

# Raavan

**Amish** is a 1974-born, IIM (Kolkata)-educated banker-turned-author. The success of his debut book, 'The Immortals of Meluha (Book 1 of the Shiva Trilogy)', encouraged him to give up his career in financial services to focus on writing. Besides being an author, he is also an Indian-government diplomat, a host for a TV documentary series, and a film producer.

Amish is passionate about history, mythology and philosophy, finding beauty and meaning in all world religions. His books have sold more than 6 million copies and have been translated into over 20 languages. His Shiva Trilogy is the fastest selling and his Ram Chandra Series the second fastest selling book series in Indian publishing history. You can connect with Amish here:

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‘{Amish is} one of the most original thinkers of his generation.’

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‘Amish has a fine eye for detail and a compelling narrative style.’

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‘{Amish has} a deeply thoughtful mind with an unusual, original, and fascinating view of the past.’

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‘{Amish’s writing is} a fine blend of history and myth... gripping and unputdownable.’

– **BBC**

# Raavan

## Enemy of Aryavarta

Book 3  
of the  
Ram Chandra Series

# Amish



HarperCollins Publishers India

*[www.authoramish.com](http://www.authoramish.com)*

First published in 2019

This edition published in India by HarperCollins *Publishers* in 2022  
4th Floor, Tower A, Building No. 10, Phase II, DLF Cyber City,  
Gurugram, Haryana – 122002  
[www.harpercollins.co.in](http://www.harpercollins.co.in)

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

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P-ISBN: 978-93-5629-097-6

E-ISBN: 978-93-5629-098-3

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Typeset by Jojoy Philip, New Delhi 110 015

Printed and bound at  
Thomson Press (India) Ltd



This book is produced from independently certified FSC® paper to ensure responsible forest management.

Om Namah Shivāya  
*The universe bows to Lord Shiva.*  
*I bow to Lord Shiva.*





To You,

I was drowning,  
In Grief, in Anger, in Depression.  
You have pulled me into the open air of Peace,  
If only for a little while,  
By merely listening to my words.

And it is not Mere Words when I say,  
That you will always have my quiet gratitude,  
You will always have my silent love.



‘When extraordinary good fortune of overwhelming  
Glory comes to a person,  
Retreating misfortune increases the power  
of its Sorrows.’

– Kalhana, in *Rajatarangini*

Who among you wants to be great?  
Who among you wants to lose all chance at happiness?  
Is this Glory even worth it?

I am Raavan.

I want it all.

I want fame. I want power. I want wealth.

I want complete triumph.

Even if my Glory walks side by side with my Sorrow.





## List of Important Characters and Tribes

**Akampana:** A smuggler; one of Raavan's closest aides

**Arishtanemi:** Military chief of the Malayaputras; right-hand man of Vishwamitra

**Ashwapati:** King of the northwestern kingdom of Kekaya; father of Kaikeyi and a loyal ally of Dashrath

**Bharat:** Ram's half-brother; son of Dashrath and Kaikeyi

**Dashrath:** Chakravarti king of Kosala and emperor of the Sapt Sindhu; father of Ram, Bharat, Lakshman and Shatrughan

**Hanuman:** A Naga and a member of the Vayuputra tribe

**Indrajit:** Son of Raavan and Mandodari

**Janak:** King of Mithila; father of Sita

**Jatayu:** A captain of the Malayaputra tribe; Naga friend of Sita and Ram

**Kaikeshi:** Rishi Vishrava's first wife; mother of Raavan and Kumbhakarna

**Khara:** A captain in the Lankan army; Samichi's lover

**Krakachabahu:** The governor of Chilika

**Kubaer:** The chief-trader of Lanka

**Kumbhakarna:** Raavan's brother; also a Naga

**Kushadhwaj:** King of Sankashya; younger brother of Janak

**Lakshman:** One of the twin sons of Dashrath; Ram's half-brother

**Malayaputras:** The tribe left behind by Lord Parshu Ram, the sixth Vishnu

**Mandodari:** Wife of Raavan

**Mara:** An independent assassin for hire

**Mareech:** Kaikesi's brother; Raavan and Kumbhakarna's uncle; one of Raavan's closest aides

**Nagas:** Human beings born with deformities

**Prithvi:** A businessman in the village of Todee

**Raavan:** Son of Rishi Vishrava; brother of Kumbhakarna; half-brother of Vibhishan and Shurpanakha

**Ram:** Son of Emperor Dashrath and his eldest wife Kaushalya; eldest of four brothers; later married to Sita

**Samichi:** Police and protocol chief of Mithila; Khara's lover

**Shatrughan:** Twin brother of Lakshman; son of Dashrath and Sumitra; Ram's half-brother

**Shochikesh:** The landlord of Todee village

**Shurpanakha:** Half-sister of Raavan

**Sita:** Daughter of King Janak and Queen Sunaina of Mithila; also the prime minister of Mithila; later married to Ram

**Sukarman:** A resident of Todee village; Shochikesh's son

**Vali:** The king of Kishkindha

**Vashishtha:** Raj guru, the royal priest of Ayodhya; teacher of the four Ayodhya princes

**Vayuputras:** The tribe left behind by Lord Rudra, the previous Mahadev

**Vedavati:** A resident of Todee village; Prithvi's wife

**Vibhishan:** Half-brother of Raavan

**Vishrava:** A revered rishi; the father of Raavan, Kumbhakarna, Vibhishan and Shurpanakha

**Vishwamitra:** Chief of the Malayaputras; also temporary guru of Ram and Lakshman







## Note on the Narrative Structure

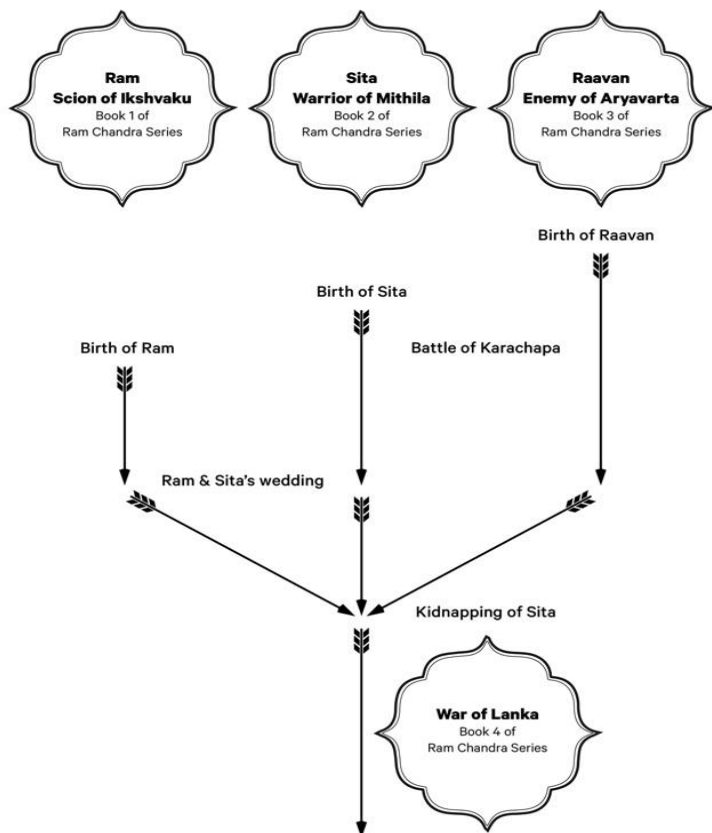
Thank you for picking up this book and giving me the most important thing you can share: your time.

I know many of you have been patiently waiting for the release of the third part of the Ram Chandra series. My sincere apologies for the delay, and I hope the book will live up to your expectations.

Some of you may wonder why I decided to change the name of the book from *Raavan – Orphan of Aryavarta* to *Raavan – Enemy of Aryavarta*. Let me explain. While writing Raavan's story, I realised a few things about the man. Right from when he was a child, Raavan raged against the circumstances he found himself in. He was very much a man in charge of his destiny. Initially, I felt Raavan had been cast aside by his motherland and was thus, in a sense, an orphan. But as the story unfolded in my mind, I felt the decisions that took him away from his motherland were deliberate. He *chose* to be the enemy rather than being cast into the role of the orphan.

As some of you know, I have been inspired by a storytelling technique called hyperlink, which some call the multilinear narrative. In such a narrative, there are many characters; and a connection brings them all together. The three main characters

in the Ram Chandra series are Ram, Sita and Raavan. Each character has life experiences, which mould who they are, and each has their own adventure and riveting backstory. Finally, their stories converge with the kidnapping of Sita.



So while the first book explored the tale of Ram, the second the story of Sita, the third burrows into the life of Raavan, before all three stories merge from the fourth book onwards into a single story. It is important to remember that Raavan is much older than both Sita and Ram. In fact Ram is born on the day that Raavan fights a decisive battle—against Ram’s father Emperor Dashrath! This book, therefore, goes further back in time, before the birth of the other principal characters—Sita and Ram.

I knew that writing three books, in a multilinear narrative, would be a complicated and time-consuming affair, but I must confess, it was thoroughly exciting. I hope it is as rewarding and thrilling an experience for you as it was for me. Understanding Ram, Sita and Raavan as characters helped me inhabit their worlds and explore the maze of plots and stories that illuminate this great epic. I feel truly blessed for this.

Since I was following a multilinear narrative, I left clues in the first book (*Ram – Scion of Ikshvaku*) as well as the second (*Sita – Warrior of Mithila*), which tie up with the stories in the third. There are surprises and twists in store for you here, and many to follow!

I hope you enjoy reading *Raavan – Enemy of Aryavarta*. Do tell me what you think of it, by sending me messages on my Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter accounts given below.

Love,  
Amish

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## Acknowledgements

*The acknowledgements written below were composed when the book was published in 2019. I must also acknowledge those that are publishing this edition of Raavan-Enemy of Aryavarta. The team at HarperCollins: Swati, Shabnam, Akriti, Gokul, Vikas, Rahul, and Udayan, led by the brilliant Ananth. Looking forward to this new journey with them.*

\*\*\*

It has been a terrible two years. I have been cursed with more grief and suffering in this benighted period, than what I had experienced in my entire life before. Sometimes I felt that the structure of my entire life was collapsing. But it did not. I survived. The building still stands. This book worked like a keystone. And the ones I acknowledge below, have been my buttresses; for they have held me together.

My God, Lord Shiva. He has really tested me these last two years. I hope He will make it a little bit easier now.

The two men I have admired most in my life, men of old-world values, courage, and honour; my father-in-law Manoj Vyas and my brother-in-law Himanshu Roy. They are both up in heaven now, looking at me. I hope I can make them proud.

Neel, my 10-year-old son; and you will pardon this father's emotionality when I say, 'My boy is the best there ever was and ever will be!'

Bhavna, my sister; Anish and Ashish, my brothers, for all their inputs to the story. As always, they read the first draft. Their views, support, affection, and encouragement are invaluable.

The rest of my family: Usha, Vinay, Shernaz, Meeta, Preeti, Donetta, Smita, Anuj, Ruta for their consistent faith and love. And I must acknowledge the contribution of the next generation of my family towards my happiness: Mitansh, Daniel, Aiden, Keya, Anika and Ashna.

Gautam, the CEO of my publisher Westland, and Karthika and Sanghamitra, my editors. If there are people outside of my family, who are the closest to this project, it is this trio. They are an unbeatable mix of capability, politeness and grace. Here's hoping for a long innings together. The rest of the brilliant team at Westland: Anand, Abhijeet, Ankit, Arunima, Barani, Christina, Deepthi, Dhaval, Divya, Jaisankar, Jayanthi, Krishnakumar, Kuldeep, Madhu, Mustafa, Naveen, Neha, Nidhi, Preeti, Raju, Sanyog, Sateesh, Satish, Shatrughan, Srivats, Sudha, Vipin, Vishwajyoti and many others. They are the best team in the publishing business.

Aman, Vijay, Prerna, Seema, and the rest of my colleagues at my office. They take care of my business work which gives me enough free time to write.

Hemal, Neha, Candida, Hitesh, Parth, Vinit, Natasha, Prakash, Anuj, and the rest of the Oktobuzz team, who have designed the cover for the book, and done a fantastic job at it. They have also made the trailer and helped manage many of the social media activities for the book. A brilliant, creative, and committed agency.

Mayank, Shreyaa, Sarojini, Deepika, Naresh, Marvi, Sneha, Simran, Kirti, Priyanka, Vishaal, Danish and the Moe's Art team, who have driven media relations and marketing alliances for the book. They are more than an agency, they are advisors.

Satya and his team who have shot the new author photos that have been used on the inside cover of this book. He made a rather ordinary subject look better.

Caleb, Kshitij, Sandeep, Rohini, Dharav, Heena and their respective teams who support my work with their business, legal and marketing advice.

Mrunalini, a brilliant Sanskrit scholar, who works with me on research. My discussions with her are enlightening. What I learn from her helps me develop many theories which go into the books.

Aditya, a passionate reader of my books, who has now become a friend and a fact-checker.

And last, but certainly not the least, you, the reader. I know this book has been delayed a lot. My sincere apologies for this. Life just took me away from writing. But it did bring me back. And I will not falter from here on. Thank you for your patience, love and support.







## Chapter 1

*3400 BCE, Salsette Island, west coast of India*

The man screamed in agony. He knew his end was near. He wouldn't have to bear this pain much longer. But he had to hold on to the secret till then. He had to. Just a little longer.

He steeled himself and repeated the chant endlessly in his mind. A chant that held immense power. A chant sacred to all in his tribe: the tribe of the Malayaputras.

*Jai Shri Rudra... Jai Parshu Ram... Jai Shri Rudra... Jai Parshu Ram.*

*Glory to Lord Rudra. Glory to Lord Parshu Ram.*

He closed his eyes, focusing on the mantra. Trying to forget his present surroundings.

*Give me strength, Lords. Give me strength.*

His nemesis stood over him, preparing to inflict yet another wound. But before he could strike, he was pulled back roughly. By a woman.

She whispered in an angry, guttural voice, 'Khara, this is not working.'

Khara, a platoon commander in the Lankan armed forces, turned towards Samichi, his childhood love. Until a few years

back, Samichi had been the acting prime minister of Mithila, a small kingdom in north India. But she had since abandoned her post and was focused on finding the whereabouts of the person who had appointed her. The princess she had once served: Sita.

‘This Malayaputra is a tough nut,’ Khara whispered. ‘He won’t break. We have to find the information some other way.’

‘There is no time!’

Samichi’s whisper was rough in its urgency. Khara knew she was right. The man on the rack was their best possible source of information for now. Only he could tell them where Sita, her husband Ram, his brother Lakshman, and the sixteen Malayaputra soldiers accompanying them were hiding. Khara also knew how important it was to extract this information. It was their chance to get back into the good books of Samichi’s *true lord*. The one she called *Iraiva*—Raavan, the king of Lanka.

‘I am trying, but he will not last much longer like this,’ Khara said in a low voice, trying to mask his disappointment. ‘I don’t think he’ll talk.’

‘Let me try.’

Before Khara could respond, Samichi strode up to the table where the Malayaputra lay shackled. She yanked off his dhoti and threw it aside. She then wrenched his langot away, leaving the poor man completely exposed and moaning in shame.

Even Khara seemed horrified. ‘Samichi, this is—’

Samichi shot him a sharp look and he fell silent. Even torturers had a code of conduct. At least in India. But clearly, Samichi had no qualms about flouting it.

The Malayaputra’s eyes were wide open in panic. Almost as if he could anticipate the pain that was to follow.

Samichi picked up a sickle lying nearby. It was dangerously sharp on one side, serrated on the other. A cruel design crafted to inflict maximum pain. She moved towards the torture rack, the sickle in her hand. She held it up, felt its sharp edge, letting it prick her finger and draw blood. ‘You will talk. Trust me. You will talk,’ she snarled as she poised the sickle between the Malayaputra’s legs. Dangerously close.

She moved the sickle slowly, deliberately. It sliced through the soft epidermis and cut deeper. Deeper into the scrotum. Inflicting the maximum pain possible at a point that had an almost sadistic concentration of nerve endings.

The Malayaputra screamed.

He cried, he pleaded for it to stop.

It wasn’t his Gods he cried to. This was beyond them now. He was calling out to his mother.

Khara knew then. The Malayaputra would talk. It was only a matter of time. He would break. And he would talk.



Raavan and his younger brother Kumbhakarna sat comfortably inside the Pushpak Vimaan, the legendary flying vehicle, as it flew over the dense jungle.

The king of Lanka was quiet, his body tense. He clutched his pendant tightly—the pendant that always hung from a gold chain around his neck. It was made of the bones of two human fingers, the phalanges of which were carefully fastened with gold links.

Many Indians believed in the existence of tribes of demonic warriors that adorned themselves with relics from the bodies of their bravest adversaries. In doing so, they were

said to transfer to themselves the strength of the dead men. The Lankan soldiers, thoroughly loyal to Raavan, believed and propagated the legend that the pendant around his neck was made from the remains of an archenemy's hand. Only Kumbhakarna knew the truth. Only he knew what it meant when Raavan held the pendant tight, the way he was gripping it now.

Leaving his elder brother to his silent ruminations, Kumbhakarna looked around the Pushpak Vimaan. The gargantuan flying vehicle was shaped like a cone that gently tapered upwards. Its many portholes, close to the base, were sealed with thick glass, but the metallic window shades had been drawn back. The diffused light of the early morning sun streamed in, lighting up the interiors. Though the vehicle was reasonably soundproof, the loud sound of the main rotor at the top of the vimaan could be heard. Added to that was the noise of the many smaller rotors, close to the base of the aircraft, which helped control the directional and lateral movements of the flying machine.

The craft's interiors, while spacious and comfortable, were done in a simple, minimalist style. As Kumbhakarna looked up, his eyes fell on the only embellishment inside the vimaan—a large painting of a single rudraaksh, near the inner summit of the vimaan. A brown, elliptical seed, the rudraaksh literally meant the 'teardrop of Rudra'. All those who were loyal to the *God of Gods*, the *Mahadev*, Lord Rudra, wore threaded rudraaksh seeds on their body or placed it in their puja rooms. The painting depicted a particular type of rudraaksh that had a single groove running across it. The original, much smaller seed, which was the model for the painting, was known as an *ekmukhi*. A rare kind of rudraaksh, it was difficult to find and

extremely expensive. A specimen impaled on a gold thread was kept in Raavan's private temple in his palace.

Apart from the painting, the vimaan was mostly bare—more of a military vehicle than one designed for luxury. Because it placed function over form, it was able to accommodate more than a hundred passengers.

Kumbhakarna noticed with satisfaction that the soldiers sat silently, in disciplined arcs that fanned out across the vimaan. They had just finished eating. Fed and rested, they were ready for action. It was a matter of a few hours before they would descend on Salsette Island. There, Kumbhakarna had been told, Samichi awaited them with crucial information about the exiled Ayodhya royals—Ram, Sita, his wife, Lakshman, his younger brother—and their band of Malayaputra supporters.

The Lankan soldiers believed they were on their way to avenge the insult to their mighty king's sister, Shurpanakha, who had been injured by Prince Lakshman. While cosmetic surgery would take away the physical marks of the injury to her nose, the metaphorical loss of face could only be avenged with blood. The soldiers knew that. They understood that.

But few of them stopped to wonder exactly what Princess Shurpanakha and Prince Vibhishan, the younger half-siblings of Raavan, had been doing so far away, deep in the Dandakaranya, with the exiled and relatively powerless royals of Ayodhya.

'They are complete idiots,' said Raavan gruffly, keeping his voice low. A curtain draped on an overhanging rod partially screened Raavan's and Kumbhakarna's chairs from the rest. 'I should never have trusted them with this mission.'

After a botched encounter and the resultant skirmish with Ram and the others, Vibhishan had taken Shurpanakha and

the Lankan soldiers on a quick march back to Salsette, on the west coast of India. From there, led by Raavan's son Indrajit, they had taken a ship back to Lanka. Upon hearing of their failed mission, Raavan had left his capital city immediately, with as many soldiers as could be accommodated in the Pushpak Vimaan.

Kumbhakarna took a deep breath and looked at his elder brother. 'It's in the past now, Dada,' he said.

'Such fools! Vibhishan and Shurpanakha have taken after their stupid barbarian mother. They can't even handle a simple job.'

Raavan and Kumbhakarna were the sons of Rishi Vishrava and his first wife, Kaikesi. Vibhishan and Shurpanakha were also the sage's children, but by his second wife, Crataeis, a Greek princess from the island of Knossos in the Mediterranean Sea. Raavan abhorred his half-siblings, but had been forced to accept them, by his mother, after their father's death.

'Every family has its idiots, Dada,' said Kumbhakarna with a smile, trying to calm his brother down. 'But they're still family.'

'I should have listened to you. I should never have sent them.'

'Forget it, Dada.'

'Sometimes I feel like—'

'We'll handle it, Dada,' Kumbhakarna interrupted him. 'We'll kidnap the Vishnu, and the Malayaputras will be left with no choice but to give us what we want. What we need.'

Raavan took his brother's hand. 'I've given you nothing but trouble, Kumbha. Thank you for always sticking by me.'

‘No, Dada. I am the one who has given you nothing but trouble since my birth. I am alive because of you. And I will die for you,’ Kumbhakarna said, his voice edged with emotion.

‘Nonsense! You will not die anytime soon. Not for me. Not for anybody. You will die of old age, many many years from now, when you have bedded every woman you want to and drunk as much wine as your heart desires!’

Kumbhakarna, who had been celibate and a teetotaler for several years now, laughed. ‘You do enough of that for both of us, Dada!’



Strong winds buffeted the Pushpak Vimaan. The vehicle lurched and juddered, like a toy in the hands of a giant demonic child. The rain was coming down hard. They watched it fall in sheets, past the thick glass of the portholes.

‘By the great Lord Rudra, it can’t be my fate to die in a stupid air crash.’

Raavan double-checked the body grip that held him securely in his chair. As did Kumbhakarna. These grips had been specially designed to evenly distribute the force of restraint over the torso of the seated passengers. Even their thighs were restrained.

The Lankan soldiers, meanwhile, had attached themselves to the standard grips fixed to the floor and walls of the vimaan. Most of them were managing to keep calm, and the contents of their stomach within. Some of them, however, being first-time travellers in the vimaan, were vomiting copiously.

Kumbhakarna turned to Raavan. ‘It’s an unseasonal storm.’

‘You think?’ said Raavan, grinning. Nothing brought out his competitive spirit like adversity.

Kumbhakarna turned to look at the four pilots, who were struggling with the levers, trying to direct the craft against the wind with the sheer force of their bodies against the controls.

‘Not too hard!’ shouted Kumbhakarna, making his voice carry over the howling wind. ‘If the levers break, we are done for.’

All four men turned towards Kumbhakarna, who was probably the best vimaan pilot alive.

‘Don’t fight the wind so hard that the controls break,’ ordered Kumbhakarna. ‘Let it flow. But not too loose either. Just keep the vimaan upright and we’ll be fine.’

As the pilots gave the levers some slack, the vimaan lurched and swung even more vigorously.

‘Are you trying to make me throw up?’ asked Raavan, grimacing.

‘Puking never killed anyone,’ said Kumbhakarna. ‘But an air crash would do the job most efficiently.’

Raavan scowled, took a deep breath, and closed his eyes. He gripped his hand brace even tighter.

‘Plus, there is a positive side to this storm,’ said Kumbhakarna. ‘These loud winds will drown out the noise of the rotors. We’ll have the element of surprise on our side when we attack them.’

Raavan opened his eyes and looked at Kumbhakarna, his eyebrows furrowed. ‘Are you crazy? We outnumber them five to one. We don’t need an element of surprise. We just need to land safely.’



The battle was short and decisive.

There were no Lankan casualties. All the Malayaputras, save their captain Jatayu, and two of his soldiers, were dead or critically injured. But Ram, Lakshman and Sita were missing.

While Kumbhakarna set about organising the efforts to find the trio, Raavan stood staring at a Malayaputra soldier who lay flat on his back on the ground. The man was still alive, but barely. Moving rapidly towards his death with every raspy breath.

Thick blood was pooling around his body, soaking into the wet mud and discolouring the green grass. The vastus muscles on his thighs had been slashed through. Almost down to the bone. Blood gushed out in torrents from the many severed arteries.

Raavan stared. As always, he was fascinated by the sight of a slow death.

He could hear Kumbhakarna.

'Jatayu is a traitor. He was one of us before he defected to the Malayaputras. I don't care what you do to him. Get the information, Khara.'

'Yes, Lord Kumbhakarna,' said Khara. He sounded relieved. Samichi and he had proven their worth, with information and muscle. He saluted and marched away towards his quarry.

Raavan focused on the dying Malayaputra. He was losing blood fast. It seemed to be spurting out from what appeared to be a small incision on his abdomen. But Raavan could see that the wound was deep. The kidneys, liver, stomach, had all been cut through. The man's body was twitching and shivering as the blood drained out of it.

Kumbhakarna's words pierced his consciousness again.

'I want seven teams. Two men in each team. Spread out. They can't have gone far. If you find the princes, or the

princess, do not engage. One of you should come back and inform us while the other continues to track them.'

Raavan's attention was still on the Malayaputra. His left eye had been gouged out. Perhaps by a Lankan soldier wearing hidden tiger claws on his hand. The partially severed eyeball hung out of the eye socket, held tenuously by the optic nerve. Blood dripped weakly from the bloody, discoloured white ball.

The Malayaputra's mouth was open, his chest heaving. Trying to swallow air and pump oxygen through his body. Desperately trying to stay alive.

*Why does the soul insist on hanging on to the body until the absolute last minute? Even when death is clearly the better alternative?*

'Dada.' Kumbhakarna's voice broke his reverie. Raavan raised a hand for silence and his brother obeyed. Raavan looked on as the Malayaputra's life slowly ebbed away. His breathing grew more and more ragged. The harder he breathed, the more quickly the blood flowed out of his numerous wounds.

*Let go ...*

Finally, there was a deep convulsion. The last, shallow breath escaped out of the dying man's mouth. For a moment, all was still. He lay with his eyes wide open, as if in panic. Both fists clenched tight. Toes bent at an ungainly angle. Body rigid.

And then, slowly, he went limp.

A few moments passed before Raavan turned away from the corpse in front of him. 'You were saying?' he asked Kumbhakarna.

'They can't have gone far,' said Kumbhakarna. 'Khara will get the information out of Jatayu soon. We'll find the Vishnu. We'll get her alive.'

'What about Ram and Lakshman?'

‘We’ll do our best not to hurt them. And make them think that this is revenge for what was done to Shurpanakha. Do you want to go back to the vimaan and wait?’

Raavan shook his head. *No.*



‘Let me see Sita,’ said Raavan.

‘Dada, there’s no time. King Ram and Prince Lakshman are close by, they might reach soon. I don’t want to be forced to kill them. This is perfect. We’ve got the Vishnu, and Ayodhya’s so-called king has not been injured. Let’s leave now. You can see her once we are back in the vimaan.’

The Lankans were in a small clearing where the Malayaputras had set up their temporary camp. They were surrounded by dense forest, with almost nothing visible beyond the tree line. Kumbhakarna was understandably eager to leave before the princes arrived on the spot.

Raavan nodded, and started walking towards the vimaan. His advance guard marched ahead, while Kumbhakarna strode alongside. The main body of soldiers followed, bearing the stretcher that carried a bound and unconscious Sita. The rear guard brought up the end.

Knowing that Ram and Lakshman were free and armed, the Lankans were on their guard. They did not want to be surprised by a hail of arrows.

Periodically, a voice sounded in the distance. Getting louder, and closer, with every repetition.

‘Sitaaaaaaaa!’

It was Ram, the eldest son of the late King Dashrath of Ayodhya. Since Ayodhya was the supreme power in the

region, Dashrath was also the emperor of the *Sapt Sindhu*, the *Land of the Seven Rivers*. When Ram was banished for fourteen years for the unauthorised use of a *daivi astra*, a *divine weapon*, during the Battle of Mithila, Dashrath had nominated Bharat to be the crown prince instead. However, when it was time for Bharat to be crowned emperor after Dashrath's passing, he had, against all expectations, placed Ram's slippers on the throne and begun ruling the empire as his elder brother's representative.

Technically then, despite being in exile, Ram was the reigning king of Ayodhya and the emperor of the Sapt Sindhu. In absentia. Even though he had never formally been crowned king. Treaty obligations on other kingdoms within the Sapt Sindhu would be triggered if he was hurt or killed. These kingdoms would then be forced to mobilise for war against those who had harmed their emperor. And Raavan knew Lanka could not afford a war. Not right now.

But there was no such obligation with regard to the wife of the emperor.

The anguished voice was heard again. 'Sitaaaaaaa...'

Raavan turned towards Kumbhakarna. 'What do you think he'll do? Can he rally the armies of the Sapt Sindhu?'

Kumbhakarna, surprisingly sprightly despite his massive size, kept pace alongside Raavan. He said thoughtfully, 'It depends on how we play it. There are many who oppose Ram and his family in the Sapt Sindhu. If we can make it known that Sita was kidnapped to avenge the attack on Shurpanakha, it will give the kingdoms that don't want to go to war an excuse to back out. Also, there are no treaty obligations that refer to the eventuality of any Ayodhya royal, other than the emperor, being hurt. So they are not treaty-bound to march just because

we've kidnapped the emperor's wife. Those who want to stay away can choose to stay away. I don't think he'll be able to rally a large army.'

'So those idiots, Shurpanakha and Vibhishan, have proved to be of some use after all.'

'Useful idiots,' offered Kumbhakarna, with a twinkle in his eye.

'Hey, I have the copyright on that term!' said Raavan, laughing and playfully slapping Kumbhakarna's massive belly.

The brothers had reached the Pushpak Vimaan and now quickly stepped in.

The soldiers followed and started taking their positions inside the craft. Raavan and Kumbhakarna were soon bracing themselves in preparation for take-off. The doors of the vimaan closed slowly with a hydraulic hiss.

'She's a fighter!' said Kumbhakarna with an appreciative grin, nodding in Sita's direction. The Lankan soldiers hovered around her, fastening straps around her unconscious body.

It had been a struggle to capture the brave warrior princess.

Thirty days had passed since the botched encounter between Shurpanakha and the princes, and the Ayodhyan royals had eased their guard, presuming that the Lankans had lost track of them. That day, they had decided to step out and get themselves a proper meal. Sita had gone to cut banana leaves with a Malayaputra soldier called Makrant. Ram and Lakshman had gone hunting in a separate direction.

The two Lankan soldiers who had discovered Sita had managed to kill Makrant, but were, in turn, killed by Sita. She had then stolen to the devastated Malayaputra camp and picked off several Lankans from behind the tree line, using a bow and a quiverful of arrows very effectively, moving quickly

from one hiding place to another. But she had not been able to get to either Raavan or Kumbhakarna, who had been sealed off behind protective flanks of Lankan soldiers. Finally, she had been forced to come forward to save her loyal follower, Captain Jatayu. It was then that she was overpowered and rendered unconscious with a toxin, before being tied up and hauled to the vimaan.

‘The Malayaputras believe she is the Vishnu,’ said Raavan, laughing softly. ‘She’d better be a good fighter!’

According to an ancient Indian tradition, towering leaders, the greatest among greats, who could become the propagators of goodness and harbingers of a new way of life, were recognised with the title ‘Vishnu’. There had been six Vishnus till now, and the tribe of the Malayaputras had been founded by the sixth Vishnu, Lord Parshu Ram. Now the Malayaputras had recognised a seventh, one who would establish a new way of life in India: Sita. And Raavan had just kidnapped her.

The soldiers around Sita dispersed and returned to their positions.

She lay there, safely strapped onto the stretcher, some twenty feet away from Raavan. Her angvastram was drawn over her body, and the straps were tight across her torso and legs. Her eyes were closed. Saliva trickled out of the corner of her mouth. A large quantity of a very strong toxin had been used to render her unconscious.

For the first time in their lives, Raavan and Kumbhakarna saw Sita’s face.

Raavan felt his breath stop. He sat immobile, heart paralysed. Eyes glued to her face.

To Sita’s regal, strong, beautiful face.



## Chapter 2

*Fifty-six years earlier, the ashram of Guru Vishrava, close to  
Indraprastha, India*

For a four-year-old, Raavan was quite sure and steady in his movements.

The precocious child was Rishi Vishrava's son. The celebrated rishi had married late, when he was over seventy years of age. Though you couldn't tell by looking at him: the magical anti-ageing Somras he drank regularly kept him looking youthful. In his long career spanning many decades, Rishi Vishrava had made a name for himself as a great scientist and spiritual guru. In fact, he was considered to be among the greatest intellectuals of his generation.

Being the son of such a distinguished rishi, the weight of expectations rested heavily on Raavan's young shoulders. But it appeared he would not disappoint. Even at this early age, he had a fearsome intellect. It seemed to all who met him that the child would someday surpass even the vast achievements of his illustrious father.

But the universe has a way of balancing things. With the positive comes the negative.

As the sun set on the far horizon, Raavan patiently tied the fragile legs of the hare he had trapped to two small wooden stumps sticking up from the ground. The creature struggled frantically as the boy pinned it down with his knee and pulled the ropes taut. It lay there with its limbs splayed, underside and chest exposed to the sky. The little boy was satisfied. He could begin work now.

Raavan had dissected another hare the previous day. Studied its muscles, ligaments and bones in detail, while it was still breathing. He had been keen to reach the beating heart. But the hare, having suffered enough already, died before he could cut through the sternal ribs. Its heart had stopped by the time Raavan got to it.

Today, he intended to go straight for the animal's heart.

The hare was still struggling, its long ears twitching ferociously. Normally, hares are quiet animals, but this one was clearly in a state of panic. For good reason.

Raavan checked the sharpness of his knife with the tip of his forefinger. It drew some blood. He sucked at his forefinger as he looked at the hare. He smiled.

The excitement he felt, the rapid beating of his heart, took away the dull ache in his navel. An ache that was perennial.

He used his left hand to steady his prey. Then he held the knife over the animal, the tip pointed at its chest.

Just as he was about to make the incision, he sensed a presence near him. He looked up.

The Kanyakumari.

In many parts of India, there was a tradition of venerating the *Kanyakumari*, literally the *Virgin Goddess*. It was believed that the Mother Goddess resided, temporarily, within the bodies of certain chosen young girls. These girls were



worshipped as living Goddesses. People came to them for advice and prophecies—they counted even kings and queens among their followers—until they reached puberty, at which time, it was believed, the Goddess moved into the body of another pre-pubescent girl.

There were many Kanyakumari temples in India. This particular Kanyakumari who stood in front of Raavan was from Vaidyanath, in eastern India.

She was on her way back to Vaidyanath after a pilgrimage to the holy Amarnath cave in Kashmir, and had stopped at Rishi Vishrava's ashram. The holy cave, buried under snow for most of the year, housed a great lingam made of ice. It was believed that this cave was where the first Mahadev had unveiled the secrets of life and creation.

The Kanyakumari's entourage had returned from the pilgrimage with their souls energised but their bodies exhausted. The Goddess had decided to stay for a few weeks in Rishi Vishrava's ashram by the river Yamuna, before continuing on her journey to Vaidyanath.

The rishi had welcomed her visit as a blessed opportunity to speak to the Goddess and expand his understanding of the spiritual world. Despite his best efforts, however, the Kanyakumari had kept to herself and spent little time with him or the many inhabitants of his ashram.

But that had only added to the natural magnetism and aura of the living Goddess. Even Raavan, usually preoccupied in his own world, had stared at her every chance he got, fascinated.

He looked up at her now, transfixed, knife poised in mid-air.

The Kanyakumari stood in front of him, her expression tranquil. There was no trace of the anger or disgust that

Raavan was used to seeing whenever anyone from the ashram caught him at his 'scientific' experiments. Nor was there any sign of sorrow or pity in her eyes. There was nothing. No expression at all.

She just stood there, as if she were an idol made of stone—distant yet awe-inspiring. A girl no older than eight or nine. Wheat-complexioned, with high cheekbones and a small, sharp nose. Long black hair tied in a braid. Black eyes, wide-set, with almost creaseless eyelids. Dressed in a red dhoti, blouse and angvastram. She had the look of the mountain people from the Himalayas.

Raavan instinctively checked the cummerbund tied around his waist, on top of his dhoti. It was in place, covering his navel. His secret was safe. Then he remembered the hideous pockmarks on his face, the legacy of the pox he had suffered as a baby. Perhaps for the first time in his life, he felt self-conscious about his appearance.

He shook his head to get the thought out of his mind.

'*Devi Ka... Kanyakumari,*' he whispered, letting the knife drop to the ground. His eyes were fixed on the *Goddess*.

The Kanyakumari stepped forward without a word, her expression unchanged. She bent down and picked up the knife. With quick, efficient movements, she cut the restraints on the wretched hare.

She then picked it up and gently kissed it on the head. The hare was quiet in her hands, its panic forgotten. The voiceless animal seemed to know that it was safe again.

For a fleeting moment, Raavan thought he saw the Kanyakumari's eyes light up with love. Then the mask came back on.

She put the hare down and the animal bounded away.