Hero Saumitri the lion left that woods, returning
to the camp where the lordly Raghu king was waiting. That
noble-natured one moved swiftly, as when a huntsman spies
the king of beasts in the forest, then runs for his weapons
— to choose with haste his deadliest club for mortal combat.

Moments later, that most celebrated one reached the spot
where the Raghu charioteer stood. Bowing before that
pair of feet, then showing deference to Vibhīśaṇa,
their best of friends, the high-minded one spoke, "This faithful thrall
of yours has found success today, my lord, by your blessings.
With your two feet in mind, I proceeded to the forest
and there did pūjā to Cāmuṇḍā, my lordship, in her
golden temple. To confuse your servant, a myriad
of chaste maids spread their net of māyā—how shall I, who am
so ignorant, recount all of that before your feet? I
came upon Candraçūḍa, guardian of the gates, but
he let me pass without a struggle due to the power
of your virtues, my lord—just as a great serpent slithers
away, powerless against the virtues of a potent
antidote!—and thereupon this slave of yours entered that
forest. Next a lion threatened, snarling, but I turned him
back; a most raucous storm blew in with terrifying howls;
forest fires, ever so like doomsday's conflagration, raged
throughout the land, burning trees in all directions; but, in
a moment's time, that companion of the wind went out of
its own accord, and the wind god vanished. It was then I
saw in front of me a gathering of heavenly maids,
sporting in the sylvan grove; with hands cupped reverently, I
honored them, begged a boon, my lord, then bid farewell to them
all. Not far off, a temple shone resplendently within
the woods, brightening up that fair land. I descended to the
lake, bathed my body, and with a blue lotus offering
I worshipped Mother fervently. appeared before
me, granting me a boon. Said that lady of compassion,
'Most pleased with you today, son of chaste Sumitrā, are all
the gods and goddesses. Vāsava has sent you weapons
of the gods. On Śiva's orders I myself have come to
expedite this task of yours. Take up your godly weapons,
warrior, and then with Vibhīṣaṇa traverse the city
proper to where Rāvaṇi worships Vaiśvānara in
the temple of the Nikumbhilā sacrifice. There pounce
precipitately on that Rākṣasa, as a tiger
strikes, and destroy him. By my boon you two will enter sight
unseen; I shall sheath you in a veil of māyā, like a
sword inside its scabbard. Now go with a stout heart, you of
renown.' Tell me, what is your wish, O jewel among men?
Night departs, and we must not delay. Shall I slay that son
of Rāvaṇa, my lordship, please command this slave of yours!"

The Raghu lord replied, "Alas, how—when living beings,
panic-stricken, run panting for their lives with wind's speed on
seeing in the distance that messenger of Death, by whose
venom gods and men alike are reduced to ashes—how
can I send you into such a serpent's hole, you who are
more than life to me? Sītā's rescue is not to be. For
naught, Ocean, did I shackle you, slay countless Rākṣasas
in war, and bring that Indra among kings with retinue
and army to this golden Laṅkā. Alas, for no good
cause at all did bloody torrents, the likes of rain, drench this
earth. Kingdom, wealth, father, mother, kin and comrade—by quirk
of luck I lost them all. All I had left in my darkened
room was the lamp, Maithili; now misfortune (ah Fate, by
what fault am I deemed guilty at your feet?) has extinguished
even that. Who is there left in my line, Brother, whose face
I can gaze upon and by so doing sustain this life
of mine? Shall I live on in this mortal world? Come, let us
once again return, Lakṣmaṇa, to our forest refuge.
At an inauspicious time, befuddled by the lure of
Hope, we came, Brother, to this city of the Rākṣasas."

Saumitri the lion answered with a warrior's brashness,
"What makes you, Raghu lord, so fearful? In all three worlds whom should that hero fear who has in his possession godly powers? Sahasrākṣa, the gods' sovereign, takes your side, so too does Virūpākṣa, that denizen of Kailāsa, and the maiden of the mountain, his ever faithful wife.

Look there, toward Laṅkā—the anger of the gods, like blackened clouds, hovers over golden hues on all four sides. Smiles of the gods, my lord, illuminate this camp of yours, just see! Direct this slave of yours, and I shall take up my godly weapons and march into the Rākṣasa's abode; I shall for sure destroy the Rākṣasa, by favor of those feet of yours. You are sage, my lord. Why do you fail to heed the orders of the gods? You always tread dharma's path; why then, Aryan, do you today engage in this un-dharmic act? Who has kicked the consecrated water pot, and where?"

With honeyed words, the ally, hero Vibhīṣaṇa, spoke,

"What he says is true, O charioteer, Indra among Rāghavas. Rāvaṇi, bane of Vāsava and throughout the world invincible, is in prowess like the overpowering messenger of Death. But today it makes no sense for us to dread him. In a dream, O jewel of the Raghus, I saw the Rājalakṣmī of the Rākṣasas.

Sitting by my head, my lord, and making bright the camp with
her purest rays, that faithful wife addressed this lowly one,

'Alas, Vibhiṣaṇa, your brother is now drunk with pride.

Would I, who abhor defilement, willingly reside in

such a sinful household? Does the lotus ever bloom in

muddy waters? When does one see stars in a cloudy sky?

Due to former deeds of yours, however, the immortals

are favorably disposed toward you. You will inherit the

umbrella and the scepter and the vacant kingly throne.

By Fate's decree, I today install you, famed one, as lord

of all the Rākṣasas. This coming day Sumitṛa's son,

the lion, will slay your nephew Meghanāda. You will

act as his accomplice. Carry out the gods' command with

care, my future king of Karbūras.' I awoke and sensed

the entire camp was permeated by a scent from

heaven, and I heard somewhat removed heavenly music,

playing softly in the sky. At the gateway to the camp

I, astounded, saw that charming woman who charms him who

inflames Madana.³ A chignon that resembled massive

clouds hid from view the nape of her neck; in her hair glistened

strings of jewels—ah me! compared to that, lightning's luster

streaking through roiling thunderheads is of small consequence!

Then suddenly Jagadambā vanished. For a time I

stood there staring, thirsty-eyed, but my want was not fulfilled;
Mother did not show herself again. Listen well to all
I have to say, charioteer Dāśarathi. Just give
the order; I shall go where Rāṇāṇi does pūjā to
god Vaiśvānara in the sacrificial temple. O
keeper of men, keep strictly to the gods' command. I tell
you, your cherished goal will for sure be reached, best Rāghava."

Sitā's husband answered, eyes filled with tears, "When I recall
those days gone by, best of Rāṣṣasas, my troubled heart cries out. How can I cast this jewel of a brother into
unplumbed waters? Alas, O friend, when mother Kaikeyī,
heartless—it was my bad luck—followed Mantharā's selfish
scheme and I, therefore, forsook the comforts of the kingdom
to preserve the good name of our father, that fond brother,
moved by love for brother, quit the courtly life of his own
free will. Mother Sumitrā wept. From an upper level
in the women's quarters his wife Ûrmilā wailed. And all
the other city residents—how can I tell you how
much they all pleaded? But he would pay no heed at all to
their entreaties. Instead, following behind me (like my
very shadow), my brother entered eagerly the woods,
freely giving up for good his youthful adolescence.
Said mother Sumitrā, 'You steal away my heart's desire,
Rāghava. Who knows by what magic's power you have tricked
my baby. Now I must entrust my treasure to your care.

"Sitā's rescue, best of friends, is not to be. Let us turn back to our forest sanctuary. Difficult to beat in combat is that Indra among charioteers, that Rāvaṇi, bane of gods, Daityas, and of men. Sugrīva, Indra of the mighty ones; prince Aṅgada, most learned when it comes to warfare; Hanumān, son of the wind and strong beyond all measure, like Prabhaṅjana, his father; Dhūmrākṣa, a ball of fire upon the battlefield, most comet-like; there is Nala and there Nīlā; Keśarī—a lion of a champion from the vantage of his foes; and all the other soldiers, god-like in appearance and as heroic as the gods; you, O great charioteer—

when you with help from all these are unable to defeat that Rāķṣasa, how then, pray tell, can Lakṣmaṇa engage him all by himself? Alas, Hope is a sorceress, I tell you, friend, for she is why we leapt across the waters that cannot be crossed and came to the Rāķṣas' domain."

Then of a sudden, in the regions of the firmament, Sarasvati, born of the skies, spoke in dulcet tones, "Tell me, is it proper for you, husband of Vaidehī, to doubt the word of gods, you who are the favorite of the
god clan? Why, O hero, do you spurn the gods' advice? Cast
a glance into the void." Amazed, the Raghu king saw there
a peacock fighting with a snake. The peacock's screeching cries
commingled with the hissing of the cobra, filling ten
directions with a frightful dissonance. Wings spanned the sky,
looking like a mass of clouds; amidst it all flashed *halā-
hala* poison, intense as any fiery holocaust.
Both fought fiercely. From fear, the earth began to tremble; the
ocean waters constantly were swelling, churning. The next
moment that best of peacocks plummeted to earth, quite dead;
the reptile hissed loudly—victorious in their struggle.\(^4\)

Said Rāvaṇānuja, "You saw with your own eyes that strange
sight; it is not devoid of portent, mark my words, husband
of Vaidehī; mull it over! It is no shadow play; the
gods have shown you through this *māyā* what will happen—today
leonine Saumitri will void Laṅkā of her hero!"

The jewel of the Raghu clan then entered once again
his tent and armed his beloved younger brother with those
godly weapons. Ah, that handsome warrior cut a gallant
figure, looking much like Skanda, the foe of Tāraka.
Upon his chest that high-minded one wore a coat of star-
studded armor; from his belt there flashed a brilliant saber,
embossed with precious stones. Down his back a shield glinted, like
the solar orb itself; beside it swung a quiver made
of ivory, gold-inlaid, and packed with arrows. In his left
hand that archer held firm the godly bow; on his head there
shone a coronet radiating all around (as though
fashioned from rays of the sun); from that crown bobbed constantly
a tuft of hair, just as a lion's mane bobs loosely on
the lion's back. Rāghavānūja dressed all excited,
shining brightly—just like the ray-ring sun god at high noon.

Hastily that hero left the camp—high spirited, like
a stallion at the sound of horns when the waves of warfare
crest and crash! Out went that best of warriors; out with him went
Vibhīṣaṇa attired in warrior's garb, fearsome when in
battle! Gods showered them with flowers; auspicious music
rang across the skies; Apsarās danced throughout the void; earth
heaven, and the netherworld filled with shouts of "Victory!"

Gazing toward the skies, hands cupped in supplication, that best
of Raghus prayed, "Beggar Rāghava begs for refuge at
your lotus feet today, Ambikā. Do not forsake, O
goddess, this humble slave of yours. How hard I have striven,
Mother, to maintain dharma—all this is not unknown to
those reddened feet of yours. Now, please, let this worthless being
savor dharma's fruits, O Mrtyuñjaya's darling. Satī,
protect my brother—more dear to me than life, this youth, this
Lakṣmaṇa—in his battle with the Rākṣasa. Quell that most turbulent Dānava. Save the gods, Nistārini!

Preserve your humble subjects, O slayer of the demon buffalo; trample under foot the frenzied Rākṣasa!"

In such a manner the enemy of Rākṣasas praised Sati. Just as breezes waft a wealth of fragrance into royal quarters, so too the air, which carries sound, bore the prayer of Rāghava to the residence at Kailāsa.

Indra of the heavens smiled in heaven, and Pavana of his own accord moved it swiftly through the carrier of sound. On hearing that sweet prayer, Mother—daughter of the mountain—overjoyed, said, "Be it so," and gave her blessings.

Dawn, she who is dispeller of both gloom and sorrow, flashed a smile on the rising-hill, as Hope, indeed, does upon a sad heart. Birds cooed in wooded groves, bumblebees darted here and there. Night softly sauntered off, taking with her stars; splendidly a single star yet shone upon Dawn's forehead but shone with all the brilliance of a hundred stars. Flower blossoms now bloomed in her tresses—a novel star array.

Turning to that best of Rākṣasas, Rāghava then said— "Be cautious, friend. The beggar Rāma has entrusted to you, best of charioteers, Rāma's priceless gem. No need of further words—my life and death this day are in your hands."
Hero Vibhiṣaṇa reassured the great archer, "You are favored by the gods, O jewel of the Raghu clan; whom do you have to fear, my lordship? Champion Saumitri will, of course, best in combat the champion Meghanāda."

Bowing to those feet of the Indra of the Rāghavas, Saumitri started off with his comrade Vibhiṣaṇa. Layers of thick clouds enveloped both of them, just as fog in the winter season encircles mountain peaks at the break of day. Invisible, the two advanced toward Laṅkā.

The goddess Māyā stepped into that golden temple where Kamalā—Rājalakṣmī of the clan of Rākṣasas, dressed in wifely Rākṣasa attire—was seated on her lotus throne. Smiling, that Ramā, Keśava's beloved, queried, "What brings you on this day, O great goddess, to this city? Voluptuous one, please tell me of your wishes."

Answered Māyā, the queen of Śaktis, with a gentle smile, "Today hold in check your power, daughter of the ocean; god-like charioteer Saumitri will penetrate this golden city, and by Śiva's orders that champion will vanquish haughty Meghanāda in the temple of the Nikumbhilā sacrifice. Your radiant power is like the fires of annihilation, O radiating woman, and hence, what enemy is there capable of
entering this city? Show sympathy to Rāghava,

O goddess, I beseech you. Grant him a boon, O wife of Mādhava; spare Rāma, a follower of dharma's path."

With a forlorn sigh, Indirā replied, "Who can fail to

heed your word, you who are adored throughout the universe?

But my heart cries out as I contemplate all this. Alas,

that best of Rākṣasas and his consort Mandodari
do my pūjā lovingly—what more can I say? True, it

is through his own fault that the wealth of Rākṣasas is lost.

I shall therefore hold in check my power, goddess, for how
can I impede the course of destiny? Tell Saumitri

he may enter, without fear, the city. Appeased, I grant

him this boon: may Sumitra's hero son in the coming

battle best the foe-defeating son of Mandodari."

To the western gate walked Keśava's desire—most fetching,
she, like a full-blown bloom at dawn cleansed by dewdrops. With that

pretty one went Māyā. Succulent banana saplings

withered; auspicious water pots shattered on their own; the

waters of this world went dry. For, that sustaining power

blended then and there with the red lac dye which lined her feet,
as at Night's departure the gossamer of nectar moon-

beams blends into the net of solar rays. Laṅkā's beauty

faded, ah! as when the jewel on the forehead of the
cobra's mate is lost. Afar, clouds of a sudden rumbled
loudly; the sky wept rain; the lord of waters tossed and turned;
mother earth quaked violently, lamenting, "Oh, my city
of the Rākṣasas, this plight of yours—you who used to be,
O golden lady, the very ornament of this world!"

The two of them climbed the city ramparts and viewed not far
away god-like Saumitri, like sun-god Tviśāmpati,
veiled in fog, or like the lord of fire, that Vibhāvasu,
cloaked in billowing smoke. Alongside was charioteer
Vibhīśaṇa—the wind with wind's companion—difficult
to overcome in combat. Who could save today, alas,
the hope of Rākṣasas, that Rāvaṇi. As the tiger,
maneuvering for position, moves under cover of
the brush when he spots a fine stag off in some dense woods—or
as the crocodile, the likes of Yama's discus weapon
incarnate, with swiftness glides undetected out toward that
distant bather he caught sight of in the middle of the
river—so too did champion Lakṣmaṇa with companion
Vibhīśaṇa proceed with speed to slay the Rākṣasa.\textsuperscript{5}

With a sigh of resignation and bidding her good-byes
to Māyā, pretty Indirā returned to her own home.
Mādhava's beloved wept. Mother earth in joy soaked up
those teardrops—as oysters suck in tenderly, O cloud maids,
water from your eyes and form priceless pearls whose excellence
is born when chaste Svātī shines in the circle of the sky.

By the strength of Māyā's power, that pair of warriors marched
into the city. At Saumiti's touch the portals flew
wide open with a thunderous clatter, but whose ears did
that racket reach? Alas! all Rākṣasa charioteers
were made deaf by Māyā's trickery; none saw those foemen,
like Kṛtānta's messengers, overpowering, serpents
slithering slyly into a bed of blooming flowers.

Quite surprised, Rāmānuja gazed all around and saw a
force of four divisions at the gateway—mahouts on their
elephants, horsemen on their steeds, great charioteers in
chariots, and on the ground foot soldiers, messengers of
Śamana—fearsome, like Bhīma, unbeatable in war.
A glow like creation's final fire filled the firmament.

Nervously the heroes gazed upon the all-consuming
blazing Virūpākṣa, a stellar Rākṣasa, who held
a prakṛṣṭvedana weapon and rode astride a golden
chariot. There stood the champion Tālajāṅgha, as tall
as a tāla palm—like a Gadādhara, enemy
of Mura. And there was Kālanemi upon the back
of an elephant, a warrior with the power to deal
death to foes. Fond of the fight and deft as well, Pramatta
stayed besotted always on the liquor of heroics.

Cikṣura, a Rākṣasa who seemed an equal to the
sovereign of the Yakṣas—and there were other mighty
heroes, terrors all to gods, Daityas, and mankind. Calmly,
with utmost care, the two proceeded. Saumitri, silent,
observed on either side of them hundreds and hundreds of
golden temples, shops and gardens, ponds and fountains; stabled
horses, elephants within stalls; countless chariots the
hue of fire; arsenals; and charming theaters adorned
with precious stones, ah yes! just as in the city of the
gods! Who is able to describe Laṅkā's many riches—
the envy of the gods! coveted by Daityas! who can
count the jewels in the ocean or stars throughout the sky!

Within the city those champions gaped in rapt attention
at the Rākṣasa king's palace. Golden colonnades and
diamond columns glistened; the pinnacles protruding from
that edifice reached the sky, resplendent like the peaks of
Mount Hemakūṭa. Ivory embossed with the charm of gold
enhanced the windows and the doors, a delight to the eye,
looking splendidly like shafts of sun at daybreak on a
mound of snow. That much celebrated Saumitri stared in
stupefaction, then spoke to friend Vibhīṣaṇa, Indra
of champions, "Among monarchs, your elder brother is to
be praised, best of Rākṣasas, a sea of glory in this world. Ah, who owns such riches on the surface of this earth!"

With a dejected sigh hero Vibhiṣaṇa spoke, "You are right, gemstone of champions. Who, alas, does indeed own such riches on the surface of this earth? But nothing is forever in this mundane life. One goes, another comes—that is the way of the world, just like waves upon the sea. Come quickly, O best of charioteers, and carry out this day the slaying of Meghanāda; gain for yourself immortality, my lord, by drinking fame's elixir."

The two moved posthaste, unseen, by the grace of Māyā. Hero Lakṣmaṇa watched wives of Rākṣasas—who even put to shame doe-eyed lovelies—on the bank of a pond, gold water jugs perched on their hips, sweet smiles upon their honeyed lips. Lotus flowers bloomed in lakes that morn. Here and there a charioteer of imposing stature would emerge. Foot soldiers, decked out in iron armor, left their flowered beds. Someone blew a conch shell brazenly, putting all at once an end to sleep. Syces saddled up their mounts. Elephants trumpeted loudly, trunks flaunting mudgaras, on their backs resplendent silk trappings, fringed with pearl pendants. Chariot drivers loaded diverse weaponry and golden banners carefully onto their chariots. Enchanting morning
music could be heard within the many temples, ah me,

just like that played in homes throughout Bengal during dola

when all the gods appear on earth to worship Ramā's mate!

Flower-maids sauntered to and fro, gathering flower blooms,

filling all the paths with floral scents and brightening with

color their surroundings, just like Dawn, friend of the flowers.

Elsewhere others scurried here, now there, bearing loads of milk

and yogurt. Gradually the hustle and bustle and the

noise intensified as townsfolk woke throughout that city.

Someone said, "Come, let us mount the wall. If we fail to get

there early, we shall not secure a spot where from to view

the spectacular fight. I wish to soothe my eyes upon

our prince in martial garb and all those other excellent

warriors." Another answered boastfully, "What is the point,

I ask you, of ascending the city walls? Our prince will

best both Rāma and his younger brother Lakṣmaṇa in

an instant, for who in the world can stand his ground against

those arrows? Our enemy subduer will burn his way

through the opposition forces just as fire rages through

dry grasses. He will strike his uncle Vibhīṣaṇa a

frightful blow, then manacle that cur. Surely the victor

will come to the assembly hall to receive his royal

favors, so let us head for that assembly hall ourselves."
What more shall the poet say of all that hero saw and heard. Smiling inwardly, the famous one, divinely brave like a god himself and bearing godly weapons, moved on, followed by charioteer Vibhīṣaṇa. Close ahead there shone the temple of the Nikumbhīlā sacrifice.

Upon a cushion made of kuśa grass sat Indrajit worshipping his chosen deity in private, clad in silken clothes with a shawl made of the same, on his forehead a mark of paste made from sandalwood, around his neck, a garland. Incense smoldered in a censer; all about burned lanterns fueled with purified ghee. There were heaps of flower blossoms and a kośā-kośī dish and spoon, fashioned from rhinoceros horn and filled with you, O Jāhnavī, your water, you destroyer of defilement! To one side lay a golden bell and sundry offerings on a golden platter. The door was closed. All alone, the Indra among charioteers sat in a trance as though Candracūḍa— Indra among yogis—O Mount Kailāsa, on your crest!

As a tiger, driven by hunger, enters like Yama's messenger a cow shed, so fierce-limbed Lakṣmaṇa entered that god's house by Māyā's power. His sword clattered in its scabbard; shield and quiver clanged together violently; the temple trembled underneath the weight of that warrior's feet.
Startled, Rāvaṇi opened wide his eyes. The hero saw
in front of him a god-like charioteer—brilliantly
coruscating like the ray-ringed solar god at midday!

Prostrating himself in obeisance, the champion, with hands
cupped in supplication, said, "O Vibhāvasu, at a
most auspicious time your humble slave worshipped you today;
and thus, my lord, you sanctified this Laṅkā with the touch
of your two feet. But, for what reason, tell me, brilliant one,
have you come disguised as the mortal Lakṣmaṇa, foe of
Rākṣasas, to grace your devotee? What is this līlā
of yours, shining one?" Again that hero bowed to the ground.

Dreadful Dāśarathī, with a warrior's daring, answered,
"I am not god Vibhāvasu. Observe well, Rāvaṇi.
Lakṣmaṇa is my name, born to the Raghu clan. I have
come here, lion of all warriors, to vanquish you in war;
do battle with me instantly!" As a wayfarer stands
transfixed with terror if suddenly he sees upon his
path the king cobra, hood raised, just so that hero stared in
Lakṣmaṇa's direction. A fearless heart today had just
turned fearful! a lump of iron melted from high heat, ah
yes! the sun, by Rāhu, had been swallowed, darkening that
mass of brilliance of a sudden! summer's heat dried up the
lord of waters! by stealth, Kali entered Nala's body!
Astonished, the champion spoke, "If truly you are Rāma's younger brother, then tell me, charioteer, by what guile did you penetrate today the city of the king of Rākṣasas? There are hundreds and hundreds of Rākṣasas—in power the terror of the Yakṣa sovereign—who, with fearsome weaponry in hand, guard the city gates. The high walls of this city are like mountains; upon those ramparts pace ten thousand soldiers, like deadly discus weapons. By what strength of māyā, hero, did you fool them all? Who is the charioteer throughout this universe, born of gods or of men, who single-handedly could defend himself against that throng of Rākṣasas in battle? Why then do you mislead me, your humble servant, with this illusion; tell this slave that, Sarvabhuk! What grand jest is this of yours, O jester? Saumitri is no formless god; how could he penetrate this temple? Look there, the door is still now closed. Your lordship, grant this devotee of yours a boon that I may free Laṅkā of her fears by slaying Rāghava this day, that I may drive away the ruler of Kīśkindhyā, and that I might offer shackled at the feet of our great king the traitor Vibhūṣaṇa. Hear that, everywhere horn blowers sound their war horns. Were I to tarry, those troops of Rākṣasas would become dispirited; bid me farewell."
Responded god-like leonine Saumitri, "I am your
god of death, unruly Rāvaṇi! That serpent slithers
through the grass to bite him whose time has come! You are ever
drunk with pride; made hero by the power of the gods, you,
fool, constantly disdain those gods! You are undone at last,
rank one. By order of the gods, I challenge you to fight!"

So saying, the hero boldly bared his sword. Dazzling the
eye with the brilliance of the fire that ends the world, that most
excellent of sabers glinted, as do lightning-flash-filled
thunderbolts in the hands of Śakra. Then said the son of
Rāvaṇa, "If truly you are Rāmānuja, the fierce-
armed Lakṣmaṇa, then I shall certainly oblige your wish
for war with war; is ever Indrajit dissuaded from
the battlefield? But first accept my hospitality,
champion supreme, and abide within this edifice—you
may be the enemy of Rākṣasas, yet now you are
my guest. I shall dress myself in warrior's garb, for it is
not the practice, among the brotherhood of warriors, to
strike an unarmed foe. This code of conduct, best of warriors,
is not unknown to you, Kṣatriya—need I say more?"

In a voice like that of thunder, Saumitri spoke, "Once he
has caught a tiger in his snare, does the hunter ever
set him free? I shall slay you here and now, you imbecile,
in like fashion. You were born among the Rākṣasas, O evildoer; why with you should I heed the dharma of Kṣatriyas? I slay a foe by whatever means I can."

Said the conqueror of Vāsava, (like Abhimanyu, seeing all the seven champions, that champion, out of rage, became the very essence of some molten iron), "You are a blemish on the brotherhood of Kṣatriyas, fie on you a hundredfold, Lakṣmaṇa. You are without shame. Were the Kṣatriya fraternity to hear your name, in disgust those charioteers would place hands over ears. You stole into this temple in the manner of a thief; like a thief, you I shall punish. Were a snake to steal into the nest of Garuḍa, would he again return to his own hole, you reprobate? Who has brought you here, foul fellow?"

In the twinkling of an eye the strong-limbed one picked up the kośā dish and hurled it with a dreadful roar at the head of Lakṣmaṇa. To the ground the hero crashed, felled by that horrific missile, as the king of trees falls crashing from the force of the lord of winds. His godly weapons clattered, and the temple shook as though caught in a violent earthquake. There flowed a rivulet of blood. Quickly Indrajit seized the godly sword—but was incapable of lifting it. He grabbed the bow, drew it toward him, but the bow stayed steadfast
in Saumitri's grasp. Furious, he then clasped the shield, but
his strength proved powerless to carry out that task. As, in
vain, an elephant tugs at mountain peaks, his trunk wrapped round,
so tugged that Indra among champions at the quiver. Who
in the world comprehends Māyā's māyā! That proud one stared
at the door, defiant, in a rush of temper. Startled,
that best of warriors saw before him—a tremendous pike
in hand and looking like some Dhūmaketu—his uncle
Vibhīṣaṇa, a one most formidable in warfare.

"At last," the foe-conqueror said sadly, "I realize
how this Lakṣmaṇa gained entry to the city of the
Rākṣasas. Alas, O uncle, was such conduct proper
on your part, you whose mother is chaste Nikaśa, you who
are blood brother to the greatest of the Rākṣasas? and
to Kumbhakarṇa, the very image of the trident-
wielding Śambhu? and whose nephew has bested Vāsava?
You show the way to your own home, uncle, to a thief? You
seat a lowly Caṇḍāla in the residence of kings?
But I do not rebuke you, for you are one who is to
be revered, one comparable to my own father. Please step
aside from the doorway. I shall go to the armory,
then shall send Rāmānuja to the place of Śamana.
Today I shall expunge in war Laṅkā's ignominy."
Replied Vibhīṣaṇa, "Your efforts will prove futile, my knowing lad. It is Rāghava I serve; how could I do him harm, whom I am asked to guard?" Rāvāṇa responded deferentially, "O brother of my father, your words make me wish to die. You, the slave of Rāghava? How do you bring such language to your lips, O uncle, please tell that to this thrall of yours. Fate has set the crescent moon upon the brow of Sthāṇu—does that moon ever plummet to earth to wallow in the dust? O Rākṣasa charioteer, how could you forget who you are? into what exalted clan you were born? Who is that lowly Rāma after all? The regal geese sport upon a crystal lake among the lotuses—my lordship, do they ever go paddle into muddy waters, home of algae scum? The lion, Indra of the beasts, when does he ever, O you lion among warriors, address the jackal as a friend? He is but a dumb dog, and you, most wise; nothing is beyond the ken of those feet of yours. He is just a little-minded mortal, O champion, this Lakṣmaṇa; if that were not the case, would he have called an unarmed soldier to do battle? Now tell me, grand charioteer, is this the dharma seemly to grand charioteers? There is no child in Lāṅkā who would not laugh at such a claim. Out of my way. I shall be back
soon enough. We shall see today by what godly force this
foul Saumitri fends me off in combat. In battles with
gods, Daityas, and with men, you have seen through your own eyes, O
best of Rākṣasas, the prowess of your humble servant.
Shall we see if your slave shies from such a puny human
being? That braggart, insolent, entered here, this temple
of the Nikumbhilā sacrifice—command your thrall and
I shall make the worthless mortal pay. Into the city
of your birth, uncle, that forest dweller has set foot. O
Providence, do depraved Daityas stroll in paradise's
Nandana garden? Is the blooming lotus an abode
for worms? Tell me, uncle, how am I to tolerate an
affront like this—I, who am your brother's son? And you, too,
O jewel among Rākṣasas, how do you abide it?"

As when a snake is made to bow its upraised head by the
power of a mighty mantra, just so, shame-faced and glum,
that charioteer, Rāvana's younger brother, answered,
570 glaring at the son of Rāvana. "I am not to blame,
my child. You rebuke me all for naught. By the error of
his deeds, alas, has our king brought ruin on this golden
Laṅkā, and destroyed himself. The god clan religiously
abstains from sin, but Laṅkā city overflows with it.
And Laṅkā sinks within these blackened waters, just as earth
will do, come Pralaya. That is why, for protection, I
have sought the refuge of the feet of Rāghava. Who is
there who wants to drown for the wayward ways of someone else?"

The bane of Vāsava grew livid. Gravely, as when the
Indra among clouds rumbles angrily in the sky at
midnight, that Indra among warriors spoke, "You who follow
dharma's path, younger brother of the king of Rākṣasas,
are renowned throughout the world—according to what dharma,
pray do tell this humble servant, please, let me hear, did you
abandon all of these—your kin, your caste, your brothers? It
says in the learned books that even if outsiders are
with virtue and your people virtueless, still then your own,
devoid of virtue, are to be preferred—outsiders are
forever only that. Where, O best of Rākṣasas, did
you learn this lesson? But I, in vain, do reprimand you.

In such company, O brother of my father, why would
you not but learn barbarity? He who travels with the
lowest of the low becomes himself a lowly creature."

At this point, through the care of Māyā, Saumitri regained
consciousness and, with a roar, that hero twanged his bowstring.
Taking aim that champion pierced foe-besting Indrajit with
the keenest of his arrows, just as the enemy of
Tāraka, the great archer, pierced Tāraka with a hail
of arrows. Alas, there flowed a rivulet of blood (just
as a stream of water courses down the body of a
mountain in the monsoon season), moistening his clothes and
muddying the ground. That charioteer, beside himself
with pain, snatched up the conch shell, bell, the plate of offerings,
whatever was within the temple, and enraged hurled them
one by one—as charioteer Abhimanyu, unarmed
against the strength of arms of seven charioteers, threw
first the crests of chariots, their wheels, then broken swords, torn
leather shields, pierced armor, whatever he could lay his hands
upon. But illusive Māyā, stretching out her arms, caused
all those things to fall wide of the mark, just as a mother
brushes back mosquitoes swarming round her sleeping son with
a wave of her lotus-like hand. Enraged, Rāvaṇi ran
at Lakṣmaṇa, letting out a wild roar, like a lion
challenging the beaters there before him. But because of
Māyā's māyā, in all the four directions that hero
saw horrific Daṇḍadāhara mounted on his monstrous
water buffalo; saw Śūlapāṇi with the trident
in his grip; saw Caturbhujā with the conch, the discus,
and the mace in his four hands; and saw, with trepidation,
the multitude of the god clan's charioteers in their
vehicles from heaven. Dejected, the hero sighed and
stood there enervated, ah me, like the moon when swallowed
up by Rāhu or like the lion caught within a snare.

Rāmānuja let drop the bow, then bared his wondrous sword;
the eye was dazzled by light from its broad blade. Alas, the
blinded conqueror of foes, hero Indrajit, struck by
that falchion fell upon the ground drenched with blood. Mother earth
quaked violently; boisterously the ocean swelled. And at once
the whole universe filled with a stupendous noise. In the
heavens, on the earth, and throughout Pātāla, both mortal
and immortal beings, in sheer terror, anticipated
some disaster. There, as the sovereign of the Karbūras
sat in his courtly hall upon his golden throne, his crown
of gold of a sudden slipped from his head and tumbled down,
as the pinnacle on a chariot when severed by
an opposing charioteer teeters, then falls beneath
the car. Seized with misgivings, the champion, king of Laṅkā,
remembered Śaṅkara. Pramāla's right eye slightly twitched. 7
Absentmindedly, alas, that chaste wife, unawares, wiped
the vermilion from her pretty forehead. 8 For no reason,
Mandodari, queen consort of the Rākṣasas, swooned. And,
asleep in their mothers' laps, babies cried mournful wails, just
as Vraja's children cried the time their precious Śyāma made
the land of Vraja dark, setting off for Madhupura.
Felled in unfair combat, that foeman of the Asuras' foes, that hope of the Rākṣasa clan, addressed the champion Lakṣmaṇa with harsh words, "Disgrace to the community of warriors, you, Sumitrā's son! Shame on you a hundred times! I, the son of Rāvana, fear not Śamana. But what will be an eternal sorrow in my heart, base one, is that by a blow from your weapon I shall die today. I—who in pitched battle subdued Indra, the subduer of the clan of Daityas—am to die now by your hand? For what false step has Providence meted out such punishment upon this humble servant—shall I ever understand? What else can I say to you? When the lord of Rākṣasas gets word of this, who will save you, O meanest of all men? Even though you plunge into the sea's unfathomed waters, our sovereign's wrath will navigate to that domain—burning like Vāḍaba. That rage of his, like a forest fire, will incinerate you in the woods, if you flee into the forest, you beastly thing. Even Night, you fool, will not be capable of hiding you. Dānava, divine, or man—who is fit to rescue you, Saumitri, when Rāvana is angered? Who in the world will wipe away your blemish, blemished one?" Saying this, that noble-minded one recalled with sadness in those final moments the lotus feet of
both his mother and his father. Anxious, he grew calm as
he thought of Pramilā, his eternal bliss. Tears blended
with his blood as both flowed freely, alas, dampening the
earth. The sun to lotus Laṅkā had reached his setting-hill.
Like dying embers or gentle rays of Tviṣāmpati,
just so the mighty one lay on the surface of the earth.

His eyes awash with tears, Rāvana's younger brother spoke,
"You who always rest on finest silken bedding, fierce-armed
one, from what aversion do you lie now on the ground? What
would the king of Rākṣasas now say, were he to see you
lying on such bedding? and Mandodari, chief queen of
the Rākṣasas? and pretty Pramilā whose countenance
is like that of the moon of autumn? and all of Diti's
daughters, who in beauty shame the godly maidens? and chaste
Nikaśā, your aged grandmama? What will they all say,
the clan of Rākṣasas, and you, the crown-gem of that clan?
Get up, dear lad. It is I, your uncle, calling you—I,
Vibhiṣaṇa! Why do you not pay heed, you who are more
dear than life to me? Arise, dear boy, I shall open wide
the door immediately, as you requested. Proceed now
to the armory, efface today in battle Laṅkā's
stain. O pride of Karbūras, does the ray-ringed solar god,
delight to eyes of all the world, ever go beyond the
setting-hill at noon? Then why today do you, dressed as you are, famed one, lie upon the ground? The horns blow, listen there, they call to you; the king of elephants is trumpeting; horses whinny shrilly; armed is the Rākṣasas army, an Ugracanḍā when it comes to war. The enemy is at the city gates, get up, foe-conqueror. Preserve the prestige of this clan of ours in the coming battle."

In such a manner hero Vibhiṣaṇa wailed with grief.

Saddened by his comrade's sadness, leonine Saumitri spoke, "Restrain your sorrow, crown-gem of Rākṣasas. What is the purpose of such fruitless lamentation? It was Fate's decree that I slay this soldier; you are not to blame. Come, let us now return to camp where Cintāmaṇi worries, separated from his humble servant. Listen well, O champion, auspicious music emanates from the homes of heavenly beings." The best of charioteers then heard celestial melodies, most enchanting, like in a dream. The two left hurriedly, just as a hunter, when he slays the young of a tigress in her absence, flees for his life with wind's speed, panting breathlessly, lest that ferocious beast should suddenly attack, wild with grief at finding her cubs lifeless! or, as champion Aśvatthāmā, son of Droṇa, having killed five sleeping boys inside the Pāṇḍava camp
in dead of night, departed going with the quickness of
a heart's desire, giddy from the thrill and fear, to where lay
Kuru monarch Duryodhana, his thigh broken in the
Kurukṣetra war! They both traveled unseen, by Māyā's
grace, to where the champion, the joy of Maithilī, was camped.

Bowing to those lotus feet, Saumitri the lion spoke
with utmost deference the following, hands together,
"By the grace of your two feet, jewel of the Raghu clan,
this humble slave proved superior to the Rākṣasa
in combat. Meghanāda—that hero, that conqueror
of Śakra—is no more." Then planting a kiss atop his
younger brother's head and hugging him affectionately,
his lordship spoke, eyes wet with tears, "I have gained again this
day by your strength of arms my Sītā, O Indra of great
physical prowess. You, of all the heroes, are to be
most lauded. Praise be to mother Sumitrā. Praise to your
father Daśaratha, the progenitor of you and
most valued of the Raghu clan. Fortunate am I, your
elder brother; lucky is your place of birth, Ayodhyā.
This fame of yours will be proclaimed throughout the world for all
time to come. But remember, offer pūjā to the strength-
bestowing gods, my fondest one. Man is forever weak
when dependent on his own strength only; and if success
is realized, it is by the good graces of the gods."

Addressing Vibhīṣaṇa, ally supreme, the husband
of Vaidehī intoned warmly, "At a most auspicious
moment, O companion, I came upon you in this land
of Rākṣasas. You, in the guise of a Rākṣasa, are
good fortune for the Rāghavas. You today have placed
the clan of Rāghavas in your debt by your merit, gem
of merit. As the king of planets is the monarch of
the day, so too, I say to you, the king of friends is you.
Come everyone, worship her who is beneficent, that
Śaṅkari." And from the sky the gods in great delight rained
down blossoms. Jubilant, the army bellowed, "Hail, spouse of
Sītā!" In terror, golden Lāṅkā woke to peals of glee.

Thus ends canto number six,
called "the slaying,"
in the poem

*The Slaying of Meghanāda.*