

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED TWENTYFOUR

Creation of Mukhāra Tīrtha¹

Sūta said:

1-2. Then there is another excellent Tīrtha named Mukhāra where excellent Brāhmaṇa-sages had contact with a thief.

That thief attained Siddhi, thanks to their power. Later he composed the epic Rāmāyaṇa and became well-known as Vālmīki.

3. Formerly, there was a Brāhmaṇa named Lohajaṅgha in Camatkārapura. He hailed from the family of Māṇḍavya. He was devoted to his father and mother.

4. He had a wife who was dearer to him than his own life. The chaste lady considered her husband as her very life. She was always engaged in what was pleasing and beneficial to her husband.

5. A great deal of time elapsed as he continued to pursue

1. Vālmiki was originally a highwayman Nārada reformed him with Rāma Mantra and he became the author of Rāmāyaṇa. Herein Saptarṣis reform him with a Sāma-mantra.

the profession fit for a Brāhmaṇa and be devoted to his father and mother.

6. Once Lord Śakra did not shower rain in the entire land of Ānarta on the earth for twelve years.

7. Then, O excellent Brāhmaṇas, that Lohajaṅgha underwent great sufferings. He did not get any alms or monetary gift.

8. On seeing his parents and wife afflicted with hunger, he was overcome by great sorrow and he thought thus:

9. 'What shall I do? Where shall I go? How can I continue to see these elderly people and particularly my wife in this miserable plight?'

10. In his great grief he went to a forest for the sake of (gathering) fruits. He could not get any. All the trees were dry and parched.

11. Then he saw an old lady going along with some quantity of vegetables. She was extremely tired thereby.

12. The merciless wretch snatched her vegetables and clothes and joyously went to his abode and offered the same to his parents.

13. Achieving his purpose thus, everyday by the acts of a thief, he maintained his family through thievery.

14. When the famine passed off and the time of plenty arrived, he never did any personal work. Forsaking his Brāhmaṇical pursuits, he continued the practice of a thief.

15. Once, O Brāhmaṇas, the seven sages, the chief of whom was Marīci, came there in the course of their pilgrimage.

16. On seeing them in an isolated place, he became furious and inimical. Raising forcibly his stick, he ordered: "Stop there."

17. He knitted his eyebrows and rushed at them. He rebuked them with harsh words as if he was about to beat them.

18. The sages saw him as one comparable to the messenger of Yama. They noticed that he had a sacred thread. Then they said to him with compassion:

The sages said:

19. Alas, you appear to be a Brāhmaṇa. How childish you are in pursuing this barbarous practice! Why do you carry on this despicable activity?

20. We are quiet and quiescent sages. We have given all our belongings. We have nothing with us which you can take away.

Lohajaṅgha said:

21. O Brāhmaṇas, hurry up and give me these white bark garments and antelope skins along with your shoes.

22. If not I will kill you all with my stick comparable to the thunderbolt. Undoubtedly, I will despatch you to the abode of Dharmarāja.

The sages said:

23. O robber, we shall give away everything to you but we would like to ask you something in general out of curiosity. Tell us.

24. You are a Brāhmaṇa. Why do you mercilessly commit theft? Have you become enslaved to terrible vices? Are you a hunter in the guise of a Brāhmaṇa?

Lohajaṅgha said:

25. This act of thievery on my part is not an indulgence in vice. It is for the sake of the maintenance of the family. Hence it is undoubtedly righteous.

26. My parents are in their advanced state of senility. My chaste wife is an adept in household chores.

27. What little I earn by means of this activity is entirely for their sake. I state this on a solemn oath.

28. Hence at the very outset, out with all your possessions. Why indulge in vain talk? My hands throb to hit you all.

The sages said:

29. If it is so, O thief, go home and ask everyone, "Are you willing to share a portion of my sins or not?"

30. If by their sharing, a part of your sin goes away, you do as you please; otherwise the sin will become unbearable (to you).

31. O extremely wicked one, you will fall into Raurava Naraka. We are saying this only out of the consideration that you are a Brāhmaṇa.

32. We are feeling compassionate towards you. It is good that you have met us. Auspicious indeed is the result of seeing sages of controlled minds.

33. One commits the sin. The other man enjoys the benefit. Those who enjoy escape punishment. It is the doer who is affected by the adverse result.

Sūta said:

34-36. On Hearing their words the thief became slightly afraid. He thought: 'There is no doubt about this that what these people say is true. So I shall go home and ask all the members of the family. If they are amenable to partake of a share in my sin I shall continue to do like this. If they do not take a share therein, I shall abandon this thievish activity. Now a great terror has entered my mind.' (Then he said to them:)

37-39. "O great sages, if you do not go elsewhere and flee from me I shall go home. I shall ask all my dependents what you said in particular. If the family accepts a share in my sin, I will take away whatever you possess. If they refuse to have anything to do with my sin, I shall undoubtedly let you (go) along with all your possessions."

40. Taking pity on him, they promised (not to leave the place) in order to make him believe and then sent him homewards.

41-43. After going home, he first asked his father: "Dear father, listen to my words and then reply:

Thousands of forbidden acts like thievery I do everyday and nourish you. Do you partake of any share (of sins) therein or not?

In this I entertain my own doubt. Tell me even as I ask "are you prepared to share the sin duly? Tell me quickly."

The father said:

44. Dear son, during your childhood I went through many worries and sufferings, committed many things good and bad with an affectionate heart and nursed you.

45. In view of this, when I am in advanced (old) age, you commit things good and bad and protect me.

46. O child, just as you had not the slightest share in the

auspicious or sinful acts then committed, the same is the case with me now.

47. The (fruit) of Karma committed by a person, whether meritorious or sinful, has to be experienced by him only. But the partakers of the beneficial results are others (not responsible for the *Karmas*).

48. I am not worried whether you bring me food by honest means or thievery. Nor do I care to think whether you cultivate the land or engage yourself in trading or commerce.

49. Hence this should not be entertained in the heart that we are all the partakers of shares in the despicable thing you commit (we are only the enjoyers). You alone are the person who have to share.

Sūta said:

50. On hearing these words he became greatly agitated in his mind. He then went to his mother and asked the same assiduously.

51. O excellent Brāhmaṇas, what was said by the father was repeated by her too, namely non-participation in his activity whether good or bad.

52. Then he went to his wife and asked the same. She too had the same stand in regard to the sin as the elders had.

53. Thereupon he got extremely distressed with regret. He despised himself; he went back to the place where the sages were present.

54. He bowed down to all of them standing there with palms joined in reverence. He said: "You all may go, O Brāhmaṇas. May my crime be forgiven.

55. I have been sinful and deluded. So I foolishly rebuked and threatened you. So you should forgive me.

56. O excellent Brāhmaṇas, your words came true in the utterance of my parents and wife. Hence I feel regret.

57. Hence, O excellent sages, be pleased ye all to impart some sound instruction to me so that I can eradicate my sins.

58. O excellent Brāhmaṇas, I have always been doing these despicable things. Women, eminent Brāhmaṇas and sages in particular (were attacked by me).

59. All those persons of weak nature, those who are incapable of fighting, have been robbed by me, never those who could fight.