

Markandeya Purana

Once Jaimini, a disciple of sage Vedavyasa expressed his curiosity before Markandeya- 'O Lord! In the great epic Mahabharat, which was created by Vedavyasa, description of Dharma, Arth, Kama and Moksha appears to be intertwined at times and at other times, it appears to be separate from one another. Vedavyasa had described the norms, the stages and the means to perform the duties in all the four stages. This epic contains cryptic knowledge of Vedas. Hence O great sage! I have approached you in order to grasp the full knowledge contained in Mahabharat with your help. Why did Lord take human incarnation even though He is the cause of the origin, perpetuation and destruction of the universe? How did Draupadi become the wife of five Pandavas? How did Balaram expiate for the sin of killing a Brahmin? How did Draupadi's sons give up their lives? Kindly narrate all these things in detail. '

Markandeya says- 'O Muni ! Presently I am engaged in evening worship. Hence I do not have time to narrate these things in detail. But I am telling you about the birds which will narrate you the entire content of Mahabharat. Those birds will also remove all your doubts. Sons of the great bird Drona- Pingaksha, Vibodha, Suputra, Sumuk etc. stay in the caves among the hills of Vindhyachal. They are proficient in Vedas. Go and ask them, they will remove all your doubts.'

Markandeya's words surprised Jaimini. To confirm, he asked again- 'It is surprising that the birds could narrate the content of Mahabharat just like human beings. It is even more surprising that they are proficient in Vedas knowledge, which is even rare to find among humans. Kindly tell me how did they come to acquire such profound knowledge despite having being born in the form of birds. Why do you call them as the sons of Drona?'

Markandeya says- 'Long ago, a strange event took place in Nandanvan involving Indra, Devrishi Narad and some of the elves. One day, Indra was enjoying his time in the Nandanvan forest along with his elves. At the same time Narad also arrived there. Indra welcomed and offered him a seat. The elves also greeted Narad. Indra then said- 'Munivar! Tell me what you desire now? If you desire to listen to a song, should I order the Gandharvas or if you wish to watch the dance, should I order one of my elves, Menka, Rambha, Mishrakeshi or Urvashi? Any of these four can perform a seducing dance before you.'

Narad expressed his desire to watch the dance of an elf, who was superior in beauty to the other elves. This led to a row among the elves. Each one of them was proud of her beauty and talent. Narad then advised them to test their beauty by breaking sage Durvaasa's penance who was at that time staying on a hilltop. All the elves expressed their inability to perform this task successfully. Only an elf named Vapu, driven by her haughtiness accepted to break the penance of sage Durvaasa.

Accordingly she reached the hill where Durvaasa was staying and began to sing an infatuating song in her sweet voice. Very soon, the song began to show its effect on Durvaasa. Attracted by the sweet voice, Durvaasa went in search of the origin of the voice and found Vapu singing at a distance. Durvaasa understood that the elf had come to break his penance. Angrily, he cursed the elf that she would take birth in the lineage of the birds for sixteen years, she would not bear a child and ultimately would be killed by a weapon to regain her heavenly abode. After saying this, sage Durvaasa migrated to Akashganga.

BIRTH OF FOUR BIRDS

Markandeya says - 'In the lineage of the avian King Garuda, there were two brothers-Kank and Kandhar. One day, Kank visited Kailash Parbat where a demon Vidrayudrup, who was a slave of Kubera, was enjoying privacy with his wife and drinking wine. Seeing Kank, the demon showed his displeasure at his arrival at an improper time. But Kank boldly asserted his right on the mountain as according to him, it belonged to all. The infuriated demon decapitated Kank with his sword.

Hearing the news of his brother's killing, Kandhar resolved to kill the demon. After performing the last rites of his brother, he also arrived on the mountain where the demon Vidrayudrup was still drinking wine with his wife. The demon lost his temper again. Kandhar then challenged the demon to have a fight with him. A fierce battle ensued between them. Ultimately, Kandhar killed the demon. The demon's wife-Madanika finding herself in a helpless situation accepted Kandhar as her husband. Thus, Kandhar returned to his palace with a newly found wife. Madanika was in fact the daughter of Menka, the elf and could change her guise at will. After marrying Kandhar, she took the guise of the bird. The bird Madanika was born as elf - Vapu in her next birth due to the curse of sage Durvaasa. Kandhar named her Taarkshi.

A Brahmin named Mandapal had four sons. Drona was the youngest among them and proficient in scriptures, Vedas etc. Kandhar married his daughter, Taarkshi to Drona. After their marriage, Drona and Taarkshi were spending their time happily. Taarkshi conceived during the same time when the battle of Mahabharat was going on. As destiny would have it, Taarkshi flew over the battlefield where she saw Arjuna and Bhagdatt, the king of Pragjyotishpur, fighting valiantly against each other. Accidentally an arrow aimed at Bhagdatt went in the direction of Taarkshi and struck her in the abdomen and tore it apart. As a result of this, four eggs fell on the ground. At the same time, a huge bell fell from Supratik's neck, the elephant of Bhagdatt, and covered the eggs safely.

After the battle of Mahabharat was over, a sage Shami visited the battlefield. There he happened to spot the bell and heard faint chirping coming from underneath the bell. The sage removed the bell and discovered four wingless chicks beneath it. Surprisingly he said to his disciples- 'Look! Falling of these eggs and getting safely covered by the bell simultaneously shows that these chicks are no ordinary birds.' Then he instructed his disciples to carry the eggs to the hermitage and keep it securely at a place safe from predators. The disciples did as told.

BIRDS MIGRATE TO VINDHYACHAL

Sage Shami thereafter began to foster the chicks in his hermitage. With time, the chicks grew feathers and began to fly here and there. But every time the birds went out, they returned to the hermitage by evening. The birds also gained Vedic knowledge by hearing the discourses, which sage Shami used to give daily to his disciples.

One day, when sage Shami was preaching his disciples, the birds arrived there and said- 'O great sage! You are like our father because you have protected us. You are our teacher also because we have gained knowledge from you. Now we have grown up, kindly tell us what should we do?'. The birds speaking like learned people amazed the sage as well as his disciple.

He asked the birds- 'Tell us, how did you speak so clearly and is there any curse behind your present condition?'. The birds replied- 'O sage! Long ago, there used to live a sage, Vipulasvan. He had two sons- Sukrish and Tumburu. In our previous birth, we were the sons of Sukrish. When our father and uncle performed Yagya, we brought them all the required materials. One day, Indra arrived at our hermitage

disguised as an aged bird. The aged bird was starving, hence we requested our father to provide him with some food. Upon enquiring by our father, the bird expressed his desire to eat human flesh. Our father tried to dissuade the bird but it did not give up its insistence. Then our father called us and said that he had promised the bird to feed it with human flesh. So, we were asked to donate our body in order to satisfy the bird's hunger. But being frightened, we expressed our inability to meet the demand of the starving bird. This infuriated our father for we were violating his promise that he had made to the bird. He then cursed us to take birth as birds in our next life and himself got ready to donate his body. As our father was breathing his last, Indra resumed his real self and said- 'O great sage! I took this guise only to test your character. Kindly forgive me and tell me what you desire now?' Indra blessed our father to have divine knowledge and penance free from all obstacles. Thereafter we also fell at our father's feet and begged for his pardon. We requested him to take back his words but he said that his words would not go futile. But still he blessed us to have supreme knowledge even in the form of birds.'

Concluding their talk, the birds said- 'O lord! Thus controlled by destiny, our father cursed us. After sometime, we took birth in bird form in the battlefield where you found us and fostered us in your hermitage. Now we are strong enough to fly long distances. So kindly free us from your obligation.'

Hearing the words of the birds, sage Shami said to his disciples- 'Look! I had already told you that these birds were no ordinary creatures. They even survived the battle of Mahabharat. It shows their greatness.' Then sage Shami granted them permission to migrate to the Vindhyachal. The birds decided to pass their time by studying the Vedas and doing penance as long as they stayed there.

DIVINE PLAYS OF GOD

Sage Jaimini reached Vindhyachal and arrived before the birds as per Markandeya's instructions. He said- 'O birds! I am Jaimini, the disciple of Vedavyasa. I have come here with a desire to have your glimpse.' The birds welcomed him saying- 'It is our great fortune that you have arrived here. Your arrival has made us feel as if God himself has arrived.' Jaimini said- 'O learned birds! Kindly listen to the purpose of my visit. Sage Markandeya instructed me to come here and see you. You kindly answer my questions that I have in the context of Mahabharat.' The birds assured him of every possible explanation as per their knowledge. Sage Jaimini proceeded- 'Why did Lord take human incarnation even though He is the cause of the origin, perpetuation and destruction of the universe? How did Draupadi come to be the queen of five Pandavas? How did Balaram expiate for the sin of killing a Brahmin? How were Draupadi's sons attain martyrdom? Kindly narrate all these things in detail.'

The birds say- 'The omnipotent, omniscient and the omnipresent Almighty God is worshipped even by the deities. We salute that Lord Vishnu who is the originator of this universe and who pervades everywhere. We salute Brahma from whose four mouths, the Vedas appeared and sanctified all the three worlds. We bow down at the feet of Mahadev. Those sages who have metaphysical knowledge assert that Narayan exists in four forms, which are both tangible and intangible. His first form is Vasudev, appearance of who is more imaginative in nature. This form exists everywhere and in every ages.

The second form of Narayan is the one that bears the earth on his head. This form of god is known as Shesh. Being Taamasi in nature, this form has taken a serpent incarnation. The third form of God exhibits his divine power and plays. It fosters all the creatures, protects religion, and is known as Pradyumna. Yet another form of

God known as Aniruddh rests on the serpent's bed in the abysmal depth of water. It carries out the task of creation.

The third form of God destroys the irreligious demons. In the past, this same form rescued the earth from the abyss in the incarnation of a boar (Varaha avatar) and killed the demon King Hiranyakashipu in the form of Narsimha (lion face with human body). This same form of God has appeared now in Lord Krishna's incarnation.

DRAUPADI'S FIVE HUSBANDS

The birds say- 'Frightened by the severe penance of Trishira, Indra killed him to protect his authority and power. But the sin of killing a Brahmin took away Indra's radiance. Trishira was the son of Twashta. Twashta became furious at his son's death. He plucked one strand of hair from his hair-lock and offered it in the sacrificial fire. This resulted into the creation of a formidable and strong demon named Vritrasur. This demon was created with the objective of killing Indra.

Learning about the birth of Vritrasur, Indra sent Saptarishis as emissaries to work out a pact with the demon. The Saptarishis effected a friendship between Indra and Vritrasur. But Indra had other ideas. He took Vritrasur by surprise and killed him. This deceitful action of Indra further enraged the clans of the demons. Soon the atrocities of the demons increased to unbearable limits. Even Prithvi felt unable to bear the burden of their atrocities. She approached the deities and requested them to get her rid of the burden.

Thus, to relieve Prithvi of her burden, the deities began to take incarnation on earth. Dharma and Vayu implanted Indra's radiance in the womb of Kunti. This resulted in the birth of Yudhishtir and Bheema. Then Indra himself produced Arjuna from Kunti. Nakul and Sahadev were born because of Indra's radiance implanted by Ashwini kumars in the womb of Madri. Thus all the five Pandavas originated from the same source even though they appeared as distinct entities, whereas Draupadi was none other than Shuchi, the wife of Indra, produced from the altar in Drupad's palace. In human incarnation, Draupadi got five Pandavas as her husband.

EXPIATION OF BALARAM

Shri Krishna's brother Balaram had remained impartial in the battle of Mahabharat. Instead of championing the cause either for the Pandavas or for the Kauravas, he had preferred to go on a pilgrimage. His wife Revati also accompanied him on this pilgrimage. Once while travelling, Balaram drank toddy and entered a beautiful garden known as Raivat. Taking a stroll, Balaram and Revati then reached a hut.

In the hut, many Brahmins were sitting and listening to Sutaji's oration. When the Brahmins saw Balaram, they stood up and felicitated him. Only Sutaji did not stand up. Balaram felt insulted and at once killed him. When Balaram regained his composure after the intoxication receded, he felt guilty for his deed. His belief that killing of Suta would enable him to attain a place in Brahma loka proved to be based on false notion as the Brahmins had shunned him for his deed.

After Balaram realised his folly, he began to curse himself and resolved to observe a twelve-year long fast in order to expiate for his sin. Thereafter, Balaram migrated to a place of pilgrimage known as Pratiloma Saraswati to carry out his expiation.

KILLING OF DRAUPADI'S SONS

In Treta Yug, there was a king named Harishchandra. Once he was hunting in the

Mahabaahu forest when suddenly, he heard loud cries of a woman- 'Save me! Save me!' It was followed by the cries of many women. Hearing those cries, King Harishchandra shouted loudly- 'Don't be afraid' and dashed in the direction of the cries. The cries however were an illusion created by Vighnaraj, the lord of the obstacles. At that time when King Harishchandra heard those cries, sage Vishwamitra was observing severe penance in the forest. In order to test Harishchandra's virtuosity, Vighnaraj entered his body. As soon as Vighnaraj entered Harishchandra's body, Harishchandra lost his temper and began to abuse Vishwamitra, which enraged him. His anger destroyed all the knowledge, he had acquired due to his severe penance. Seeing the angry Vishwamitra, King Harishchandra began to shiver. With folded hands, he begged Vishwamitra's pardon. He said- 'O great sage! It is my duty to protect the subjects. Kindly forgive me. Your wrath could greatly affect the performance of my duties as a king. Vishwamitra said- 'O king! If you are a true follower of religion, tell me, who should be given a donation? Who should be protected and who should be fought with?' Harishchandra answered- 'O great penancer! Donations should be made only to such a Brahmin who indulges in fast and religious actions. Protection should be extended to those who are afraid and battle should be fought with enemies.'

Vishwamitra said- 'If you are a religious king, give me Dakshina (donation) as I am a Brahmin seeking salvation.' Harishchandra said- 'Tell me your desire. I am ready to grant it. Vishwamitra said- 'O king! Just presume that I have received whatever you would donate me. Now, give me Dakshina for the Rajsuya Yagya.'

Harishchandra said- 'Ask me whatever you wish to have as the Dakshina of Rajsuya Yagya.' Vishwamitra said- 'O king! Give me all you have except your own body, your wife and child.' Feeling pleased, King Harishchandra granted what Vishwamitra desired. Vishwamitra said- 'O king! Tell me, who is the lord of your kingdom?' Harishchandra said- 'Since the moment I have presented this kingdom to you, you are its master.' Vishwamitra said- 'If I am the master of this kingdom, what are you doing here? Leave at once! But before leaving, remove all your clothes, ornaments and other royal insignia and go out wearing tree's bark only.'

Thus after losing his kingdom, King Harishchandra got ready to leave with his wife Shaivya and son Rohit. Vishwamitra then intercepted him and said- 'Where are you going without paying a Dakshina for Rajsuya Yagya. Harishchandra said- 'O lord! I have donated my whole kingdom. Now only our bodies remain with us. What can I give you now?' Vishwamitra said- 'You cannot leave without paying a Dakshina because you have promised me.' Harishchandra said- 'Don't be angry, O Brahmin! I have nothing at present in my position but I will definitely pay you your Dakshina in due time.' Vishwamitra said angrily- 'Specify the time period within which you will give me my Dakshina or else be ready to get cursed by me.' Harishchandra said- 'I will pay the Dakshina within a month.' Thereafter, Harishchandra started to live in seclusion with his wife and children. Seeing the king's pitiable condition, his entire subjects began to follow him. Seeing their condition, Harishchandra halted and took a look on his subjects. At the same time, sage Vishwamitra also arrived there and began to curse Harishchandra for having attachment towards his subjects. Hearing the harsh words of Vishwamitra, Harishchandra left the kingdom with his wife Shaivya and son Rohit. To drive the king away as soon as possible, Vishwamitra began to beat the queen's back with a stick.

Vishwamitra's abhorrent action enraged the five guardian deities of the directions and they condemned him. Enraged Vishwamitra cursed them- 'O sinners! Go and take birth as human beings.' This curse of Vishwamitra frightened the deities. They begged his pardon. Pleased by their prayers, Vishwamitra said- 'My words cannot be undone. But despite having incarnation of human beings, you will remain

bachelors throughout your life. You will never feel attachment and allurements for anybody.' Thus due to Vishwamitra's curse, those five guardian deities took birth as the five sons of Draupadi. Dronacharya's son, Ashwatthama, ultimately killed them.

KING HARISHCHANDRA

After being thrown out from his kingdom by Vishwamitra, Harishchandra reached the holy town of Varanasi, which was an abode of Lord Mahadev. There Harishchandra saw Vishwamitra standing before him. Vishwamitra said- 'A month has been completed now. Now, give me my Dakshina.' Harishchandra said- 'There is still half an hour in the completion of this month. Please wait. I will give your Dakshina.' Vishwamitra said- 'I will come after half an hour.' Saying this, Vishwamitra departed.

When Vishwamitra left, Harishchandra started to worry as to what would happen to him in his next birth if he did not keep his promise made to a Brahmin. Seeing him perplexed, queen Shaivya tried to console him. She said- 'Man requires a wife only to produce a child. Now we already have a child- Rohit. Hence I am no longer useful for you. You sell me and pay the acquired wealth as Dakshina to the Brahmin.' Harishchandra fainted after hearing his wife's words. The queen began to wail at her husband's condition. Thus wailing, the queen also fell unconscious. The little Rohit also felt perplexed by his parent's condition. He began to cry- 'O father! O mother! I am hungry. Give me food.' At the same time, Vishwamitra arrived there in the guise of Kaal. After sprinkling water on Harishchandra's face, he made him conscious and said- 'O king! Get up and pay my Dakshina. Your sorrows will increase if you do not fulfil your promise.'

Harishchandra was regaining his consciousness slowly but seeing Vishwamitra he fainted once again. This further enraged Vishwamitra. He said- 'O king! If you have even slightest of respect for Dharma, give my Dakshina at once. I will wait till evening and curse you if you fail to pay my Dakshina.' Saying this Vishwamitra departed. The fear of the curse began to terrorise Harishchandra. Meanwhile the queen also regained consciousness. She once again insisted to sell her in order to pay the Dakshina. This time, Harishchandra accepted her proposal and took the queen to the township. There addressing the crowd, he said- 'O dear citizens, kindly listen to me. I am selling my wife who is dearer to me than my own life. Anybody interested in buying her, please do so before evening.' An old Brahmin stepped forward from the crowd and said- 'I will buy her.' Hearing his words, Harishchandra became extremely sad that he could not even utter a word. The Brahmin then stuffed the money in the bark clothes of Harishchandra and began to drag the queen by her hair. The boy Rohit began to cry holding the hem of her mother. Seeing the condition of her son, the queen requested the Brahmin- 'O Arya! Kindly let me see the face of my child for once.' Then the queen turned towards Rohit and said- 'O son! Your mother is no longer free now. She has become a slave. Do not touch me because I have become an untouchable.'

Then the old Brahmin began to forcibly drag the queen with him. Rohit also followed them crying loudly for his mother. The old Brahmin angrily kicked him. But still the boy did not give up following them. At last, the queen requested the Brahmin- 'O lord! I will not be able to serve you without my son. So kindly buy him also.' Hearing the words of the queen, the Brahmin once again stuffed some more money in the clothes of Harishchandra and tied the boy with the queen and began to drag both of them. Meanwhile Vishwamitra also appeared there and demanded the Dakshina. Harishchandra gave him all the money he had got from selling his wife and son. Seeing that amount of money, Vishwamitra boiled with anger and said- 'O wretched among the Kshatriyas! You call this small amount of money as Dakshina! Now look at the powers of my penance.' Harishchandra trembled with fear and said- 'O lord! Please wait a little more.' Vishwamitra said- 'Now only, a quarter of the day remains.'

I will wait only for this period and not more.' Saying this, Vishwamitra went away. With stooped face, Harishchandra once again said addressing the crowd- 'Now I am available for sale. Whoever wishes to buy me, please come forward before sunset.' Dharma in the guise of a Chandaal stepped forward from the crowd. He had a huge stinking body. He said- 'I will buy you.' Harishchandra asked- 'Who are you?' The Chandaal said- 'I am a Chandaal. My name is Praveer and I am the resident of this very town.' Harishchandra thought- 'It is better to accept the curse than accepting the slavery of a Chandaal.' At the same time, Vishwamitra also arrived there and said angrily- 'This Chandaal is ready to pay you a lot of money. Why don't you then pay my Dakshina?' Harishchandra said- 'O lord! I am born in Suryavansh. Accepting the slavery of a Chandaal causes great pain for me. I have no money now. Since now onwards, I will be your slave and do whatever you will ask me to do.' Vishwamitra said- 'If you are my slave and ready to obey me, then I sell you to this Chandaal for 1000 gold coins. Go and become his slave.' The Chandaal then presented many villages that were spread over an area of 100 Yojans to Vishwamitra and tying Harishchandra with a rope dragged him to his town.

In the Chandaal's house, Harishchandra contemplated- 'The queen must be thinking that I would soon get her freed from the slavery of the old Brahmin after paying his dues. But she does not know that I myself have become the slave of a Chandaal.' After a few days, the Chandaal appointed Harishchandra as the supervisor of the cremation place and instructed him to be there present all the time and to cremate each dead body only after thorough investigation. He also instructed him to collect the toll for cremating every dead body and divide it in such a way that one sixth part of the toll goes to the king and from the remaining five parts, three parts should be reserved for him he should take only the remaining two parts as his remuneration. Since that day, Harishchandra began to live in the cremation ground. He always remembered the glorious days of his kingdom, his queen and his son. He had great regret that just because of the anger of Vishwamitra, he lost everything. Very soon, his new found occupation began to show on his appearance. His hair grew long and was unkempt, his body dry and stinking. In this guise, he began to roam in the cremation ground always carrying a stick in his hand. His whole day passed in the assessment of the cremation toll and its division among the various claimants. He had lost his mental stature as he even forgot the count of the days and could not distinguish between the day and night.

One day, a snake bit Rohit as a result of which, he died. Shaivya brought Rohit, crying and wailing to the cremation ground. Even in the unkempt guise, she recognised Harishchandra. Hearing her wailing, Harishchandra went near her expecting to get the clothes of the deceased. There he saw a woman carrying a dead boy wrapped in a black cloth. He could not recognise queen Shaivya but the royal appearance of the boy forced him to think- 'To which royal family did this unfortunate boy belong to? How pitiable, the cruel Kaal did not even spare this boy. My son Rohit would have attained the same age by now.' His silence further hurt the queen who said- 'O lord! O king! How come, you have been living here without caring for your wife and son? We have already lost our kingdom. Now, we have lost our son also. O destiny! Did you not destroy everything of Harishchandra?' Harishchandra began to think who that woman could be and who that dead boy was? 'Isn't she my wife?' Thus recognising his wife and dead son, Harishchandra began to cry loudly and fainted. The queen after seeing her husband's condition fainted too. After sometime both of them regained their consciousness. Then the king took the dead boy in his lap and once again fainted. Queen Shaivya began to wonder why Harishchandra was staying in the cremation ground. For a moment, she forgot her sorrow and began to look at her fainted husband. Then she noticed the stick in Harishchandra's hand. Usually Chandaals used to carry that kind of stick. She became dejected with the thought that she had become the wife of a Chandaal.

She then began to curse the destiny and began to wail embracing King Harishchandra and said- 'O king! I don't know whether I am dreaming or it is a reality. I have lost the power of thinking.'

Hearing the words of the queen, the king opened his eyes and narrated the whole events that led to his becoming a Chandaal. Then the queen narrated her experiences and how their son Rohit died because of snakebite. Harishchandra fell on the ground and began to hug his dead son. He was wailing- 'How unfortunate I am that even my wishes are not under my control. Without the permission of the Chandaal, I cannot even commit self-immolation. But now, I will not differentiate between the sin and virtuosity. I will destroy my body in the pyre of my son.' The queen said- 'O king! I am also unable to bear the burden of sorrows. I will also commit immolation with you. Then all three of us will stay unitedly in the heaven. It won't matter to us even if we suffer the tortures of hell.' Then the king arranged a huge pyre and put his dead son on it. With the queen, he began to pray to God. Just then all the deities arrived there led by Dharma. Sage Vishwamitra also accompanied them. They praised Harishchandra. Then Dharma, Indra and Vishwamitra came closer to the king.

Dharma said- 'O king! You have satisfied me with your merits like patience, endurance, truthfulness etc.' Indra said- 'Harishchandra, you are very fortunate. You have won our hearts along with your wife and son. You have even won the heaven with your action. I invite you to stay in heaven along with your wife and son.' Then Indra sprinkled ambrosia on the dead Rohit. Rohit got up and sat up in no time. Harishchandra, his wife and son Rohit were clad in divine clothes and garlands. Indra invited them to stay in the heaven forever but Harishchandra said- 'O king of the deities! Without the permission of this Chandaal, I cannot go anywhere.

' Dharma said- 'O king! I had learnt in advance about the miseries you would suffer in future. That's why I took the guise of a Chandaal and showed you all the grotesque action.' Indra once again invited them to heaven but once again, Harishchandra refused saying that in Koshal, people must have been living mournfully in his absence. 'I cannot leave them in that pitiable condition to enjoy the comforts of the heaven', said Harishchandra. Then, Indra, Dharma and Vishwamitra led Harishchandra to Ayodhya, the capital of Koshal. There they carried out the coronation of Rohit. Thereafter, they took Harishchandra and his queen Shaivya to the heaven.

THE STORK AND THE PARTRIDGE

The birds say- O great sage Jaimini! When, King Harishchandra attained his heavenly abode, their family priest, sage Vashishta re-emerged from water. He came to know about the entire development. He was angry at Vishwamitra's stubbornness. He at once cursed Vishwamitra to become a stork.

On the other hand Vishwamitra cursed Vashishta to become a partridge. Thus both of them turned into birds and began to fight. Their fight caused great panic all around. At last accompanied by the deities, Brahma himself arrived at the scene and dissuaded the birds from fighting. But Brahma could not convince them and they continued to fight.

Brahma then destroyed their avian appearances and both the sages regained their original form. Their enemy too ended at the same time. Brahma explained to them that Vishwamitra had not done any harm to Harishchandra. In fact he had felicitated Harishchandra's ascend to the heaven. Both the sages felt ashamed and they embraced each other before leaving for their respective hermitages.

BIRTH OF LIVING CREATURES

Jaimini says- O great birds, how does a living being take birth? How does it grow in the womb bearing all the pain? How does it grow after taking birth? What happens to the soul after death? How does it experience the fruits of his Karmas? The greatest surprise is how does a little foetus survive in the womb. Kindly clear all these doubts.

Birds say- Once upon a time, a Brahmin lived along with his son- Sumati. One day, the Brahmin instructed Sumati to study Vedas under the tutelage of a teacher and himself went to the forest to attain Brahmgyan- the knowledge which frees the soul from transmigration. But due to his laziness, Sumati did not pay heed to his father. When his father repeated his instruction, he simply laughed and said- 'O father! I know everything. I have studied all the Vedas in my various births. I have experienced the darkness of mother's belly for many times. I have suffered thousand kinds of diseases in my previous lives. I have experienced the authority as well as slavery in my previous births. I had killed as well as got killed by others. Hence, I feel, I have all the knowledge and I am sure that I will definitely attain Brahmgyan.' Sumati's father was pleased at his son's claims and asked him how he attained such virtuosity.

Sumati said- 'O father! I was a Brahmin in my previous birth. I had attained the designation of Acharya. After sometime, I became a recluse. I was blessed with an extraordinary memory, which I retained even after my death. This is the reason why I remember the self knowledge attained in my previous birth. With the support of this knowledge and religious virtues, I will attempt to attain salvation. Tell me what you expect from me. I will try to fulfil your expectations.' The Brahmin then asked many questions related to life and death. Sumati explained those queries thus:

Those who never tell a lie, who have faith and devotion, only such people die peacefully. Whoever's mind is free from the evils like Kama, Krodh, Moha, Dwesh etc. (lust, anger, affection, jealousy etc.) and who are altruistic in nature and make donations liberally die in peace. Those who lack these virtues suffer great pain at the time of death. As soon as such people sight Yamadoot they begin to cry and call their relatives. But their relatives do not understand their calls. Then the dying person turns away his eyes and grasps for breath. He feels great pain when his soul leaves his body. Even after death, sufferings of such people do not end. They have to undergo scores of tortures in hell. Those who donate umbrella, shoes, clothes and cereals attain heaven. The sinners on the other hand pass through different hells and take birth as inferior creature in their next lives. After continuous transmigration through lower life forms, these sinners once again take birth as human beings but are imperfect. They remain dwarf, hunched or have any other deformity. Then they pass through all the four castes- Shudra, Vaishya, Kshatriya and Brahmin classes. As their action improves, they might even attain the position of Indra.'