



Ratnasar

In the city of Ratnavisala, where reigned King Samar Singha, there lived a merchant named Vasusar. He had a son named Ratnasar. One day, Ratnasar went to his garden-house in the company of his peers when his eyes fell on Acharya Vinayandhara who had come there. He went near the Acharya, bowed thrice and raised the following question:

"Holy sire! What helps the acquisition of happiness?"

The Acharya replied, "As a key to happiness, contentment may be deemed to be unsurpassed. In the absence of contentment, not even the king of gods or a universal monarch can be happy; but with contentment, even one sleeping on the bare earth and living on a coarse diet may be happy. Contentment may be of two types—full and qualified. A homeless monk has full contentment, but a householder's

contentment is qualified. To have it, every householder should limit his acquisition."

These words very much inspired Ratnasar, who accepted the vows of a sravaka, particularly the vows of equanimity and of limiting acquisition.

One day, Ratnasar came across a Kinnara who had the body of a human being but the face of a horse. Ratnasar could not check a smile at his queer shape, and he spoke the following words almost without effort: "If this be a human being, why does it have the appearance of a horse? Surely he is neither a human being nor a celestial being, but an animal from another land or an animal-vehicle for some god."

At these words, the Kinnara felt slighted and said, "Ratnasar! You look on me with utter contempt only because of your ignorance. I am a Byantara (sylvan) god with freedom to behave and freedom to

enjoy. In my view, you are a real animal who is grossly deceived by your own father."

Ratnasar was taken aback. Said he, "What do you mean when you say that I have been grossly deceived by my own father?"

"I mean what I say. You have been deceived. Had it not been so, you would have been in the know of special things in your household. Your father has kept out certain things from the purview of your knowledge."

"But your allegation is vague. To substantiate, you should be specific at least about some items and indicate how they have been kept out of my knowledge."

Your father has a special steed of black hue, lean but very fast, who has been imported from another land. It has a broad neck, flies with the air and gives

sure success to its master. Its normal speed is 100 yojanas per day, and it can encircle the earth in seven days. The steed is kept hidden from you. I shall deem you to be a true hero only when you can take possession of it."

So saying, the Kinnara disappeared in the sky. Ratnasar returned home with only one thought, how to get the steed. He entered into a discarded room and lay on a worn-out cot. When the news reached his father, he came running, and, knowing the problem of his son, he said, "I really had no intention of hiding anything from you, but, you see, I cannot tolerate your absence from home. If you had known the existence of the steed, it is pretty sure that it would have been difficult for me to detain you at home. I deliberately kept it a secret only to avert this situation. But now that you have known about it, I shall

pass it on to you and give you the liberty to do what pleases you."

Ratnasar's problem was so easily solved. He was happy now. He took no time to ride on its back and move out of the city. Once beyond the bound of the city, he put the steed to gallop. Vasusar had a trained parrot. Knowing that his master's son had moved out, it expressed a desire to accompany him as an escort. Vasusar readily agreed. The parrot now flew out of the cage and overtook Ratnasar, who received it cordially and placed it on the steed.

As the steed was flying over a dense forest, Ratnasar's eyes fell on a hermit youth who was extremely charming. The youth also saw him and was charmed by his manly grace. The existence of a human being in such a dense forest so much delighted Ratnasar that he could not check the temptation to come down and

meet him. The hermit youth advanced to receive him. The youth made inquiries about his name, his parents, his family, his line, his caste, his city and country, and his purpose for visiting there. He also invited him to be his guest.

As Ratnasar alighted from the steed and was about to satisfy the curiosity of the youth, the parrot spoke out, "Why are you interested in these details? We haven't come here to settle a marriage in your family. We are strangers and, at the moment, your guests. That should be enough for you."

The hermit youth took no offense at the parrot's words but was delighted at the parrot's intelligence. Then, turning to Ratnasar, he said, "Sir, you are lucky to have a sincere friend in this parrot. I request you both to accept my hospitality. I am a hermit, and so I may not be able to

provide you with all comforts, but I shall do my best to help you."

Then the youth led them to another part of the forest where there was a tank. Ratnasar took his bath and became fresh. Then fruits were served for his lunch. The parrot and the horse were duly fed.

After lunch, all of them sat down to rest and chat. Getting a hint from his master, the parrot said, "Young man! You are in the very prime of youth, and it should be a surprise that you have courted renunciation. Despite your very delicate frame, you have preferred to choose a hard life. But it seems to me that, like the malati flower, you have dedicated your life to a colossal waste. How very nice you would look in silk and nylon; instead, you have put on a bark. Your hair needs a delicate touch; instead, they are all matted. I do not know what induced you to this wrong choice."

The hermit youth was abashed. With tears of joy in his eyes and his throat almost choked, he said, "Your endearing words give me great joy. Both of you are inquisitive about my choice, and this gives me added joy. Surely shall I narrate the story of my life to such friends as you both."

Ratnasar and the parrot now sat attentively and the hermit youth was just about to start his account when there started a severe cyclone darkening all directions with flying dust. There was a terrific roar in the wind, so that nothing was visible and nothing was audible. The hermit youth was unfortunately caught in the wind, which lifted him up to the sky. He cried for assistance, but before Ratnasar could do anything, he was carried far, far away.

Ratnasar became very sad at this event. To change his thought, the parrot said,

"This hermit youth does not seem to be a boy. He must be a girl who has been turned into a boy by the machination of some cruel god, demon, or vidyadhara. His face-cut and gait lend support to my guess. If somehow she could be rescued from her present state, I have no doubt she would be glad to marry you."

They were now searching for the youth, but the search did not yield any result. One day, they reached a temple dedicated to the first Tirthankara Risabha. Ratnasar worshipped at the feet of the image and sat down at the window to rest and enjoy the forest view outside. Addressing the parrot, he said, "So many days have passed, and we have not been able to trace the hermit. It causes me much pain."

"Regret not, sir. There will be the happy reunion this very day."

Just then, a lady stepped inside the temple. She worshipped and danced before the image. Ratnasar saw all this from the window. Slowly he came down to her, bowed before her, and inquired who she was and how she came to that dense forest and for what purpose. The lady gave an account of her story.

“There is a city named Kanakpura, where reigns King Kanakadhwaja. His wife, Kusumshri, dreamt one night that two garlands came flying to her. In the morning, when she told the king about the dream, he said, ‘It appears that twin girls will be born to you.’

“In course of time, the queen gave birth to two daughters, who were named Asokamanjari and Tilakamanjari. When they stepped into their youth, the king thought of settling them in marriage, preferably with one groom.

"It was now spring, and both the sisters went to the royal garden to enjoy a swing. Asokamanjari sat on it, and Tilakamanjari pushed from behind. Just then, a vidyadhara was flying over the garden. When he saw Asokamanjari on the swing, he picked her up from there and disappeared in the sky. When Tilakamanjari saw this, she fell down senseless on the ground.

"When the sad news reached the palace, the king, the queen, members of the royal household and leading citizens all came to the park. But there was nothing to be done, and so all returned very sad at the episode.

"Tilakamanjari was now at the palace. It was the last quarter of the night when she got up and came to the temple of Goddess Chakreswari to propitiate her for the recovery of her dear sister. The goddess was well pleased at her devotion

and assured her that in a month's time she would not only know the whereabouts of her sister, but also she would meet her. When Tilakamanjari inquired of the goddess when and where she would meet her, the goddess told her that she would meet her in a temple dedicated to the first tirthankara in a dense forest in the western direction from the city. The goddess further advised her to worship the tirthankara daily, and she offered her the assistance of a divine peacock to carry her there. I am that Tilakamanjari, sir, and you understand now the purpose of my presence here."

Just at that moment, a peacock came down. While taking leave of the stranger, the princess said, "This peacock is my vehicle, and I come here daily on his back. Today I complete a month of my worship, but I do not see any trace of my sister anywhere. Sir, you are moving through

many lands. If, by chance, you come across a lady bearing similarity to me, be kind enough to pass the information on to me."

"Charming lady! Surely I shall oblige you if I see one like you. So far in my wandering I did not come across any such lady, but I met a hermit youth in a forest."

"Today you will surely meet your sister," said the parrot.

"In that case, I shall remain ever grateful to you."

When the three were in the midst of conversation, a terrified goose fell from the sky and sat on Ratnasar's lap saying, "Oh brave man! I seek refuge with you. I am wretched and helpless, and there is none to save me. Please save my life." Ratnasar took the goose under his protection and uttered words of consolation. He offered it cool water to

drink. After the goose was somewhat pacified, Ratnasar asked who it was, whence it came, how it could speak in a human voice, and of whom it was so afraid. He assured that he would try to mend the situation and allay the fear if it was within his power in any way.

As the goose was about to recount its story, however, a noise became audible outside, and soon there appeared some soldiers outside the temple. The parrot now came near the temple door and said to the soldiers in an angry voice, "Men! Haven't you reached a wrong place? Don't you know that Prince Ratnasar is taking rest here? Aren't you familiar with his prowess, which neither gods, nor demons, nor vidyadharas can excel? If by any chance his angry glance falls on you, you can nowhere escape for the safety of your life."

This created a terror in their minds. They talked amongst themselves, "Surely this must be a god or a demon; otherwise, he would not have challenged us, the vidyadharas. If, as we see, the prince's parrot is so very sharp, how much more powerful the prince himself must be! It may become difficult for us to stand before him. It is, therefore, not wise to accept the challenge of one whose strength we don't know."

The soldiers returned to their chief to report, who, on hearing the account, lost his temper and said, "Fie on you all, cowards, that you are so much afraid of an insignificant parrot! I used to take pride in your valor, but I see now that it was all placed in very unworthy persons. I know not who this prince may be, but you at least should have known that none among the gods or the demons is capable of standing before my prowess. Fools are

you all, wholly unworthy for the profession of arms!"

So saying, he mobilized his power to the full with ten heads and four hands and equipped himself with deadly arms. Then, with a terrific roar that would put even a lion to shame, he descended and entered into the temple precincts. The parrot saw him and came back to Ratnasar in terror. Now, throwing the challenge, the vidyadhara said, "You wretched man! Get away at once, or you force me to kill you. You have kept hidden my dear goose. If life is dear to you, then surrender her at once!"

The parrot, the lady, the peacock and the goose were all trembling. Only Ratnasar did not lose his nerve. Firmly he said, "You fool! I am not afraid of you, nor am I going to surrender the goose to you. Get out of my sight at once, or I shall cut off

your ten heads and make of them to the ten directions!"

There was a severe fight in which Ratnasar fought against the vidyadhara and his soldiers from horseback. One by one, the soldiers fled, and soon there was none but the chief. There was now a straight fight in which the vidyadhara invoked his magical powers and hurled them at his human adversary. Ratnasar met them all. At last, he threw an arrow which pierced the vidyadhara in the chest, and he fell down in a swoon. Regaining sense, he entered the arena again, this time more dreadful than before. Finding Ratnasar in danger, the divine peacock assumed his original form of a god, picked up a heavy mace, and struck the vidyadhara on the head. This ended all his magical powers, and he stood helpless, acknowledging defeat.

Ratnasar now came inside the temple in the company of the god. Tilakamanjari, who had witnessed the fight from the temple, had no doubt that the man must be a rare hero. He was beautiful, too, and she felt she would be happy to be his bride. Besides, this would help her in the search for her sister, which was only possible by courage and intellect, which Ratnasar possessed.

Ratnasar now picked up the goose and placed her on his palm to help her to tender her account, which she did as follows: "Madan is the vidyadhara chief at Rathapur on the Vaitadhya hills, and his wife is Kamala. One day, the chief was flying over a garden at Kanakpur when Asokamanjari was enjoying a ride on the swing. The chief was charmed at her beauty and picked her up. When Asokamanjari started bewailing, he said to her, 'Oh lady! Don't be afraid. I am not

a rogue or a thief, but the master of a kingdom. You will have no trouble with me. Rather, you will always find me obliging and ready to serve you in all manners. Among all my consorts, you will be the foremost.'

"Asokamanjari was very much annoyed at his misbehavior in picking her up, but she preferred to keep silent. Madan took it to be the outcome of the sudden separation from her near and dear ones and felt that she would be all right after some time. To give her respite to convalesce, he turned her into a hermit youth and placed her in a forest. There he visited her daily to win her favor, but he was no more successful than he was on the first occasion. Sir, it was this hermit youth whom you yourself met. If you will remember, the youth was about to tender his account up to you when a cyclone created by the vidyadhara picked the youth up and took him to

Madan's city. There he again repeated his overtures, but with no better result. Then he unsheathed his sword to kill her, but Asokamanjari did not yield. She said, 'Swords may be helpful to win kingdoms, but not a woman's heart, which can be won by love and affection only. by sticking to your haughtiness, you demonstrate how unworthy you are to seek my heart.'

"Madan was fully aflame with rage. 'You foolish girl! You decry me like that in my very presence! I must put an end to your life,' he shouted.

"Asokamanjari was not terrified at his words. She said, 'When I am decided not to court you, what's the point in my staying with you like this? It is better that you kill me at once. I am no seeker of my life from your hands.'

"At this, Madan softened. He even changed his mind. Then he turned Asokamanjari into a goose and put her in a

cage. When his wife, Kamala, saw the goose, she had some suspicion. One day, she induced the goose to give her full account, which she did. Now, you know, a lady cannot bear the presence of a co-wife. So one day Kamala took her chance and opened the cage. The goose escaped and was on her wings floating through the air. When at last she became tired, she came down to the ground to sit on your lap. Here I am, sir! When the vidyadhara came to know of my escape, he pursued me. The rest of the story is too well-known to everyone present here."

When the account was complete, Tilakamanjari could no longer restrain herself. She said, "Sister dear! How did you live in the dense forest as a hermit youth? How do you live now in the shape of a bird? I know not what karma may have put you through so much suffering. How will you get rid of this animal body?"

The god stood near at hand. He changed the goose into her human form. It became a very happy occasion, an occasion of reunion of two dear sisters.

Jokingly, Ratnasar said to Tilakamanjari, "The credit for this reunion should in part go to me. I must have my due reward."

"Sir, even if we give our all to you for all that you have done, that will be too inadequate a reward."

So saying, Tilakamanjari took a precious necklace from her neck and placed it on Ratnasar. He was not willing to accept it, but Tilakamanjari was insistent, and he could not disoblige her. Tilakamanjari also honored the parrot suitably.

The god then turned to Ratnasar and said, "These two worthy ladies have already been allotted to you by Goddess Chakreswari. I am only to fulfill the ritual aspect now. I offer the hands of both the

sisters unto you, and it behooves you to signify your acceptance."

Ratnasar could not decline such an offer. He gladly signified his assent.

It is a significant irony of life that it never moves in a straight line. At a moment when one feels he is in full possession of earthly pleasures, pains almost unknowingly creep in. One night, as Ratnasar was lying on his couch, he saw a terrible-looking man rushing toward him with bloodshot eyes and challenging him to a duel. As he got ready to meet him, the man picked up the cage with the parrot and fled. Ratnasar pursued him up to a very long distance but could see him no more. He had now no doubt that his adversary was either a god, a demon or a vidyadhara who had put him to an irreparable loss by taking away the parrot.

He did not turn his steps and was decided not to do so until he recovered the parrot. Throughout the day, he continued his search and reached a city in the evening.

As he was about to enter the city, he was prevented from doing so by a parrot, who said that it did so for his own good. This made Ratnasar very inquisitive, and as there was no prohibition or taboo on the account being given, the parrot said, "Here, in this city, there reigned a king named Purandara, under whose administration people were happy, except for one thing which made their life miserable. This was the depredation by a thief who regularly visited the city at night. He turned many rich men into paupers. Efforts were made to catch him, but without success. One day, the king himself headed the hunt and pursued the thief as he was escaping with a bundle of treasures. When the thief saw that he

could not escape, he slipped into a nearby monastery. Inside, there lay a monk who was fast asleep. He dropped the bundle near him and, empty-handed, he escaped without generating any suspicion. When the king reached the monastery, he found the monk with the stolen treasures and arrested him. The monk was tried and ordered for execution. After he was executed, he became a yaksa. To take revenge, he not only killed the king, but turned the whole city into a desert, and he still haunts it. It is for this, sir, I prevented you from entering the city."

A grateful Ratnasar said, "Dear bird! Thank you for the information. But you take it from me that I am not afraid of the devil, and he can do me no harm. Rather, you will see, I shall bend him before me."

So saying, he entered into the city. He freely moved through it and was charmed

at its wealth and affluence, piles of grains and the palace, and he passed through all the chambers of the palace. At the seventh floor, he saw a fine couch, and, tired as he was, he lay on it and was soon asleep.

The yaksa returned at night and became furious to find a man lying on his couch. He was surprised, too. Diverse thoughts came to him. "A place where people do not even dare to come, this man sleeps carefree. He must be very daring. I must kill him. But what mode shall I adopt to kill him? Shall I separate his neck, as a fruit is separated from a tree? Shall I peel his skin with a knife, as is done to a fruit? Shall I hurl him into a blazing fire? Shall I throw him up in the sky like a ball? Shall I drown him in the sea?"

But the very next moment, he changed his mind. "After all, he is my guest. He has come to take shelter in my abode. It

would be ridiculous to kill him. Even an enemy should not be killed if he be a guest. I should do him no harm until he wakes. Then I shall consider the right step." He went out and assembled his attendants. Then he returned inside the palace.

But he could not contain himself for long. As he saw Ratnasar still in deep slumber, his blood boiled again, and he thundered, "You shameless wretch! Does it look nice to lie like this on another's couch? Get up and fly, or be ready for a fight!"

Ratnasar awoke and said, "Why do you disturb me? You need to be kept busy. I bid you to rub my feet with ghee mixed with water and put me to sleep again."

These words surprised the yaksa. "Men are afraid of me," thought he, "but what sort of man this may be who bids me to rub his feet. He must be a very divine person. I must obey him."

So he started rubbing Ratnasar's feet as ordered. He became a slave unto him. After the yaksa had done it for some time, Ratnasar sat up and said, "I am sorry for putting you to this humiliating job, but I am pleased that you obeyed me. Ask for a boon. I shall undertake any difficult job to help you."

This was a great surprise for the yaksa. He thought, "A human being willing to give a boon to one who is a divine person. Normally, a god gives a boon to a human being. What new thing can this fellow offer of which I may be in need? But let me see."

So thinking, the yaksa said very politely, "Sire, I do not know of any on the earth, in heaven, or in the nether world who can offer me anything I do not already possess. But since you insist, I must ask. May I take it that you will not decline?"

"Speak out what you want. I stand by my words."

"Then, sir, you take over the administration of this city. I deem you fit for this job. So you rule here and have a nice time. I shall help you in all possible manners."

Ratnasar was caught up in his own snare. Thought he, "This fellow offers me a kingdom, and a kingdom is obtained only when auspicious karma is up. But already I am under a vow not to acquire a kingdom. And at the same time, I am promise-bound to this fellow to honor my words. What is to be done now?"

After some consideration, he said, "My dear fellow! As to the acquisition of the kingdom, I am already under a vow not to do so. Therefore, ask for something else. What's the utility of gold (earring) that obstructs hearing?"

"But, sir, you have given me your words of honor, and honest people do not transgress them even if it may cost them their life."

"Since a kingdom becomes a cause of much sinful activity, I did undertake a vow pretty early never to acquire one. And you will agree, to transgress a vow is the worst of all sinful activities. I cannot strike at my own feet with an axe to suit your purpose, or even to please you. So you see, it is necessary for you to ask for something else."

The yaksa now lost his temper. "This is very unworthy of an honest man, I must say. Now a duel is inevitable to settle it, and, as I can see, one must die. Do you think it will be less sinful? When I, a god, desire you to do something, where is the question of transgressing the vow? I have given you a good chance, my dear sir, and you are a fool not to make use of it. You

know, you lay on my bed; you made me rub your legs; and now you dishonor me! This is extremely impertinent, and I warn you about the consequence. So long as I am favorably disposed toward you, I can do anything to help you, but once I am angry, you will find no place to hide your head."

Ratnasar remained silent. The situation being what it was, what else could he do? this all the more irritated the yaksa. He threatened him again and repeated the threat for the third time. The yaksa now caught him by the hair and threw him into the sky. As he was falling, he held him between his hands and said, "Don't invite sure death by your foolishness. It is not wise to refuse a kingdom. I discharged even menial duties to please you, and you disobey me even on the most coveted offer. Well, this is your last chance. So long I did save you because I was favorably disposed toward you, but you

deserve no genial treatment, since you have only slight for me. So I must now set you right. I must hurl you on yonder rock, as a washerman does with his clothes against a wooden plank. You will die a painful death and go to hell."

So saying, he brought Ratnasar to the rock. But Ratnasar did not waiver. With his firmness, he said, "Do what you please. Ratnasar has never transgressed his vow, nor will he do so now. He is above fear and greed. No power on earth can make him change his mind."

Even the power of a divine being breaks before the power of a mighty soul. The yaksa admitted defeat. He gave up his disguise and appeared in his celestial form. He congratulated Ratnasar for his strength of mind and steadfastness about the vow and said, "Sir, I confirm that you are the foremost among the people who are well known for their steadfastness.

Men like you alone justify the epithet of the Mother Earth as being the mother of heroes. My real name is Chandra Sekhara. While in heaven, I had heard about your steadfastness. The heavenly surgeon Harinegamesi one day extolled you so high as to suggest that you would not accept even a kingdom to uphold your vow. So I came down to hold the test, and, I must candidly admit, your performance excels all expectation. Pleased as I am with you, I request you now to seek a boon.

With his usual detachment, Ratnasar said, "Divine sire! by the grace of spiritual power, I have all I need. I want nothing. But if you so please, I suggest you fix yourself in religion."

The god now restored the parrot to Ratnasar and shifted the two to their own city. Then he took leave and disappeared.

We now reach a happy end to Ratnasar's story. The story of his steadfastness

reached far and wide, and men, even monarchs, organized receptions for him and held him in the highest esteem. Many years passed since he had left his parental home on the back of his father's steed, so Ratnasar's mind moved thither. Therefore, in the company of his two wives, Tilakamanjari and Asokamanjari, he came back to his own city, where a reception was held in his honor by the king.

Such a worthy man throughout his life, Ratnasar could not but pass his old age still more worthily. Once Dharma Suri, the master of all knowledge save the kevala jnana, had come there, and Ratnasar came to pay his obeisance and homage to him. Even King Samar Singha had come. Now, on a query by the king himself as to the pious karma in previous births, by dint of which Ratnasar came to command so much prestige and fame, the learned sage gave

the following account, which is the subject matter of the next story.