured that the city of Ayodhyā had a king who was well matched with its glory.

50. This work *Haṁsasandeśa* is equal to a gemstone; it has been forged by the great sculptor Venkaṭanātha, who possesses exceptional knowledge of sculpting, acquired through flawless learning of all arts; its brilliance is the result of repeated polishing against the whetstone of intellect; it is an instrument for attaining remarkable benefits; it can be extolled as an extraordinary friend who has united Sītā and Śrī Rāma; it is utterly blemishless. May scholars, with their superior vision of intelligence, enjoy this text in its entirety and imbibe its import through their ears!

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[1] *Bharadvāja-saṁhitā*: '*sa ca sarveṣu lokeṣu tameva hyanusañcaran sammodate samaguṇaḥ kāmānnī kāmarūpadhṛk*' – 'Thus, one who has involved himself fully in serving Bhagavān and attained liberation, gets to relish any food he likes and assumes any form he chooses; possessing qualities similar to those of Bhagavān and abiding by His wishes, the liberated soul delights in travelling to any of the worlds'. This same concept is given in the *Taittirīyopaniṣad – Bhṛguvallī* (10.5): '*etam ānandamayam ātmānam upa-sankramya | imān lokān kāmānnī kāmarūpyanusañcaran* |' – '(He who knows this, on leaving this world,) attains the blissful self and moves about these worlds, enjoying food at will and assuming any form at will' and in the *Chāndogyopaniṣad* (7.25.2): '*sa svarāḍ bhavati | tasya sarveṣu lokeṣu kāmacāro bhavati* |' – 'He becomes self-luminous; he enjoys unrestrained movement in all the worlds'.