

When in face-to-face combat Vīrabāhu, crown-gem of
warriors, fell and went before his time to Yama's city—
speak, O goddess of ambrosial speech—which best of warriors
did the foe of Rāghava, treasure-trove among that clan
of Rākṣasas, designate commander, then send fresh to
the battle? And by what stratagem did he, the joy of
Ūrmilā, destroy the hope of the Rākṣasas, Indra's
conqueror, that Meghanāda—invincible throughout
the world—and thus free Indra from his terror? I, who am
10 ignorant, praise your lotus feet and call upon you once
more, white-limbed Bhārati! Come, chaste woman, favor me, your
servant, as you came and sat once on Vālmiki's tongue (as
though upon a lotus-throne), Mother, when that fowler deep
in the forest with a keen arrow pierced the heron perched
beside his mate. Who in this world comprehends your greatness?
That most mean of men, who robbed, was made immortal, by your
grace, like Umā's husband, Mṛtyuñjaya! O Varadā,
by a boon of yours that thieving Ratnākara came to
be the poet of a mine of poetry! At your touch,
20 a poison-tree can endue the splendor of a graceful
sandalwood! Alas, Mother, is there like virtue in this
slave? Yet, a mother's love reaches out as strongly to that
dearest of her children who lacks talent, is slow of wit.

30 Come from on high, compassionate one, appear, enticer
of the universe! Let me, Mother, sing this epic song
filled with virile *rasa*. Grant this thrall the shadow of your
feet. You come also, goddess, you who are the honeybee
Imagination! Glean honey from the flower garden
of the poet's mind and form your honeycomb from which the
folks of Gauḍa might in bliss sip nectar ever after.

Upon his golden throne sat warrior Daśānana—a
mass of brilliance, like the highest peak upon gold-crested
Hemakūṭa mountain. Ministers, counselors, and the
like by the hundreds sat about, bowed humbly. It was a
court unequaled on this earth—made of crystal. In it, gems
shone brightly, as bloom lush lotuses in Lake Mānasa.
White, red, blue, and yellow pillars, row on row, held aloft
an aurous ceiling, as the Indra among snakes¹ spreading
his ten thousand cobra-hoods, obligingly supports the
40 world. From its valance sparkling diamonds, emeralds, rubies, pearls
dangled, as dangle leafy garlands (intertwined with buds
and blossoms) from a temple. A gem-born luster smiled like
lightning—blinding! Sweet-eyed slave girls waved artful yak-tail whisks;
those moon-faced maids swayed lotus-stem-like arms ecstatically
forth and back. The umbrella-bearer held the parasol;
ah, just as Kāma might have stood in Hara's anger's flame,

unburned, so he stood on the floor of that assembly hall,
as bearer of the royal parasol. Before its doors
paced the guard, a redoubtable figure, like god Rudra,
50 trident clutched, before the Pāṇḍavas' encampment's gateway!
Constant spring breezes delicately wafted scents, gaily
transporting waves of chirping, ah yes! enchanting as the
flute's melodic undulations in the pleasure groves of
Gokula! Compared to such an edifice, O Maya,
Dānava lord, how paltry was that jeweled court built at
Indraprastha with your own hands to please the Pauravas!

In such a court as this there sat the sovereign Rākṣasa,
struck dumb with grief for his son! Tears trickled in endless streams—
dampening his raiment, just as a tree, when its sap-filled
60 trunk is stricken by sharp arrows, cries silently. In front
of him, palms together, stood the bearer of bad tidings,
ashen gray from dust, his entire body moist with blood. From
the many hundred soldiers who waded into warfare's
sea in the company of Virabāhu, only this
one warrior came ashore. That Rākṣasa, spared death's black waves
which had engulfed all the others, was called Makarākṣa—
in strength he matched the Yakṣas' lord. When he learned of his son's
death from this messenger, alas, Naikaṣeya, jewel
among kings, was overcome with gloom that day! Those in the

70 royal court were saddened by their ruler's grief. His world went
 dark, ah me, as does the world at large when the lord of day
 is screened off by clouds! But upon regaining consciousness
 moments later, Rāvaṇa, sighing, spoke dejectedly,

"This news of yours, messenger, is like a nightmare! Beggar
 Rāghava in face-to-face battle slew the archer who,
 by his strength of arms, has harassed even the immortals?
 Did Providence, with flower petals, chop down so stately
 a *śālmālī* tree? — Ah son, Vīrabāhu, crown-gem of
 warriors! for what sin have I lost a treasure such as you?

80 what fault of mine did you observe, harsh Fate, for which you stole
 my wealth? Alas, how am I to bear this anguish? Who else
 now will uphold the honor of our clan in this black war!
 As in the depths of the forest a woodsman first trims limbs
 one by one before the tree is felled, O Providence, so
 too does this most forbidding enemy, as you observe,
 hack at me relentlessly! I shall be toppled, roots and
 all, by his arrows! Were that not to be, would my brother
 Kumbhakarṇa, trident-bearer Śambhu's very likeness,
 have met his death prematurely because of me? and all

90 those other soldiers—in defense of this Rākṣasa clan?
 Alas, Sūrpaṅakhā, at what ill-fated moment did
 you, hapless woman, see that snake, full of *kālakūṭa*

venom, in the fatal Pañcavaṭī forest? At what
 inauspicious time did I (saddened by your plight) transport
 to this golden dwelling that flaming beauty, Jānakī?
 Ah me, would that I could quit this golden Laṅkā, enter
 some dense woods, and thereby cool the burning in my heart through
 solitude! Once my gorgeous city seemed a theater
 brightly lit by rows of burning lamps and decked with wreaths of
 100 flowers! But one by one those flowers wither now, the lamps
 go out; now silent are the *rabāb*'s and *vīṇā*'s strings,
 the flute and *muraja*; why then do I linger any
 longer here? For who is there who likes to dwell in darkness?"

So bemoaned Rāvaṇa, Rākṣasa sovereign, dolefully,
 like the blind king in Hastinā, alas, when he heard from
 Sañjaya's lips how his dearest sons had been slain by blows
 from fierce-armed Bhīmasena in the Kurukṣetra war.

Then Sāraṇa, his minister (excellent and learned
 confidant) arose and, hands cupped reverently, began to
 110 speak with deference, "O king, renowned all through the world, crest
 of the Rākṣasa clan, excuse this thrall of yours! for who
 in the world is meet to counsel you? However, reflect
 on this, my lordship—when cloud-cleaving pinnacles are crushed
 to rubble by a strike of lightning, the mountain as a
 whole is never stirred by that oppression. This earthly world

is full of *māyā*, its joys and sorrows are all for naught.

Only the foolish are befuddled by illusion's hoax."

Lañkā's ruler answered, "What you say is very true, Prime
Minister Sāraṇa! I know indeed this earthly world

120 is full of *māyā*, its joys and sorrows all for naught. Yet

knowing that, this heart still cries inconsolably. Death has
snatched the flower which had bloomed upon the stalk that is my
heart; now this deflowered heart is sunk in sorrow's sea like
a lotus stalk in water, its blossom-treasure stolen."

And saying thus, the king ordered, with a glance cast toward the
messenger, "Tell me, messenger, how did that champion
Vīrabāhu, bane of the immortals, fall in battle?"

Bowing low before the great king's feet, hands joined together,
that bearer of bad tidings resumed, "Alas, O Lañkā's
130 monarch, how shall I recount the peerless tale? how shall I
describe Vīrabāhu's valor? As an elephant in
rut wades through a stand of reeds, so too that elephant of
archers waded through the enemy ranks. Even now my
heart pounds as I recall the way he rampaged! I have heard,
O sovereign of the Rākṣasas, thunder's rumble, lions'
roar, and ocean waves when they crash; I have seen swift lightning
streaks, my lord, run upon the winds. But never have I heard
through all three worlds such a dreadful snap and clatter from the

twanging of a bow! nor ever seen such awesome arrows!

140 "That legion of grand warriors with Vīrabāhu joined the
battle, like a herd of elephants with their lordly bull.

Dust rose thick as clouds covering the sky—as though those clouds
had come in anger darkening the heavens; a hail of
arrows whirred through the air, flashing like lightning's splendor! Praise
the skill of Vīrabāhu! who can count the foe who fell!

"In this fashion your son, O king, with his troops fought against
the enemy! After some time Rāghava, Indra of
the mortals, joined the fray, a gold diadem on his head,
a tremendous bow in hand, like the bow of Vāsava,
150 studded with a mix of many jewels." So saying, that
bearer of bad tidings wept in silence, just as weeps a
mourner, reminded of some past heartache! In sympathy,
without a sound, the members there assembled also wept.

Teary-eyed, Rāvaṇa, the love of Mandodarī, spoke
again, "Speak, news bearer, I must hear; how did the son of
Daśaratha slay Daśānana's champion scion?"

"How, O world's sovereign," began once more the bearer of bad
tidings, "how, O wealth of Rākṣasas, can I bear to speak
of that, or you to listen? Rāmacandra pounced upon
160 your son in battle, as the lion, yellow-eyed, with gaze
afire, gnashing wrathfully awful fangs, leaps upon the

nape of a bull's neck! Then all about swelled the waves of war,
 like a raucous ocean dueling with the winds! Sabers
 flashed, like tips of flames, from amidst ten thousand aligned shields
 which resembled smoky billows! Conch shells blared with a roar
 like the ocean! What more shall I say, my lord? Through fault from
 a former birth, I alone survived! Fie, Providence, for
 what sin did you cause such agony for me today? Why
 did I not lie upon a bed of arrows on that field
 170 of battle next to Virabāhu, the ornament of
 golden Laṅkā? But it is not my fault completely. See
 this lacerated chest of mine, O gem of kings, caused by
 enemy weapons; on my back there are no marks of wounds."

That Rākṣasa was stunned with anguish when he finished what
 he had to say. Then Laṅkā's sovereign, as a twinge of pride
 and grief shot through his frame, spoke up, "Bravo, messenger! What
 brave heart would not yearn to enter battle after hearing
 your account? On hearing drumbeats of the double-headed
ḍamaru, does the deadly cobra ever stay at rest
 180 inside his hole? Hail Laṅkā, mother of brave sons! Come—let
 us go, my courtiers, and see how Virabāhu, crown-
 gem of warriors, fell in war; let us gratify our eyes."

That ruler of the Rākṣasas climbed the palace peak, as
 the ray-ringed jewel of the day ascends the rising-hill

of gold. On all sides Laṅkā richly shone, crowned with golden
mansions—heart-stealing city! Those edifices made from
gold were encompassed, ring by ring, with flower gardens; there
lay ponds—the homes for lotuses—and silvery fountains,
magnificent trees, and floral sprays—pleasing to the sight,
190 like the youth of a young maiden; there were temples topped by
diamonds and shops of many hues, adorned with precious stones;
it was as though the world had gathered sundry treasured things
prescribed for *pūjā*, then placed them at your feet, O charming
Laṅkā, you who are the world's desire, residence of bliss.

The Rākṣasa sovereign scanned the highest walls—like staunchest
mountains. Atop, like lions on those mountains, prowled armed guards,
drunk on valor. The abductor of Vaidehī viewed four
lion-gates² (closed now) where chariots and charioteers,
horses, elephants, and troops of countless soldiers stood, poised.

200 That monarch gazed beyond the city and saw there hostile
forces, like grains of sand on some ocean beach, or starry
clusters strewn across the circle of the heavens. Encamped
before the eastern gateway was the warrior Nīla, most
difficult to best in warfare; at the southern gate stood
Aṅgada, a fighter with unseasoned strength as of an
elephant calf or of a poisonous snake who, at the
end of winter, sporting new, vivid skin, sidles to and

fro with hood held high—proudly flicking out its trident tongue!

At the northern gate stood guard the king himself, Sugrīva,

210 a lion of a hero. And Dāśarathi watched the

western gate—alas, downcast without his Jānakī, like

the lotus-pleasing moon without his moonlight!—backed up by

Lakṣmaṇa; the wind's son, Hanumān; and best of comrades,

Vibhīṣaṇa. The opposition ranks had surrounded

golden Laṅkā, just as a hunting party deep within

the densest jungle, cautiously with teamwork ensnares a

lioness—whose form is charming to the eye, whose force is

furious, like goddess Bhīmā! The king of Rākṣasas

surveyed the nearby battlefield. Jackals, vultures, buzzards,

220 dogs, and bands of ghouls milled about noisily. Some flying,

some were squatting, others squabbled. Some would beat their wings to

try to scare away their fellow creatures who were just as

greedy. Some, bellowing and squawking, giddy with glee, doused

their flames of hunger; some sucked rivulets of blood! A herd

of elephants had fallen, colossal in bulk; there were

horses swift as winds, now, alas, quite still! Countless broken

chariots, chariot drivers, mahouts, horsemen, lancers,

and troops of soldiers higgledy-piggledy strewn around!

Their armor, shields, sabers, spears, bows, arrows, quivers, cudgels,

230 battle-axes glinted here, there—gem-studded coronets,

turbans, and accouterments, all awe-inspiring. Among instruments sprawled the musicians. Pennon-bearers, staves with golden flags in hand, had fallen, struck by Yama's staff. As, alas, the gold-tipped harvest harvested by peasants falls on the field, so the many Rākṣasas had been felled by arrows of the Rāghava champion, sun among the solar clan! Likewise Vīrabāhu—crown-gem of warriors—fell, crushing hostile heroes, as Ghaṭotkaca, raised in Hiḍimbā's loving nest, like a Garuḍa, had fallen at the time Karṇa, wielder of Kālaprṣṭha, let fly his missile called Ekāghnī to preserve the Kauravas.

Smarting from excruciating sorrow, Rāvaṇa spoke, "To recline upon the bed on which you lie today, dear son, is every champion's fervent longing! For who is there, when quelling foemen, who fears to die to save the land of one's birth? He who shies away is a craven coward; shame be his a hundred fold! But, the heart that is addled by the wine of affection, my dearest one, turns soft like a flower blossom. Only Antaryāmī knows how faint mine is, struck as it is by this lightning bolt. I myself know not. O Fate, this mortal world is but the playground for your *līlā*—can it be you are pleased to witness others' sufferings? Fathers always grieve for sons' misfortunes—O

you who are the father of the world, is this your nature?

Son! my Vīrabāhu! lion among Indras among

warriors! how can I, when bereft of you, hold fast to life?"

So lamented Rāvaṇa, Rākṣasa monarch, who then

turned his gaze to stare out toward the distant sea—the home of

makaras. Out there a line of stones firmly bound one to

260 another floated on the water, like a static string

of clouds. On either side foam-capped waves, like the hooded best

of snakes, surged in endless, grave hissing. Across that well-built

bridge, broad as a royal causeway, flowed a babbling stream of

beings, like water through a channel during monsoon rains.

In a fit of pique proud Rāvaṇa, bull of heroes, called

to the ocean, "What a pretty garland you wear around

your throat today, O Pracetas! Fie on you, lord of the

waters! Does such apparel become you, O you who are

impassable, invincible? is this your jewelry,

270 alas, O jewel-quarry? By what virtue—speak, sir, for

I would hear—by virtue of what deed did Dāśarathi

buy you? You, the adversary of Prabhañjana, yet

fierce as strong winds yourself! tell me, for what trespass do you

wear this shackle? The juggler fits a chain on a lowly

bear and trots him out for show, but who is capable of

slipping cuffs around the lion's royal paws? This Laṅkā,

golden city, shines refulgent on your chest, O husband
of blue waters, like the Kaustubha gem upon the breast
of Mādhava; why toward her today are you so heartless?

280 Arise, warrior, with a hero's strength break up this bridge; drown
your shame; cool my searing hurt by scuttling this puissant
enemy of mine beneath unfathomed waters. Do not
tolerate the ugly blemish to remain upon your
forehead, Indra of the waters; I implore you humbly."

Having thus spoken, Rāvaṇa, great king of kings, returned
to his assembly hall and there sat down again on his
golden throne; overwhelmed with sadness, that noble-minded
one remained mute while around him ministers, counselors,
and the like, alas, sat grieving quietly. Suddenly

290 at that time, there drifted in from all directions soft sounds
of weeping blended with anklets' tinkling, jingling girdles,
and ominous outcries. Escorted by the golden-limbed
women of her retinue, Queen Citrāṅgadā stepped to
the floor of that assembly—hair, alas, disheveled! her
arms, naked, without bangles, like forest-ornamenting
vines when, in snow, they lack gem-like blossoms! her tear-filled eyes
were as the dewy lotus pads at night! The queen was quite
beside herself, lamenting over Vīrabāhu, as
does a mother bird when some fell snake slips inside her nest

300 and swallows up her fledglings. A storm of woe blew into
 that assembly hall! The womenfolk stood there, appearing
 comely as the wives of the divines, their loose and flowing
 hair seemed a swirl of clouds, their heaving sighs Pralaya-like
 heavy winds, their streams of tears torrential rains, their wailing
 moans the thunder's rumble! Lañkā's sovereign on his gold throne
 was startled. Maidens in attendance, tear-soaked, dropped their yak-
 tail whisks; the umbrella-bearer let slip the parasol
 and wept; angry and confused, the guardsman unsheathed his dread
 sword; and the ministers, the counselors, and members of
 310 the court, alarmed, broke down crying, causing utter havoc.

Some time passed before Citrāṅgadā, the queen, spoke softly,
 gazing as she did toward Rāvaṇa, "Compassionate Fate
 gave me a gem; but worthless me, I placed it with you for
 safekeeping, O jewel of the clan of Rākṣasas, as
 a bird keeps its young in the hollow of a tree. Tell me,
 where have you stored it, lord of Lañkā? where is my priceless
 gem? It is a monarch's *dharma* to safeguard possessions
 of the poor. You are the king of kings. Pray tell this lowly
 wretch, O monarch, how you kept safe for me that wealth of mine!"

320 Then hero Daśānana countered, "My love, why in vain
 rebuke me! Who ever criticizes one who errs due
 to evil forces of the planets, charming one? Alas,

it is Fate's will, my lady, that I must agonize so!
 Just look, this golden city, bearer of heroic sons,
 is empty now of warriors, as at the height of summer's
 heat a garden lacks blossoms, a river wants for water!
 Daśaratha's son has left my Lañkā a shambles as
 does a porcupine on entering the bamboo-framed thatched
 structure of a pan leaf plantation, trashing it. The sea
 330 wears chains round his leg at his behest! You are consumed by
 sorrow for one son, O gentlewoman, but my breast is
 sundered both day and night from grieving for a hundred sons!
 Alas, dear lady, as strong winds through a forest scatter
 cotton-like seeds once pods of the *śimula* split open,
 just so these many Rākṣasas, pinnacles upon our
 massive clan, have been scattered in this deadly war. Fate stretched
 out its arm to level Lañkā—this I tell you truly."

The Rākṣasa lord fell silent. Moon-faced Citrāṅgadā,
 a Gandharva's daughter, wept, head bent with sadness—alas,
 340 bewildered by memories of that foremost of her sons.

Once more, Dāśarathi's adversary resumed speaking,

"Does such lamentation ever suit you, my good woman?

Your best of sons, who slew his homeland's enemies in war,
 has gone to heaven. You are the mother of a hero.

Is it right to grieve a son who died engaged in acts of

heroism? My lineage is glorious this day
because of your son's prowess. Why then are you shedding tears,
you whose face is like the moon, streaked by water from your eyes?"

350 The charming-eyed Citrāṅgadā replied, "He who slays in
war foemen of his native land was certainly conceived
at an auspicious moment. I hold in high esteem the
lucky woman, that mother of such a bloom of warriors.
But consider, husband, where your Laṅkā lies, how distant
from Ayodhyā city! For what cause, from what greed, do tell,
king, did Rāghava come to this land? Yes, golden Laṅkā
tempts the Indra of divines, is unsurpassed throughout all
the world. Surrounding her gleams an ocean like a wall of
silver. We hear his residence is on the Sarayū's
riverside—that little man. Still, does Dāśarathi war
360 in hopes of capturing your golden throne? Who, a mere dwarf,
would seek to grasp the moon? So, why do you refer to him
as our homeland's enemy, O hero? A snake's head stays
ever bowed; but if one taps upon it, then with hood raised,
that cobra bites the one who tapped his head. Who, please tell me
this, today in Laṅkā set ablaze the doomsday fire? My
husband, by the very fruits of your own deed, alas, have
you doomed the clan of Rākṣasas and are yourself undone!"

That said, Citrāṅgadā, Virabāhu's mother, withdrew

370 sobbing, with her handmaids, to the inner chambers of the
 palace. Out of grief and rankled self-esteem that foeman
 of Rāghava quit his golden throne, roaring fiercely. "At
 long last," declared the sovereign, "my Laṅkā is destitute
 of warriors! Whom else shall I send to this black war? Who can
 hold aloft the honor of the Rākṣasas? I myself
 shall go. Prepare, Indras among warriors, ornaments of
 Laṅkā! Let us see how deft he is, this gem of Raghus!
 Will the world this day be minus Rāvaṇa or Rāma!"

When that son of Nikaṣā, lion among champions,
 had so announced, *dundubhi* drums-of-war boomed forth from the
 380 floor of the assembly with a thunderous roll. At such
 frightful rumblings the Karbūras, intoxicated on
 heroism's liquor, equipped themselves, those terrors of
 gods, Daityas, and of men. From the elephant barn charged a
 herd of tuskers (in might, most difficult to check, like a
 stream of rushing water); from the stable pranced a train of
 horses, necks arched, spiritedly champing at the bit. Gold-
 crested chariots came wheeling out and cast a glow on
 the city. Troops of infantry followed, gold turbans wound
 round their heads, swords in scintillating scabbards; down their backs
 390 hung leather shields, impregnable in battle; they brandished
 cloud-splitting *sāla*-tree-like lances; iron coats-of-mail

encased their frames. Mahouts appeared like the wielder of the
thunderbolt atop the best of thunderheads; horsemen, like
sons of Aśvinī, gripping fearsome javelins and world-
destroying battle-axes—a luster rose within the
sky, as when a forest fire penetrates some wooded land.
Warrior flag-bearers held on high flags of the Rākṣasa
clan, then unfurled the best of banners, embossed with gems, which
seemed to be the wings of Garuḍa as he flew through the
400 skies. A martial band produced a deep, resounding clangor
all about; horses in formation neighed impatiently;
elephants were bugling; conch shells blared in earnest; and strummed
bowstrings combined with rattling swords to fill one's ears with sounds!

Golden Laṅkā quaked beneath the weight of champions' feet—
the monarch of the waters roared, wrath! That commotion reached
lovely Vāruṇī, seated on her coral throne under
water in a golden lotus garden where she, with pearls,
was putting up her chignon. Startled, that faithful woman
gazed about her. Speaking to her moon-faced handmaid, in sweet
410 tones she asked, "For what reason, do tell me, please, confidante,
has Pāśī, monarch of the oceans, suddenly become
so very agitated? Look, our pearl-crowned residence
rocks violently. Perhaps those mischievous winds have blown
in again to do battle with the waves. Fie on the god

Prabhañjana! How could that monarch of the winds forget
so quickly his own pledge, my dear. That day in Indra's court
I begged to have him manacle the winds and throw them all
in prison. With a smile that god pleaded then, 'Grant me leave,
O goddess of the waters, that I might frolic always
420 with your limpid streams, servants of yours on the surface of
the earth—permit me that, and I shall honor ever your
command.' Then and there, confidante, I consented. So why
now do the gusty breezes come today to torment me?"

In reply her attendant babbled, "It is pointless to
accuse Prabhañjana, O queen to Indra of the seas.
This is no storm, but rather, monarch Rāvaṇa at his
palace in golden Laṅkā has assumed a tempest's guise
to deflate in battle the warrior pride of Rāghava."

Vāruṇī spoke once again, "Ah yes, true, my confidante,
430 Rāvaṇa and Rāma struggle over Vaidehī. The
Rājalakṣmī of the clan of Rākṣasas is my boon
companion. Hurry to her dwelling place; I am eager
to have news of the conflict. Give Kamalā this golden
lotus. Tell her that since she went home, thereby darkening
our ocean dwelling, this flower bloomed where that moon-faced one
had placed her crimson feet while seated on her lotus-throne."

Attendant Muralā, at Vāruṇī's command, surfaced,

bounding from the waters, as leaps a nimble *sapharī*,
 flashing its illusion of shiny, silver-seeming sheen
 440 to the sun. That messengeress reached the lotus-home where
 the lotus-lady, love of Keśava, sat upon her
 lotus-throne there in Laṅkā city. For just a bit she
 paused before the door, to soothe her eyes on the sight in front
 of her, charm and grace that would excite the maddener of
 Madana.³ Springtime breezes sauntered there—ever-faithful
 followers—murmuring, in hopes of garnering fragrance
 from those godly lotus-feet. Bouquets shone resplendently
 everywhere, just like congeries of gems in Dhanada's
 golden vault. Redolent sandalwood and myrrh smoldered in
 450 a hundred golden censers permeating her temple
 with their scents. Upon some platters made of gold were arranged
 divers gifts and sundry *pūjā* offerings. Golden lamps
 in a row were alight, each filled with fragrant oils—softly
 glowing, like the glow of fireflies up against the full moon's
 radiance! With face averted, moon-faced Indirā sat
 glumly—as sat Umā of the moon-like countenance, cheeks
 cradled in her palms, when the tenth day of the waxing moon
 of Durgā Pūjā dawned, with pangs of separation at
 her home in Gauḍa—so sat bright Kamalā, goddess on
 460 her lotus-throne. Can dolor enter such a blossom-heart?

With measured paces, pretty Muralā stepped into the
temple; and once inside, that messengeress bowed before
the feet of Ramā. Indirā—the Rājalakṣmī of
those Rākṣasas—bestowed her blessings, then began to speak,

"What brings you here today, Muralā, please tell me? And where
is my most dear companion, that goddess of the waters?

I think of her constantly. How could I forget all the
kindness faithful Vāruṇī showed to me when I lived with
her? Ramā's hopes are domiciled in Hari's breast—still this

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Ramā managed, though bereft of such a one as Hari,

by virtue only of Vāruṇī's salve of love! Tell me,

is she well, that bosom friend of mine, the Indrāṇī of

the seas?" Beautiful Muralā responded, "Vāruṇī

is ensconced safely underneath the waters. Because of

Vaidehī, Rāma wars with Rāvaṇa; she is eager

to have tidings of the battle. This lotus, O chaste one,

it bloomed for joy where you had placed those two reddened feet of

yours; and for that reason, Pāśī's consort sends it to you."

With sad sighs, Kamalā, moonlight of Vaikuṇṭha, answered,

480

"Alas, friend, the prowess of foolish Rāvaṇa day by

day erodes, like an ocean's shoreline from the pounding surf.

You will be amazed to hear: the hero Kumbhakarna,

whose look is ferocious, and Akampana, in warfare

steady as a mountain, fell along with charioteer
Atikāya. Of the many other Rākṣasas, I
am powerless to tell. Virabāhu perished—crown-gem
of warriors; those sounds of weeping that you hear within the
inner quarters, Muralā, issue from Citrāṅgadā,
disquieted by grief felt for her son. I am anxious
490 to depart this city. My heart breaks when I hear day and
night these women sobbing! In each and every household, there
wails, messengeress, a son-less mother and a widow!"

Asked Muralā, "Tell me, O great goddess, which warrior arms
heroically to fight anew today?" Answered the wife
of Mādhava, "I know not who outfits himself this time.
Muralā, come outside and let us see who goes to war."

With that said, Ramā, escorting Muralā, stepped without,
both appearing like Rākṣasa maidens, habited in
silken garments. Their anklets tinkled sweetly, bangles ringed
500 their wrists, while eye-bedazzling ornamented girdles drew
attention to those slender waists. Before the temple door
both watched wide rows of soldiers marching down the royal way,
like fleet wind-driven waves across an ocean. Along sped
chariots, their fellies clattered as they rolled. Steeds galloped,
in aspect like a dire storm. Elephants alarmed the
earth by the burden of their feet as they lumbered, vaunting

high their trunks as Daṇḍadhara vaunts his deadly scepter.

Instruments of music blared their resonating tones. Gem-

embroidered, rousing banners by the hundreds fluttered. On

510 either side stood the world-enchanting wives of Laṅkā at

the windows of their golden dwellings, raining down flower

blossoms, calling out their auspicious *ululu* sounds. Said

Muralā, gazing at the moon-like face of Indirā,

"Today I witness on the earth heaven's grandeur, goddess!

It seems to me that Vāsava himself, monarch of the

skies, entered Laṅkā city with an armed force of the gods.

Speak, kind one, kindly tell me, which charioteers are armed

for battle, intoxicated on the wines of valor?"

Said chaste Kamalā of the lotus-eyes, "Alas, my friend,

520 Laṅkā's golden city is without her heroes! They who

were the Indras of great charioteers, terrors of gods,

Daityas, and of men, have been vanquished in this fight so hard

to win! That gem among the Raghus took up the bow at

an auspicious time! See there, that charioteer on the

gold-crowned chariot, that leader among Rākṣasas is

Virūpākṣa, Bhīma's likeness, a warrior who fights armed

with iron arrows, difficult to best in war. And there,

riding on that elephant, look, it is Kālanemi,

bhindipāla clenched in fist, a hero who by his strength

530 metes out death to foes! Look, that horsemen, Tālajaṅghā, a
 tāla palm in stature, with club in hand, he resembles
 war-club-wielding Murāri! See, Pramatta, drunk on wines
 of warfare, and the Rākṣasa Bhīṣaṇa, whose chest is
 hard as stone! What more can I say about the others? There
 were hundreds of like soldiers who perished in this struggle,
 as when Vaiśvānara penetrates a dense forest, stands
 of even the most tall among the trees are reduced to
 ashes in the course of that horrific conflagration."

Asked messengeress Muralā, "Tell me, goddess-queen, why
 540 do I not see Meghanāda, the charioteer who
 in battle bested Indra, that lion—yellow-eyed—of
 Rākṣasas? Was he slain, chaste one, in that fatal warfare?"

Replied Ramā of the charming smile, "Perhaps the prince is
 strolling leisurely through Pramoda park and does not yet
 know Virabāhu fell today in battle. Muralā,
 go at once to Vāruṇī. Tell her I shall presently
 leave this golden city and return to Vaikuṅṭha. Through
 his own fault Laṅkā's ruler comes to ruin. Alas, as
 in the monsoon rainy season when a pond of clearest
 550 water is turned turbid by churned mud, just so by sin is
 golden Laṅkā sullied! How am I to stay here any
 longer? Go, my friend, to where Vāruṇī is seated on

her coral siege in that pearly home of hers. I shall fetch
Indrajit back to Laṅkā's golden city. The fruits of
a former birth will soon come to fruition in this land."

Bowing to the goddess' feet, then taking leave of her,
Muralā, the winsome messengeress, rose upon the
path of winds, just as a fetching peahen, eyes entranced by
coruscation from the multi-jeweled brilliancy off
560 Ākhaṇḍala's bow,⁴ flies toward an alluring pleasure grove!

That pretty lady reached the ocean's shore, then plunged into
those deep blue waters. In the meantime she, the lotus-eyed
love of Keśava, Lakṣmī of the clan of Rākṣasas,
set out to where far away was Meghanāda, gem of
warriors, bane of Vāsava. Through the void sped Indirā.

Moments later Hṛṣikeśa's sleek-haired darling reached the
place where ever-winning Indrajit was seated. It seemed
a mansion like Vaijayanta—on verandahs rows of
handsome golden pillars topped by diamonds stood, as around
570 Nandana gardens stands a file of graceful trees. From the
branches cuckoos cooed; bees hummed as they meandered; flower
buds were blooming; leaves were rustling; vernal breezes blew; and
cascades, gurgling, tumbled. As the goddess stepped up to the
palace made of gold, she saw a host of fearsome-looking
women, bows in hand, turn defiantly toward the brilliant

gates. Down each one's back there swung a braid beside her quiver.

Like lightning streaks were those plaits, interspersed with jewels—gem-

hooded serpents were the arrows in those quivers! Golden

coats-of-mail covering high breasts seemed like nets of sunbeams

580 draped upon full-blooming lotuses. The arrows in their

quivers were keenly tipped, yet sharper still the darts from their

almond eyes. They, intoxicated on youth's liquor, paced

like female elephants in heat in spring. Ornamental

girdles sonorously jingled from about their well-formed

hips; around their ankles anklets tinkled. The *muraja*,

vīṇā, flute, and *saptasvarā* sounded; waves of music,

spilled out everywhere, blending with yet other sounds to fill

one's mind with rapture. That best of champions dallied with

these maids of shapely bodies, just as the lord of night sports

590 with Dakṣa's daughters, or, O Yamunā, daughter of the

sun, as the herdsman danced beneath *kadamba* trees, flute to

lips, sporting with the cowherds' wives upon your splendid banks!

Meghanāda's wet nurse had been a Rākṣasī whose name

was Prabhāṣā. Ramā, wife of Mādhava, took her form,

then appeared, clutching in her hand a cane and wearing white.

Rising from his golden throne, Indrajit, lion among

Indras among warriors, did obeisance to his nursemaid's

feet, then said, "For what reason, Mother, have you come today

to this retreat? Tell me, your humble slave, of Laṅkā's weal."

600 Kissing him atop his head, that daughter of the ocean
incognita answered, "Alas! Son, what can I say of
golden Laṅkā's predicament! In pitched battle hero
Vīrabāhu, your dear brother, perished! The ruler of
the Rākṣasas, mourning, moved by profound grief over him,
with his troops readies himself today to fight in person."

 That great-armed one, aghast, inquired, "What was that you said,
respected lady? Who slew my dearest little brother?
When? I bested the best of Raghus in night combat; I
cut to pieces the opposing army with a rain of
610 terrorizing arrows. But this news, this strange news, Mother,
wherever did you get it; tell this slave of yours at once."

 That pretty Indirā, finest jewel of the ocean,
answered, "My son, alack! it was that wizardly human,
Sītā's husband; though he succumbed to your arrows, yet he
revived. So, be quick, uphold the honor of the clan of
Rākṣasas in this heinous war, crown-gem of Rākṣasas!"

 Full of wrath, great warrior Meghanāda tore apart his
garlands, threw away his golden bracelets; lying at his
feet, his earrings shone most elegant, like fetching blossoms
620 of *aśoka* under an *aśoka* tree! "Fie on me,"
the crown prince chided gravely, "Fie on me! Hostile legions

cincture golden Laṅkā, and here am I midst these charming
 women! Does this befit a one like me, Indrajit, son
 of Daśānana? Bring my chariot at once. I shall
 efface this infamy; I shall slay the enemy throng."

Then that bull among the Indras of the charioteers
 dressed in warrior's garb, just like the son of Haimavatī
 when he went to conquer Tāraka, the great Asura,
 or, like Kirīṭī, disguised as Bṛhannalā, when he
 630 caparisoned himself beneath the *samī* tree as a
 champion, then with Virāṭa's son went to recoup the
 cow herd. His chariot was cloud colored; its wheels gave off
 lightning flashes; its pennons looked like Indra's bow; and its
 steeds were swift of foot. Onto that chariot stepped the crown-
 gem of warriors with a hero's pride. At such time pretty
 Pramīlā grasped hold her husband's hands (alas, as when a
 golden vine hugs tight the king of trees) and weeping, that young
 beauty spoke, "Where, companion of my heart, would you consign
 your thrall, pray tell me, when you yourself have gone away? How
 640 shall this hapless girl abide apart from you? Alas, my
 lord, when deep within the forest, of her own accord a
 creeper wraps herself around an elephant's leg and if
 unwittingly at play the elephant should lumber off,
 still that lordly bull would have proffered her the refuge of

his feet. So why do you, virtues' fund, deny as much to
 this slave of yours today?" Meghanāda smiling answered,
 "You have bested Indrajit, my chaste one, and secured him
 with firm fetters. Who is able to untie those bonds? I
 shall return with haste, pure woman, once I have defeated
 650 Rāghava in combat—by virtue of your purity.

Now bid me farewell, my one whose visage is like the moon's.

On the wind's path there arose, with menacing sounds, that best
 of chariots, as though Mount Maināka had spread its gold-
 hued wings and flown, lighting up the skies! That Indra among
 heroes drew back angrily the bowstring and snapped his bow
 with verve, just as the Indra among birds screams threateningly
 from within the clouds. Both Laṅkā and the ocean quavered!

Sovereign Rāvaṇa was arming, frenzied with heroic
 spirits—martial music blared; elephants were trumpeting;
 660 horses whinnied; both troops on foot and charioteers yelled
 with fury; silken banners fluttered; and a golden glow
 from armor lifted to the skies. At just that moment the
 charioteer Meghanāda arrived in full career.

The Karbūras, out of pride, cheered when they saw their best of
 champions. That son, bowing to his father's feet, spoke, palms
 pressed together, "O monarch of the clan of Rākṣasas,
 what is this I hear, Rāghava though dead is yet alive?"

I fail to comprehend such *māyā*, Father! But, grant me
 your permission; I shall topple, roots and all, that wicked
 670 one today! I shall turn him into ashes with deadly
 fiery arrows, and with my wind-weapon, blow him away;
 or if you wish, I shall place him, bound, at your regal feet."

Embracing the prince and kissing him atop the head, that
 overlord of golden Laṅkā spoke with tenderness, "You,
 dear lad, the crown upon our clan of Rākṣasas, are the
 hope of hosts of Rākṣasas. My heart wants not to send you
 once again into this black war. But alas, Fate has turned
 against me. Who ever heard, my son, of stones that float on
 water; and who has heard of one, though dead, who lives again?"

680 He answered with a hero's boldness, that foe of the foe
 of Asuras, "What a lowly fellow that human is—
 and you, an Indra among kings, fear him? Were you to go
 to war while yet this servant lives, then, Father, that disgrace
 would be decried through all the world. Meghavāhana would
 laugh. God Agni would flare up with anger. Twice I vanquished
 Rāghava. Command me once more, Father, so that we might
 see by what medicines that warrior will revive this time!"

The king of Rākṣasas replied, "Hero Kumbhakarna
 was my brother—from trepidation, I, prematurely,
 690 woke him. Alas, look there, this body lies slumped upon the

ocean's shore, like a mountain peak or tree that has been struck
 by lightning! Yet if you resolutely wish to fight, dear
 son, first propitiate your chosen deity—perform
 your ritual sacrifice at Nikumbhilā, my gem of
 warriors! For it is you I designate commander. But
 mark, the lord of day now descends the setting-hill. In the
 morning, dearest child, you will wage war with that Rāghava."

Saying this, the king, sprinkling Ganges water, formally
 invested with authority his crown prince. Suddenly
 700 a bard broke into songs of praise, playing passionately
 upon the *vīṇā*, "O city of the Rākṣasas, there
 are teardrops in your eyes. You, whose hair is loose and flowing,
 are distraught by sorrow. Your bejeweled crown and regal
 ornaments, alas, O royal beauty, lie fallen on
 the ground! Arise, my sweet, cast off this gloom, chaste one. The sun
 for Rākṣasas is upon the rising-hill. Your night of
 woe is over; your dawn has come at last! Arise, my queen,
 and look. His strong left hand holds fast the bow whose strumming would
 cause Ākhaṇḍala, home in Vaijayanta, to turn pale!
 710 Gaze upon that quiver. Packed therein are Paśupati-
 frightening missiles, like the very Pāśupata! Behold
 that Meghanāda, most skilled among the skilled, a lion
 among Indras among warriors, whose form is pleasing to

the sweeter sex! Praise be to consort Mandodari! Hail,
Naikaṣeya, ruler of the Rākṣasas! Hail, Laṅkā
hero-bearer! Dearest Echoes, daughters of the sky, all
listen, then repeat, in full-throated voices: 'Foe-quelling
Indrajit now arms!' Let them quake with terror in their camp—
the Raghu king; Vibhīṣaṇa, disgrace of Rākṣasas;
720 and all those vile creatures who roamed the woods of Daṇḍaka."

The Rākṣasas' drums and such resounded, and Rākṣasas
exulted. Golden Laṅkā filled with shouts of victory.

Thus ends canto number one,
called "investiture,"
in the poem
The Slaying of Meghanāda.