

Gods, Demons, and Others Study Guide

Gods, Demons, and Others by R. K. Narayan

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Contents

Gods, Demons, and Others Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
One; Lavana, Chudala and Yayati.....	4
Two; Devi, Viswamitra, Manmata.....	10
Three; Ravana, Valmiki, Draupadi.....	15
Four; Nala, Savitri, The Mispaird Anklet, Shakuntala.....	20
Five; Harischandra, Sibi.....	25
Characters.....	28
Objects/Places.....	34
Themes.....	37
Style.....	39
Quotes.....	41
Topics for Discussion.....	43



Plot Summary

Written by R.K. Narayan, who is regarded as one of India's greatest English language novelists, *Gods, Demons and Others* is a collection of some of the most well-known stories of Hindu mythology. They are taken, in part, from the ancient texts of 'The Ramayana', an epic hero's tale starring Rama, which is known in one form or another by every man, woman and child in the Indian society, and 'The Mahabharata', which is the other major epic tale of the culture, starring two rival families and chronicling their struggles. The stories of 'Viswamitra', 'Ravana' and 'Valmiki' are all taken from 'The Ramayana'. 'Yayati', 'Draupadi', 'Nala', 'Savitri', 'Shakuntala', 'Harischandra' and 'Sibi' are out of 'The Mahabharata'. The source of 'Lavana' and 'Chudala' is the 'Yoga-Vasishta'. The source of 'Devi' is the 'Devi Bhagavatam', and the source of 'Manmata' is the 'Shiva Purana'. Finally, 'The Mispaird Anklet' is from the Tamil epic 'Silapadikham'.

Narayan included only stories that revolved around outstanding personalities, and he aimed at assembling as large a variety of characters as possible. It was his hope that taken together, they would provide the reader with a total picture of Indian mythology. These stories, as written within this text, are not meant to be taken as translations. In the preface of the work, Narayan explains that a storyteller reciting one of these stories orally to a crowd of villagers would often embellish it with long theological or didactic tangents, aimed at criticizing modern attitudes or expounding on a philosophy. Such tangents, if added to this volume, would expand it to epic and unpublishable proportions. While the storyteller, or narrator, is vital to any of these stories, Narayan has kept him in the background as much as possible unless he is needed to come forward with an explanation or introduction.

The storyteller, or Pandit, is really the crux of all the short stories in this collection. He is a key figure within the rural Indian community. At the end of a long, laborious day working in the fields, the members of a rural village would gather on the front doorstep of the storyteller's hut, wanting some entertainment. The stories that the storyteller would recite to the villagers were essentially road maps detailing how to properly live one's life, and the characters in these epics were considered prototypes and molds in which humanity is meant to be cast. Among the villagers, it would not matter if an individual was or was not literate. The oral tradition would insure that even those who could not read the written word would be able to participate. This is very important, as every story has within it philosophical or moral significance, and would outline the distinctions between good and evil. The collection of stories in this work are ones that would have been heard over and over again within the Indian culture, meant to be pondered over again and again, in order to engender within the listener an ever deepening understanding of life, death and destiny.



One; Lavana, Chudala and Yayati

One; Lavana, Chudala and Yayati Summary and Analysis

Lavana: The story of Lavana begins with the Pandit contemplating the idea of modern man being "flung" into space to circle the Earth, and how such a man does not wait for the day to turn into night. He, rather, takes matters into his own hands in the name of science. To illustrate the nature of time, the Pandit tells the story of Lavana, who is the ruler of an ancient kingdom called Uttar Pandava. Lavana is a good ruler, loved by his subjects. One day a stranger arrives in his kingdom, boasting that he is a magician who can perform feats the king has never before seen. The king warns him that he has seen all manner of magic and will not be impressed with anything ordinary. The magician assures him that he does not operate out of a bag of tricks; rather, he uses nothing but his eyes to facilitate his magic. The king looks into the magician's eyes and all that he sees and knows around him dissolves.

He finds himself alone in a field with a wild black horse whom he cannot catch or tame. The king chases after the horse and travels far into strange lands. He finally mounts the horse to discover it is a flying horse, who lands him atop a giant tree filled with monkeys. The king falls from the tree away from the flying horse and the monkeys and is glad to be back on solid ground. He begins walking and continues for many days and nights until he is overtaken by hunger, thirst and fatigue. A young woman comes along, who is carrying food to her father chopping wood in the forest. The king begs her to take pity on him, to save him and feed him, and she refuses to do so unless he marries her.

The king agrees to marry her, and is content to be the son-in-law of a woodcutter. In time, the king becomes the head of the family, So much time has passed that the king has no memory of his former life. The king is borne four sons by his wife. A great famine strikes the land, and the king and his family are forced to move from their home. As they wander, the king insists that the eldest three sons, whom he detests, go off and make their own way. The king is fond only of the youngest son, who, like the king and his wife, is in a delirium from hunger and exhaustion. The king promises to start a fire and find some meat to cook for him.

With that, the king awakens from his dream to find himself sitting in his assembly hall as though no time at all has passed. He asks his subjects how long he slept, and they tell him he was only unconscious for a minute or two. The king insists that he has passed through a whole lifetime of seventy years. He looks around to find the magician, but he is nowhere to be found.

Chudala: Sikhi-Dhvaja is a young prince who is interested in nothing but games and sport and militia. At sixteen, he sets out to conquer in the name of his father, and by the age of eighteen, he is very accomplished in these matters. He is blind to the ways of love or the charms of women up to this point, but soon becomes aware of the language



of birds when they utter their love calls. As such, his father arranges for him to marry a beautiful young princess named Chudala. The two live in bliss for many years as husband and wife. Suddenly, the couple becomes dissatisfied with their life together, wondering how long they can go on doing nothing more than enjoying their lives. They contemplate the idea that there must be more to life, and seek to turn over a new leaf. Chudala, thus, spends all her time in study and by disciplining her mind, progresses quickly in her quest for illumination and self-knowledge. Sikhi-Dhvaja notices a change in his wife and comments on her radiance, and she replies that she has a sense of peace and oneness with every being.

The spiritual development of Sikhi-Dhvaja is stunted in comparison to Chudala, and her husband's crassness makes her sad. The situation soon becomes intolerable for Sikhi-Dhvaja, and he retires to the forest to meditate. Chudala weeps for the absence of her husband and rules the country in his stead. Because of her enlightenment, she is able to follow him psychically through his plight. Since she has also mastered the art of assuming any form she chooses, Chudala appears before her husband in the form of a young male aspic named Kumbha, who tells Sikhi-Dhvaja that he struggles because he has no guru, and that he, Kumbha, will assume this role. She explains that renouncing one's external possessions is not enough; he must also cultivate a detachment that will render him unaffected by good and evil, pain and pleasure, loss and gain. Kumbha leaves Sikhi-Dhvaja to his task, regains her queenly form and returns to her duties in the kingdom.

When she returns to the forest to check on her husband's progress, however, she finds him emaciated and in a trance from which he cannot be awakened. She must enter his body and awaken him from the inside out. When he is fully awake, he proclaims to her (as Kumbha) that he is now above all passions and has complete confidence in himself. Together, Sikhi-Dhvaja and Kumbha travel the world and behold many wondrous places. Chudala finds herself longing for her husband's company as a woman and not as his guru.

Kumbha leaves Sikhi-Dhvaja to become Chudala again, in order to attend state matters, and returns to him again as his guru in two days. Sikhi-Dhvaja notices that Kumbha looks sad, and Kumbha tells him a fabrication. He says that it is because the sage Durvasa had put a curse on him so that he will retain his manhood only during the day, but will be transformed into a woman every night. Sikhi-Dhvaja assures Kumbha that no matter what his form is, he will always be his guru and friend. When night falls, Kumbha excuses himself from the king to transform into a beautiful woman named Mandanika. She persuades the king to take her as his wife, and she finds that the king, though responsive, is untouched by any experience. Chudala is satisfied that her husband has come through the first test successfully; he is now so far advanced that he makes no distinction between yielding and resisting, as these things are immaterial and outside him.

Chudala decides to put Sikhi-Dhvaja through a second test. She wishes to see how far he will yield to bhoga, or pleasure and enjoyment. She creates an illusory Indra to set before him, who tells him that since he has achieved such spiritual enlightenment, there



is no reason why he should not join the Indra in his world of unending pleasure and delight. The king tells the Indra that one needs not seek happiness externally, and that true contentedness exists only within. Chudala is satisfied with this answer, and plans a third test for her husband to see if he has mastered krodha, or anger.

Chudala transforms herself into Mandanika, and also creates a lover for herself so that the king may catch them in passion's embrace. When the king finds them, he regards them indifferently and goes about his own business. Mandanika begs the king for forgiveness, but he explains that there is no need. She asks if he will still have her as his wife. He thinks about this for a moment, and decides that it may not be necessary for them to be husband and wife any longer. He tells her that no matter what form she chooses, Kumbha or Mandanika, he or she will always be dear to his heart. Chudala then transforms into her original form and explains to the king what has been happening. He exclaims that man's truest guru is, indeed, his wife. Sikhi-Dhvaja and Chudala return to their kingdom to rule in peace and happiness for ten thousand years.

Yayati: In the war between the gods and anti-gods (asuras), the asuras are always winning, as they are guided by the great sage Sukracharya who is master of the Sanjivini mantra. The Sanjivini mantra is an incantation that can bring the dead back to life, and is known only to Sukracharya. The gods decide to send Kacha, son of Brihaspati, the presiding god of wisdom and acumen, into the realm of the demon king Vrishaparva, to study as Sukracharya's pupil. Sukracharya accepts the charming and humble Kacha as his disciple, but only if Kacha will commit to a vow of celibacy. Sukracharya becomes quite fond of his young student, as does Sukracharya's daughter, Devayani, who falls in love with him. Meanwhile, the asuras realize that Kacha's knowledge of the Sanjivini mantra will lead to their demise, they begin to make attacks on his life. First they cut him into bits and feed him to wolves and dogs, but Sukracharya brings him back to life. Next, they murder him and grind him into a powder that they dissolve in the sea. Again, Sukracharya brings him back. Then, the asuras kill him, burn his body and make a flour from the ashes that they dissolve in Sukracharya's wine. In order to bring him back this time, Sukracharya himself must die, because when he utters the incantation, Kacha will burst his belly emerging from it. So, while Kacha is in his bowels, Sukracharya teaches him the Sanjivini incantation so he can be brought back to life himself. Sukracharya explains to the demons that as a result of their vicious attacks on Kacha, he has now learned the mantra and is now equal to Sukracharya himself, the thing they most feared.

Kacha decides that the time has come to return to his own world, but Devayani begs him not to go and to marry her instead. When he refuses, she curses him, vowing that the mantra he learned from Sukracharya be ineffectual. In turn, he curses her, vowing that she will never find happiness in marriage. The gods rejoice when Kacha returned with the Sanjivini mantra, and immediately set forth to provoke the asuras. Indra, leader of the gods, plans to disrupt the relationship between Vrishaparva, the king of the demons, and Sukracharya. He spies a group of women bathing, among them Devayani, as well as the daughter of Vrishaparva, Sarmishta. Indra goes to the bank of the river and mixes up the clothing the women have left on the bank, so that when they emerge,



Devayani takes up Sarmishta's robe instead of her own. Sarmishta is enraged and insults Devayani and throws her into a deep well.

The young prince, Yayati, from a neighboring country, is out hunting deer when he comes upon Devayani in the well. He helps her out of the well, and she asks that he marry her. He gently puts her off by saying he is not worthy. Sukracharya becomes worried about his missing daughter and goes in search of her. When he finds her, she vows that she will never set foot in the city again because of what Sarmishta has done to her. Sukracharya vows that he will stand by his daughter, and tells Vrishaparva that he is left forever to his own devices. Vrishaparva repents to Sukracharya and Devayani, promising he will do anything to find himself in their favor again. Devayani declares that to be appeased, Sarmishta must agree to become her servant, and it becomes so.

Again, Yayati encounters Devayani while chasing a deer, and he also sees the beautiful Sarmishta, who captures his attention. Devayani summons her father and insists that he allow her to marry Yayati. Yayati has no choice but to marry Devayani with her father's blessing, and they are wed, but Sukracharya warns Yayati never to call Sarmishta to his sleeping chamber, speak to her alone or touch her. Yayati agrees. When Sarmishta declares her love for Yayati, he must decline her, citing his promise to the king. Sarmishta persuades Yayati, claiming that his promise is one made outside of truth and thus is non-binding. She tells him that a woman without children is doomed to hell, and asks that he save her from this fate. They begin a fulfilling affair, and soon Devayani is no longer appealing to Yayati. He begins encouraging her to drink an intoxicating beverage that leaves her in a perpetual state of insobriety. Sarmishta bears three sons for the king.

One day, Devayani discovers these children who look so much like Yayati at their mother's feet and announces the infidelity to her father. Sukracharya declares that because of his actions, Yayati will be stripped of his youth and condemned to senility. Yayati begs Sukracharya to tell him what he can do to repent, and the seer tells him he may retain his youth only if he takes it from one of his own sons. Both sons by Devayani deny him, as do his eldest sons by Sarmishta. The youngest son, however, gives his youth up for his father, who vows that he will give his son back his youth in a thousand years. The years go by, and Yayati lives in utter bliss and pleasure. Once the thousand years are up, Yayati returns from his life of abandon to give youth back to his youngest son. He declares that he has learned from his experiences that there is no such thing as satiety, and that now he must end this phase and turn to God. He overcomes all his moods and emotions, and this pleases the gods. He is welcomed in heaven by Indra, but announces that no other is his equal in spiritual prowess. Indra decides that his ego is too heavy and he must fall back to Earth. He falls back to Earth, and after some time is able to control his ego so that he may return to Heaven and stay there.

Analysis: These three stories are ones concerning "others". These are stories that, within the whole of the text, see the least interference from the gods. Each story is concerned with discoveries made in the realm of the spirit. In Lavana, one meets a king who encounters a magician that shows him a magic like none he has ever seen. The lesson that Lavana learns from this encounter is that one cannot truly gain new



perspective unless they walk in the shoes of another. Lavana essentially has an out-of-body experience and travels far from his palace and kingdom, marries a peasant woman and lives a long life as a commoner. Of course, these things are all happening in his imagination only, but to him they seem real enough. Things turn sour in this imagined life when the famine strikes, and he and his wife and sons must move on from their home. They encounter the hardships of hunger and fatigue, and when Lavana sets off to find food for his remaining son, the spell is broken and he awakens only a few minutes later back on his throne. He learns, as does the reader, that time is relative, and that in order to really sympathize with another, it is essential to truly understand their plight. From the magician, Lavana received the rare and unique gifts of time and perspective.

In Chudala, one meets a husband and wife for whom unrelenting marital bliss eventually is not enough to sustain and fulfill them, so they turn to spiritual matters. The wife, Chudala, gains her spiritual merit more quickly than her husband, and she makes it her mission to become his guru and usher him through his spiritual adolescence. A common, reoccurring theme in Indian mythology and folklore is the idea that in order to gain spiritual merit, one must often pass a series of tests. Chudala tests her husband's ability to make no distinction between yielding and resisting when she transforms from his guru into the image of a beautiful woman and persuades him to take her as his wife. She is satisfied to learn that he has advanced to the point where these things are immaterial and exist outside of him. Once he passes this test satisfactorily, she decides to test his ability to resist bhoga, or pleasure and enjoyment, by appearing as Indra, chief of the gods, offering and invitation to a paradisiacal destination. Again, Chudala is satisfied that her husband has reached another milestone in understanding that happiness is not an external destination, rather a place inside of oneself. The third test is to see if he can resist krodha, or anger. Chudala creates a lover for herself and arranges for her husband to discover them together. Once again, she is satisfied to see that he passes the test by regarding the scene with indifference. More than anything, this story outlines for the reader exactly what one must learn and understand in order to achieve spiritual enlightenment according to Hindu religion and mythology.

The third story in this section is that of Yayati. There are many stories within this story, the prevailing themes of which revolve around the idea that because these characters are very human, they succumb to temptations, they make mistakes, they allow their anger to dictate them; the point at the end of all these transactions is that these actions lead to consequences and lessons learned. For example, the power struggle between Devayani and Sarmishta is one of two prideful, headstrong women that could apply to any time in history in any culture. The consequence of Sarmishta's prideful, angry reaction is that she must become Devayani's servant. Of course, this leads to the affair between Sarmishta and Yayati. It is interesting to see how the character Sarmishta sets her sights on Yayati - for her own personal satisfaction, or for revenge, perhaps? In any event, she is able to persuade him to break his promise to the king easily enough by telling him that a promise made outside of truth is worthless. In the end, one can see a much more endearing element of the human spirit, and that is the selfless sacrifice that one will make for someone they love. Yayati, because he broke his vow to the king, must pay with his youth, unless he can find someone to take the fall in his place. His



son offers himself as a sacrifice, and Yayati lives in utter bliss and pleasure with that gift of youth for a thousand years. Of course, in the end, he learns that there is no such thing as satiety, and he returns the borrowed youth back to his son. But of course he has one more lesson to learn, and that is the lesson of relinquishing ego. Yayati arrives in heaven with an ego so heavy that it pulls him back to earth. Only when he is able to bring his ego under control, can he remain in heaven.



Two; Devi, Viswamitra, Manmata

Two; Devi, Viswamitra, Manmata Summary and Analysis

Devi: Every demon, according to the storyteller, seeks immortality after attaining the favor of a god, and will invent impossible and fantastic situations in which to stay alive so that the gods have to invent clever ways to be rid of them. The demon Mahishasura, (Mahisha meaning buffalo and asura meaning demon) asks Brahma, the creator, that he may continue to live unless a woman appears who is capable of killing him in a fight. Mahisha grows up to become the king of the demons, and taunts Indra, ruler of the gods, endlessly. Indra sends spies into Mahisha's camp to discover that his resources are great, and Indra prepares to fight. Indra assembles the three great gods, Brahma the creator, Vishnu the protector and Shiva the destroyer, as well as all the lesser gods. The battle that ensues is great, and the gods realize it is futile to try and defeat Mahisha. They discuss the idea that he may only be destroyed by a woman, and consider sending their wives into battle. They decide, however, that their wives are not warriors and they will be condemning them to their doom.

The higher gods pray to the Highest Source for help and produce Devi, the Great Goddess, a dazzlingly beautiful female representation of highest God, dressed in red robes and riding a fearsome lion. She screams a challenge to Mahisha that is so loud it reverberates through space and reaches his ears. He sends his scouts to see who has challenged him and why, and they return to report that the challenge has come from a radiant woman with eighteen arms, who wields a different weapon for each arm. Mahisha tells his scouts to go and fetch her, and he will make her his chief queen. She tells the scouts to tell Mahisha that her mission is to destroy him. Mahisha scoffs at the possibility, replying that a woman has no weapons other than her eyes and her curves. His scouts warn him that she is no ordinary woman, but he orders them to go and kill her or bring her back as his captive. Only one soldier survives the mission, and returns to describe the bloody battle scene to Mahisha. Mahisha sends back his scouts to ask Devi what she wants, and she replies that, as the primordial foe of evil, she wants Mahisha to either come and face her, or return to the netherworld where he belongs.

For this meeting, Mahisha changes into the form of a human being, reasoning that this great goddess will find this form most pleasing. When he goes to meet her, he surrounds himself with his warriors but is stopped short by the sound of her trumpet. He offers to make her his wife, a proposal that she spurns with contempt. She tells him he has one last chance to return to his own world, or she will have no choice but to fight and kill him. He attempts to distract Devi with a story, which further enrages her, and the battle ensues. In the end, Devi severs Mahisha's head with her discus, and the gods say a prayer of thanksgiving to her. Devi assures them that all they need to do is think of her in the future, and she will be at their side. The storyteller concludes by saying that



whoever recites this prayer of thanksgiving on Friday will find protection from evil, no matter how insurmountable their foe at first seems.

Viswamitra: The mightiest of the kingly race is a king named Chedi, who during one of his outings discovers a hermit's camp. The camp turns out to be the home of the great sage Vasishtha. He invites the king and his hundred thousand men to come and dine with him. The king does not believe that Vasishtha will be able to accommodate them all, but is astonished when silk couches and golden bowls appear to seat and feed every last man,. The king demands to know how Vasishtha has managed this amazing feat, and Vasishtha leads him down a path away from the camp to show him. They travel into the forest and to a glade where the magical half human, half cow, Sabala, stands. Vasishtha explains to the king that all he needs to do is ask for anything he wants and Sabala provides it for him. The king decides that such a thing should belong to him, and tells Vasishtha that he will give him heaps of gold and cattle in exchange. Vasishtha replies that it is the greedy way of men in power to want to uproot and carry away the tree that provides fruit, shade and blooms, and that the king cannot have Sabala. The king promises that he will have Sabala supply Vasishtha's needs from his royal palace, but that she must go with him. When Vasishtha again refuses, the king tries to take Sabala by force. Sabala does not want to leave Vasishtha, and asks that she be allowed to create men to fight off the soldiers forcing her to leave, and Vasishtha agrees. The king, in turn, brings more soldiers, and Sabala creates more fighting men and so forth, until the king's entire army lay slain. Vasishtha explains to the king that his strength comes from inside of himself, and that within all of us there is a spark of goodness. When he, the king, is able to rouse that goodness, his power will be matchless. Thus, the king renounces his throne and sits in seclusion and rigorous meditation for a thousand years.

When Iswara, the Ultimate God, appears to ask the king why he is doing this, he says he wishes to match Vasishtha's strength in every way and wield the Brahma Astra, the ultimate weapon. Iswara grants him these wishes, and the king musters a new army to attack Vasishtha, but they are unable to get past Vasishtha's staff, which repels all. The king begs to know what power he wields in his staff, and Vasishtha tells the king that they live in two different worlds. The king renounced everything for one purpose: to attack Vasishtha again, and that he is and always will be nothing more than a fighter. The king vows that he will prove Vasishtha wrong, and goes once again into meditation for a thousand years. Brahma the creator then appears to the king and says he approves of his efforts. He hence names him a rishi - Viswamitra Rishi, the greatest kingly sage known in the world. This is not good enough for the king, however, as he wishes to be a Brahma Rishi. He sets forth into the world to show everyone that he has reached the summit of sagehood, and he determines to prove that he is as worthy as Brahma himself.

He gets his chance soon enough when he meets a man named Trisanku, whose ambition it is to enter heaven in his earthly form. Trisanku is rejected by Vasishtha and his sons, but Viswamitra succeeds, after ten days of intense concentration and performance, to neutralize the pull of gravity, and Trisanku begins to levitate towards heaven. The assembly cries their praise for Viswamitra, who then asks, since he has performed a feat that Vasishtha could not, if he will then be called Brahma Rishi? As soon



as he utters this phrase, Trisanku falls from his great height, head-first, and is not able to right himself. Again and again Viswamitra tries to get Trisanku into heaven, and again and again he fails. Finally, Viswamitra decides to create his own heaven and universe, and makes it upside-down so Trisanku will feel right-side up.

Viswamitra spends most of his time thereafter involving himself in other people's affairs, until he realizes that this is a drag on his spiritual strength. He sees that the forces of the outside world offset whatever growth he had obtained through his rigorous tapas. Suddenly, Viswamitra realizes that Vasishta's eminence comes from the ability to mind his own business and remain unperturbed when provoked. Thus, Viswamitra seeks solitude in the Himalayas, renounces all speech, and rids himself of anger. For the first time in his existence, he forgets his own needs and his own ego, and thus attains the status of Brahma Rishi. Vasishta visits him then and addresses him thus, and Viswamitra thanks Vasishta for spinning his life off in a different direction, that fateful day when he tried to take Sabala from him.

Manmata: Brahma the creator decides one day to create a unique female named Sandhya to enrich the universe. She is lonely, so he creates a brother for her, called Manmata, who is the god of love. Manmata asks Brahma if he may test his strength by sending out his arrows, and permission is granted. The arrows fall on the surrounding assembly, made up of Sandhya's male family members, who lose all sense of themselves, and begin making incestuous advances towards her. These improper activities are stopped by Iswara, the Ultimate God, who harshly reprimands Brahma for allowing it. Out of Brahma's sweat during his passionate attentions towards Sandhya is born Rati, the beauty of beauties. Brahma offers Rati to Manmata in marriage, and sends them off to exact revenge on Iswara, hoping to inflict upon him the same embarrassing predicament in which he has been caught. Manmata finds, however, that his arrows, and the powers of his companion Vasanta are useless upon Iswara.

Around this time, Taraka is born, and his birth is an ill omen for the world. As he grows up, Taraka spends a thousand years in penance to attain strength and invincibility. When Brahma intervenes, hoping to stop Taraka's evil powers, he agrees only if he is to be granted invincibility under all circumstances. Brahma grants this request with the condition that only one born to Iswara should be able to defeat him. Taraka becomes the tyrannical ruler of Sonitapura, oppressing the strong and weak alike. Vishnu and Brahma are both helpless against Taraka, and they realize they need to enlist the help of Shiva, the embodiment of Iswara. He can help by begetting a son, but will only be able to do so if he gives up his rigorous penance.

To Himavan, lord of the Himalayas, and his wife is born Pavarti, the embodiment of the Goddess Shakti. When she is a girl, she becomes fascinated with Shiva and becomes his disciple attendant. The gods realize that Pavarti could be their greatest ally in destroying Taraka, if only Shiva would take interest in her as a woman. Manmata is called in to try and persuade Shiva, but to no avail. Manmata's magic slowly begins to work on Shiva, and Pavarti as well, but Shiva sees Manmata behind a bush and, opening his third eye, reduces Manmata to ashes. Shiva resumes his meditations and moves away from the area. At this time, the great sage Narada arrives at Himavan's



palace to advise Pavarti that she must rely on her own inner resources, go into solitude and pray.

Manmata's wife Rati arrives where Shiva is meditating, grieving for her burnt-up husband. Shiva tells her that he is lost only in body but that he still exists. The other gods intervene as well, asking Shiva what he has done. Destroying the god of love means that the function of the universe can not continue. Meanwhile, Pavarti's penance is beginning to pay off. Disguised, Shiva appears before her to ask why she is praying. She says that she is working to gain the affections of Shiva, and for no other reason. Shiva, in disguise, mocks her, saying that Shiva is not worth having, and when she unwaveringly defends him, he decides to appear before her in his full glory and take her as his wife. Rati comes to them then, while Shiva is in his most rapturous state, asking that Manmata be returned to his original form. Shiva agrees, with the condition that he will be visible to her only, and to no one else. Shiva and Pavarti bear the six-faced god Subramanya, who leads his forces against Taraka and destroys him.

Analysis: Each of these stories is meant to depict a process of sublimation. Sublimation means, essentially, to divert the energy of an ill-meaning goal to one of a more socially and morally acceptable nature. In Mahisha, one meets the buffalo-headed demon whose main goal is to torment Indra and all the gods. The Great Three, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva create Devi, who is Iswara incarnate, to destroy him. Devi's purpose is to rid the world of his evil, and of any evil. Mahisha, whose bid for immortality came with the condition that only a woman could kill him, scoffs at the idea that a woman, whose only weapons are her looks, could get the job done. He condescendingly attempts to make Devi his queen, and she answers with a force that he could never have anticipated. The sublimation that one can see in this story is that of Mahisha hoping to inject the world with his evil and Devi arriving to cleanse the world of this infection.

In Viswamitra, we see the beginnings of a story that lives on through the ages of Hindu folklore; that of the great sage Vasishtha vs. the aspiring former king Chedi who becomes Viswamitra. The enlightened Vasishtha is minding his own business in his hermitage when the king arrives. Vasishtha does little more than make him welcome with a stunning and unexpected reception, and it is the nature of the king to know how this fantastic feast could appear. It is further the nature of the king to wish to covet the sacred cow, and when he is vanquished by the great Vasishtha, he decides he must find a way to own the same great power. The difference between Vasishtha and the king is simple: they have different intended uses for their power. Vasishtha wants nothing more than to please the gods and advise others, and as he himself puts it, the king is swollen with pride and ego and the strength of arms. His only wish is to conquer and acquire. Through humble meditation and penance, the king emerges a thousand years later as a great sage himself, Viswamitra. In his heart, however, not much has changed. He cares only to return to vanquish Vasishtha, and to enjoy the reverence of others when he is able to fulfill the wishes of Trisanku. Viswamitra certainly is guilty of unrelenting tenacity, as he pushes forward with his quest even after Trisanku has given it up. In the end, he finally forgets his ego and his own needs and only then is he worthy of embracing Vasishtha as an equal. Only then, and for the first time, is he able to truly understand happiness.



The third story in this section is that of Manmata, the god of love, who is created to serve a very specific and essential function in the world. When he first tests his powers, however, an unfortunate thing occurs. All of the men in attendance are related to the only woman in attendance, and begin to advance upon her in incestuous and inappropriate ways. The Ultimate God, Iswara, intervenes and Brahma's nose is bent out of shape. Manmata is ordered to go forth and teach a lesson to Iswara, as Shiva, and the result of this interaction is that Manmata is razed to ashes. The gods are in an uproar over this, because the world cannot function without the god of love. The savior of the story is Pavarti, who becomes Shiva's wife. When Manmata's wife, Rati, approaches Shiva to ask that her husband be restored, he is in a rapturous mood because of his union with Pavarti. In the end, Manmata is restored but is visible only to his wife. Thus, when "cupid's" little arrows pierce lovers, they never see it coming.



Three; Ravana, Valmiki, Draupadi

Three; Ravana, Valmiki, Draupadi Summary and Analysis

Ravana: Ravana is first known as Dasagreeva, and is later given the name Ravana, which literally means "scream", by Shiva. Ravana is born with ten heads and twenty arms. His brothers and sister, all born at the same time, are Kumbhakarna, Soorpanakha and Vibhishana, all of whom are portents of evil, save the last. Their step-brother, Kubera, is a man of great respectability because of his tapas, and the brothers go into seclusion in the hopes that they will gain strength and honor through penance as well. They meditate for thousands of years, Ravana in hopes of obtaining immortality. To Ravana, for his penance, Brahma grants indestructibility at the hand of any god or celestial being, and that if one of his heads is cut off, it will grow right back. The brothers return now to the world to test their strength. Ravana delights in tormenting others, and cannot bear to have anyone around him as his equal. The one commendable thing he does in his life is to marry Mandodari.

Because his brother had attempted to advise him, Ravana decides to march upon his land and vanquish him, and steal his prize possession, a flying chariot. While flying back to his home, the Kailas mountain gets in his way, and irritated, Ravana steps out of his chariot and attempts to move the mountain with his strength. Nandi, Shiva's assistant, who is deformed and dwarfish, orders Ravana to cease and desist. Ravana laughs at Nandi and calls him a monkey, and in turn, Nandi curses Ravana, vowing that it will be a monkey who brings about his demise. Flying away from Kailas, Ravana attacks every kingdom he sees. He receives his second curse from Vedavati, who is betrothed to Vishnu, when he tries to ravish her, she throws herself into a fire to cleanse herself of his touch, vowing that in her next birth she will be solely responsible for his demise. He is cursed a third time by King Aranyaka, who Ravana attacked and tormented during one of his excursions, to be exterminated by a member of his own Ikshvahu clan.

Ravana soon begins to hear of reports of a young man called Rama; the whole world seemed to be engaged in singing his praises, and of course Ravana could not stand for this. One day, Ravana's sister Soorpanakha enters his chamber claiming that Rama has attacked her, and Ravana decides to kidnap Rama's wife, Sita. When Rama returns to his home to find Sita missing, he employs the assistance of various forest creatures to help him follow her trail.

Sita resists Ravana, and he insists that he has the right to abduct anyone's wife and force himself upon her. Of course Ravana has many, many wives, but he is maddened by Sita's beauty. She continues to resist him, vowing that he and his city will perish, as Rama's revenge will be fierce. Ravana commands his disciples to mentally torture Sita, which they do, and she nearly comes to believe that Rama has deserted her.



Rama's emissary, Hanuman, son of the god of wind and endowed with extreme strength, finds Sita and makes himself known to her. He takes on the appearance of a giant monkey and destroys the forest where Sita is being held. When word of this reaches Ravana, he sends his men to kill the monstrous monkey, but none of them return. He finally sends his son, Indrajit, who uses the Brahma Astra, leaving Hanuman lying limp and still. Hanuman, however, is not killed, as a favor from Brahma himself, the touch of the Brahma Astra would leave him still for only four-fifths of an hour. Hanuman is bound and taken to Ravana, where he lights his tail on fire and drags him through the streets of his city. Sita hears of this torture and prays that the fire will not hurt Hanuman, which it does not, and he is thankful for the opportunity to view the city's street plan. Hanuman then escapes his bonds and jumps from building to building, lighting the entire city on fire.

Ravana consults with his warriors who advise him to fight, but his brother Vibhishana advises him to undo the thing that is causing all the strife; give Sita back to Rama. Ravana refuses, and Vibhishana immediately travels to Rama's camp. Rama decides that Vibhishana will make a much more just ruler than his brother and sends a messenger to Ravana to tell him this, and that he must release Sita or he and his city will be destroyed. Ravana orders that the messenger be killed, but since the messenger is Angada, son of Vali, who rises into the sky and breaks the tower of Ravana's palace. When Angada returns to Rama with his report, Rama decides that he must immediately strike, and sends in his horde of warrior monkeys. When Ravana returns from the battlefield where he has gone to face Rama himself, he is badly wounded, his chariot broken and his crown shattered. He awakens his brother, Kumbhakarna, who is soon killed in battle, as well as his son Indrajit. Ravana's sons remind him of his invincibility and tell him not to despair. Rama faces Ravana alone in the end, and every time he severs one of Ravana's heads, it immediately grows back. Finally, Rama employs his Brahma Astra, which he embeds in Ravana's heart. Rama is able to kill him because he is a god in human form, and while Ravana asked for indestructibility of his heads, he is vulnerable in his heart. In the end, Ravana is destroyed by all three things that cursed him: a monkey, a woman and a member of his own Ikshvahu clan.

Valmiki: Valmiki is known as the greatest story teller ever in Hindu mythology, the Adi Kavi (foremost poet or fountainhead of poetry) who composed all twenty-four thousand stanzas of the Ramayana. In actuality, the Ramayana is a work which "rose up" in the writer and the main character, Rama, the main character and hero of the Ramayana, revealed himself to Valmiki in a vision. Rama is the incarnation of Vishnu, but in human form and oblivious to his godliness. In order to understand how such a story came into existence, the reader must forget everything he or she knows about traditional time and a horizontal sequence of events.

To begin the story of Valmiki, one must first start with the scholar named Sankha, who, after completing his studies, is returning home when he is confronted by a robber. The thief takes what little money and jewelry Sankha has, as well as his sandals and tells Sankha to run away. The sand is so hot, however, that Sankha's feet burn and he is in agony, and the thief, though at first finding it funny, calls Sankha back to return his sandals. Sankha tells the thief that he has a vestige of compassion left over from his



previous life, and of course the thief is curious to know how Sankha knows this, so he tells him the story of his former life. In his first incarnation, the thief is a scholarly man who falls in love with a prostitute despite being already married. He falls ill from the diseases that the prostitute gives him, and chokes to death when he bites off his wife's pinky finger as she attempts to administer medicine to him. He is then reincarnated as the thief to pay for the sins of his former life. Sankha tells him that in his next life, he is a hunter and a bandit with a large family to feed who often relies on taking what he needs from others in order to endure the survival of his family. One day the hunter encounters Seven Sages who explain that they wish to help him. They tell him to go home and ask his family and his wife if, since they are willing to share the loot that he robs, are they willing to share the load of sin that he is acquiring that will be passed along with him into the next life? He returns to tell the sages that they do not wish to share the load, and the sages tell him to meditate and pray, and say the word "Mara" over and over again. The hunter does this and the word comes to sound like "Rama". The hunter stays in his meditation for thousands of years, and when the sages come back to him, he emerges as the poet Valmiki.

Valmiki is a rishi now, a sage, able to view past, present and future as one. One day, the great sage Narada visits Valmiki and tells him the prophecy of a great man, born into the race of Ikshvahas, son of King Dasarata. One day Viswamitra arrives in the king's court to ask him a favor. He wants Rama and his brother, Lakshmana, to accompany him to help protect sacrifices that are being meddled with by demons. It is a dangerous mission, but he can think of no one else who is worthy or capable. It is agreed that they will go, and the mission is such a success that Viswamitra endows upon Rama all the spiritual merit he himself has acquired. He teaches him rare feats of archery, and these skills win him the hand of Sita in marriage. After this, Rama lives in exile for a while at the hand of his father's third wife.

Valmiki is deeply moved by the story of Rama and is hardly able to think of anything else. He is visited by Brahma after writing his very first poetic composition, and then has the grand vision of Rama's entire life. He recites aloud the entire twenty-four thousand stanzas for his disciples. Once he has had his vision and it is complete, he must find the appropriate people to pass it along to, and he chooses Kusa and Lava, Rama's own sons who have never met their father.

Kusa and Lava came to live with Valmiki after Rama rescued Sita from Ravana. Rama tells Sita that because she has lived alone in a stranger's house, he can no longer permit her to live with him. Sita's grief is so great that she throws herself into a fire, but she is rescued from the flames by the god of fire himself. This satisfies Rama that his wife is worthy and pure, and they live in domestic bliss for a while. After a few years pass, Sita finds that she is with child. One evening, Rama's chief of intelligence tells him that he has overheard a conversation in the marketplace where two men are talking about allowing a wife who has strayed back into his house; the king has done it, so should we all, said the man. At this, the king decides to take Sita into the forest to live with the sage Valmiki to set an example for his people. It is in his ashram where the twin brothers are born, and Valmiki becomes their mentor and teaches them the Ramayana. The brothers go then to Ayodhya to sing the Ramayana for their father, who invites



them in and calls his scholars to transcribe the stanzas for him. Rama, thus, is the subject of the Ramayana as well as its first reader. Once Rama discovers the identity of the twins, he sends for Valmiki and Sita. When Sita arrives, she decides to take revenge on Rama for sending her away, and asks the Earth to open up and swallow her whole, which it does. Rama is overcome with anger, but Brahma appears to tell him that he, Rama, is Vishnu incarnate, and that Sita is Lakshmi, his eternal spouse, and that she awaits him in the after life. Rama is pleased and prepares for retirement. Valmiki watches as this human drama unfolds, and marvels over the way that these characters manage their affairs in their own way. He goes back to his ashram and returns to his life of contemplation.

Draupadi: The five Pandava brothers, Yudhistira, Arjuna, Bhima, Nakula and Shadeless return home to their mother, Kunthi, one day exclaiming that they have come bearing a gift of alms. Kunthi, without seeing this gift of alms, automatically instructs the brothers to share it among themselves, not realizing that the gift is actually a beautiful young woman named Draupadi. Arjuna had entered a competition (Draupadi's Swayamwara, a ceremony by which a princess chooses her husband) and because of his skills in archery, won the hand of the princess in betrothal. Knowing that they could not go back on the wishes of their mother, the brothers reluctantly agree to all wed Draupadi and share her as their wife. The brothers are invited to Draupadi's kingdom by her father, who is shocked to hear the news that her daughter will have five husbands, until the sage Vyasa arrives to explain why this is the correct course of action.

Vyasa explains that Draupadi was Nalayani in her previous life, one of the five ideal women in the land, who was married to a leper. Despite his appearance and cantankerous attitude, Nalayani was a devout wife, and as a reward to her, he grants her one wish. Her wish is to for him to love her as five men, able to come back to one form. He granted her wish and for a time they lived a passionate life together. Eventually, however, her husband wished to depart this world for the next, and Iswara the Almighty found her meditating, praying for her husband. Since she repeated the word "husband" five times over, Iswara granted her prayer and the word of the Almighty cannot be revoked. When Nalayani is reborn as Draupadi, it is not in the usual way; she instead appears out of a sacrificial fire before her father who adopts her.

The gods had a plan for Draupadi in bringing about the destruction of evil on Earth. The Pandava brothers' rivals are their cousins, the Kauravas, whose king is Duryodhana. Upon Draupadi's Swayamwara, the Kauravas discover that the Pandavas are indeed still alive when Arjuna takes up his bow, dressed as a common Brahmin and wins the hand of the princess. The Kauravas had thought they were rid of the Pandavas, and now realize that they must put another plan into motion.

Draupadi is married to the brothers, with the understanding that she will live as wife to each of them for one year at a time. They build a splendid palace together and invite Duryodhana there as a special guest. While there, Duryodhana commits several social faux pas, including mistaking polished marble for a pool, walking into a clear glass pane and attempting to pluck a piece of fruit from a painting. Humiliated, Duryodhana challenges the eldest brother, Yudhistira, to a game of dice. Yudhistira bets and loses



everything, including the palace, his kingdom, his horses, his arms, his elephants, and even his wife. Duryodhana calls Draupadi in front of him and the assembly, announces to her that she is now his slave, and orders her to disrobe in front of everyone. She refuses, and when one of his attendants begins forcing her, she prays to Krishna to help her. The elders of the family intervene and return to the Pandavas all that they lost in the game. Duryodhana lures Yudhistira into another game, however, and this time, decrees that the Pandavas must be exiled for thirteen years. Krishna appears to Draupadi during this exile and tells her it is time to wage war on the Kauravas. The Pandavas wipe out the evil-doers and after a thousand years, their Earthly mission complete, move towards heaven in their earthly forms. None but Yudhistira are allowed to enter without first enduring purgatory, however, because of sins committed in their mortal lives.

Analysis: In Ravana and Valmiki, the reader is introduced to Rama, the hero and main character of the Ramayana, the ancient Sanskrit epic that is known to every man, woman and child in the Indian Hindu culture. It depicts the standards of human relations, portraying the ideal wife, the ideal servant, the ideal king and the ideal brother. The Pandit, or storyteller, would know all twenty-four thousand stanzas of the Ramayana (literally translated to mean "Rama's journey") by heart, but would leave the text open before him as he recited it to back his words with authority. The Ramayana, along with the Mahabharata are called the "puranas" and are the source book for all legendary tales in Hindu folklore and mythology. The standard literary formula is in place: there is a clear villain who commits wrongdoings, and a hero who restores peace and justice to the world. Good always prevails over evil, the sufferings of the saintly are temporary, as are the triumphs of the evildoers. Everyone familiar with Hindu folklore, with the perspective of the Ramayana coloring it, understands that everything will come out right in the end, if not in this life, then in the next, and if not in this world, then in another. Both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are mentioned in the "Vedas," the ancient, sacred texts of Hinduism, which proves their antiquity. They are believed to have existed externally and taken shape out of the breath of God. Supposedly Valmiki wrote the Ramayana because of a vision he had, and recited all twenty-four thousand stanzas to his disciples. Draupadi is the epic heroine of the Mahabharata. She is known in Hindu folklore as the proud, unbending princess born of fire, who suffers her disgraces in stride and in the end vanquishes her perpetrators with relish. In this short story about Draupadi, it is the Pandava brothers and their one wife, Draupadi, versus their evil cousins, the Kauravas. Draupadi is married to all five brothers because of an accidental comment made by the brother's mother. The moral lesson to be learned from this tale is one should never be tempted by their enemies to gamble away their fortunes, kingdoms, and especially their wives, as their may be unseen forces at play behind the scenes.



Four; Nala, Savitri, The Mismatched Anklet, Shakuntala

Four; Nala, Savitri, The Mismatched Anklet, Shakuntala Summary and Analysis

Nala: Nala, the ruler of Nishadha, to everyone's surprise, remains a bachelor. One day a poet arrives in the king's court, describing a beautiful young princess named Damayanti, from a neighboring kingdom. From that moment forward, Nala is enamored with the princess and can think of nothing but meeting her. The poet tells him to send a messenger to Damayanti, and Nala sends one of his swans. When the swan returns, he reports that Damayanti is just as enamored with him as he is with her, and that he should await word of her Swayamwara. When it is announced, Nala finds himself on the road with four strangers, who turn out to be Indra, chief for the minor gods, Varuna, god of air, rain and ocean, Agni, god of fire and Yama, lord of death, all in human form wishing to have a chance to win the hand of Damayanti. Inside the Swayamwara, they try to trick Damayanti by all assuming the form of Nala, but in the end she chooses the correct Nala and they are wed. Two additional gods, Kali and Dwapara, feeling snubbed at having missed the chance at the princess's hand, decide to work within Nala's brother, Pushkara, and persuade him to challenge Nala to a game of dice. Nala and Damayanti lose everything to his Pushkara except for the clothes on their backs, and they are banished from the country. Pushkara takes his place now as king.

Knowing that his road will be a dangerous one from now on, Nala leaves Damayanti within sight of her father's kingdom and deserts her in the middle of the night. When she awakens to find her husband gone, she does not do as he hoped and return to her parents, she goes looking for him instead. She travels for a while with a caravan, which leaves her in the city Chedi. She appears to be a beggar with mud caked on her face and her sari ripped, and soon finds herself being chased through the streets by an angry mob. She is rescued by the kindly king who orders that she be taken to the palace, where the king's mother can care for her.

Meanwhile, Nala wanders far and wide. He comes one day upon a fire which he stamps out and a serpent nearby thanks him for saving him from the fire. As repayment, the serpent rises up and bites Nala, emptying all of his venom into him, deforming his appearance and offering him a disguise. The serpent advises him that should he wish to regain his original form, he need only wrap himself in the special cloth the serpent provided and he will be as he once was. Nala travels then to a kingdom known as Rituparna, where he is befriended by the king and becomes his chief horseman and chef.

Back in Chedi, Damayanti encounters an emissary sent by her father to try and find her. When the emissary discovers that she is the princess, she is taken home and sends out her own emissaries in search of Nala. She receives word that there is a man in the



kingdom of Rituparna who can cook like her husband and who has his same way with horses. In order to draw this man to her, Damayanti arranges for another Swayamwara under the guise of having lost Nala and needing to replace her husband with another. When Nala arrives in his disguise, Damayanti questions him and he answers her with facts that only Nala would know. She is distraught by his strange appearance, but he dons the special cloth given to him by the serpent and becomes his original self again. The king of Rituparna, though distraught at losing his best horseman and chef, teaches Nala his adept skills at gambling, and Nala is able to win his kingdom back from his brother. In the end, Pushkara is left with nothing but his loincloth, but being the generous soul that Nala is, he gives his brother a portion of the kingdom and advises him to turn over a new leaf.

Savitri: Asvapati, ruler of the kingdom Mudra, prays to the Goddess Savitri to give him a child. He wants a boy, but he gets a beautiful little girl and names her after the Goddess. When the time comes for Savitri to find a husband, none come forward as they are intimidated by her, thinking she is the Goddess incarnate. Savitri, as a result, searches far and wide to find a husband. When she does, she returns home to ask for her father's blessing. The king is talking with the sage Narada and she tells them that she found the man she wishes to marry in a hermitage, tending to his blind father. The man's name is Satyavan. Narada tells Savitri that she should not marry this man, because he can see the future, and Satyavan's earthly life will be over in one year. Savitri decides that despite this, she still wants to marry Satyavan, and Narada praises her spirit and devotion.

Savitri and Satyavan marry, and it is a happy marriage. When there were just four days left of her husband's life, Savitri undertook a severe penance, fasting for three days and nights. After her penance, she notices that her husband was heading off into the woods and she insists on following him. As he is chopping wood, Satyavan suddenly becomes weary, complaining of a headache and lies down and falls asleep. Savitri knows this means that his time has come, and she notices a red-robed, red-eyed figure looming nearby with a noose in his hands. He introduces himself to her as Death, also known as Yama. Savitri stashes Satyavan's body in a safe place and follows after Yama. He turns and tells her to stop following him, to which she replies that now that her husband is dead, she has no life either now, and must go where her husband goes. This sentiment pleases Yama and he grants her one wish, anything but the life of her husband. She wishes that sight be restored to her father-in-law. Savitri continues following Yama, and again he tells her to cease, but this time she tells Yama that she wishes to learn from him. Again he grants her a wish, anything except Satyavan's life, and this time she wishes that a hundred sons be born to her father. She continues following Yama and speaking her philosophies to him and he grants her two more boons. She asks that a hundred sons be born to her. Yama tells Savitri that he reveres her, and grants her the one thing she wants most of all, the renewal of her husband's life. For the first time ever, Yama goes back to his own world, having yielded back a life he took. Savitri and Satyavan return then to the hermitage to live a long and happy life together.

The Mismatched Anklet: In the flourishing seacoast town of Puhar, a couple named Kovalan and Kannagi are celebrating their marriage. They enjoy a happy marriage until



the day Kovalan takes an interest in a young woman named Madhavi. She becomes his mistress, and he spends all of his time and money on her. Once he has squandered nearly his entire fortune and greatly shamed himself, he and Kannagi decide that they must take what riches they have left - a pair of very fine gold anklets - and leave town. The couple travels to a nearby town called Madurai where they plan to sell the anklets and begin a new life. Kovalan sets out into the marketplace to sell one of the anklets, and fails to see the humped bull in front of him, an indication of a bad omen. He comes across an opportunistic goldsmith, agrees that the anklet is out of the ordinary and fit for a queen. He asks Kovalan to wait for him while he takes it to the queen for her examination and approval. The goldsmith finds the king and tells him that he has captured the thief who stole the queen's anklet that had recently gone missing. Normally, the king would have ordered the thief to be brought before him, but since he was preoccupied and in a hurry, he told the goldsmith to execute him. The goldsmith returns to his hut and his henchman runs Kovalan through with his blade, leaving him dead on the ground. The goldsmith had actually stolen the queen's anklet earlier in the day and felt fortunate that he found someone to take the blame.

Kannagi begins to worry why Kovalan has been gone for so long. When she discovers that her husband has been named a thief and murdered, her anger is terrible. She storms through the city streets with the matching anklet in hand until she comes to the palace, demanding to see the king. The king and queen are horrified at the injustice that has occurred, but Kannagi's rage is boundless. She is joined by the god of fire, whom she commands to destroy the city. She asks that the innocent, the good, the learned, the infirm, the animals and the children of the city be spared. The city is enveloped in flames and destroyed.

The presiding deity of the city comes to Kannagi to tell her that she understands her rage, but that the king comes from a long line of just and noble men, and then tells her the story of her husband's previous life in his previous birth. He was called Bharata, and in the service of his monarch, he arrested an innocent merchant, denounced him as a spy and had him executed. The merchant's wife raved and cursed like a madwoman for fourteen days until she flung herself from a cliff, cursing the man responsible. Thus, Kannagi would have redemption in fourteen days. When the day arrived, her husband came to her in spirit form and they ascended to heaven together. The very spot is today a temple with a statue of Kannagi known as Pattini Devi, meaning the wife who became a goddess.

Shakuntala: The name Shakuntala means "one who was brought up in the forest by birds". As an infant, Shakuntala's parents abandon her on a bed of leaves beside a river and the birds watch over and protect her. Shakuntala's mother is Menaka, the most accomplished beauty in her world, sent by Indra, chief of the gods, to distract Viswamitra from his rigorous meditations. Indra, it seems, is ever petrified of being displaced, and thus sends Menaka with the help of the god of love and the god of wind on her mission. She succeeds in distracting Viswamitra, and they enjoy each other's company for a thousand years. Shakuntala is born of this union, but her father immediately rejects her, realizing he must immediately return to his austerities and



waste no more time with pleasures. Menaka decides at this point that she has been away from her world for too long, abandons her daughter and vanishes.

Shakuntala is taken in by the sage Kanva, and he raises her in his ashram in the forest. One day, king Dushyanta comes across the ashram while hunting and meets the beautiful Shakuntala. He declares his love for her and persuades her to marry him right then and there. He leaves her, once they consummate the union, promising to send a chariot for her soon. Days and weeks and months pass, and no chariot comes. When the appropriate amount of time has passed, Shakuntala bears the king's son. Kanva notices Shakuntala's despair over her husband's absence and assembles a bank of escorts to accompany her to the capitol.

When Shakuntala faces the king, she explains that the child is his, and asks why he never sent for her. The king, to Shakuntala's dismay, claims that he has never laid eyes on her before, and calls her a lowly woman bearing a false claim. Shakuntala, as well as the on-looking assembly sit in grim, stunned silence until a voice from heaven speaks, asking the king to end Shakuntala's suffering, saying that she speaks the truth. The king rises from his throne at once to welcome his wife, apologizing for his rudeness, explaining that he had to feign forgetfulness so that she could speak her words to the assembly to show them the truth. Dushyanta ruled with Shakuntala by his side until it was time for their son to take over the throne, and they retired to a hermitage to live out their days as husband and wife.

Analysis: In all four of these stories, one can see a heroine, a wife, overcoming formidable obstacles in order to regain a lost husband. Nala and his beloved wife, Damayanti, are separated after Nala's brother overtakes his kingdom. Damayanti, a dainty woman of noble birth who lives a pampered and sheltered life, searches far and wide for her husband, and undergoes many hardships and sufferings in the process.

In the story of Savitri, one can see a wife who seeks out a husband and discovers the perfect mate for herself in Satyavan. To her great dismay, she is told by a sage that she should find someone else to wed, as Satyavan's life will last only another year. Savitri decides that she doesn't care, she will marry him anyhow. This in and of itself is an amazing sacrifice, because according to law and tradition in those times, when a husband died, a wife was to sacrifice herself on the funeral pyre and be cremated alive with him. When the time comes for her husband to die, Savitri follows him into the woods and waits for death to appear. Amazingly, she fearlessly follows death, Yama, and charms him with her philosophies until he gives her husband back to her - the first life relinquished in his career. Savitri took matters into her own hands, never gave up, and refused to take no for an answer.

In The Mispaird Anklet, one can see a wife who is fiercely devout to her husband, despite his infidelities with a public woman. When he is unjustly murdered, her rage is boundless, and she literally sets the city on fire with her anger. In the end, she discovers that her husband was paying for mistakes made in a former life, and thus her heart softens and the fire dies. She and her husband are reunited and journey to heaven together, another happy ending. Finally, there is the story of Shakuntala, who marries a



king and waits for him to come back for her as promised. He never does return, however, and she travels to his kingdom to remind him of their marriage. How embarrassing and heartbreaking for her when he claims that she is telling false stories about their union. Finally, he "remembers" her, and they live out their days together. Shakuntala is a story told within the text of the Mahabharata, and there are a few different versions of it in circulation within Hindu folklore. In one version, Shakuntala is given a ring by the king, by which he will be able to recognize her, but she loses it in the river on her way to the kingdom. Only when a fisherman catches a fish that has the ring in its belly and returns it to Shakuntala does the king remember her.



Five; Harischandra, Sibi

Five; Harischandra, Sibi Summary and Analysis

Harischandra: Harischandra's troubles begin when the two great sages, Vasishta and Viswamitra, begin discussing his merit. Vasishta claims that there were few to rival the great King Harischandra in any of the worlds, above or below. Viswamitra, ever Vasishta's rival and always ready to challenge him, scoffs at this claim, swearing that he will cause Harischandra to back out of his promises and reveal his true character. So, Viswamitra lays in the path of Harischandra a woman named Siddhi, who he encounters one day while making the rounds of his capitol. He notices her because of her extreme grief, and she explains to him that Viswamitra is attempting to conquer her through severe meditation. Harischandra is moved by her plight, and vows to help her, as is his kingly way. He finds Viswamitra deep in meditation, awakens him and humbly pleads with him to cease his torment of poor Siddhi. Viswamitra declares that he is impressed with the way Harischandra cares for the welfare of his subjects, and sends him on his way. Harischandra is pleased with the outcome of his mission, but his relish is short-lived.

Once Harischandra returns to his city, he finds his subjects in a panic, for a gigantic, monstrous boar is wreaking havoc everywhere. Harischandra and his men follow the boar and try to kill him, but to no avail. Exhausted and defeated, Harischandra rests for a moment, when a saintly, venerable old man appears and offers him a basket of fruit and shows him the way to a cool, clear pool of water where he may quench his thirst. Harischandra and the man rest together for a while, and the king feels so thankful and refreshed that he asks the old man what he can do to repay him for his kindness and assistance. Little did Harischandra know that the stranger was none other than Viswamitra, who was awaiting just such a chance to take advantage. Viswamitra demands the contents of the king's treasury, his kingdom and all of his possessions, and that he must leave the capitol at once. The king, having promised to give anything, has no choice but to acquiesce. In addition to this, Viswamitra insists that, as is customary, a fee must be paid along with the gift. Harischandra is given thirty days to pay the fee, and must sell his wife and son into slavery. Still short, he must also agree to work for the chief of the Chandalas as his assistant in the cremation grounds. The king's wife, Chandramati, accepts her fate dutifully and works hard.

One day, Chandramati's son is sent into the forest on an errand, is bitten by a cobra and killed. Chandramati goes to his side and is naturally grief stricken. A group of night patrolmen come upon her and find her grieving over the boy, and assume she is a witch who has killed him herself. She is taken to Harischandra's master, who commands him to take her to the cremation grounds and cut off her head. Overcome with this grisly task, Harischandra begs his master to spare him the horror, not recognizing yet that the woman he is to execute is his wife. The chief Chandala is unmoved and insists Harischandra obey. Harischandra and Chandramati travel to the cremation ground, she carrying her dead son and he keeping his eyes closed so as to avoid seeing the horrible



task before him. Chandramati asks if she may be cremated with her son once she is dead, and Harischandra tells her that, in accordance with the laws of his master, she must pay a tax first. She tells him that she has no money, and he notices the gold chain around her neck. This is a curious discovery, because it is a gold thali that was given to her at birth and is invisible to anyone but her husband. In that moment, husband and wife recognize each other again. They decide to burn themselves on the pyre they built for their dead child. Once they set foot into the fire, however, the gods decide that these two have been put through enough. Flowers rain down and extinguish the fire, and voices from heaven declare that their trials are over and they are victorious. Viswamitra appears then and admits that all the torments he has endured were set in his path deliberately, and that his worth has been proven. His son is given back his life, and Harischandra and Chandramati are sent back to their kingdom to rule in peace and happiness. Viswamitra also surrenders all of his spiritual merit and power to King Harischandra, and he begins his spiritual training over from nothing.

Sibi: After a holy sacrifice on the banks of the Jumna River, King Sibi is making the rounds through his subjects to assure that everyone is well fed and comfortable. Satisfied, the king retires under his own canopy and is dozing when a soft white dove drops into his lap. Just then, the hawk that had been pursuing the dove lands near the king, demanding that he hand it over. The king refuses, deciding that it is his duty as king to protect the creature that has come to him seeking refuge. The hawk argues, saying that the dove is his food, earned by honest chase. The king and the hawk engage in a philosophical conversation involving life and death, right and wrong. The hawk tells the king that he is faint with hunger, and that if the king denies him food any longer he may die. He also explains that nearby, his wife and four hatchlings are waiting, and if food is denied them as well, the king will have six deaths on his hands and conscience. The king tells the hawk that he has just fed a huge feast to his subjects, and if it is flesh that he wants, he can have as much as he pleases. The hawk explains that he does not feast on carrion; he requires fresh, warm meat dripping with blood, as he is a wild animal. He tells the king that he will have to cut it out of his own body to satisfy him.

The king promises as much flesh from his own body as equals the weight of the dove. He orders his subjects to construct a scale, and proceeds to place the dove on one side of the scale, then sits on the ground, utters a prayer, and removes a strip of his own flesh to lay on the other side of the scale. His subjects, naturally, protest the king's actions, but he persists. The scale does not move, so the king, who promised the hawk the exact weight of the dove, scoops flesh from his other leg and lays it on the scale. Again, the needle does not move, so the king steps onto the scale, offering the hawk his entire self. The hawk, satisfied, tells the king that he will make a fine meal for his family, but ponders how he will carry his weight up the mountain to the nest. The king tells the hawk to go and get his family, so they can feast on his flesh, and the hawk swoops in as if to peck at the king's body. Suddenly, divine music fills the sky and the hawk turns into Indra, while the dove turns into the god of fire. They tell king Sibi that they were testing him, and that he passed the test, indeed. They tell the king that as long as future generations recount the tale, they will partake of the spiritual merit he himself has



acquired. The flesh on the scale turns to fragrant flowers, and the king regains his energy in a moment.

Analysis: Everyone always assumes that it is good to be the king, but few people truly recognize the sacrifices it takes to be a ruler. These two stories are examples of what a king must endure. In both of these stories, there are higher powers working to test the merit and worth of these kings. In Harischandra, the struggle between Viswamitra and Vasishta rages on, with the king suddenly thrown into the middle. Viswamitra makes it his mission to cause Harischandra to fall, and as such, places a series of obstacles in his path. Harischandra surprises Viswamitra, however, and his unswerving virtue is vastly proven. In Sibi, one meets a king who takes the duty of protecting one who comes to him for asylum to the extreme. King Sibi is not even protecting one of his human subjects, but a small dove that has dropped into his lap. The hawk pursuing the dove presents some very legitimate arguments to the king, who will not budge. In the end, he literally removes his own flesh in exchange for the life of the dove, a move that none of his subjects can believe. Indeed, the king goes above and beyond the call of duty in this case and his worthiness is proven immensely.



Characters

Iswara

Iswara - Also known as Narayana or Mahashakti, he is the supreme God who is beyond change, creation and dissolution. When this supreme being descends to a practical plane, the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva is created. Brahma is the god known as the creator, father of all creatures. He rides a swan, and his consort is Saraswati, the goddess of learning. Brahma's progeny are numerous, but among them the most distinguished are the Seven Sages, Brihaspati, the god of wisdom; Prajapati, and Daksha. Vishnu is the protector and rides an eagle. He resides in Vaikunta and his spouse is Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. When the world is threatened by extinction, Vishnu incarnates himself into an avatar and intervenes. His most important avatar is Rama, hero of the Ramayana, and Krishna, who supported Draupadi and the Pandavas in the Mahabharata. Shiva is the destroyer, and he rides a bull. His spouse is Pavarti, and he resides in the Kailas mountain. His sons are Subramanya, who defeated the demon Taraka, and Ganesha, the god with an elephant's head, prayer to whom is said to remove all obstacles, who wrote down the Mahabharata at the dictation of Vyasa.

The Story Teller

The story teller, also known as The Pandit, is a very important part of the culture of a rural Indian village. He is the source of entertainment and enchantment for the simple inhabitants of the village, and also attends to priestly duties within the village. All day, the people of the village will work in the fields, and at the end of a hard day's labor, they will gather in front of the story teller's hut and wait silently for him to emerge. The Pandit prays three times a day, chooses his food according to the almanac, and spends all of his time in contemplation, worship or study. Every detail of his life is set for him by what the shastras (Hindu laws and codes of conduct) say, and he has unquestioned faith in the validity of the Vedas (the oldest Hindu scriptures). The stories that he tells often have common themes. Sages spend their lives in the wilderness seeking a life of illumination and austerity through tapas, or concentrated meditations. Demonic creatures often have unlimited powers and revel in harassing mankind and god kind alike, until a hero emerges to put an end to his follies. The kings in the stories are often men who wage wars and take action to expand their empires. Often a king will wander away from his kingdom and find himself in a situation that turns out to be a turning point in his life. Often Renunciation is the way to attain a higher life, and at some stage every character of goodness adopts it. The story teller entertains the villagers with these anecdotes, while at the same time, instructing them on how to live their lives, as the characters in the epics are prototypes and molds in which all of humanity is cast.



Rama

Rama is the hero of the Ramayana (literally meaning Rama's journey), composed by Valmiki, which is one of the two epic texts of India. Rama is referred to within Hinduism as the 'Maryada Purushottama', which literally means the perfect man or lord of virtue. Rama's wife is Sita, who is considered to be an avatar of Lakshmi, the embodiment of perfect womanhood. Rama was the incarnation of Vishnu, but in his human form he became oblivious to his godliness. Rama's life and journey are said to be of perfect adherence to Dharma, despite the trials and challenges he faces. At the age of sixteen, Rama is asked on a very dangerous mission to defeat demons who are disturbing sacred ground, and he does the job credibly. He was asked on the mission by a king who claimed that Rama was the only one who could handle the job. Also, when asked by his father's third wife to relinquish the throne in favor of her son, Rama spends fourteen years in exile. He is joined there by his wife and brother, who cannot bear to be without him. It is while they are living in the wilderness that Sita is kidnapped by the demon Ravana. Rama is most notably credited for killing this ten-headed, twenty-armed demon, and ridding the world of his evil. When Rama liberates his wife, he sends his Brahma Astra through Ravana's heart, the only place where he is vulnerable. Once his exile is over, Rama returns to be crowned king of Ayodhya, where he rules for eleven thousand years. This era is known as Rama Rajya, a time that is known for perfect peace and prosperity.

Viswamitra and Vasishta

The story of Viswamitra and Vasishta begins when Viswamitra is still king Chedi. He and his hundred thousand men are invited in by the great sage Vasishta to his hermitage where a great feast has been laid out. As a result of the kindness and hospitality that Vasishta offers, King Chedi attempts to covet the cow Sabala, and in the process causes his great army to be slain. Chedi decides that he must vanquish Vasishta, and realizes that to do so, he must also become a great sage. He meditates in penance for a thousand years and emerges as Viswamitra. Unfortunately, the desires of his heart have not changed, and his purpose is as yet to covet and acquire. In the end, Viswamitra forgets his ego, his needs and his warrior sensibilities, and only then can he find happiness and be equal to Vasishta. In the story of Harischandra, Viswamitra challenges the word of Vasishta, who claims that in all his time in any world, he has never seen anyone to equal to Harischandra's kingly divinity. In consequence of this speech, Viswamitra sets in Harischandra's path a series of obstacles designed to make him stumble and fall and prove Vasishta wrong. In the end, however, it is Viswamitra who is proven wrong, as Harischandra continuously does the right thing no matter how difficult or painful it may be.

Lavana

Lavana is the king we meet in the first story, who is visited in his assembly hall by a wandering magician. He warns the magician not to try any simple magic tricks, that only



the never-before-seen will impress him. The magician tells Lavana to look into his eyes, and King Lavana is transported away from his kingly palace and into an unknown life as a commoner. He lives a lifetime this way - seventy years - before he returns to his former self, sitting on his throne as though little or no time at all has passed. The lesson that Lavana learns is that in order to truly understand another's plight, one must walk in their shoes, in this case literally. Only when he has forgotten his previous life and suffered the trials of poverty can he return to his former self.

Chudala

Chudala is the wife of King Sikhi-Dhvaja. While they live a blissful life together, they find that they seek spiritual fulfillment as well and both set out to obtain higher merit through prayer and meditation. Chudala discovers her inner self much more easily than her husband, to his despair, and he retires himself into the wilderness to meditate. Chudala simultaneously runs the kingdom and becomes her husband's guru in disguise while putting him through tests to discover whether he is progressing in his quest. She discovers that he makes no distinction between yielding and resisting, and is able to reject both bhoga and krodha, and thus they are able to return to their kingdom to rule and king and queen for ten thousand years.

Yayati

Yayati is a prince who marries Devayani, daughter of Sukracharya, the great sage and master of the Sanjivini mantra. Sukracharya works for the demon king, Vrishaparva, whose daughter is Sarmishta. Yayati and Sarmishta have a forbidden affair and three sons together. When Sukracharya discovers this infidelity, he curses Yayati into old age, but Yayati's youngest son takes the curse in his father's stead. For a thousand years, Yayati lives in youth and bliss because of his son's gift, and once the thousand years are up, he returns the youth to his son. Upon entering heaven, Yayati declares that none other can equal his accomplishments, and because of this, the weight of his ego pulls him back to earth. Only when he masters his ego is he able to remain in heaven.

Devi

Devi is the fearsome but beautiful eighteen-armed Goddess who is the incarnation of Iswara, the Ultimate God. She is created by the trinity of Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva in order to defeat the demon Mahisha. She is the primordial foe of evil, and in each of the hands of her eighteen arms, she wields a different weapon. When she was created by the trinity, they all prayed intensely to the Highest Source for help, and Grace descended in the form of emanations from the face of each god. She wears robes of blood red, is crowned with a sparkling diadem, and rides a fearsome lion. When Mahisha's men encounter her, they tell their master that they could not glimpse her face for more than a second, as it dazzled them, and that it radiated the purest emotions of joy, anger, wonder, laughter and compassion.



Manmata

Manmata is the god of love, who is created by Brahma the creator as a brother to Sandhya. His wife is Rati, the beauty of beauties. Manmata is sent by Brahma to attack Iswara, the Ultimate God, with his arrows as a matter of revenge. Manmata's arrows are ineffectual against Shiva, as Iswara, and when he sees Manmata shooting at him behind a bush, he opens his third eye and reduces Manmata to ashes. When Shiva takes Pavarti as his wife, Rati appeals to him in this, his happiest mood, to return Manmata to his original form. He agrees, except that he will be visible to Rati only, and invisible to everyone else.

Ravana

Ravana is a demon who was born with ten heads and twenty arms. Originally, he was known as Dasagreeva (meaning ten heads), but was given the name Ravana by Shiva, when he attempted to move Mount Kailas, Shiva's home. Ravana prays in penance for nine thousand years, and is granted a boon by Brahma. Ravana asks for immortality, naturally, as this is the main request of demons. Brahma refuses, but gives him the gift of indestructibility instead. Every time one of his heads was severed, it would immediately grow back. Ravana hears of the greatness of Rama and despises him for it. He kidnaps Rama's wife, Sita and Rama and Ravana wage war over her release. In the end, it is Rama who is victorious, as he plants his Brahma Astra in Ravana's heart, Ravana's only point of vulnerability.

Valmiki

Valmiki is known in Hindu folklore as the greatest story teller of all time, or the Adi Kavi: the fountainhead of poetry, or the foremost poet. Valmiki composed the 24 thousand stanzas of the Ramayana, which is known in one form or another to every man, woman and child in the Hindu culture. The main character of the Ramayana is Rama, who revealed himself to Valmiki in a vision. Valmiki did not begin as such, in his first lives, he was a thief and a hunter, but through a thousand years of penance, he emerged as Valmiki.

Draupadi

Draupadi is the heroine of the Mahabharata, one of the two epic ancient texts of India. She was married to all five of the Pandava brothers, who are the heroes of the text. Her hand in marriage was won by the third brother, Arjuna, who performed a remarkable feat of archery in a contest where Draupadi was the prize. When Arjuna and his brothers arrive home, someone jokingly calls to the mother that they come bearing a gift of alms, and the mother calls back to share it amongst themselves. Thus, since their mother's wishes are binding, they all must marry Draupadi. The arrangement is further sealed when the sage Vyasa explains that because of a situation in her former life, in this life it



is correct for Draupadi to have five husbands. She helps her husbands defeat their evil cousins, the Kauravas, and assists them out of exile while being advised by Krishna.

Nala

Nala was the king of Nishadha, who falls in love with the beautiful princess Damayanti. They are wed, and live a happy life together until Nala loses everything, including his kingdom, to his brother in a game of dice. Nala and Damayanti are ordered out of the city and into exile. Nala leaves Damayanti because he knows that his path will be a dangerous one, and she wanders far and wide in order to find him. In the end, they are reunited, despite Nala's appearance being altered. Nala wins back his kingdom, after learning how to play dice well from King Rituparna. Being the forgiving and generous man he is, Nala gives his brother half of the kingdom to rule.

Savitri

Savitri was born to King Mudra, and named after the goddess Savitri. Because she shared a name with a goddess, Savitri found that no one would come forth to be her husband. So, with her father's blessing, she set forth to find her perfect mate. When she returns home, the sage Narada tells her that the man she chose to be her husband, Satyavan, will die in a year and that she should choose someone else. Savitri marries him anyway, and when the year is up, she goes with him into the forest where he passes away. Savitri sees Yama then, also known as Death, and follows him. She charms him with her philosophies and he relinquishes her husband's life back to her.

Kovalan and Kannagi

In the story *The Mismatched Anklet*, Kovalan and Kannagi are husband and wife. Kovalan has an affair with a prostitute and loses their fortune, so they leave their town of Puhar for the neighboring Madurai. The only thing of value left to the couple is a pair of very fine gold anklets. Kovalan sets out to sell them to the local goldsmith. The goldsmith had recently stolen a fine gold anklet from the queen and was happy to meet Kovalan so that he could take his anklet, call him the thief, and kill him. When Kannagi hears of this outrage, she literally sets the town of Madurai on fire with her anger. Finally, her anger is quelled when the city's deity comes to explain that Kovalan was paying for his actions in a previous life. She and Kovalan are reunited in the afterlife, and a temple to Kannagi is built on the spot where she and Kovalan ascended to heaven.

Shakuntala

Shakuntala was born to the goddess Menaka and the sage Viswamitra. She was rejected immediately by her father, and her mother abandoned her to return to her own world. Shakuntala was left on a bed of leaves beside a river, and the birds protected her. She was found by the sage Kanva and he raised her. She grew up to be a beautiful



young woman, and she caught the attention of King Dushyanta when he was out hunting. The king marries Shakuntala right then and there, and promises her that he will send his chariot soon to bring her to the palace. He never comes back, however, and nine months later, Shakuntala bears the king's son. Shakuntala and her son travel to the kingdom to confront the king, who claims he does not remember her. To end Shakuntala's pained suffering, a divine voice from above declares that she speaks the truth, and the king suddenly remembers and welcomes her.

Harischandra

Harischandra was a king who was greatly revered by the sage Vasishtha. Viswamitra, Vasishtha's rival, decided to test the great Harischandra's virtue, and sets a demonic wild boar loose in the kingdom. After chasing it day and night, Harischandra meets a man who shows him to shade and water, and Harischandra promises the man anything he wants in return for his kindness. Little did he know that the man was Viswamitra in disguise. He asks for everything - Harishandra's kingdom, the contents of his treasury, even the jewelry he wore - and that he and his wife and son would immediately leave the capitol. Also, Harischandra would have to pay a tax for the gift and sell his wife and son into slavery. Harischandra was a man of his word, and he had promised the man anything, so he had no choice but to comply. In the end, Harischandra and his wife are reunited when they think their son has been killed. They are about to burn themselves on the pyre with their son when the gods intervene and Viswamitra forfeits his spiritual merit to Harischandra, having been proven wrong.

Sibi

One afternoon, after a feast on the river's edge with his disciples, King Sibi went to retire under his canopy when a small white dove dropped into his lap. The hawk who had been chasing it swooped down next to the king and demanded he give him the dove, as he had been chasing it and it was his meal. The king refuses, claiming that the dove had come to him for refuge. The hawk and the king argue until the king realizes that the hawk will not be satisfied until he gets fresh meat. The king offers his own flesh instead of the dove, whereupon the hawk turns into Indra, the chief of the gods, and the dove turns into the god of fire. King Sibi had passed the test that was designed to challenge his virtue as king and protector.



Objects/Places

Mount Kailas

This is where Shiva and Pavarti live. Once when the demon Ravana was flying past, the mountain got in his way. He stepped out of his flying chariot and screamed while trying to move the mountain. This is when Shiva gave Ravana his name, which originally was Dasagreeva, meaning 'ten heads', but after this incident he became Ravana, meaning 'scream'.

Fragrant Flowers

Often, at the point in a story when there is a divine intervention, fragrant flowers will appear. For example, when King Dushyanta finally remembers his wife, Shakuntala, fragrant flowers rain down on the assembly as the divine voice speaks out. Also, at the end of King Sibi's tale, when the hawk becomes Indra and the dove becomes the god of fire, the king's flesh in the scale pan turns into fragrant flowers. The flowers are meant to represent the divinity of the gods, but also to show their power of turning an object or a situation that is undesirable into something lovely and fragrant.

The Humped Bull

In the story The Mispaid Anklet, when Kovalan sets out into the marketplace to sell his wife Kannagi's gold anklet, he fails to notice that he has walked past a humped bull. The humped bull is an omen of ill tidings, and if Kovalan would have seen the bull, perhaps he would have delayed his journey and perhaps lived to see another day. As it turned out, he was murdered by the town goldsmith and took the fall for the goldsmith's thievery.

The Brahma Astra

The Brahma Astra is the weapon that was created by Brahma, and is known as the deadliest and most powerful weapon. It was the Brahma Astra that Rama wielded that finally finished off Ravana, when he struck the demon in the heart, his only point of vulnerability. There is a specific mantra that must be uttered which is bestowed upon the user at the time when it is needed. The Brahma Astra causes destruction of all the living things around it; the land becomes barren, men and women become infertile and the land becomes dry and cracked from drought. It is compared to the arrows of Apollo in Greek Mythology or to the modern-day nuclear bomb.



Pushpak Vimana

When the demon Ravana invades his brother's city of Alakapuri, he steals Kubera's prized possession, his flying chariot called Pushpak Vimana. This flying chariot could not only take its riders anywhere they wanted to go through the skies, it could also grant wishes. When Ravana kidnaps Rama's wife, Sita, he carries her off in the flying chariot. He also uses it to take her to the skies above the battlefield where her husband and his brother supposedly lie dead. When she sees their bodies, she wishes to end her life, but it was of course, a trick, as they were not really dead but only in a faint.

Puhar and Madurai

In the story *The Mismatched Anklet*, husband and wife Kovalan and Kannagi are celebrating their nuptials in their town of Puhar, a flourishing seacoast town where the Cauvery river joins the sea. When Kovalan falls in love with a young prostitute and loses his fortune, he and Kannagi leave Puhar in favor of Madurai, a neighboring city. In Madurai, Kovalan sets out to sell Kannagi's fine gold anklet, he is murdered by the town goldsmith. Kannagi's rage is so fierce when she hears of this unjust murder that she literally sets the town of Madurai on fire and all of its inhabitants, save the innocent, the learned, the good, the infirm, the children and the dumb animals, perish.

Ayodhya

Ayodhya is the birthplace of the Hero, Rama. To appease his father, and at the request of his father's third wife, Rama spends fourteen years in exile, joined by his wife and his brother. Once his exile is over, Rama returns to be crowned king of Ayodhya where he rules for eleven thousand years. This era is known as Rama Rajya, a time that is known for perfect peace and prosperity.

The Godavari River

The Godavari River is the second longest river in India, second only to the great Ganges, and runs from western to southern India. In the story *Valmiki*, a scholar named Sankha is returning to his home land along the banks of the Godavari River when he encounters a robber who steals his sandals. The sand along the river is hot, and scorches his feet. The robber calls him back and returns his sandals, and in exchange for this kindness, Sankha tells the scholar the story of his past lives. The robber prays for a thousand years and emerges as Valmiki, the greatest poet in Hindu folklore, who wrote the *Ramayana*, the story of Rama's life.



Lanka

Lanka is the demon Ravana's capital city. It is a fine city, filled with palaces, museums and gardens, encircled and decorated with the booty all of Ravana's various campaigns. The people in the streets of Lanka are all richly dressed and ornamented, and the air is filled with hymns and chants glorifying Ravana. When Ravana kidnaps Rama's wife, Sita, he brings her to Lanka. Rama's armies break the tower off of Ravana's palace in Lanka, and assault the city before Rama himself kills Ravana with his Brahma Astra.

Uttar Pandava

Lavana is the king of a realm called Uttar Pandava. It is a rich and beautiful country, and Lavana is beloved as its ruler. One day, Lavana encounters a magician who enters his court and through telepathy, this magician transports Lavana away from his beloved kingdom. Lavana learns a lesson about the nature of time through the tricks of the magician and lives a lifetime walking in someone else's shoes.



Themes

It's Not Always Good to be the King

There are many examples within these stories how, although being a supreme ruler may sound like the ultimate in luxury, in actuality, the sacrifices that a king must make in the name of his crown, or for the greater good of his subjects, often would lead to extreme suffering. Often, this suffering occurs at the hands of the gods or higher beings, who wish to test the kings to determine whether they are capable of living up to their merit as a ruler of the people. In the story of Harischandra, for example, King Harischandra, ruler of Ayodhya, is tested by the other-worldly sage known as Viswamitra. Certain obstacles are placed in the king's path, so that as a result, he must surrender his entire kingdom and treasury over to a stranger and sell his wife and son into slavery. To Viswamitra's surprise, the king lives up to his word and proves his merit, and as a result, just as Harischandra and his wife are about to sacrifice themselves on the funeral pyre together, Viswamitra appears to congratulate them for passing the test. Another example comes in the story about king Sibi, who finds himself as the unwitting protector of a dove who has literally fallen into his lap. The dove appeals to the king to save him from the hawk who is in pursuit of him, and the king obliges. As a result, the king ends up offering his own flesh in exchange for the life of the dove, as anything less would be unsatisfactory not only to the hawk, but also in regards to the quality of the king's merit. In the end, again, the dove and the hawk are actually divine beings, bent on testing the king, and are in the end satisfied with his kingly qualities. Other common elements of the kings in these stories are the waging of war, which is considered the legitimate public activity of a ruler in order to obtain more land or treasure, the ruling of his subjects strictly according to the shastras, and straying from his kingdom and into situations that alter the course of his life.

Sacred Sages

Within these stories, a common theme is the life of the sage. A sage, by definition, is a mentor in spiritual and philosophical topics who is known for profound wisdom. The sage typically spends his life living in isolation, often within a forest, seeking illumination through 'tapas', or concentrated meditations, and by living a prudent life of austerity. Of particular note are the sages Viswamitra and his rival, Vasishta. In the story 'Viswamitra', the great sage Vasishta meets a greedy king who wishes to obtain the same powers as Vasishta and undergoes a rigorous penance in order to do so. In the end, the king emerges as a great sage himself, the legendary Viswamitra, who is able to achieve great accomplishments with his powers, such as creating a new universe, but is unable to achieve true greatness until he can forget his own ego and his own needs. Viswamitra and Vasishta go head to head in the story of Harischandra. Vasishta announces to an assemblage of gods and sages that Harischandra is, in his opinion, the greatest human alive, and thus utterly infallible. Viswamitra scoffs at this proclamation and vows to test the king's merit. In the end, it is Viswamitra who is proven



wrong, and Vasishta who is victorious. Also, sages will often take in those who have been rejected in one way or another by society. In the story of Shakuntala, the baby girl Shakuntala is abandoned by her other-worldly mother, (her father, incidentally, is the great sage Viswamitra) and taken in by the sage Kanva, whose hermitage is nearby. Kanva takes the child in and raises her as his own, and when it is time for her to journey into the city to find her king, he accommodates her thus. Another sage of note within the stories of this book is Sukracharya, found in the story of Yayati, who is master of the Sanjivini incantation. Sages are sacred within the texts of Hindu mythology because they represent higher power through austerity and wisdom and provide an example of behavior befitting the return of good karma.

Glorious Gods and Despicable Demons

Demoniacal creatures are common within these stories, and they often undertake intense penance in order to obtain strange and unlimited powers with which to harass mankind and godkind alike until a hero arrives and puts them out of commission. Examples of demons are Ravana, who had ten heads and twenty arms, and Mahishasura, which literally means 'demon with a buffalo's head'. A demon will usually seek immortality after the favor of a god. Even the most thoughtlessly generous gods, however, will stop short of granting a demon absolute immortality, as doing so would certainly lead to the ultimate destruction of the world. Typically, the clever demon will sidestep the god failing to grant absolute immortality by requesting the condition that he may be destroyed only under certain conditions. For example, Ravana could only be killed if pierced through the heart by the ultimate weapon of the Brahma Astra, and Mahishasura could only be felled by a female. In the story of Yayati, we are introduced to the demon king, Vrishaparva, whose daughter is Sarmishta. As far as the Gods go, the supreme god who is beyond all creation and dissolution is Iswara, also known as Narayana, or Mahashakti. The descent of this Supreme Being to a practical place establishes the trinity of Brahma, The Creator, Vishnu, The Protector, and Shiva, The Destroyer. Indra is the chief of the minor gods, known as 'devas', who number thirty-three million. Varuna is the lord of the oceans, atmosphere and water, Agni is the god of fire, Vayu is the god of wind, Kama, also known as Manmata, is the god of love, and Yama is the god of death, to name a few.



Style

Perspective

Gods, Demons and Others was written by R.K. Narayan, who recorded these stories, preserved mainly in the oral tradition, as spoken by The Story Teller. The Story Teller is a figurehead of the rural Indian community, who would act as a public servant and even a priest in some situations. Every rural village within the culture would have a storyteller. It would be essential to pass these stories along, down through the generations, as they basically outlined the road map that the villagers needed to follow in order to live a prudent and austere life. The stories are told from a third person, past tense perspective, as they would be stories of occurrences that happened to mythical characters who lived thousands of years ago. Narayan selected certain stories to include within this text after listening to several different story tellers, and warns in the preface that they are not meant to be taken as translations. He rewrote them in his own terms, from recollection, just as he would write any other story normally out of the impact of life and the people around him. In an effort to move the narrative along and not allow the text to expand into epic proportions, Narayan deleted much of the editorial commentary that would have been typical of the story teller.

Tone

These stories are the well known stories of Hindu mythology as transferred orally from generation to generation by the story teller to the general populous, and translated for the English market by R.K. Narayan. Therefore, the tone is narrative, with an adherence to the moral undertones of each tale. Invariably, each tale will begin with an inquiring mind asking a fundamental question of an enlightened mind. It is inherently understood by the Indian listener of these tales that the hero will achieve the grace of the gods through adherence to austerity and prudence, and that the demons will get what they deserve in the end for their mischief. The descriptive words that Narayan chooses within the stories are never unnecessarily intellectual, but instead are typically the perfect vocabulary word for the occasion. The text is also peppered with words from the Hindu language, which assists the reader in furthering his or her understanding of the language and culture behind the text itself.

Structure

Gods, Demons and Others consists of five sections. The stories are grouped, as the introductions of each section indicates, according to certain common themes such as the treatment of certain typical figures, or the ideal king or the virtuous wife. In section one, we have the stories of 'Lavana', 'Chudala' and 'Yayati', all stories which concern "others". These stories see the least interference from the gods. Each story is concerned with a discovery in the realm of the spirit. The second section is a group of



stories are 'Devi', 'Viswamitra', and 'Manmata,' all stories that depict a process of sublimation in one form or another. Section three consists of 'Ravana,' 'Valmiki,' and 'Draupadi,' all stories where god himself participates in the action. The stories of section four are 'Nala', 'Savitri', 'The Mispaiied Anklet', and 'Shakuntala', which all depict the heroine according to Indian tradition. In each story , a wife is depicted as overcoming formidable obstacles in order to regain a lost husband. Finally, section five includes the stories of 'Harischandra' and 'Sibi', both of which have a king as their central character, and illustrates aspects of the ideal ruler. In total, 'God's, Demon's and Others' is 241 pages in length, which includes an introductory section called 'The World of the Storyteller', a page and a half outlining the gods of the stories, the five sections described above, a one and a half page note on Cosmogony, and a glossary.



Quotes

"The king cried, 'But I passed through seventy years. I passed through a whole lifetime of seventy years. Did I not?' He looked about and cried, 'Where is that magician?' And everyone looked about, but the magician was gone."

Lavana, p. 23

"One had also to cultivate perfect detachment, which led to a well-poised mind, unaffected by opposites such as good and evil, pain and pleasure, loss and gain, and when one ceased to identify one's real inner soul with extraneous impacts and experiences, one attained equanimity, calmness and imperturbability."

Chudala, p. 27

"A promise made in jest, or under extraordinary circumstances, or to save a life or property, may be broken without any moral consequences. Truth is something more than that, and for all such lapses, there are extenuations."

Yayati, p. 41

"You are an inquirer, and it is my duty to answer you. You must understand that my strength comes from my inner being. Within every one of us there is a spark of godhood. When you are able to rouse it and employ it, you will acquire matchless strength."

Viswamitra, p. 71

"What a simpleton you are! Why do you want Shiva, that rough, rugged, unresponsive fellow, who did not hesitate to scorch the poor god of love? A man of unnecessary, who has smeared his body with the ashes, whose retreat is the graveyard, who has clothed himself with the hide of a tiger, and whose coronet and armband are live snakes! Nothing is elegant about him, forget him!"

Manmata, p. 94

"The life that you now enjoy or suffer is a result of your actions in previous lives, and now you are acquiring more sins every hour, instead of seeking liberation at least in a future life."

Valmiki, p. 132

"You may well imagine Draupadi's reaction to this situation. She sent up a silent prayer to the gods to solve this problem and edged closer to the only woman in the house, feeling relieved at the thought that whatever might be the number of husbands, she would only have one mother-in-law. (At this the storyteller permitted himself a smile)."

Draupadi, p. 147

"When a bird flies off with the only garment a man possesses, what's left for him but to rip an edge off his wife's sari?"

Nala, p. 180



"I cannot feel any tiredness where my husband is," she said. "In good company one attains salvation, and therefore should one always stay where good people are found."
Savitri, p. 187

"Over the sounding of the bell, Kannagi screamed, 'Go and wake your king who has put his conscience to sleep, whose heart has become granite, and tell him that a wretched woman bearing a widowed anklet is at his gate.'"
The Mismatched Anklet, p. 199

"Into this grim silence, a voice from heaven cried, 'O good king, let her not endure this trial any more. She spoke the truth, and this is your son, accept him.' At these words, flowers were showered upon the assembly."
Shakuntala, p. 210

"Ignorant mankind! How the eagle came to be so much respected, I shall never understand; what is there to commend the eagle? Its wingspread? You people are too carried away by appearances!"
Sibi, p. 231



Topics for Discussion

Discuss Karma, and cite examples where it comes back to haunt despicable characters, or works in the favor of characters of virtue.

Compare the idea of the ideally virtuous Indian wife with the idea of the modern woman, in view of modern feminism. Include in this discussion the idea that it was prudent at one time in Hindu culture for a wife to cremate herself - meaning, burn herself alive - on her husband's funeral pyre.

In light of feminism, discuss Devi and the role that she plays in the story involving the demon Mahishasura. Is she truly a feminine heroine, considering that she is an incarnation of the patriarchal ultimate God, Iswara?

How is the character Savitri a heroine, and how does her persistence and unwillingness to take no for an answer save her family in the end? Considering that she must face the god of death and does so fearlessly, does this make her an extraordinary character, or merely foolishly determined?

In the fifth section of the book, we meet two different kings, Harischandra and Sibi. Consider the tests that these two characters are forced to endure, and discuss whether or not you feel the virtue of the kings was proven in the end. What about the supposed virtue of the gods? Were the tests that they presented the kings with just and fair, and where is Indra, chief of the gods when his charges are misbehaving?

Discuss Viswamitra and the personality flaws that he needed to overcome in order to become a great sage. Also, discuss his rival Vasishta, and explain why he is, inherently, a sage who commands more respect than Viswamitra, if you feel that he does.

Discuss the character Lavana, and consider the idea of illustrating the nature of time through narrative. Can you think of any examples within popular culture where you have seen this theme used again?