The sun set, and Twilight appeared—a gem upon her brow. Night-blooming lotuses now blossomed; in ponds the wan-faced lotuses of day closed fast their eyes; warbling birds returned to nests; and cattle, lowing, shambled toward their cow sheds. With the moon and her radiant stars came Night, smiling. Flirting, fragrant breezes, blustering about—to all they whispered sweetly, "What riches did you win kissing which of several flowers?" The goddess Sleep arrived. And, as tired children curl up in their mother's lap, just so the many creatures of land and sea took refuge at that goddess' two feet.

The moon's beloved constellations spread throughout the gods' abode. Amidst the divine assembly sat the sovereign of gods, on a gold throne—to his left, Puloma's sloe-eyed goddess daughter. A silver parasol, bright with gems, shone brilliantly from above that Indra of divinities. Handling with skill the jewel-studded yak-tail whisks, the fly-whisk bearers fanned to and fro. Fresh breezes emanated, gaily wafting honeyed scents from Nandana garden. All around rang out celestial music. Six rāgas, with their thirty-six accompanying rāginīs, advanced and started playing. Urvasī, Rambhā with the captivating smile, Citralekhā, and sleek-haired Miśrakeśī danced, charming with their jingling anklet bells the hearts of a host of gods!
Gandharvas served in golden vessels nectar; others, the
food of the divines. Some bore saffron, musk, and vermilion;
some, the paste of sandalwood; others still, carried garlands
strung with fragrant mandāra blossoms. In Vaijayanta,
Vāsava was joyous with his heavenly entourage.

At such a time appeared the Rākṣasas' Rājalakṣmi,
lighting up that godly city with her beauty's brilliance.

Courteously, the spouse of Śacī bowed to Ramā's feet.
Blessing him, then sitting on his golden throne, the one with
lotus eyes, who dwells in Puṇḍarīkākṣa's heart, spoke, "King
of divines, pay heed to why I come today to your court."

Responded Indra, "O daughter of the Indra among
waters, beguiler of the universe, those two red feet
of yours, Mother, are longed for by this universe. He on
whom you mercifully cast your gaze of mercy, mercy-
mistress, his life in this life is indeed fulfilled. By what
merit from a former birth has this slave of yours obtained
that joy? Do explain this to your humble minion, Mother."

Ramā spoke again, "For some time now, treasure of divines,
I have lived in golden Laṅkā. The king of Rākṣasas
worships me. But, alas, finally Fate has turned against him.
Due to his own fault, that sinner puts an end to his own
lineage. Even then, my lord, I am not able to
forsake him. Can one who is a captive flee, Indra of
the gods, if the prison doors remain unopened?

As long as Rāvana lives, I shall be confined within his house.

That son of Rāvana, whose name is Meghanāda, you
know him well, O conqueror of Vṛtra, he is now the
one and only warrior left in Laṅkā. The rest of them
were slain in combat. That champion, a mighty lion,
will attack tomorrow Rāmacandra. Yet once again
Dasānana has appointed him commander. You must
consider well how to protect that Rāghava, so dear
to all the god clan. I tell you—were proud Meghanāda
at Nikumbhilā to complete his sacrifice before
the time he enters combat, the husband of Vaidehī
would find himself in trouble. Mandodari's son would be
invincible throughout the world, O Indra of divines!

As Vainateya is supreme in strength among the birds,
so that gem of warriors is foremost of the Rākṣasas!"

So saying, Ramā, Keśa's desire, fell silent, ah
me! as the vīṇā pauses after entertaining hearts
with melodies! The six rāgas, thirty-six rāginīs,
and such, on hearing Kamalā's sweet speech, forgot to do
what they do naturally, as in springtime other birds just
sit and listen to the cuckoo's call in a flower grove.
Then spoke that lord of the sky, "From this grave peril, Mother, who but Viśvanātha can rescue Rāghava? The son of Rāvana is difficult to best in battle. I fear him more, much more, than serpents fear the serpent-eater! This very thunderbolt, the one which pulverized the skull of Vṛtra, the Asura, was repulsed by weapons that great hero wielded. Hence, worldwide they call him Indrajit. By a boon from Sarvasuci, that best of warriors has become all-conquering. Command your thrall that I might go with due dispatch to his residence on Mount Kailāsa."

Spoke the beloved of Upendra, that daughter of the Indra among waters, "Go, then, lord of the divines, with haste. Humbly narrate, god, these tidings at the feet of him who wears the moon, there upon the summit of Kailāsa. Tell him that chaste mother earth cries constantly, unable to withstand the burden. Tell him that Ananta now is weary. If the king of Rākṣasas is not uprooted, the earth will sink to Rasātala! Virūpākṣa is quite fond of Lakṣmī. Please let him know that she, forsaking Vaikuṇṭha, has lived for many days in Laṅkā! She thinks of him constantly in that lonely place, but is it that he finds some fault with her for which he does not think of her a whit? What father keeps his daughter from her husband's house—
ask that of learned Jaṭādhara! If you fail to meet
Tryambaka, tell all before the feet of Ambikā."

And saying such, that moon-faced love of Hari said good-bye,
rose, and left. Through the sky the sleek-haired love of Keśava
descended, as gold idols sink in lucid waters, bright,
from beneath the water’s surface due to innate brilliance.

Mātali fetched the chariot. Śacī's husband gazed at
Śacī, speaking very sweetly, "Come along, my goddess,
come with me. When winds are laced with scented nectar, he is
twice as cordial. Mark this, wife, the beauty of a lotus
rests within the nature of its fully blossomed flower."

At her loved one's words, that woman well-endowed with hips smiled
and, taking her husband's hand, stepped onto the chariot.

That chariot approached with speed heaven's golden doors, which
opened of their own accord with pleasing sounds. Exiting
in haste, that divine conveyance shone splendidly against
the sky. With a start, the world awoke thinking that the sun
had climbed the rising-hill. Phīṅgā birds chirped; other feathered
creatures filled forest groves with morning's song. In their bridal
chambers bashful brides left flower-beds and set to housework.

Near Lake Mānasā beamed brilliantly the lustrous peak of
Mount Kailāsa. Upon its tip sat Bhava's home, like the
peacock-crown on the head of Mādhava. That wondrous blue-
black bodied mountain was arrayed with clumps of golden blooms,

ah me! as though a yellow dhuti! Waters gushed from springs—
as if that body were anointed with white sandal paste!

Stepping from his chariot to the footpath, that monarch
of the skies, with his queen of the skies, entered the bliss-filled
abode. There sat Īśvari, the queen of queens, upon her
golden throne. Vijayā waved a fly-whisk. Jayā held the
royal parasol. Alas, the opulence of Bhava's
residence—how can the poet convey it? Contemplate,
gaze upon it in your mind's eye, all you thoughtful people.

With utmost reverence, great Indra and Indrāṇī bowed
before the feet of Śakti. Ambikā blessed them, then asked—
"Speak the good news, god—both of you, what brings you here today?"

The hurler of the thunderbolts, palms pressed together, spoke,

"What is there in this universe, Mother, of which you are
unaware? Laṅkā's sovereign, hostile to the gods, worried
now by the war, has once again today installed his son
Meghanāda to the post of general. Tomorrow
at dawn that enemy-harassing prince will engage in
battle, after worshipping his chosen deity and
getting from him coveted boons. His prowess, Mother, is
no secret. Rājalakṣmī of the Rākṣasa clan came
to Vaijayanta and so informed this slave of yours, O
Bhagavatī. The love of Hari said chaste mother earth

cries out, no longer able to withstand that awful weight;

Śeṣa, upholder of the universe, is weary; and
even she herself, the fickle one, is these days ever
anxious to exit golden Laṅkā city. That goddess
directed me, your servant, to narrate humbly at your
feet these tidings, Annadā. The jewel of the Raghu
clan is a hero favored by the gods. Yet what warrior
in the god clan would dare fight Rāvaṇi upon the field
of battle? That Rākṣasa, Indrajit by name, renowned
throughout the world, renders lusterless in combat, Mother,
the universe-destroying thunderbolt! Consider by
what means, O Kātyāyanī, you can save Rāghava.

If you do not bestow him mercy, then, come tomorrow,
overwhelming Rāvaṇi will void this world of Rāma!"

Answered Kātyāyanī, "Naikaṣeya is the finest
among Śiva's worshipers—Trisūli feels most kindly
toward him. O Indra of divines, can it be that harm to
him could ever come from me! Tāpasendra is absorbed
in meditation now, and thus, O god, is Laṅkā such."

With hands cupped most reverently, Vāsava spoke yet again,

"That sovereign of the Niśācaras, that worst offender
against dharma is an adversary of the gods! Think
of this, O daughter of the Indra among mountains. Is it ever proper, Mother, to extend your mercy to that wicked one who steals treasures from the poor? Well-mannered Rāghava forsook his joy and comfort to uphold his father's solemn vow and in a beggar's garb entered the deep forest. He had but one priceless gem. Of how he cared for her, what more can your humble servant say? The vile one spread illusion's net, then stole that gem! Alas, Mother, when I reflect on that, my heart fumes in flames of anger! With his boon from Trisūlī, that Rākṣasa warrior now turns disdainful of the gods! and greedy for another's wealth, another's wife—that ever-avaricious, lowly thing!

Yet then, because of what (I fail to understand), do you grant sympathy to such a fool, compassion-giving one?"

That monarch of the skies fell mute. The queen consort of the skies, whose speech is like the music of a vīnā, began to speak in dulcet tones, "Whose heart would not be rent, goddess, by the sorrows of Vaidehī? She sits day and night in the Aśoka grove (like a forest bird now kept encaged) and in grief that beauty mourns. It is no secret to those reddened feet of yours, O Mother, what heartaches the moon-faced one endures without her husband. If you fail to wield the staff of punishment, O goddess, who will discipline this
dharma-spurning lord of Rākṣasas? Once you overcome

Meghanāda, return Vaidehī to Vaidehi’s joy.

Wipe away your servant’s blemish, Śaśāṅkadhārīṇī!

For I die of shame, Mother, when I hear from people that

a Rākṣasa downed in war the monarch of the heavens."

Smiling, Umā spoke, "You detest Rāvaṇa, O Jiṣṇu.

And you, Śacī, who surpass them all in loveliness, are

eager for Indrajit's demise. Both of you implore

me to demolish golden Laṅkā. It is not within

my power to effect such a feat. The Rākṣasa host

is by Virūpākṣa given shelter. Except for him,

Vāsava, who in the world, tell me please, can fulfill this

wish of yours? Immersed in yogic meditation, O king

of gods, is Vṛṣadhvaja. That Indra among yogis

sits in solitude upon the awesome, cloud-draped mountain

known as Yogāsana. How could one approach him there where

Garuḍa, Indra among birds, is powerless to fly?"

That son of Aditi spoke with humility, "Whose might
except for yours, O Jagadambā, grantor of release,

approaches Bhairava's, the foe of Tripura? Goddess,

lay waste the clan of Rākṣasas and thereby salvage all

three worlds; enhance Dharma's glory; lighten the burden for

mother earth; and rescue Rāghava." In such a manner
the adversary of the Daitya clan flattered Sati.

Suddenly that city filled with a rare fragrance; sounds of bells and conch shells could be heard all around, accompanied by auspicious jingling, soft and sweet, as when the cuckoos sing harmoniously in some distant wooded grove. Her golden throne tottered. In honeyed tones that ideal wife of Bhavesa asked her friend Vijayā, "Little moon-face, tell me, where, why, and who worships me at this untimely time?"

First she chanted mantras, then jotted down some figures with a piece of chalk, computing calculations, and at last with a smile that confidante reported, "O daughter of the mountains, the charioteer Dāsarathi worships you in Lāṅkā. I deduce, by my computations, that the Raghu sovereign, hands cupped in supplication, offers blue lotuses before a water pot on which those two pretty feet of yours are painted out of bright vermilion. Confer to him the gift of abhaya, O Abhayā.

That finest Raghu, son of Kauśalyā, is your foremost devotee. Deliver him from danger, O Tārini!"

Sati, queen of queens, arose from her golden throne and once again addressed Vijayā, "Vijayā, do attend this godly couple properly. I shall proceed to where sits Dhūrjaṭi on Mount Yogāsana (that huge mountain peak!)."
And saying this, Durgā, she who moves with elephantine grace, went inside her golden dwelling. Then the beautiful Vijāyā spoke warmly to Vāsava, Indra of the gods, together with his heavenly queen, and seated them upon the golden throne. With utmost satisfaction the couple partook of the offerings made to them. Jayā, laughing, hung a string of star-shaped flowers round Śacī's neck; she placed upon her hair bun an ever-tasteful, ever-blooming spray of gem-like blossoms. Instrumental music sounded all about, and a troupe of women sang and danced. Kailāsa city was entranced, as were all three worlds! When babies heard the honeyed sounds within their dreams, they smiled, eyes closed, upon their mother's lap. And sleepless, love-sick maidens rose aflutter, thinking they had heard their lovers' footfalls at the door. Cuckoos ceased their songs throughout the forest. And a band of yogis started, thinking that their chosen god, from whom they begged a boon, had indeed appeared before them.

When she had slipped into her golden dwelling, that perfect wife of Bhaveśa reflected, "How can I call upon Bhaveśa today?" Then, mulling over that a moment, Sati's thoughts turned to Rati. Umā's wishes instantly wafted, in the form of ripples of a fragrant breeze, to where charming Varānanā, enchantress of Manmatha,
dallied with Manmatha in a pleasure garden. Rati's heart danced like viṇā strings at a finger's touch. Straight away went that bride of Kāma, hastily, upon the wind's path to the peak of Mount Kailāsa. Just as, at the end of nighttime, lotuses lay themselves wide open on a lake, bowing at the feet of Dawn, harbinger of light's sovereign, so bowed that love of Madana at the feet of Hara's darling. Giving Rati her blessings, Ambikā smiled and said, "That Indra among yogis is immersed in austere meditation on Mount Yogāsana. Tell me, moon-faced one, how, by what enticement, can I break his trance?" Bowing once again, that sleek-haired one replied, "Goddess, you should assume a most enchanting form. If you so order me, I shall fetch you divers garments and adorn your sterling body. As soon as he lays eyes on you, Pinākī will be enticed, exactly as the sovereign of the seasons was tempted when he caught sight of the forest, flower-tressed."

So saying, Rati smoothed her hair with aromatic oils, then plaited it into a captivating braid. Next, that lovely one assembled sundry ornaments, embossed with diamonds, pearls, and such. She brought with her paste of sandalwood, vermillion mixed with saffron, musk, also silken garments glittering with many jewels. That one with charming eyes
in delight outlined both feet with red lac dye. That daughter
of the Indra among mountains looked the very image
of a world-enchantress. She glowed with twice the splendor of
lustrous gold when rubbed upon a buffing stone. Within a
looking glass the goddess saw that moon-like face of hers, as
the full-bloomed lotus sees its full-blown charm in pellucid
waters. With a smile, the darling of the victor over
Smara spoke, gazing toward the love of Smara, "Summon up
the monarch of your life." At once that love of Madana
called (as the queen among cuckoos calls to Springtime) to her
Madana. Phuladhanu hurried there, as those who live
abroad come eagerly at the strains of their own music.

Said that daughter of the stones, "Come with me, Manmatha. We
shall go to where the sovereign among the yogis sits,
entirely absorbed in yoga. Come at once, my child."

Prostrate at Abhayā's feet, blissful Madana, offspring
of infatuation, answered worriedly, "Why do you,
goddess, give your servant such an order? I am scared
to death, Mother, as I recall that past event! When due
to foolish Dakṣa's blunder, Satī, you abandoned your
corporeal form and, on your own, took birth within the
home of Himādri—it was then that Viṣvanātha, out
of grief from loss of you, gave up responsibility
for the universe and commenced to meditate. Later,

Indra, sovereign of the gods, directed me, your servant
to disturb that meditation. At a quite ill-fated
moment I went, Mother, to where god Vāma was immersed
in austere meditation. I seized my flower-bow and
let fly a flower-arrow at that most inopportune
of times. As a lion without warning springs upon the
king of elephants, there filling up the forests with his
terrifying roar, O Bhaveśvari, just so the sun
whose home is situated in the forehead of your spouse,
sprang forth in anger and consumed this slave of yours. Alas,
Mother, how can I ever, humbly, tell those reddened feet
of yours what burning pain I endured? With forlorn wails I
called to Vāsava, the moon, the winds, and sun; but no one
came. In no time whatsoever I was turned to ashes!

With much trepidation and without enthusiasm,
I think of Bhaveśa—please forgive this slave of yours, O
Kṣemaṅkari. At your feet I modestly beseech you."

Śaṅkari spoke with a smile, consoling Madana, "Come
along with me in best of spirits and be brave at heart,
Anaṅga. By my boon you shall be all-victorious!
The fire who had seized you at that inauspicious moment,
consuming you in his flames, will do today your bidding,
just as the deadly poisons take on the qualities of medicine, thus saving lives when they are handled wisely."

Then with hands pressed palm to palm and bowing before Umā's feet, Kāma said, "What has he to fear in all three worlds, O Abhayā, to whom you grant abhaya? But may I say this to your lotus feet—how, O daughter of the Indra among mountains, will you venture out from this abode in such enchanting garb—do tell this slave of yours. In a flash, Mother, the world will go insane gazing at your graceful sweetness—I tell you in all honesty. This well-meant act, O goddess, will quickly yield contrary ends. When the gods and Asuras churned the lord of waters and produced the drink of immortality, the most mischievous sons of Diti quarreled with the gods for that sweet nectar. Śrī's spouse arrived upon the scene disguised as Mohini, a most exquisitely enchanting woman. When the three worlds saw Hṛṣīkeśa in disguise, they swooned, struck by one of this slave's darts! Gods and Daityas both forgot about the nectar of immortal life. Nāgas bowed ashamed, seeing down her back her braid; Mount Mandara himself turned motionless at seeing her high breasts! Remembering all that, O Sāti, a smile comes to my lips. If copper gilded with a film of gold is dazzling, then consider, goddess, how more awe-
inspiring is the luster of pure gold!" Without delay,
mystifying Ambikā conjured up a golden cloud
and with it veiled her charming figure. It was, alas, as
though a lotus bloom could cloak its moon-like countenance with
sunset's glow! or, as though in heaps of ashes flames could hide,
suppressing their bright grins! or, as though god Śakra, with a
cakra, could mask the wealth of nectar in the lunar orb!

Through a door inlaid with ivory that sweetest smiling
one stepped from her home, like Dawn herself overcast by clouds.
With her was Manmatha, flower-bow in hand, upon his
back a quiver that was packed with keenest flower-arrows—
and she, a lotus, seemed to bloom upon those thorny stalks.

On the very peak of Mount Kailāsa is an awesome
plateau summit called Yogāsana, renowned throughout the
world; it was to there the world-enchanting goddess mounted,
mounted on the king of pachyderms. At once surrounding
caverns closed—crashing, roaring mountain streams fell as silent
as the lord of waters when in peaceful, calm confluence.
The clouds fled far away as does darkness faced with Dawn's
bright laugh. The goddess saw in front of her the ascetic
Kapardī, body smeared with ashes, his eyes shut, drowned in
austere meditation's sea, deadened to the outer world.

To Madana that lady with the most delightful smile
spoke, "What is the point of hesitating, enemy of Śambara? Shoot your flower-arrows." At the goddess' command, Minadhvaja knelt upon one knee, then twanged his bowstring piercing Umā's husband with infatuating arrows. A thrill shot through Śūlapāṇi. The matted mass of hair upon his head shook, as, when there is an earthquake, a stand of trees upon a mountain top will shake, snapping and cracking. His lordship began to stare! Flames roared from his forehead, flashing, blazing bright! Seized by fear, Phuladhanu took refuge in the breast of Bhavāṇi, as a frightened lion cub hides when clouds with thunderclaps and lightning streaks disgorge, as spirited as doomsday fires, dazzling to the eye. Now, opening his seeing eyes, Dhūrjaṭi arose.

The daughter of the rocks then shed her conjured veil of clouds. Charmed by a beauty like Mohinī's, that master of all animals spoke excitedly, "Why do I see you here alone in this deserted spot, mother of Gaṇendra? Where is, O Śaṅkari, your mount, the Indra among beasts? where are Jayā and Vijayā?" Smiling, Umā of the most alluring smile replied, "Indra among yogis, you had forgotten me, your humble servant, and stayed in this forsaken place so long. That is why I come, my husband, in hopes of seeing your two feet. Does a wife who loves her
husband go escorted by attendants when she greets him?

At dawn, my lord, does not the cakravākī bird proceed
alone to where her heart's mate waits." Affectionately, god

Īsāna, a trace of joy on his lips, gave Īsānī
a seat upon his deerskin. All about, buds burst open
into bloom; bees, now maddened with a thirst for honey, swarmed;
vernal, southern breezes blew; cuckoos cooed; and a rain of
blown blossoms cleansed by nighttime dew clothed that best of mountain
peaks. In Umā's bosom Kusumeṣu (what more fitting
dwelling place than this for Manasija) sat there strumming
merrily on his flower bow, letting fly a hail of
arrows—by love's scents was Trisūlī made mad! Overcome
by utter shame, Rāhu rushed forth, gobbled up the beaming
moon, while the smiling solar god hid within the ashes!

Then taking on the guise of Mohana, to captivate
his Mohini, that god spoke, smiling, "I know, my goddess,
all your inner thoughts—why Vāsava has come with Śacī
to our Kailāsa home and for what cause the jewel of
Raghus worshipped you at this untimely time. The son of
Nikaṣā is my greatest devotee, but that foolish
fellow is undone by the fruits of his own deed. My heart
aches just to think about him, Maheśvari! Alas, my
goddess, what can you give that human being, where will you
find the strength to block what is predestined from another birth? O Umā, send Kāma to the Indra of the gods.

Direct him to proceed at once, my Mahesi, to the residence of goddess Māyā. By the grace of Māyā, hero Laksmaṇa will slay the hero Meghanāda."

Minadhvaja set off, as the king of birds departs his nest and flies away, gazing back repeatedly toward his happy home. Fluffy clouds, golden color, wafting scented fragrances and raining flower blossoms—lotuses, both red and white, jasmine, semuti, jāti, pārijāta, and so forth, all beloved by gentle breezes—engulfed the god of gods, that greatest god, there with the greatest goddess.

By the golden door, inlaid with ivory, there awaits the moon-faced charmer of that Madana, tears in her eyes, aha! separated from her husband! It was then the companion of the spring reappeared. Not hesitating, Manmatha joyously stretched out his arms and drew his spouse in fond embrace to him, placating her with caring words. Her teardrops dried, as do the dewdrops on lotus petals when the sun shows himself upon the sunrise pinnacle. Regaining her heart's treasure, that richly handsome woman, her face to his (like the myna to the parrot during luscious springtime) spoke very loving words, "You have saved your
servant's life by coming back so soon to her, O joy of
Rati! Whom shall I tell how I worried? I cannot stop
trembling, husband, when I hear the name of godly Vāma
and recall those past events! that overwhelming, spiteful
Śūlapāṇi! Do not venture near him any more, swear
to me, O lord of my existence!" With a honeyed smile
Pañcaśara answered, "In a shady grove, who fears the
solar rays, my beauty. Let us greet the god clan's sovereign."

Manmatha reached where Vāsava was seated on his throne
of gold and, bowing low, relayed the message. Embarking
on his chariot, the charioteer monarch of the
gods sped off to Māya's dwelling. His spirited steed flew
through the sky, the fly-whisk plume upon its head unswerving;
those chariot wheels rumbled, churning clouds along their path.

In due time, the hero Sahasrākṣa reached the place where
Māya dwelt. Dismounting from his splendid chariot, that
foremost charioteer among divines stepped within the
temple. Who can ever put in words all of what that god
saw there? There sat the magic queen of Śaktis on a seat
of gold, radiant with added splendor from the sharpest
rays from the sun. With his palms pressed together, Vāsava
bowed most reverently and said, "Give this slave of yours your
benedictions, O great enchantress of the universe."
Upon vouchsafing him those benedictions, the goddess asked, "Tell me what has brought you here today, Aditi's son?"

Replied the sovereign of the gods, "At Śiva's orders, O grand Māyā, I have come to your abode. Inform his slave of yours how, by what strategy, can Saumitri on the morrow vanquish Daśānana's son? By your grace (so says Virūpākṣa) the warrior Laksmana will overcome that champion Meghanāda in ferocious combat."

The goddess thought a moment, then replied to Vāsava,

"When Tāraka, the Asura, indomitable, laid claim to heaven by repulsing you in battle, sovereign of divines, at such a time that general, the favored of the Kṛttikās, was conceived within Pārvatī's womb.³ To slay the Dānava king, Vṛṣabhadhvaja armed this warrior personally, forging weapons of tremendous strength. Observe this shield embossed with gold, and that sword, god, itself a god of death incarnate, lying sheathed over there. Look, Sunāsira, that awesome quiver, inexhaustible, replete with arrows the likes of venomous serpents, hoods flared. Gaze, god, upon the bow." Staring at the beauty of that bow, Śaci's valiant husband smiled and said, "How worthless is your humble servant's jeweled bow when matched with this. That best of shields blazes, like the solar orb—dazzling eyes."
That sword shines with furious force, like a flame. Where within this world, Mother, is another quiver such as that one?"

"Listen, god," resumed the goddess Māyā, "Ṣaḍānana vanquished Tāraka by the power from those weapons. And by the force of those same weapons, hero, Meghanāda soon will die—I speak the truth. Yet not a warrior within all three worlds, neither god nor human, can in a fair fight slay Rāvaṇi. Send this weaponry to Rāma's younger brother. I myself tomorrow shall proceed to Laṅkā and there protect Lakṣmaṇa, god, in his battle with the Rākṣasas. Go now to the land of the divines, treasure of the godly host. When Dawn, the friend of flowers, opens up the golden portals of the east tomorrow with her lotus hand, that lion among Indras among warriors will free you from your fear of Indrajit, constant dread of yours—Laṅkā's lotus-sun will sink behind the setting-hill."

In ecstasy, the Indra of the gods praised that goddess, gathered up the weapons, and then headed home to heaven.

The champion Vāsava took his seat upon the golden throne within the gods' assembly hall and called on champion Citraratha, "Bear these weapons carefully and go, great hero, straight to golden Laṅkā. Saumitri the lion will slay in combat Meghanāda come tomorrow by
the grace of Māyā. How that will happen, goddess Māyā
will inform him. You tell Rāghava, O sovereign of the
Gandharvas, that the denizens of heaven wish him well, that Hara's
love, Pārvatī herself, was pleased with him today. Bestow
upon him abhaya, high-minded one. If Rāvaṇi
is killed in battle, Rāvaṇa is sure to perish too.
And that jewel of the Raghu clan, Vaidehī's bliss, will
again regain his chaste Vaidehī. Mount my chariot,
O best of charioteers, and be on your way. Lest the
Rākṣasas catch sight of you in Lāṅkā and engage you
in hostilities, I am ordering the clouds to veil
the sky; I am summoning Prabhañjana and shall have
him loose the winds a while. Then lightning will come out to dance;
and I shall fill the world with swelling, rumbling thunderclaps."
Bowing humbly to the feet of the Indra among gods,
the charioteer Citraratha gathered cautiously
that weaponry and then proceeded to the mortal world.
The lord of gods called upon Prabhañjana and said, "Quick,
raise a cataclysmic storm in Lāṅkā city, sovereign
of the winds; set free imprisoned gales at once; bring on the
clouds; and quarrel somewhat raucously with the hostile lord
of waters!" That god exuberant, just like a lion
springing when his chains are broken, went to where the winds were
being held within the dark recesses of a mountain
cavern. From afar Pavana heard the loud and mindless
howling; he watched the mountain lurch from forces far inside
as though unable by its strength alone to hold in check
those mighty winds. By touch, the god pushed aside the stony
portal. With screams that menace, winds sped forth, as do waters
when embankments suddenly give way! Earth quaked; the ocean
roared! Rows of waves shaped like massive mountains tumbled, crashing
loudly, driven mad in combat with the winds! Clouds clamored
noisily as they scudded here, there. Lightning laughed, followed
by the crackling roar of thunder. The lord of stars, his stars
in tow, fled; all the while clouds surged over Laṅkā, belching
flames. Throughout the forest, timber snapped, toppling with a thud,
while violent storms whipped through the skies, streaming rain as if
to drown creation in Pralaya's deluge, dumping hail.

The Rākṣasas in panic dashed inside their homes. Amid
that camp, where stood the valiant Indra among Rāghavas,
came unannounced the charioteer Citraratha, like
the ray-ringèd sun, a royal robe cloaked his figure! Round his
waist there shone an ornamental girdle with a mass of
brilliance like constellations of the zodiac—from it
hung the best of swords, brightly coruscating! How shall the
poet pen the golden glow from his godly quiver, bow,
shield, armor, lance, and coronet of sunbeams? That godly
shine bedazzled, and soon a scent from heaven filled the land.

Most respectfully that best of Raghus bowed before the
godly messenger, then asked, "Heavenly inhabitant,
what land but heaven, ah me, is adorned by such grandeur,
such grace? Why are you here today, forsaking Nandana
gardens—please tell your servant that. I have no throne of gold,
O god. What shall I offer as a seat? Yet if you, lord,
feel some compassion toward your slave, accept this water for
the washing of your feet, and take these presents, and kindly
sit upon this seat of kuśa grass. Rāghava, alas,
is but a beggar!" And blessing him, that charioteer
took a seat on the kuśa grass, then spoke in sweetest tones,
"My name is Citraratha—hear me out, Dāśarathi.
I am a faithful devotee and serve the Indra of
the gods, come rain or shine. The Gandharvas are under my
command. I journeyed to this city in accordance with
Indra's orders. That monarch of the gods and the god clan
wish you well. Gaze at these weapons, gem of men. The king of
gods sends them to your younger sibling. Great goddess Māyā
will come at dawn to explain by what course of action the
champion Lakṣmaṇa will slay the champion Meghanāda,
on the morrow. You are beloved by the gods, O jewel
of the Raghu clan. Abhayā herself is pleased with you!"

Replied the son of Raghu, "At these auspicious tidings, O best of Gandharvas, I am afloat in a sea of bliss! Yet I am but an ignorant mortal—alas, how shall I ever show you my appreciation? Tell me!"

That messenger said with a smile, "Listen, gem of Raghus, gratitude for gods, protection of the poor, suppression of one's senses, treading ever on the path of dharma, serving constantly the goddess Truth, even offerings of sandalwood and flower blossoms, foods, and garments made of silk and such the gods will scorn if he who offers them is himself untrue. This basic fact I tell you truly."

Rāmacandra bowed. Charioteer Citraratha gave his blessings, then departed for the city of the gods in his godly chariot. The raucous tempest calmed; the ocean settled down. Golden Laṅkā smiled again as she gazed upon the moon with starry entourage. Entering the gentle waters, moonlight once more bathed her silvery form while out of curiosity the lotus blossoms grinned. Anew, cadaver-eating jackals ran out on the battle ground along with droves of vultures, ghouls, and buzzards. The Rākṣasas, drunk from all the liquor of heroics, came out-of-doors once more, brandishing their awesome bludgeons.
Thus ends canto number two,
called "weapons acquisition,"
in the poem

*The Slaying of Meghanāda.*