

# **BHAGAWAN PARASHURAM**

and

Evolution of Culture in North-East India

**SWAMI BANGOVINDA PARAMPANTHI**

In the first part, the book deals with the life of Parasuram and the Legends. They are drawn upon the great Epic, the Mahabharata and the Puranas with a critical reference to the scriptural in-depth study and factual interpretations of the pristine glory in the backdrop of scenic beauty and grandeur known as Parasurameswar Temple in Arunachal Pradesh. These attributes are even relevant to our modern thinking.

The second part illustrates the geographical factors of the Parashuram kund with its historical perspective in order to know more about the people there, their way of living, their culture and civilization. This book unfolds many facets hitherto unknown to us and still it contributes to the widening knowledge more about the tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh and their quiet way of enriching our cultural heritage. The third part of the book narrates this cultural heritage of the people with special reference to their simplicity of life style, innocence of looks, spontaneity of laughter and curiosity to know more about the people in the plains.

**Swami Bangovinda Parampanthi (1928)** is a devoted monk of high order. He is the Secretary of a well-known religious and charitable Association--"Viraj", located both in Guwahati and Dibrugarh. He is a prolific writer and thinker. He has contributed leading articles both in Bengali and Assamese languages to various Indian Journals.

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**AND**  
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# **BHAGAWAN PARASHURAM**

## **—A Critical Scriptural Study of His Life**

Bhagawan Parashuram is regarded as one of such divine incarnations who appeared on this earth to redeem the promise of establishing the path of righteousness at the time of its decline. His inspiring life story shows that he reminded the shirkers of their duties and put them in the right direction. The legend of his killing Kshatriya—the warrior clan for twentyone times is an indication that they strayed away from their respective duties and allowed the rules of despotism. The essential virtues Kshatriya has got to possess in the words of the Gita: ‘Courage, bravery, cleverness, fearlessness, generosity and knowing how to rule a kingdom’. Thus Parashuram by giving a jolt to them who were negligent of developing these qualities made them conscious of it and taught them to be always vigilant and aware of their own duties in order to enable dharma to preserve the way of balanced life and keep the society in order. Many places of pilgrimage have been reverentially named after him to honour his name and to remind us of his life and teachings. Of such holy spots, the Kunda on the North Eastern tip of our land, is one of the holiest places and from time immemorial we find

thousands of pious people coming here not only to take a holy dip but also to derive inspiration, peace and tranquillity of mind. The scenic beauty, crystal clear water of the Kunda, divinely surcharged atmosphere and environment makes every pilgrim conscious of his essential nature as also immensity and eternity of our soul. Moreover as Dr K.M. Munshi observes:

The personality and exploits of Parashuram are part of India's millennial memory. The ruins of temples dedicated to him all over the country show that at one time his worship must have been widespread. There is a Parashuram Kund in East Assam, a Himalayan peak named after him. Five lakes in Kurukshetra are associated with his exploits. Many places on the west coast from Cambay to Cape Comorin keep his memory alive. There is a temple of Parashuram at the spot where the Narmada meets the sea. There is Parashuram kshetra near Bombay. He was guardian deity of Shurpareka (modern Sopara) once an international port. Many castes claim descent from him.

Hence it is but proper to study the life story of Parashuram as is recorded in different mythological lores and scriptures so that we may get an inkling into his dynamic personality and, reforming zeal. He is not only an 'Avtar' but a great reformer, educator and teacher-all rolled together. Of the glowing tributes paid by the sages (rishis) of the days of yore only a few may be cited below. Valmiki describes him:

So arrives Bhargava Rama there, the subduer of the warrior class resembling a Kailas mountain, his power unbearable and common man could hardly stand his ever brilliance. He tied his on the neck holding arrows in his hand. Verily he looked like a Shiva.

(Ramayana, Adi, 74/17-19)

Vyasa eloquently speaks of him:

Wearing lock and loin cloth and accompanied by his disciples Parashuram resplendent' with divine power

appeared there. Rama, thus approached King Hotrabahana with happy mood and having axe, sword and bow with yet he stood there free from any sign of aggressiveness. (Mahabharata, Udyog 165/16-7)

Coming down to the classical age we find that Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Bharavi, Bhatti and others while depicting and adapting the episodes of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata for their poems, dramas etc. glowingly describe the matchless prowess of Parashuram. It is rather impossible to catch the spirit and warmth of the original verse in translation, howsoever precise it may be. Kalidasa describes him in the Raghuvamsa:

Parashuram appeared there wearing the holy thread and the bow thereby indicating his paternal and maternal lineages respectively and stood there like a sandal tree as if girted by snake and like a sea in the face of the moon. Further in utter disregard for the public criticism he obeyed the biddings of his father though the latter in extreme rage became ruthless and was devoid of all sense of decorum. Thereafter Parashuram conquered the whole world. The Rosary made up of twentyone Rudrakshas which he had on him shows that he exterminated the warrior class twentyone times.

(Raghu XI, 64-66)

And Bhavabhuti in a single verse brings out very aptly the whole personality of that Superman in his Mahaviracharita:

To whom who has the flaming and replendent axe about him having the arrows on the arm, putting the bow on the rear, wearing deer skin and matted lock and the rosary and holy thread is worn like bracelets. Indeed, he represents both the spirit of calmness and of strength at the same time. (Mahavir Charita Act II, 16)

So does Bhatti. While describing the encounter of Dasarathi Rama and of Parashuram, Bhatti describes the latter in his inimitable way:

The Son of Jamadagni, Parashuram, largechested, arrow in hand, like a full grown palm tree in stature, fierce and armed with a bow his hand reaching the knees encountered Rama in front of the road.

(Bhatti II, 50)

The above quoted texts bespeak the prowess of Parashurama who had exterminated the whole warrior class for twentyone times. In the Bhagavad Gita it has been said 'of the warriors I am Rama'—Rama sastravrita Maham (X.31). Sankarcharya and other commentators explained it to be the Rama—the son of Dasaratha. But Sridhara, Keshabkasmirin and others tend to accept both Dasarathi Rama and Bhargava Rama as is evident from their sayings: sastravritam viranam madheye Dasarathi va Parashuram.

In a text of Mahabharata (Adi II, 3) we find:

At the juncture of Treta and Dwapara the valiant Parashuram repeatedly killed the warrior class inspired by the anger as it were.

It shows that Parashuram lived at the juncture of Dwapara and Treta. And traditionally the Gita is placed in Dwapara age. Hence it can be held with emphasis, that the chief amongst the warriors as mentioned in the Gita and other texts might have referred to Parashurama. In a recent article Sri G.V. Ketkar of Pune opined that Rama in the Gita should be taken as Parashuram. His arguments based on two grounds. Firstly Dasarathi Rama was proficient only in wielding bow and arrow while Parashurama was proficient in all types of weapons. Drona, the Acharya of Kuru-Pandava asked from him entire 'astravidya' (science of weaponry) as is evident from the texts of Mahabharata. Further Parashuram belonged to Bhrigu clan and in the Gita (X.25) Krishna referred to him as 'Am Bhrigu among saints' maharsinam bhriguasham' so naturally we may take the reference of Rama here as Bhargava Rama who was one of the outstanding warriors of all ages.<sup>1</sup>

Rama was a great warrior indeed but He has been venerated as Avatara—incarnation and more specially as 'Maryada

Purusottam' and His worship is performed as such. Completely hiding His divinity He appeared to be an ideal householder and hence he is known as 'Maryada Purosottam' does not overstrip his own power. We also find that Parashuram taught the lesson of archery and military science to the warriors of name and fame, such as Bhishma, Drona, Karna and others and wrote treatises on it known as Dhanurveda. When Bhishma refused to marry Amba she approached Parashuram for mediation. Bhishma did not pay heed to Parashuram's request when he wanted to make some reconciliation, between the two. As a result a great fight ensued and continued for years. At first Bhishma was unwilling to go in for war with him as he was his Guru saying:

In my boyhood days I learnt the archery in all its aspects from you, so I am your disciple.

(MBH Udyoga, 167/16)

Dronacharya too learnt the art of warfare and archery from Parshuram as we read in the Mahabharata:

On coming to know that Parashuram has mastery over archery (dhanurveda) and other weaponry, Drona wanted to learn them from him and also the moral values of war.

(MBH Adi, 126/28)

After his exterminating mission Parashuram naturally became the custodian of the whole world as also the weapons recovered from those whom he vanquished. He gave away all these weapons to Drona before repairing to the forest.

Parashuram started imparting all sorts of lessons of warfare in all its aspects and intricacies to Drona.

(MBH Adi, 126/42)

The veteran fighter Karna also learnt the lesson of military science and archery from Parashuram. Karna's skill in archery is due to his teachings and training so meticulously imparted to him by Parashuram, So it is stated.—He became famous as a

skilled bowman by getting lessons from Drona, Kripa and Parashuram.

Parashuram was greatly pleased with Karna's performance and skill and gave him a chariot to facilitate his movement in the battlefield. In this regard the story of Karna's perseverance and patience during his training period under Parashuram deserves special mention. It appears from the story that Parashuram as was the usual practice of that time used to impart lesson on military science to Brahmin students alone. Knowing this Karna though belonging to Kshatriya clan disguised himself as a Brahmin. It so happened one day Parashuram fell asleep and reclining his head on Karna's lap. A poisonous insect said to be inspired by Indra started biting Karna and bored his thighs. Lest his Guru's sleep should be disturbed Karna admirably bore all the smarting pain and remained calm in the face of such mortification inflicted by the biting insect. Blood started oozing out from the wound and soaked Guru's hair. At this Parashuram got up and found his disciples extraordinary patience and calm notwithstanding such excruciating pain and strain. At Parashuram's bidding Karna disclose his identity. Parashuram felt annoyed at this unusual behaviour of Karna for not disclosing his caste identity earlier and said that in spite of his training and excellent acquisition of knowledge of different weapons he could not be able to remember the use of exact weapon in time of dire need during warfare. The story of Karna's defeat at the hand of Arjuna is too well known to recall (vide Mahabharata, Karnaparva Chap. 34; Santi parva Chap. 2 and 3). Magnificence of Parashuram and Karna's character was nicely highlighted in spite of the fact that social customs of the time had prompted Karna to tell a lie and thereby incur the displeasure of Parashuram. Karna knew well that prevailing social custom would not permit him to learn the military science form Parashuram who himself was a Brahmin, yet when he could perceive his fault he submitted that the teacher-Guru and father were the same hence he introduced himself as a Brahmin belonging to Bhrigu clan. He approached Parashuram in the hope and with the sole motive of mastering the difficult science of archery.

The Guru who is well versed in wisdom and steadfast is father too, hence I told you earlier that I was a Brahmin of Bhrigu clan.—So confessed Karna.

(MBH Santi, 3/28)

Parashuram saw reason behind his cogent argument as well as his love and eagerness for knowledge and blessed him by saying that he would be victorious everywhere. All these texts firmly establish the fact that Parashuram was a great teacher in military science in which he possessed surpassing excellence. In our ancient lore we have stories of three Ramas. They are Sri Ramchandra, Bhargava Parashuram and Sankarshana Balarama—the later so named because he transferred himself from one womb to another as also for ploughing up Hastinapur when Kurus disobeyed him.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from the fact that they were accepted as Avatars and had divine powers, all of them were great warriors and two of them Dasarathi Rama and Balrama belonged to the warrior class. Their process and knowledge and the life they lived furnish shining example of the great ideal of Kshatriya clan who were entrusted with the duty of preserving the law of dharma and protecting the weak as well as the country or state they inhabit.

## II BIRTH AND LINEAGE

All the scriptures gave the same story of Parashuram birth and lineage. During his exile (vanabasa) when Yudhisthira came to Mahendraparvat he very much desired to have audience with Parashuram and requested one of his close associates Akritavarna to arrange the same and wanted to know the Parashuram's life story. The life story as described by Akritavarna is as follows: It was through the prayer of gods that Vishnu decided to take human form and chastise the sullen Kartavirja. At that time there was a famous and formidable King Gadhi, who repaired to the forest for some time. A beautiful female child was born to him and she was matchless in everyway. Richika, the son of Bhrigu wanted to marry her. The king agreed to give him the daughter on some

conditions which he said were laid down by his ancestors and which he did not like to dishonour. It was that the daughter would be given to one who would be able to give him one thousand horses with light dark ears and red inside and their bodies being of bright reddish colour. Richika agreed to supply such horses as a price for his daughter. He approached Varuna, the guardian diety of the sea to help him and the help prayed was extended to him. He brought those one thousand horses to King Gadhi and he gave his daughter Satyavati Richika in marriage. After the marriage Richi Bhrigu came to visit his son Richika and the daughter-in-law Satyavati. He asked his daughter-in law what she would like him to give. Accordingly she prayed for a son for her as well as for her mother. Pleased Bhrigu blessed her and said that: 'After purificatory bath both of them should touch Aswatha and fig trees respectively and should eat the Charoo (a preparation of rice, milk and honey) which the Richi prepared with much care (MBH Vanaparva Chap. 96).

That Charoo was differently sanctified (mantraputa) with sacred words to be taken by them. But at the time of distribution, things went wrong. It was the wish of the Rishi that the child, his daughter-in-law would be a great warrior and valourous man. When Bhrigu came to know that the thing had been so changed in that way, he blessed the daughter-in-law saying that the son to be born to her would be a Brahmin by caste and be equipped with the spirit of Kshatriya but their grand-son would be a great warrior with matchless power and of great strength. (vide: Sivapurana 30/26, Mahabharata, Vanaparva Ch. 96 Santiparva Chap. 48). There is a confusion about the lineage of Parashuram in the Puranas. Different Puranas placed him in different ages and described him belonging to different clans. According to the Vayu Purana (Ch. 88/134) Sagar learnt military science from Parashuram and reclaimed the lost kingdom of his father from the Haihaya clan. Dr Girindra Sekhar Basu, the author of highly scholastic book 'Purana Pravesh' feels that it is difficult to determine to which clan Parashuram actually belonged to. The Vayu Purana (Chap. 91/58) tells us that Jahnu married the grand daughter of Yubanaswa of Iksakshu clan. We have too Yubanaswas, but the grand father of Jahnu's wife was not

a king. The Vishnupurana (bk. 4, Ch. 4.43) tells us that Parashuram belonged to Haihya clan. So one has to conclude that Parashuram was not the contemporary of Dasarathi Rama. Further evidence can be deduced to show in support of this contention. Vayu Purana tells us that King Mulaka of Ikshashu clan had to hide himself because of the fear of Parashuram and Mulaka preceded ten generations before the Dasarathi Rama. Kartavirja whom Parashuram was reported to have killed also belonged to Haiyaya clan and there was eternal enmity between Ikshashu and Haihaya. Hence it would be wrong to assume that Kartavirjarjuna was killed by Dasarathi Rama. Parashuram of Haiya clan preceded Kartavirjarjuna and the Vayu Purana ascribes him to be the incarnation of God. It has been stated there that Pramati was an incarnation of Kali age. And for this reason Dr Basu feels that Pramati and Parashuram were identical persons on the strength of Vayu Purana which has definitely identified Pramati with Parashuram in his prowess and valour when it is said that he was born in the lunar dynasty like Parashuram in the Bhrigu clan and destroyed those people who were unrighteous and impious. But we feel it has merely compared Pramati with Parashuram and this cannot be taken as a proof of identity of two persons. The following observation of Vayu Purana (Chap. 58/75-7) may be noted in this context. In the beginning of Kalijuga Pramati of lunar origin was born and he resembled like a Parashuram in every way. Accompanied by vast army he annihilated hundreds of kings. He destroyed those people who are unrighteous, irreligious and devoid of any principle.

The cycle of age (yuga) is moving on eternally—hence the reference of 19 Yugas of 31 yugas perhaps means 19 cycles approximately. The conception of Kalki Avatara is patterned after the Parashuram, who would be valuous and powerful and would also protect the law of dharma, Stories are bound to differ in various Puranas as they have been written in different ages and under varying conditions but plausible solution to this confusion can be found if we accept Yogavasistha Ramayana text which says that the Lord incarnated six times in the form of Parashuram,

The God has taken the form of Parashuram five time in previous aeons—this time he would come again as the son of Renuka. Nirvanprakarana I.22.5.

To some extent we believe it sets at rest the difficulty of determining the historicity of the age of his advent and of lineage. Further going through a few texts in Puranas one gets the impression of two Parashuramas. When we accept Parashurama as an Avatara-incarnation of God then it does not seem good to make confusion more confounded by deducing this and that from the texts of the different Puranas which are bound to differ as in the case of other issues too. Nevertheless, the tradition and some of the texts confirm that Parashuram belonged to Brahmin clan. In the Ramayana Sri Ramchandra described him as Brahmin hence he has to be looked upon as such. Parashurama was the nephew (sister's son) of Viswamitra. Text reads:

You are Brahmin and related to Viswamitra hence I won't do any harm to you.

(Ramayana Adi, 76/6, MBH Aswamedhaparva Ch. 34)

The whole of his life-story can be condensed in the words of Srimad Bhagavata which we quote in extenso.

Rishi Jamadagni had a number of sons of whom Rama or Parashurama was the youngest. The Kshatriyas were then sunk in rajas and tamas (passion and ignorance). One of them, King Arjuna, the ruler of the Haiyahas had worshipped Lord Dattatreya and had earned the boon of possessing one thousand hands, mastery of Yogas and supernatural powers such as travelling through the air with the speed of thought, stopping and reversing the natural flows of rivers etc. One day Arjuna went out with his ministers and the whole army on a hunting expedition and by chance entered Jamadagni's hermitage. The Sage received them fittingly and fed them all with the help of his celestial cow Kamadhenu which could supply all edibles in abundance making the property of the hermitage surpassed even that of the King's palace. This excited Arjuna's envy. At the time of parting, the latter unceremoniously drove away with Kamadhenu and her calf to

his capital, Mahismati, disregarding the feelings of his host and of the kidnapped animals. Parashurama, who happened to return home just at that time rushed with his bow and axe after the royal party, caught up with them before they entered the capital and exterminated the formidable force which Arjuna had sent to meet him, making their blood to flow in copious stream on that battle field. Greatly amazed, Arjuna himself took up the challenge and with five hundred bows simultaneously strung by his one thousand hands he rained arrows on Rama which did not prevent the latter from fiercely attacking him and axing down all his arms one by one and finally his head. Then they saw the incredible feet of Rama, Arjuna's ten thousand sons, ministers and retinue took to their heels, leaving the field to Rama who took back the divine cow and her calf now happy at their release to his father and briefed him with the news of the fight. But the Sage instead of rejoicing rebuked him.

“You have O Rama of mighty arms” he said “committed a grave sin in killing a ruler of man, who is the representative of all the gods on earth, for nothing. We the brahmins, dear son, have earned respect by our shine forgiveness alone, by which we shine like the sun and please Lord Vishnu. Cutting off a consecrated head is more sinful than slaying a Brahmin. You have to atone for it, spending a whole year in pilgrimage to all the holy places keeping your mind fixed on the Supreme Lord”.

At the end of the year Rama returned from pilgrimage only to find himself faced with new compulsions to massacre kshatriyas. The Sons of Arjuna who had not forgotten their debt to the father were on the look out to revenge themselves on him. As one day Jamadagni was sitting near the sacrificial fire, absorbed in meditation, his sons being absent, they entered the hermitage, slashed off his head and carried it away with them. The loud cries of the mother, whose pleadings with the murderers to spare her husband's life had proved useless, brought her sons from the forest. Rama shouldered his axe and speeded like the wind to Mahisamati

where he met the culprits and laid them all low, together with the whole princely race. Collecting their heads he made a very high tower therewith in the centre of the city, leaving their blood to flow like a river. He then took back his father's head, joined it to the body and performed a number of sacrifices in honour of Shri Vishnu. Regaining his spiritualised body Jamadagni became the seventh star in the constellation of the seven Rishis who look after the welfare of humanity (identified by some with Ursa Major).

Twentyone time did Parashuram go round the world and liquidated the kshatriyas from it, collecting their blood in five tank which he dug at Samantapanchaka in Kurukshetra and made it a place of pilgrimage on big ceremonial occasions. Then purifying himself of all sins, he gave up violence and retired to Mt. Mahendra to perform tapas with a serene mind and prepared himself for his destined task of propounding the Vedas to the world in the next Manvrtara (the eights).<sup>3</sup>

### III SIGNIFICANCE OF HIS NAME AS PARASHURAMA

We have to examine now how Bhargava Rama came to be known as Parashurama. The Kalika Purana (Ch. 83 vs 5) says that he was born with the axe (Parashu) as Karna was born with Kavacha (amulet) and so he came to be known as Parashurama. But we have a different version in the Padma Purana (Uttarkanda 241/39, 41-2) and the Brahmavaivarta Purana (Ganeshkhand Ch. 44/22). The Padma Purana tells us that he practised austere penances to acquire the power of valour kshatравirja. Pleased with his penances Vishnu gave him the sacred axe for destroying all the wicked kings and warriors. The text reads:

Parashuram did the penance to please Vishnu. Pleased by his tapasya Vishnu said that he was giving him the power by which he should correct those kings and kshatriyas who were negligent of their duties and thus presented him with axe and other weapons.

Both the Mahabharata and the Brahmavaivarta Purana on other hand tell us that he got it from Mahadeva, who was his Guru and taught him the science of archery.

The Parashu (axe) is a precious gift from the gracious Guru.

Through his intense penance he could please Mahadeva and got various kinds of weapons from him including most powerful axe. (Santiparva 48/33)

It is also stated that in the Brahmavaivarta when he exterminated the warrior class for twentyone times, Mahadeva seeing him move above with the axe in his hand hailed him as Parashuram.

Mahadeva named Bhargava Ram as Parashuram when he saw he conquered the warrior class twentyone times by his axe. (B.B. Ganeshkhand 40/76)

It may be mentioned here that Mahadeva was his Guru who taught him all the intricacies of archery. In those days Dhanurveda or the science of archery was a highly developed science and both Brahmins and Kshatriyas used to receive lessons in it. It appears that military training was a compulsory subject for all. Paying tribute to Mahadeva as his Guru Parashuram says:

I earnestly desire to see the one by whose grace I have been able to subdue Kartivirja and Suchanda and I acquired knowledge of various sorts and get the weapons of different dimensions and types. He is ever gracious and pleased with the devotees who take refuge in Him. He is equal to all and answers the prayer of the devotees. (B.B., Ganeshkhand 42/2-3, 8)

The other Puranas such as Siva, Padma etc. concur with the description of B.B. Although there may be slight difference in the text of various puranas I think those can be adjusted and harmonised with one another for instance, Padma Purana tells us that he got the Parashu from Vishnu. The different

Puranas are written to glorify particular deities as the names suggest yet essentially a unity of purpose has been maintained through out all the puranas. We are also told that Mahadeva gave him Kavacha (amulet) so that he might not be overpowered by any one and also enjoined upon him to meditate on Lord Krishna for his success. (vide Adhyatma Ramayana Adi 7/19-22, B.B. Ganeshkhnd 33/1, 4-5)

In my boyhood days I went to Chakratirtha and did penance for Vishnu, which is the source of the world on being satisfied by my penance, Vishu blessed me by saying that he was satisfied by me tapasya and told me too that His power would permeate me by which I would be able to conquer Kartavirja and subdue the other kshatriyas.

Parashruam's devotion to his Guru Mahadeva was exemplary. Whatever he had done, he felt was done or performed through His grace and will. This is amply borne out by the following:

With the grace of Siva and remembering Him Constantly Parashuram could subdue the warrior class in this way. (B.B., Ganeshkhanda 40/72-3)

It has been often contended that 'Parshu' or the axe was a weapon inferior to bow and arrow. And from this, conclusion was drawn that Bhargava Rama belonged to that age when Parshu or axe as weapon was in vogue for warfare. We should remember that use of steel indicates much highly developed state of civilisation. Steel was used at the mouth of the arrow. This sort of slipshod argument is not tenable since Bhargava Rama knew the use of all sorts of weapon as he himself wrote Dhanurveda. Scriptural texts confirm that he learnt all kinds of warfare and he could handle with ease and dexterity different kinds of weapons in battles as were used to be fought during the Pauranic age and he trained every challenge in accordance with the rules as laid down in the prescribed texts. So it would not be wise to determine his age by mere referring to the use of Parashu.

IV  
LEGENDS

We shall now narrate some of the legends that are woven round his life and critically examine their implications. All of them show his great prowess and put him on the forefront of the warrior class. These legends, if narrated methodically can be put in the following order:

1. Encounters with Kartaviryarjuna and Ganesha
2. The killings of warrior classes for twentyone times
3. Encounter with Dasarathi Rama,
4. Matricide.

Bhagavata story as quoted earlier put the whole of Parashuram's life story including the legends in a nutshell. Here we propose to critically examine all these legends as found in the various Pouranic lores and in other sources.

*1. Encounter with Kartaviryarjuna and Ganesha*

King Kartavirjarjuna of Haihaya clan was reputed to be a great warrior and peerless in prowess.

The king Kartavirjarjuna was a powerful man who established suzerainty upto the end of the world by conquering the whole world.

(MBH, Aswmedha 34/2)

Birds still sing the glory of King Kartavirya who was pious, valorous and learned too. There is indeed none like him. (Brahmavaibarta, Ganeshkhand 35/62-3)

Kartavirya was the disciple of Bhagawan Dattatreya and through his grace he had a golden chariot and had the power over the entire humanity. He used to wield his power through his Guru's grace and could move anywhere at any time persecuting all the people unnecessarily. Finding his despotism unbearable, gods and Rishis approached Vishnu to redress the wrong done by Kartavirya. They also told him that Kartavirya had the courage to persecute India and his wife Sachi. Vishnu assured them that he would see how Kartavirya

could be checked and repaired to Badarikashram. He decided to come to the earth in the form of Parashuram to help the humanity in time of distress and free it from all despotic harassment. (vide: MBH, Vanaparva, Chap. 96). The life story and lineage of Kartavirya have been given in details in Vayu Purana (Chap. 94). He was the son of Kritavirya—the eighth descendant in the line of Haihaya, in whose name the clan came to be known. After the usual training and learning as was the usual practice of the royal families in those days, he sought four boons from his Guru Dattatreya who offered them to him. Firstly, they were, he would get thousand arms, secondly he would be able to deflect the unrighteous people from their wrong way, thirdly he should be able to conquer the world following the rule of warfare and fourthly unconquerable though he would be in several battles, he would be ultimately subdued and killed by a man of his equal power. Thus empowered and emboldened by these boons he conquered almost whole of the world and ruled it with all the power he had at his command. Whenever he performed any yajna, it was performed in an extremely lavish way. Gold vessels were used and even ceremonial altars were also done in gold.

At that time people used to sing a panegyric in his honour 'none would be able to outshine Kartavirjarjuna in penance, Knowledge and in other things. Indeed he was man amongst men (Vayu 94/20). Finding him most powerful, the sun-god approached him with a request to give him some food (anna). Then the king Arjuna enquired of what meals he would prefer. The Sun God demanded of him plants, animal etc. for the world. Kartavirya satisfied all his demands. Being very much pleased the god gave the King some arrows which could travel everywhere and would never get exhausted. On getting his power through the Sun God he burnt everything and in course of doing so the hermitage of Sage Apaha was also burnt. The Sage Apaha cursed the King that he who was the cause of destruction of his Ashram would be killed by a peace loving Brahmin, Parashuram (Vayu 94/47). One day Kartavirya happened to enter the Ashram of Maharshi Jamadagnya, the father of Parashuram while he was out on a hunting. Jamadagna was engaged in worshipping as was his wont. It

was midday and the king was tired. The Rishi enquired of him about his welfare. The king was highly pleased with the courtesy shown to him at his Ashram and wanted to return. The Rishi insisted upon his staying there and asked him to have his meal at his place as no guest could go away without having his food at that hour, Saying:

During the time of worshipping gods, you come to my house as a consummation of my prayer. A guest is looked upon as angels in disguise. I feel greatly attracted by your kind behaviours, so be gracious to accept my hospitality.

(Skanda Purana, Nagarkhand 66/24-5)

But the King wondered how a Rishi would entertain such a big royal entourage. The Rishi divined the King's dilemma and told him that the Kamadhenu—all wish yielding cow, would provide all his requirements. We have on the authority of Padma Purana that Jamadagnya got this wish yielding cow from the Indra, the legendary King of the gods. Jamadagni did penance for several years to please Indra who being satisfied asked Jamadagnya to get a boon from him. Jamadagnya asked for the Cow named Surabhi and readily Indra granted his prayer and offered him the cow (Padma, Uttar 241/5-6). It is said on getting the Cow Jamadagni lived like a second Indra. Thus the Rishi entertained the royal entourage lavishly with all sorts of delicacies. On seeing the divine power of the wish yielding cow, the king felt tempted to take her away from the Rishi by offering him large amount of money and thousand of cow in return. The sage did not agree and said that according to the injunction of the sastras a Brahmin could not sell it. The King returning home sent his ministers imploring the Rishi to part with the cow, but Rishi turned down their request.

Infuriated by the refusal, the King exercised his military power and as a result a big tussle ensued. It is stated that at that critical hour, Rishi Jamadagna shouted and prayed for necessary weapon from the Kamadhenu to meet the challenge.

Hearing the King's words and determination Jamadagni rose from the place of meditation and shouted for weapons. (Skanda Nagar 66/47)

The Rishi fought Arjuna's soldiers with the weapon created out of the wish yielding cow, Kamadhenu and at the end the King was badly defeated.

The Sage putting on the battle dress started fighting with the King. Even though the King was green with anger and continued the fight yet the Sage fought valiantly with the weapons given by Surabhi so much so that the King fell unconscious. However having regained his consciousness after a while, he fought again and threw the weapon that generated fire which the Sage extinguished by another weapon that brought forth water.

(Brahma Vibartapurana, Ganeshkhand 26/5-8)

Even in the second round of fight the King had been defeated again and he felt so much humiliated that he wondered what would happen next.

Thus defeated, the King felt very much astonished and remembered God in an anguish state of mind.

(B.B. Ganeshkhand 27/1)

Nevertheless, the King was non-chalant and non-relenting. So armouring himself with superior weapons given by his Guru Dattatreya he went to have another round of fight. Dattatreya, it may be mentioned here taught him the science of archery and also the technique of warfare. He invited the Riski to fight and the Rishi accepted the challenge. In his last bid to win the battle the King hurled the deadly weapon which killed the Rishi instantaneously.

Enraged as he was by his defeat, the King brought out a deadly weapon known as 'ekpurushanghatini' given by his Guru Dattatreya, which he released after moving it for sometime. That weapon pierced through the sage

Jamadagnya and soon he fell unconscious and left the world.  
(B.B., Ganeskhhand 27/24-26, 8/30)

In the meanwhile, Parashuram and his brothers returned to the Ashram and found that everything in the Ashram had been completely destroyed. The dead body of some of the inmates as well as other things lay scattered all over the place. The Kamadhenu too had not been spared.

He saw the Ashrama had been completely ransacked and surrounded by the Pulindas and the Cow was grievously wounded because of merciless beating.

(Skanda, Nagar 67/2)

They also found some inmates of the Ashrama weeping and enquired of them about their old parents. It was their mother's old habit to enquire about the welfare of their children whenever they returned, but on that day they did not find her there and suspected that something had gone wrong with her. The inmates of the Ashrama who survived the holocaust narrated the events telling how their parents had met with their sad end. They wailed over the predicament that had befallen them.

Parashuram was prepared for such a tragic event, yet he started wailing out of deep and unspeakable grief for his father lying dead on the ground.

(MBH, Vanaprva 97/29)

All the brothers wanted to cremate their parents and other inmates and performed the obsequies as enjoined by the scriptures but Parashuram refused to join them. On enquiry from the sages about his non-participation Parashuram told them the reason thereof. He said 'As the King killed my innocent father without any reason or provocation and hurt my mother twentyone places, so unless I exterminate the entire Kshatriya clan twentyone times, I would not perform any obsequies but I would do so with the blood of the Kshatriyas.

Being a Kshatriya himself the King killed my innocent father disregarding the ideal of kshatriya and hurt my mother at twentyone places, therefore if I do not strike that race twentyone times and kill them, then it would be a great sin. I will kill that scoundrel the king along with his retinue who killed my father and others and did indulge in all sorts of grievous offences and thereafter only I will perform necessary obsequies with their blood. (Skandap, Nagar 67/14-15.17)

He vowed to kill kshatriya as many times as he found the marks of hurting on his father. (Sivapurana 30/41)

With this determination and promise he went to Brahma-loka and apprised Brahma of everything that had taken place. Brahma could perceive that according to the law of Karma everything moved round, so none could prevent the imminent annihilation of the warrior class as promised by Parashurama. He advised him to approach Siva, who, he said, would fulfil his prayer and grant necessary power for achieving his avowed objective. It so happened that when he came to Sivaloka and wanted to be shown in, Ganesh prevented him. At this he got furious and hot words were exchanged between them which ultimately led to a fierce duel. Ganesh expanded his trunk and tied Parashuram and subjected him to great pressure. This continued for some days and Parashuram could not bring him under control notwithstanding his dexterity in the military science and techniques.

Gajanana extending his big trunk tied Parashuram and moved him fast like a wheel. None can escape from the reaction of his own action without having his full circle. Rama had to suffer little because he got over it as he saw Lord Krishna.

(B.B., Ganeshkhand 43/15, 29)

Being so humiliated, Parashuram got terribly enraged and hurled his axe. As a result one of the tusks of Ganesh was completely broken and he came to be known as Ekadanta (One who possesses one tusk) from then on. After having

done this Parashuram bypassed Ganesha and approached Siva directly. Text reads:

Parashuram then hurled the great axe given by Siva aiming at Ganesh, yet Ganesh did not resist it since it was a gift from his father. That axe fell on his face, this uprooting one of his tusks. And so Parashuram approached Siva forcibly.

(B.B., Ganeshkhand 43/32-4)

He told Siva in details about what happened to his father and the destruction wrought by Kartavirjarjuna, through vengeance.

King Karatvirya while out on hunting came to my father's hermitage hungry. So my father received the king and his men with all the courtesies and fed them sumptuously that ungrateful King wanted to take away the Kapila cow and killed my father. And Kapila too died of shock at the death of my father.

(B.B., Ganeshkhand, 30/5-6)

But the divine consort of Shiva reprimanded Parshurama for his unseemly behaviour with Ganesh and refused to accept him. Perceiving their apathetic attitude, he started weeping when Siva took pity on him and give him an amulet (Kavacha) so that he might remain invincible by any adversary and blessed him saying:

I give you the most sacred words encased in amulets and through my blessings you would be able to defeat the king and completely free the world from the kshatriya twentyone times. Your glory and name would travel throughout the world.

(Brahmavaivarta GK 30/21-3)

Siva also advised him to proceed to Pushkara and perform Tapasya-penances there so that the action of the amulet would be more effective and get the blessings from Lord Krishna. Accordingly he went there and performed severe penances.

Krishna appeared before him and give the boon (vara). Brahmavaibarta Purana has given beautiful description thereof :

After days of meditation and penance Parashuram saw a beautiful person seated in a well decorated chariot and with a glorious halo around him. He was full of compassion and smile, ready to extend graces to his devotees. Prostrating himself at his feet Parashuram prayed such a boon as by which he could destroy the warrior class twentyone times. Lord Krishna granted it and disappeared then and there. (G.K., 33/4-7)

Emboldened and empowered by divine graces Parashuram set out for the kingdom of Kartaviryarjuna. Reaching the bank of Narmada in the neighbourhood of Mahismati, Parashuram sent word to the King challenging his authority and inviting him to battle. The Queen Monorama tried in vain to dissude the King from such a encounter, but all her entreaties fell flat on his ears. He said, as a king belonging to the warrior class he had no other alternative than to accept the challenge and face war manfully. And it would indeed be disgraceful not to answer the challenge thrown to him and on the part of one who was adept in warfare. He also told the queen that he knew he would be killed by Rama as destined but hardly could he go back on his word of accepting the challenge. So says the King:

I know I would be defeated and killed at the hands of Parashuram and his vow to that effect will not go awry. Knowing all this why should I ask for his grace since to a man of honour, dishonour is more than death.<sup>4</sup>

(B.B. GK 34/76-7, 35/85-7)

## 2. *The Killings of Warrior Classes for twenty one times*

The fight started in right earnest. Parashuram too was accompanied by a big contingent of army drawn from Sabara, Pulinda etc. The fight continued for several days together, none could overshadow the others. Large number of Princes gathered there to watch this unusual battle of two equals.

The fight broke out between the warriors of Haihayas and Pulinda. Savaras aimed poisonous arrow at them which killed Haihayas instantly. Being subdued with their sin they could not resist but destined to die at the hands of their enemies. (Skanda, Nagar 67/23-4)

At one stage Kartavirya felled Parashuram and it was felt that the latter had been defeated by the former. But Vishnu secretly told him that it would be very hard and difficult task to defeat Kartavirya unless he dispossessed him of the secret amulet given by Rishi Dattatreya. He acted accordingly and finally was able to kill him. Kartavirya tried his utmost and unsheathed his sword to strike out but his hand suddenly got benumbed because of his past deeds and also as a consequence of killing innocent Brahmins. Thus Parashurama started railing at him and reminded him of his past nefarious deeds saying: You killed my father and now it is time to avenge the patricide by punishing you severely. Thus described Skanda Purana:

Parashuram with repeated shouting fell the arms of Kartavirya one by one by his axe and ultimately after beheading him he himself collected blood of the King himself. (Nagarkhanda, 67/35-6)

We have a slight different version of this episode in Aswamedha Parva of the Mahabharata. It is stated there that Kartaviryarjuna was greatly puffed up by his prowess, once asked the Sea-god (Samudra) to name a person equal to him in strength and valour. Samudra told him about Parashuram (Ch. 33/7). So he went to the Ashrama of Jamadagnya and challenged him. Naturally a great encounter ensued and both had shown their excellence in prowess and strength. Ultimately Parashuram burnt all the soldiers and severed the head of the King with his axe.

The power that has been generated by Parashuram started burning the whole army of the enemy. Thereafter with his axe he stroke hard Arjuna of thousand hands. (Asw. Ch. 33/10-11)

According to the Mahabharata and some other texts Rishi Ja.nadagnya was killed by the sons of Kartavirya. It is thus stated one day taking advantage of his sons absence they entered the Ashrama and killed him without any compunction. The Rishi was then sitting for the performance of a yajna.

Jamadagni the great devotee was sitting absorbed near sacrificial fire and his sons were absent, the sons of Kartavirya entered the hermitage, slashed off his head and carried it away with them. (Bhagavata 9.16.11)

The battle being over, Parashuram asked his men to carry the blood to the place where his father fell and a hole was dug to deposit the same. Parashuram, thus completely annihilated the Haihaya clan and performed the last rites and obsequies of his father with the blood of the kshatriyas clan as he had promised earlier.

He bathed himself with the blood of the Haihayas and with the sacred thread on his rightside he offered oblation to the manes. (Skanda, Nagar 68/7)

In this way Parashuram conquered the whole world and exterminated the warrior class. He performed Aswamedha yajna and offered the whole world conquered by him as a gift to Brahmin Kashyapa. As he made over the whole world as gift, Kashyapa felt that Parashurama could no longer stay in the territory thus gifted away. So Parashuram went to the last point of the earth and asked the sea to go aside and make room for him. He gave a threatening to the sea god to the effect that if he did not provide him with land he would drink him dry. (Skanda P. Nagar, 68/13-15)

Thus the Seagod complied with his request and receded and some land was thus reclaimed. According to MBH Santiparva Chap. 48 Kashyapa after receiving the gift of the territory as conquered by Parashuram bade him go to the south sea and not to enter the territory offered to him. The south sea of its own accord made an island which came to be known as Shurparaka.

The sea receded of its own and made an island for Parashuram, the unconquerable and that island is to be known as Shurparaka. (MBH Shanti, 48/68)

In that reclaimed land Parashuram retired and started performing penance (tapasya).

In this way exterminating the Kshatriya he felt very much depressed and so he went away to the forest for penance. (MBH, Santi, 48/55)

He also rehabilitated many people and races on that island. The present state of Kerala is believed to be the self same land reclaimed by Parashuram and traditionally it is called Parashuramkhestra.<sup>5</sup> It is also stated that standing on the Sayadri Mountain when he saw the sea lashing against the mountain he threw the axe and lo, the surging sea receded back and the land now known as Kerala came into being. The land is believed to have been populated with Naga tribe and Parashuram brought Brahmins and other people from Aryavarta and settled them there. Frightened by the fierce tribe they fled from the land but he again brought them back making many changes in the custom, and manners of that island. The Nampudri Brahmin was thus created and blessed him at Thiruvallam near Trivendrum. On the bank of Karmana river, Adi Shankaracharya built a temple of Parashurama which is still in existence. The legend has it, when his own caste Nampoodri excommunicated him from their caste he built this temple and did Sraddha of his mother. There is another temple associated with his name known as Parashurameswar Temple in Bhubaneswar temple complex built between 575-800 A.D. How the presiding deity of that temple came to be known as Parshurameswar is not definitely known.<sup>6</sup> 'The Chitpavan Brahmin of Maharastra also owe their origin to Parashuram. The story goes that after extermination of Kshatriyas he was so defiled that he could not persuade any Brahmin to perform any religious rites for him. At that time it so happened that a horde of ship wrecked foreigners was washed ashore near Sayadri Mountain. The corpses of those unfortunate ship wrecked were purified by

Parashuram by burning and they were brought back to life again. After reviving them he taught them Brahminical rites and called them Chitpavan (those who were purified on the chita (the funeral pyre) pavan (purified). With a view to rewarding them he prayed to the sea to give them land. The sea agreed to recede as far as Parashuram could shoot an arrow from the crest of Sayadri. The arrow was shot and a belt of land about thirty miles in breadth was reclaimed. The bank of river Vasistha about forty miles of Ratnagiri were set apart for the new Brahmins and in memory off the process by which they had been purified the settlement is known as Chitpavan. Valentine Chirol, the author of 'Indian Unrest' (London 1910) observed:

The Chitpavan Brahmin are undoubtedly the most powerful and most proficient of all brahmins of the Deccan. A curious legend ascribes their origin to the miraculous intervention of Parashuram, the sixth Avatara of god Vishnu, who finding no brahmins to release Him by the accustomed rituals from the fulfilment of his earthly labours dragged on the shore the bodies of the fourteen Barbarians that he found washed up from the ocean burnt them on the funeral pyre and breathed life and brahminhood into their ashes. On these new made Brahmanhood he conferred the name Chitpavan—which means 'purified by fire.'

I do not think that this story is corroborated by scriptural authority or has the sanction of probing research. Some scholars, however are of opinion that Chitpavan Brahmins are of Nordic origin, of the six main races of the world from which later generation of mankind flowed Nordic is one. It is said that they entered India from Eurasian steppe. Their original physical characteristics are present in some of the races in Punjab, Chitral, Swat etc. and also in Chitpavan Brahmins. They are fairskinned, tall and have yellow coloured hair-although certain changes took place owing to miscegenation. Dr Suniti Kumar Chatterjee says of them that they formed the

Nordic Aryan speaking group of India who gave to India its Aryan speech and by their organisation, imagination and adaptibility helped bring about a great cultural synthesis leading to the foundation of the Hindu civilisations.<sup>8</sup>

In this context it may be noted here that some scholars found foreign elements in Parashuram mythology. Dr Amulya Sen in his interesting monograph 'The Hindu Avataras-Suggestion for Identifications' (1966) feels that Parashuram belonged to Hittite, the earliest iron users, the king of 1700 B.C. of the same tribe and the word Parashu is the Sanskritisation of Persia (Iron). He reads Jamadagni as Jamad Agni, suggesting fire worshippers of Persia. Sri J.M. Chatterjee a noted scholar in his introduction to his Bengali translation of Gatha or Bhargava Veda (1964) also feels that both Jamadagni and Zarathustra were identical persons. Etymologically both the words have the same meaning. Jamadagni means 'one who devours fire'! Likewise 'Jarat' means the same, devouring or to whose brightness even fire becomes pale. 'Ustra' means that which is as bright as fire. Both their colour and complexion have been described as shining white as is evident from Harivamsa (Vishnuparva 39/21).

On the strength of the evidence of Mahabharata (Santiparva Ch. 339/84) Chatterjee contended that Parashuram was born thousand years prior to Rama and the age of Zarathustra was identical one. Further he feels that Zarathustra might have been known as Parashuram as Rama of Persia, as in the Vedic Age. Persia was known as country of Parashu. It has been referred to from Rigvedic mantra that when it is stated that 'we got thousand cows in the country of Parashu-sahasram Parasam adade (8.6.46). Moreover, in a stone inscription of Bihistan, Parsees called themselves as Parasava.

On the otherhand, we see some occidental scholars like Mr Pacoike the author of 'India in Greece' opined that Parashuram went as far as Persia and named it after him. Even the name of the river Euphratis suggests 'Come to India' (Eu-well, Acquba Fretass—Bharata). He wrote:

The Parasoos, the people of Parasooram, those warriors of axe have penetrated into and given a name to Persia they are the people of Bharata and to the principal stream that pours its waters into the Persian gulf—they have given the name Eu-Bharatas (Euphrates).<sup>9</sup>

K.A. Nilkantha Sastri also confirms the presence of Hindu colony in upper Euphratis on the authority of Syrian writer Zenab (4th century A.D.). He informs us about the existence of Hindu temples over there. It was about 304 A.D. those Hindu temples were destroyed at the hand of St. Gregory. Referring to Euphratis Hindus, Seveous Selikht (A.D. 662) a teacher and Bishop observed: "I will omit all discussion of the science of the Hindus, a people not the same as Syrians, their subtle discourses in the science of astronomy discoveries that are more ingenious than those of the Greeks and the Babylonians, their valuable methods of calculation and their computing that surpasses description."<sup>10</sup> Ludwig and Weber read in certain Rigvedic passages the foreign element of Parashuram mythology when they interpreted the hymn (R.V. VII.83.1) which refers to Prithu Parasava as with 'large ribs or' with broad axes' meaning Perthians and Persians. But the meaning and sense in the passages however require the word Parashus to be taken as 'ribs'. It cannot however be definitely stated that the Parsus were Persians. Referring to the Rigvedic story of Sudas's fight in which several tribes were crushed, one of the tribes belong to Bhrigu tribe. According to Koshambi the word 'Bhrigu had foreign element since philologically it is equivalent to phrygian—' but survives in India only as the name of Brahmin clan which become important long after Rigvedic period.<sup>11</sup> Dr Sukumar Sen in a recent research article also traced the origin of Bhrigu to phrygian. He also informed us that there was a book known as Bhriguvamsa like a Harivamsa which recounts the story of Bhriguclan. Vamsa here does not mean genealogy but glories and attainment of their clan. He also feels that origin of Durga can be traced to phrygian mode of worship, mother sitting on the lion.<sup>12</sup> So it appears that a segment of scholars found the foreign connexion with the clan of Bhrigu. The hymns of Zend-Avesta resemble the Vedic hymns and it is now

proved that Aryans lived from Central Asia down to the land of Upper India generally known as Aryavarta. Although the word 'Arya' is more of linguistic and cultural expression than racial, nonetheless it was Aryan cultural ideal that dominated the whole of Asia. Dr Amulya Sen further tries to identify the Shurparaka with Shurrappak of Sumerians and feels that Shurparaka is the Sanskritisation of the above. According to tradition Shurparaka is on the western Coast. When Haihayas Kingdom was devastated, Parashuram founded some new cities and colonised them. Surparka was one of them and became the centre of International trade on the Western coast of that time.<sup>13</sup> According to Anandaram Barooah it was on the South East of Nasika. Says he:

Soopa, south east of Nasika appears to me to be the holy Surparaka of the Mahabharata. It agrees in name and being an inland town also agrees in position (Vanaparva 118/8-10). It is said to have been founded by Jamadagnya one of the descendants of Richika, with whose name it is always associated. The country of Surparaka was therefore, the land of the Richika or descendants of Richika and probably included the modern districts of Poona and Sattara.<sup>14</sup>

Referring to the battle with Kartaviryarjuna following the forceful taking away of Surabhi, the cow of Jamadagni, Dr Amulya Sen observes:

A divine cow is known in Egyptian folk tales—a vast cow standing athwart, the vault of heaven, the earth lying between its fore and hind feet and its belly studded with the stars being the arch of heaven. Does the taking away of the divine cow suggest Ramase II's and his father Schi's combat with Hitties?<sup>15</sup>

All these researches show that there was very close collaboration between or diffusion of various cultures in ancient times and free exchanges of ideas too. From ancient times Persia or Iran have been the seat of civilisation and culture. Even to this day they have revived some of the

aspects of their cultural heritage and certain names of places and persons strongly suggest the affinity with the Vedic culture. The recent excavations in Middle East have yielded certain facts which go to show that a common Vedic or Aryan culture flourished there and around in the past.

Apart from the Chitpavan Brahmins many other castes owe their origin or survival to Parashuram. Of these we recount the story of two such castes to show how they survived Parashuram's wrath. According to Khatri tradition although they belonged to Kshatriya community it was Parashuram who agreed to turn them into traders. The legend has it that, when Parashuram reached Panchanad (Punjab) he found that one Vaishya Sudharma protected some of the Kshatriyas from his wrath. Sudharma won over Parashuram and according to his suggestion the latter agreed to spare them on condition they would follow the profession of their protector and work as traders. Till now Kshatris although their origin is not yet determined, follow the business profession.<sup>16</sup> The other community Chandrasena Kayastha Prabhu traces its origin to Parashuram too. Here is the story:

Chandrasena was the only son of Karataviryarjuna. His pregnant wife Ganaga took shelter in the Ashrama of Rishi Darlavya. Parashuram asked for her. Darlavya agreed on condition that he would not kill the child to be born. Parashuram not only agreed but blessed the child to be born and since he had taken away the kingdom said that Somraj and his successors would live on Asi (Sword or weapon) in times of war and masi (ink and pen) in times of peace.<sup>17</sup>

We have reference of this episode in Skanda Purana. From the progeny of Somraj the Kayastha Community commenced its genealogy afresh and still the members of this community worship Renuka—the mother of Parashuram as their family deity. Even in retirement Parashuram spent the day in meditation and prayer in that sea-girdled land he could not forget the wrong done by Kartavirya by killing his father. The women of the surviving warrior class started marrying Brahmins and thus a new warrior class was again created.

Those Brahmins who married these Khatriya girls were dispossessed of the land given by Parashuram. So Parashuram again set out on his extermination mission and killed all the Khatriyas irrespective of women and children.

Thus to redeem his earlier promise he did such fearful acts again by killing all the kshatriyas twentyone times again. And the blood of kshatriyas killed filled the big five lakes as it were. (MBH 98/9). *Srimad Bhagavata* (9.16.9) says nine lakes had to be created to fill the blood that flowed from such acts. So one can gauge the extent of destruction and loss of life wrought by his wrath. What made Parashuram fret again notwithstanding the fact that he retired completely from all activities? One may honestly suspect the genuineness of his final resolve not to face any confrontation with the warrior class. But the *Mahabharata* (*Santiparva* Ch. 48) gives the reason saying that he was provoked by the remark of Parabasu, grand son of Viswamitra that Parashuram boasted in vain of his prowess as he would hardly be able to fulfil the avowed mission of exterminating the kshatriya clan, since it had been noticed that some kshatriyas came to attend King Yayati's sacrifice. Moreover, out of the fear of a handful of kshatriyas he had hidden himself in the mountain. On hearing this slur on his valour Parashuram took up arms again to fulfil his mission of extermination. So said Parabashu:

O Rama, all the members of the warrior class are hiding in the mountain out of fear, yet you boast of your prowess. Now the whole territory has again been peopled by kshatriyas. On hearing this Parashuram took up arms again. (MBH, *Santiparva*, 49/59-60)

It was in the last round of encounter with the warrior class that he heard an oracle dissuading him from carrying such destruction any further. The other version as given in the *Mahabharata* tells us that while he was offering oblation to his ancestors in the lake of blood as promised by him his grandfather Richika appeared to him in a vision and asked him not to indulge any more into such mass killing of the kshatriyas. MBH, *Vana* 98/10: *Aswamedha* 34/18-34)

He protested saying that he could not stand such a tragic

death of his father and he was ridiculed by the kshatriyas that being a Brahmin he did not possess such guts to mass carnage as he did (MBH, Aswamedha 34/22). In this regard they recounted the story of Alarka which gave the metaphysical interpretation of life. Then they asked Parashuram to go for penance which he did and attained the highest perfection of life (MBH, ASW Ch. 35). It is also said that the ancestors were pleased with him for what he had done for the fulfilment of the promise and hence they bade him withdraw from this mission. The lakes that were created out of the blood of the vanquished kings were named after him and came to be known as Ramahrad (MBH, Vana 69/16, 68/26-35). Now he quietly repaired to Mahendraparvat (Now in western coast) and spent the rest of his life in meditation for the benefit of the world and humanity (MBH, Adi. 59/4, Vana 98/14). Along with this he also used to impart lessons in military science to the deserving and aspiring students. One may be curious to know how after their complete annihilation at the hand of Parashuram the kshatriyas as a class survived the ordeal and could preserve themselves as a race. The grandsire of Mahabharata Bhisma told that after Parashuram's fearful mission surviving wives of the Kshatriyas approached the Brahmins and it was through them that warrior class could maintain their progeny.

Those widowed wives through the association with the Brahmins well versed in Vedic knowledge brought forth children. It has been enjoined in the Vedas that the son belonged to the wife where she willingly sought companionship. Moreover those kshatriya women remaining steadfast in the rule of dharma sought the Brahmins and their custom was in accordance with the Vedic tradition. (MBH, Adi 98/6-7)

Bhisma supported his views by recalling the ancient story of Uthathya and Dhiringatama. We also find in the Mahabharata (Santiparva Ch. 46) that some of the Kings of Haihaya descendant escaped the wrath of Parashuram by hiding themselves. They were Viduratha of Puru clan, Soudasa of Lunar dynasty, Gopali, the son of King Sibi, Mahabala of King

Prataralana, Gautama of King Devirath and Vrihadratha whom sage Burbhuta reared and helped. Some people also gave shelter to the Kshatriyas who escaped his wrath. The Earth is said to have asked them to come out of their hiding and restore law and orders so that people might live happily. She wanted that progeny of the vanquished Kings should rule the world. So the Sage Kashyapa established them to rule the world and thus the world was again peopled by the warrior class. (MBH, Santiparva, 48/95-96)

### 3. *Encounter with Dasarathi Rama*

Parashuram's encounter with Dasarathi Ram took place after his repairment to Mahendraparvat. In this story we see two Divine soules are facing each other and the author of the Ramayana is deft enough to depict it in a language that inspires others. Both have appreciated their divine mission and role in saving the mankind and the world. We are only asked to draw lessons from it.

We present the whole episode as given by Valmiki in his Ramayana. While Sri Rama was returning to Ayodhya after his marriage with Sita, Parashuram came to know about his prowess and the story of his breaking Haradhanu which remained a riddle to many a good and seasoned warrior. As the entourage of Sri Rama was proceeding to Ayodhya they were, it is said, alarmed by many evil signs and omens. Dasaratha and others consulted Vasistha who told them that there was nothing to worry, as good signs were also there. At that moment they saw Parashuram coming as it were like a blazing sun burning everything and all were wondering whether he would create another cataclysm by exterminating the warrior class over again.

Vasistha and other Rishis thought would such things recur again, even if it was presumed that his anger would be satisfied with the great fight.

(Ramayana, Adi, 74/20-22)

Approaching them Parashuram addressed Sri Rama thus: 'On hearing your divine prowess, the breaking of Haradhanu, I have come to check personally your valour. If you have

courage, then you break this bow which I got from my father, and which is equal to Haradhanu'. At this challenge Dasaratha got very much frightened and entreated him not to go in for fight with Rama saying 'Your ire has been evaporated by killing the warrior class. By virtue of observing penance you have acquired knowledge so you must do nothing drastic to my son. 'Moreover

You have taken birth as a Brahmin and have been reputed to be a tapasvi, you should therefore shake your hatred towards kshatriyas. You have given up the weapons before Indra, hence you should assure my boys their safety.  
(Ramayana, Adi, 75/6-7)

Dasaratha further said: 'You have promised not to touch weapon again and gifted the whole world to Kashyapa which you conquered, hence what makes you challenge Rama at this time. You know quite well, may God forbid but it is known to your goodself quite well that none of us will be able to stand the calamity should any befall Rama. The Poet Bhatti has beautifully depicted the state of Dasaratha's mind when he says: Thou, who hast often conquered multitudes of Kings hast made offerings to the manes with the blood of Kings for water. Refrain from thy wrath which has no existent enemy for its object. What concern hast thou for the child Rama to challenge as equal? (Bhattikavya, II.52). Parashuram completely ignored Dasaratha's solicitations and threw challenge to Rama again describing the historicity of the bow. He said that the Haradhanu and the bow he was carrying had been prepared by Viswakarma. The one was used by Siva, the other one by Vishnu. Vishnu gave it to Bhrgu from whom he inherited it. And with this bow he had killed the whole warrior class and spared not the children even. After all this averred Parashuram: 'I have now repaired to Mahendra Parvat and now coming to know that you have broken Haradhanu, I have come to examine personally how much prowess you possess'. (Ramayana, Adi, 75/25-28). Accepting the challenge of Parashuram, Rama retorted: 'I heard of your unprecedented and matchless prowess and redeeming of the promise you made to your father, but I

cannot stand your cavilling at my power and thereby the whole of the warrior class. I take up the gauntlet and show you how I act'. Rama then took the bow from Parashuram and easily handled it and got it ready for releasing the arrow. He did it with so much ease that everybody present there got greatly amazed. In so doing he addressed Parashuram saying: 'Being Brahmin you are to be venerated, hence I would not release such an arrow as may endanger your life, but surely I shall deprive you of all your power and dispossess you of the world you won'.

In the meantime gods and heavenly beings gathered there to see the battle between the two Ramas. As Sri Rama released the arrow named after Vishnu, Parashuram became completely immobilised and started gazing vacantly at Rama. When he came to his senses he said: 'Since I gifted away the world to Kashyapa, I promise not to spend even a night here so allow me to go to Mahendraparvat quickly'.

Parashuram swooned by the power of Vishnu and fell down on the ground. After a while, however he regained his senses and offered obeisance to that great power.

(Adbhuta Ramayana 9/24, MBH, Vana 84/31)

When I gifted away the territory to my Guru Kshyapa, he wanted me not to stay there for even a night hence I should never spend a night here. So pray, please don't stand in my way I will go back to Mahendraparvat with as much speed as I can command.

(Valmiki Ramayana Adi, 76/14-15)

Further he asked Ram to destroy all the places he won and said that he could understand that Rama was born as the incarnation of Vishnu and he (Parashuram) had nothing to lose by being humiliated by Rama rather he added, by this defeat he felt glorified. (Ramayana, Adi, 76/19). Sri Rama accordingly used the bow and the darkness that enveloped the earth at the time of their encounter cleared of and Parashuram went to his abode at Mahendraparvat after receiving deserving courtesies from all present there.

After receiving due respect from those present, Parashuram left the place by worshipping Rama.

(Ramayana, Adi, 76/24)

In Adhyatma Ramayana we read that while Parashuram made penance during his boyhood days Vishnu told him that he would take back all of his power after he would have incarnated as Sri Rama.

I would take back the power which I give you today when I take birth in Treta yuga as a son of Dasaratha.

(A. Ramayana, Adi, 7/23-4)

The Mahabharata makes a slight variation in the story when it states that Parashuram on hearing the prowess of Rama went to Ayodhya to challenge him. When Dasaratha heard that he had come to the outskirts of his kingdom he sent Sri Rama where the encounter took place. The text reads as follows:

Coming to learn once of the prowess that Rama, the son of Dasaratha did possess and also of the valorous deeds of unique nature he had done, Parashuram went to Ayodhya with the famous bow which killed so many people. When Dasaratha came to know that Parashuram was on the outskirts of his kingdom he sent Rama to receive him with due honour and courtesies he deserved.

(MBH, Vana 84/9-12)

Rama handled the bow of Parashuram with ease as asked by him. Even then Parashuram insisted on the former's stretching it from hand to ear. On this Rama got furious and told him that he was full of jealousy and was of a sulken nature (*darpe paripurna*) adding 'You got this type of prowess through the grace of Brahmna and that is why you are trying to malign me without knowing my divine nature. I grant you super sensuous sight to witness my glory. Like Arjuna of the Gita, Parashuram saw the cosmic Revelation of Sri Rama (MBH, Vana Chap 84). The cosmic revelation as given here in four verses (Vana Ch. 84/25-28) reminds one of the same

revelation as shown to Arjuna by Krishna. It may be mentioned here that this cosmic Revelation of the Lord (Viswarupa) has been described in three places of Mahabharata, in the Bhismaparva (Gita), Sabhaparva (Ch. 122/1-26) and in Vanaparva (Ch. 84) as seen by Parashuram. This has been done because of emphasising the fact that God is all pervading. He is in macrocosm as well as in microcosm. From the Mahabharata and Adbhuta Ramayana (Ch. IX) it appears that Parashuram returned to Mahendraparvat completely broken and ashamed.

Begging leave of Sri Rama he went back again to Mahendraparvat and started staying there crest fallen and also in austere penance. (MBH, Vana, 84/32)

Even then he could not forget his humiliation at the hand of Sri Rama and gods found him to be completely disheartened, sad and perplexed. So they asked him to go on a pilgrimage to a lake known as Diptoda where his great grand father Bhrgu performed penance. Accordingly he went on a pilgrimage getting back all his power and energy as before. (MBH, Vana 84/36-7, Adbhuta Ramayana Chap).

Bhavabhuti (700 A.D.) in his drama Mahavircharita has given a different version of this episode. It cannot be safely said the source from which he drew his story, but the main source obviously is the Ramayana. Yet Bhavabhuti's description and recounting of the whole episode is so artistically done that one feels it to be original. He has taken liberty with the original story of Valmiki making the dramatic adaptation of his own. Admitting his debt to Valmiki he says:

I am the admirer of the great Sage Valmiki, the son of Prachetas who wrote the story of Rama by reading which purifies our soul. I also follow his footstep as I write the story of Rama, So you enlightened spectators of this drama listen to it and enjoy it. (Act. I)

The whole story of Parashuram is given in different contexts and the poet's delineation of characters brought out the main traits of personality and character of both the Ramas. The

Poet starts the story with the palace of Malvaban one of the Ministers of Ravana when he was engaged in a tete-e-tete with Shurpanakha, sister of Ravana. It appears from the story that Rakshasas heard of Rama's coming over to the forest at the request of Viswamitra they sent for Parashuram through some emissary. Parashuram did not oblige Malvaban and others but rather chastised them for their untoward and unseemly behaviour to Rishis. When Shurpanakha questioned the validity of Parashuram's friendliness towards them Malvaban replied to her that they had no right to criticise his conduct. (Act. II, 11) this verse shows their deep devotion to and implicit faith in one who admonished those mischief makers for their lapses. Nevertheless, they wanted to excite Parashuram against Sri Rama to their own advantage—so both Malvaban and Shurpanakha went to Mahendraparvat and let him know in details the story of Sri Rama's prowess and breaking of Harsdhanu. Parashuram got highly excited and straightaway came to Ayodhya to challenge Rama. From now on the story of Parashuram is set in such a way as the Poet unfolds as a deft artist two highly ideal characters. Both are appreciative of each other's prowess, learning, character and mission of life.

As Parashuram approached Sri Rama he spoke highly of him to Sita who got frightened by thinking of the impending encounter between them but Rama dispelled all her fear. Parashuram being enraged and excited entered the inner apartment of the palace of his own without caring for securing permission from the palace guard. As he saw him entering the palace Sri Rama described him so beautifully, bringing out the whole trait of his character. (Act. II, 23)

Parashuram then threw challenge to Sri Rama saying that he had broken the bow which was sanctified by his Guru Siva. Then both of them refreshed their memory by recalling the antiquity of the bow. Parashuram, in the meantime was surprised to see Sri Rama's unique calm and composure in the face of provocations, and challenges and silently paid fuisome praise for it. (Act. II, 32) while both the Rama's were conversing together, Janaka accompanied by his family priest Satananda arrived there. Janaka exchanged usual courtesies and offered respects as deserved. Parashuram wondered what

made them come here. A sense of compassion and affection arose in him for Sri Rama but at the same time he could not make up his mind how to challenge him. Satananda assured Rama that nothing would befall him. At this time they charged Parashuram for entry into inner apartment without having any previous permission in reply he said that being a forest dweller he was not fully aware of the urban formalities. All entreaties and persuasions failed to dissuade Parashuram from any encounter with Rama—so Vasistha addressed him with these wise words which are indeed worth quoting and remembrance for all time:

Listen, my boy, what would avail you all these weapons you are well versed in knowledge, follow the Vedic path man of wisdom, and you are on the righteous path. Friendship, mercy, gladness and indifference, you follow this fourfold way of cultivating goodmind. May you have good brotherly feelings and you leave aside the axe. From gladness of mind, thus cultivated by own efforts, the fortunate one like you is filled with Truth (ritambhara prajna) and all other dross of ignorance is cleared. Therefore as a man of wisdom you should try to get over this ignorance that breeds misunderstanding, since you have deep predilection for penance.

(Act. III, Vs. 4)

Parashuram did not agree either with Vasistha or Viswamitra who claimed common lineage from Bhrigu, but remained adamant in his resolution to have a fight with Sri Rama. He averred that he would rather perform any hard expiation which might be called upon to do than to retrace his steps by laying down his weapon. He also said that he would hardly stand the insult hurled on his Guru Sankara by Sri Rama who had the temerity to break his bow. Satananda as was the practice of the age, wanted to beshrew him out of anger for all his remarks, but Vasistha prevented him from doing so. In the midst of the exchange of hot words, accusation and counter accusation with claim for superiority on either side they maintained respect for each other which is the classic example of mutual understanding and appreciation of contending

parties. The Poet by so doing set an example as to how complicated issues could be settled amicably through sympathetic understanding and discussion. Even in their anger the Ramas never lost the sense of decorum. Parashuram then came forward and challenged Rama but ultimately he was defeated. Thereafter he offered apology and wanted to perform any sort of expiation for disobeying the Rishis but Viswamitra said that all his lapses and sense of egoism had been cleared away by the touch of Rama—, so why he should think of expiation? Dasaratha said that Parashuram was ever-pure and established in virtue and whatever he did, he did for the good of the humanity. As fire and sanctified water (tirthodokam) do not require any purification, likewise he needs no purificatory rites as such. (Act IV, 27) Although Bhavabhuti departed from the main Puranic theme, none the less it should be observed to the credit of the Poet, none of the earlier authors has described Parashuram-Sri Rama relation in such artistic and beautiful way as Bhavabhuti did. As one reads it one feels the charm of the superb and masterly poetic creation of two ideal life which is indeed Bhavabhuti's own.

Sri Sankardev (1449-1569) the great reformer Saint of Assam wrote a small playlet on Rama-Parashuram episode known as Rama Vijay Nat his last literary work written at the behest of Chilaray of Coochbehar. It is written in a simple language with all his usual literary flair. He closely followed the Ramayana story but made departure when he made Parashuram and Viswamitra fight each other. The whole playlet is interspersed with Sanskrit verses. When Viswamitra saw Parashuram was determined to do harm to Sri Rama he challenged him. Then followed a great fight between them with clubs etc. The fight was so fierce that both of them lost sticks and clubs and finally Parashuram subdued Viswamitra. So describes Sri Sankardeva:

Parashuram was the incarnation of Vishnu and unconquerable. Viswamitra could not stand his prowess—so he had to fly away. (Vs. 14-15)

When Parashuram again approached Rama—he strung his

arrow, seeing which Parashuram got frightened and his axe fell down from his hand.

His axe fell down and he fell prostrated at the feet of Rama saying 'Both of us are same as I am one of your parts (amsa).' (Vs. 16)

Parashuram said again—'Rama, you are God-incarnate and unaware as I was of your great prowess, I showed my temper which I should not have done, so please forgive my lapses'. But Sri Rama said that as the arrow was sanctified it could not be withdrawn. Hence he released it towards the firmament. Parashuram went away saying that he received a new lease of life at Rama's grace. The whole playlet is a beautiful presentation of that great episode and the reader is at once convinced of Sankardev's fine literary creation which gave new dimension to a well known story of the days yore.<sup>18</sup>

Goswami Tulsidas (1532-1625) in his Ramacharita Manasa (Balkanda) set the whole episode in the court of Janaka himself. When after breaking of Haradhanu the marriage of Sita took place Parashuram came to know about Rama's great performance of the breaking the great bow which remained as a puzzle to many at that period. While the invited Kings were discussing among themselves about the valorous act of Rama, Parashuram appeared there with his usual gusto which made everybody shaky and frightened. Goswamiji's description of Parashuram is indeed fine and highlights the esteem with which the latter was held all the time. On coming there he wanted to know who was the man responsible for breaking the bow and possess such power and valour to do so. It was left to Lakshmana to challenge him and both of them engaged themselves in heated arguments. Both tried to show their points and every body present at the royal court was expecting some terrible thing to happen at any moment. At this stage Rama intervened to say that wise men never found fault with a boy as Lakshmana was, who indulged in frivolous talks. Except this Lakshmana did him no wrong. Why should he then get so much agitated and excited, Parashuram retorted by saying that this axe had killed so many people including kings and warriors and the same axe he was carrying on his person, so

how could he retrace his step now? So saying Parashuram wanted to strike him, but lo, he felt his hands had become benumbed. Although he was seething with rage but he felt a sense of despair welling up in him, and he could not move his hand. In the words of the poet:

Parashuram was seething with anger yet he could not move his hands. The axe which killed so many kings does not want to work. God has turned his face from him His nature changed and felt why this despair.

(Vs. 313 Balkanda)

Here Tulsidas has very subtly showed that love is the most potential weapon of all other weapons not to speak of Parashuram's own axe, which symbolcally represented the spirit of violence. Rama met Parashuram's challenge with reason, patience and perseverance and even in the face of provocation and repeated demand of engaging themselves in battle and he remained unsullied. Hence Parashuram had to concede to the rational approach of Sri Rama. When we try to reason out and approach certain controversial issue with sympathy and understanding, love comes of its own and defeat the onrushing force of violence. Ahimsa is a mental attitude and not mere renunciation of weapon or violence. We have to cultivate that attitude by faith, belief and understanding by disciplining our mind. Even after this Parashuram tried to provoke Rama but he chose to remain calm and peaceful offering reasonable arguments. Quite reasonably and with certain force Rama reminded him of his Brahminhood and all that it represents and as such his position in society and his duty towards its preservation. None the less Parashuram remained unconvinced and quipped:

The wood of the sacrifice is my army, all the kings are like sacrificial animals. By axeing all I would perform my yajna.

(Vs. 316, Balakanda)

Rama without feeling discouraged at the behaviour of Parashuram tried once again to convince him and said if he had called him a Brahmin he had not done any mistake, since

all people howsoever strong and valourous might be, would bow his head before him. He also made it clear again that he did not fear to face his challenge, but he would surely like to avoid it for greater interest and maintaining peace. He added that who gave due respect to the qualities one possessed, never believed in the spirit of violence rather would try to appreciate it. Parashuram atlast saw reason to Rama's arguments and handed over his own bow to him. And Rama took with all the ease which made Parashuram wonder of his divine power. Thus in narrating the episode with all its poetic sentiments (*rasa*), Goswamiji established the truth that Love or Ahimsa ultimately conquers. What we need is faith and patience. This in other words develop a sense of reverence for every human life and being. It is a very strenuous efforts but ultimately the strain and suffering turn into sustaining happiness Parashuram withdraw by singing fulsome praise of Rama. This is also very significant and characteristic of his deep understanding of his love for Sri Rama.<sup>19</sup>

Ramayana story as it is known has been adapted all over the world and specially in south East Asia. Ramkien of Siam, Ramayana of Indonesia, Bali and other areas show how it percolated in the life of the people of these areas. Recent discovery of Mikir Ramayana-Chhabin Alum shows how the story of inspired even the tribes in the remotest corner of our land.<sup>20</sup> According to Karbi Ramayana Rangpo Kather or Rang Kather as Parashuram was known to them offered resistance to Sri Rama on the way. Rama entreated him to leave him alone but he did not concede to it, so he killed him. But another version of the said Ramayana, Parashuram invited both Rama and Lakshmana to fight. Lakshmana stretched his hand and asked him to strike. Parashuram with his big axe which is said to be as big as it touched the sky stroke him but it could not hurt Lakshmana. As he could not do anything he fled away saying that he had taken away their power with him but Lakshmana retorted by saying that his strength was with him rather he subdued his anger and egoism. At that time Lakshmana shouted at Rama saying that Rang Kather had taken away their strength. The actual wording is 'bitam nangken pal tangla' i.e. poison is taken away from Rama. Poison, we believe stands for strength). Since Parashuram took

away the strength of Rama so he could not kill the golden deer (Swarnamriga).<sup>21</sup> According to Tibetan (Khotani) Ramayana Rama remained in exile in fear of Parashuram.

In Harivamsa (Vishnuparva Ch. 39 & 40) we find Krishna met Parashuram at Karvirpur on Sayadri hill when Mathura was about to be attacked by Jarasandha. Krishna decided to go to south to distract the attention of Jarasandha in order to save Mathura. He felt that it would be easy for him to kill him there and by following both the brother (Krishna and Valaram) he would leave Mathura untouched. When they met Parashuram, they introduced themselves to him. Parashuram told them that in order to meet them he came all the way from Surparaka. He advised them how to meet Jarasandha and wanted them to go to Gomantak mountain. After escorting them upto Gomantak, he departed for Surparaka.

Krishna, you have come down to earth for the benefit of the world. It is through compulsion of age that you have come here. As soon as confrontation with Jarasandha starts, you would be able to arm yourself to defeat him. (H.V., Vishnuparva, 40/36-7)

The story of Parashuram's meeting with Krishna is interesting since tradition places the age of Dwapara after Treta when Sri Rama came. Parashuram is regarded to be one of the seven immortals (Chiranjeevi). He said through the grace of Krishna I get this immortality (ibid 40/33).

#### 4. *Matricide*

We now proceed to the most popular legend of Parashuram's life, viz., matricide. The story of matricide is same in all the Puranic texts, they only differ in timing. Skandha, Siva and Brahmavaivarta Puranas have left it out altogether. We narrate the story mainly drawing it from Srimad Bhagavata (Skandha IX, Ch. 16) and Kalika Purana (Ch. 83). It came to pass one day that Renuka, the mother of Parashuram went to the Ganga to have a dip. While she was returning to the Ashram she regaled herself and felt drawn to the king Chitraratha who was playing with celestial nymphs. She felt so much attracted to and interested in this sporting

scene that she forgot everything. At the Ashrama, Jamadagnya felt worried over the delay to her returning, as it was time of midday worship. Jamadagnya could perceive through the smell of effusion of her body why she was so late and got very much annoyed. He became so much furious for her unusual conduct that he asked his sons present to kill her. We quote the relevant texts from the Mahabharata:

Renuka who was then observing some vow (vrata) went to take bath in river. On her way back she saw king Chitraratha of Matrkavrata and felt attracted to the handsome King who wearing golden garland was having his bath with his wife. As she returned to Ashrama late with wet cloth, frighened and absent minded, Jamadagni could perceive what had happened there.

(MBH, Vana 97/5-8: Bhagavata IX.16.2-8)

Thereafter Jamadagni asked his sons to kill their mother but none obliged him when Parashuram came forward and killed her knowing fully well his father's power of Tapasya as well as his spirit. (Bhagavata IX.16/5-6).

Parashuram even killed his brothers because they did not carry out their father's command. Jamadagni was greatly pleased with Parashuram and wanted him to ask for any boon by way of reward. He accordingly prayed five boons from his father which were (1) Revival of his mother and brothers (2) Expiation of matricidal sin (3) Mother should not remember her son's heinous misdeed (4) Invincibility in any battle and (5) Long life. Jamadagni readily granted all his five prayers and the Mother came back to life in no time. It appeared that she came out as if from deep sleep. (Kalika Puran Ch. 83/20-22, Bhagavata IX, Ch. 16)

There is another tradition which gives a different version of the story and makes Renuka, sister-in-law of King Kartavirajarjuna. Once while she was proceeding to take bath in the river she chanced upon Kartavirjarjuna. The King then told her jocularly that since they were at the very doorstep of their Ashrama would she not entertain him and his party? Renuka felt embarrassed as how could she manage food for such a big party. She told this to her husband:

Jamadagni. Rishi Jamadagni remembered Indra who helped him in entertaining the King and his Troupe. Kartavirya could realise his power and how he acquired it. Kuvera the brother of Indra who was instrumental in providing such lavish meal to them went back to his abode with that wish yielding cow. Enraged as he was for not getting the cow which he demanded, the King destroyed the Ashram, killed all of his four sons and left the place in huff. Renuka drowned herself in a nearby lake. On receipt of this news Parashuram came to the Ashram posthaste from Mahendraparvat and killed the king. After Kartavirya's death, Rishis and gods prayed for Mother Renuka when she came out from the lake-her hideout. This lake is said to be located at Himachal Pradesh known as Renukahrad a sacred spot. It is situated 28 miles off from Nahan a small town of Himachal Pradesh on Hardwar-Simla Road. The lake situated within the mountain is said to look like a man lying and stretched over it, and the area of mountain is said to be three to four miles. Once Renuka remembered her son Parashuram who came to her immediately from the place of his self-exile at Mahendraparvat. She requested him to stay with her but he said since he was engaged in penance for the good of humanity he could not comply with her request but promised to come to her twice in a year. To observe that day of his coming to the Mother, a fair is still held in Oct-Nov (Kartick) in that place. There are temples with Parashuram image and with footprints of Mother Renuka in and around the lake which are venerated by thousands of pilgrims.<sup>22</sup>

Knowing fully well that womenfolk is outside the purview of capital punishment, and in particular Renuka being his own mother why did Parashuram readily agree to perform such heinous act? Anticipating such queries the Bhagavata says that he knew the divine power of his father and had the conviction that he would revive his mother, hence he chose to do so. (Bhagavata IX, 16.8) While consoling his mother Kausalaya Rama cited the example of Parashuram who obeyed his father's command without any questioning. (Ramayana, Ajodhya 21/33) Similarly Kalidas, the immortal bard utilises this unquestioning obedience of Parashuram to his father while discussing Sita's banishment in the Raghuvamsam.

When Rama asked his brothers to leave his consort Sita in exile under the pretext of showing her Valmiki's penance grove, all the brothers except Lakshmana refused to execute such ruthless act. Lakshmana somehow overcame his reluctance and hesitation musing thus:

He heard that Bhargava (Parashurama) killed his own mother at the behest of his father, hence he (Lakshmana) accepted the command of his elder brother. The command of respectable persons should be carried out without any asking.

(Raghuvamsa 14/46) 22 (a)

We do not have any authentic description of Mother Renuka and how she bore all these ordeal. Why did she submit to her husband's wrath knowing fully well that she was innocent. She remained silent and bore all the hardships and humiliation inflicted on her by her husband and sons. Mother Renuka exemplifies the glowing ideal of Hindu motherhood. Her love and affection for her son was unique. Does she also remain a silent figure in our mythological lore like Urmila, Srutakriti and Mandavi of the Ramayana of whom Rabindranath so beautifully portrayed in his essay 'Kaveyer Upekshita'? Yet Mother Renuka became a guardian deity of many castes in our land. Temples have been erected in her honour in many parts of the country and till today she is worshipped as a goddess. Dr K.M. Munshi very aptly describes her in the following strain which catches the main spirit of her life:

I have often thought of the unique place, which Renuka occupied in Indian memory. Apart from Amba the mother aspect of Shakti she is the only goddess to whom shrines were built for centuries in many parts of the country. Like Mary in the Christian world she shares the honour with us of being the mother of God. She was devoted wife who cheerfully allowed herself to be killed by her son, in order to obey the mandate of her Lord. The dutiful son not only obeyed his father's cruel mandate but ultimately induced him to revive her

and Parashuram like few figures in the collective memory of mankind is known to literature as son of Jamadagni-Renuka. I thought of her of what she must have enveloped her son and his disciples, what passionate sense of purity and loyalty she must have possessed to offer her head willingly when her husband harboured a suspicion against her and what indelible impressions her maternal love must have left on the generations who knew her so that succeeding ages have to come to look upon her as the mother par excellence.<sup>23</sup>

To conclude the life story of Parashuram, after granting the boon to him Jamadagni told that by mere getting boon none could get rid of the sin, hence he should wash off his sin by having a holy dip at Brahmakund. Accordingly he travelled all the way from Sayadri (now in Maharashtra) to Assam and took expiating bath there and felt refreshed and all his sins were washed off as it were. (Kalika Purana 83/26-7) Parashuram was so much convinced of the efficacy of the water of Brahmakunda that he let out its water to the plains of Kamrupa—so that it might flow through the whole of Assam, making the land fertile with verdant green plantations. It was also his hope that people in general would be benefitted and spiritually elevated by bathing in it. (Kalika Purana 83/28-32) The scriptural texts contradict the popular belief that Parashu (axe) which remained clung to Parashuram's hand fell down as soon as he bathed there. We had occasion before to allude to the text and critically examine all the available data to show that he was born with axe (sahajaparashu) and various views put forward by puranic lore on this. Except the Kalikapurana as quoted and the Padmapurana (Sristikhand Ch. 55) we do not find any reference of Parashuram's pilgrimage to Brahmakund after the matricide more specially in the Mahabharata and the Bhagavata where his life story has been told in extenso. Puranas like Brahma, Siva, Brahmavaibarta, Skanda and Vishnu have altogether left out this legend of matricide. Siva Purana tells us that Parashurama did Tulapurushavrata in order to get rid of all sins accrued to him for killing so many innocent people. (Siva Purana 30/52-3)

In the Bhagavata of course we are told that killings of Kings who uphold the rule of law (Dharma) and protect or of the countries is tantamount to the killing of Brahmins or wisemen, hence Parashuram was enjoined to go on a pilgrimage with constant thought of Achyuta—so that all the sins might be wiped out. (Bhagavata IX, 15, 41)

The life story of Parashuram is one of the most inspiring characterisations of an ideal life in our ancient lore. It instils in us a sense of courage, stamina and boldness to face all the difficulties and mischances that we may be expected to encounter. He is regarded as an Avatara but his life story has been presented in such way as the mortal man may take a leaf from it and mould his life after it. That is why it has been said he lives eternally and is still there beckoning us to follow the ideal of courage, strength and self-confidence so that we may build up a better world and happier society on this earth. (Bhagavata IX. 16.26)<sup>24</sup>

### **Assessment of the Legends**

Accepting the whole scriptural and mythological legends of Parashuram's prowess and his militant mission of extermination of the warrior class we may ask ourselves what made the authors describe the destruction of a big segment of humanity in such massive way and glorify the violence? Do these stories have any moral for humanity? What do they teach us? What moral they point at? When, therefore, we try to ratiocinate the whole legend and the story of the extermination of khatriya clan by him we feel that made Parashuram bring about such huge destruction and loss of life and take revenge in such ruthless and inhuman way. Could he not satisfy himself by exterminating the kshatriyas once instead of twentyone times? According to some scholars the veda has twentyone names for the earth (Rg. Veda 7.87.4) when it says: "Ubacha me varuno medhiyaya trispta namadna bibharti" so it is inferred that these twentyone names of the earth turned into the story of extermination of twentyone times in later mythological stories. Such instances are not lacking in our mythologies. The story of Vamana came from the Vedic hymn that Vishnu moves in three strides all over the world. In Vedanga Nirukta in nighantu portion twentyone synonymns

of Prithvi or earth have been enumerated. On the other hand, we feel this enumeration of twentyone times may be taken as a way of assertion or impress upon the people the dimension of Parashuram's prowess. Our Puranas are found sometimes to have cited some unbelievable figures. This, we feel the ancient people's way of putting big things in bigger way or hyperbolic manner. Hyperbolic or Atishyaokti is a common mark of Sanskrit Literature. And one may also take it figuratively. The same tendency of exaggerations is still at work as would be evident by the tendency of the modern Press to give higher exaggerated accounts in respect of referring to the crowd assembled in some functions or meetings.

Secondly, some of the dominant social contents of the age were reflected in Puranic stories. It appears Brahmins led by Bhrigu were a bit orthodox and followed the vedic rites etc strictly. Whereas Kshatriyas led by Kartaviyarjuna of Haihaya clan were progressive in their outlook. Parashuram belonged to Bhrigu clan of Brahmins hence these battles showed that both of them tried to dominate and led the society in their own way. If we are to accept the theory of Zarasthustra depicting him as Rama belonging to Persia, then we see Parsoos were opposed to Image worship as believed in Vedic Monotheism by giving stress on fire worship as symbol of one God. Was it that Bhrigu or Parashu stood for strict Vedic ritual of Homa whereas Haihayas were not.<sup>25</sup> This sort of clashes of ideal continued till to the age of the Ramayana. When Sri Rama of the Solar dynasty asserted himself by humbling Parashurama, the age of Bhrigu dominance came to be eclipsed. Rabindranath Tagore in his essay on the Vision of India's History has very clearly and carefully interpreted the main social currents of the age of the Ramayana. He says though Sri Ram was the disciple of Vasistha, he revolted against him and followed the idea of his going over to Viswamitra. It must be one of reasons that weighed heavily with Dasaratha to allow him to go exile for fourteen years though he was reluctant in the beginning to quote him:

The clash came to such a pass that professional differences between Brahmins and Kshatriyas became one of the mental reservations which ultimately burst

into social differences. The story of Vasistha and Viswamitra is a pointer to that movement of history.

Many other scholars of repute read in Parashuram legend the conflict of castes specially between Brahmins and kshatriyas. It is said that to impose their ideal of castes and way of faith priestly class led by Parashuram subdued Kshatriyas twentyone times but kshatriyas did not submit rather tried to maintain their supremacy. The evolution of castes could not take place in hundred years it must have taken several centuries to evolve. As John Campbel Oman puts it:

From such facts and legends regarding the origin and working of the institution of castes as are revealed sometimes deliberately, sometimes quite casually in the literature of the Brahmanas from the ancient Vedas, through the Brahmnas, Upanishads and sutras to the famous Indian epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata may be learned how insidiously the Brahmins magnified their own importance and privileges and how their arrogant self assertion often brought them into serious conflict with the kshatriyas, who, if we are to believe the priests, were entirely exterminated by Parashuram because of their opposition to the Brahmanas. The legend to that effect is accepted by many living Pundits, who maintain that no lineal descendants of the original kshatriya caste are existing at the present day.<sup>26</sup>

Sir Charles Eliot, Theodore Golstucker among others share the same view. Even in some recent research papers by Indian scholars this theory has been supported from the historical point of view. Eliot's view of this legend has some new angle which we quote:

This legend clearly refers to a struggle for supremacy between two upper classes, though we may doubt if the triumphs attributed to the priestly champions have any foundation in fact. The Ramayana contains a singular account of a contest between the Rama and the greater hero of the same name in which Parashuram admits

other's superiority. That is to say an epic edited under priestly supervision relates how the hero god of the warriors is then worshipped by common consent as the greater divinity but under priestly patronage. The tenacity and vitality of the Brahmanas enabled them ultimately to lead the conqueror captive and Ramachandra became champion of Brahminism as much as Parashuram.<sup>27</sup>

In this connection they referred to the legend of Vena, the conflict between Vasistha and Viswamitra to substantiate their view point, but in fact from the scriptural lore it appears that conflict has never been a source of enmity amongst the Brahmins and the warrior class, rather they contributed to each other's talents towards the development of social harmony and peace. This is clearly evident from the text of Aiteraya Brahmana of the Rigveda when it observes:

Other kings befriend that King whose enemy is vanquished and who has for his minister a learned Purohita (Brahmin) who is the protector of the state.<sup>28</sup>

Kshatriyas as a class used to administer and protect the country. At the time of Parashuram they were negligent of their duties. They became despots and ruled the country according to their sweet will, hence a change was badly called for. From the Vedas down to the Smiritis and Puranas we find the stress had been given in the harmonious development of four Varnas that constituted the organic whole of the society, they should do their respective duties and should not allow imbalance in the society. Kshatriya Kings should administer the country in close collaboration with Brahmins or Rishis who represented intellect, culture and a sense of fair judgment. As we read in the Yajurveda (XX.25):

I wish to know that holy world where Brahmins and khatriyas became equal and where gods enjoy company of Agni.

The story of King Vena as it has been told in the

Bhagavata (Bk. IV Ch. 14-5) points out the eagerness of Rishis to maintain clear and honest administration of a country. Kalidas too pointed out that Kings used to derive inspiration through the blessings of the Rishis who represented the true spirit of Brahmanhood which they provided them with through their tapasya, contemplation and fair counsel whenever necessary. Bhatti has beautifully put the idea in the mouth of Viswamitra when he said:

By me you are looked upon as a Refuge in the midst of dangers and you too depend on us for the increase of righteousness the kshatriya and the priesthood are for each other's benefits do not make hesitation, send your son.  
(Bhattikavya Canto I, 21)

Parashuram through his conduct and deeds tried to reform and catch that spirit of Arya ideal of Varnashram. Notwithstanding the arguments and interpretations that we have so far examined we may say that it was not the intention of Parashuram to exterminate all the kshatriyas, his axe of destruction fell on those who were negligent of their duty and responsibility as he wanted to establish the ideal of kshatriyahood. As set forth in our ancient lore true kshatriyas should protect the honour of their motherland and save the humanity from the hand of rowdy elements. The weapon is meant for relieving the misery of the helpless, but not for killing the innocent to put in the words of Poet Kalidasa. (Sakuntala Act I) The ideal of knighthood that set itself in the eleventh century Europe was something very akin to kshatriya ideal of our land. The valour, strong disciplined life and sense of dedication to the cause were reminiscent of what Kautilya upholds as an ideal of our land. "This so writes a historian", "a peculiar institution called chivalry originated in the piety of some nobles who wished to give to the profession of arms of religious tendency. These nobles devoted their swords to God and bound themselves by a solemn oath to use them only in the cause of the weak and the oppressed. There were ceremonies and rituals through which these nobles had to pass and they were the symbolical of the life a knight was taking upon himself. After bath a knight had to cloth with white

tunic, as a symbol of purity of the life and robing him in a crimson vest to denote that he was called upon to shed blood, and finally in a complete suit of black armour which was an emblem of death for which he must always be prepared. Moreover, he took an oath to speak the truth, to maintain the right to protect the distressed, to practice courtesy, to defend the Christian religion, to despise the allurements of ease and to vindicate the honour of his name.”<sup>29</sup> Poet Tennyson in his poems and writings exemplified them and showed how dedicated those knights had been. He made Sir Galahad say:

My strength is as the strength of ten,  
Because my heart is pure.

These lines show how those knights were committed to their great ideal. We have seen in the history of our land valiant kshatriyas staked everything for the honour of the country and society. The kshatriyas never budged an inch from the right cause and upheld it even at the cost of their life. In the coat of arms of the Rajasthani princes of yore the motto was ‘He who is steadfast in dharma is helped by God’ was inscribed. This nicely reflects the whole philosophy of kshatriyahood. And this steadfastness to duty is the main theme of their life.

Thirdly: According to the historians Parashuram was prior to Rama Dasarathi and traditionally Treta or Satyyuga ended with him hence they feel that the conflict between Bhargava Ram and Parashuram was tenable neither historically nor from the point of view of Purana. As Dr Pusalkar points out:

There are clearly instances of anachronism as the result of the anxiety of the writer of the epics to establish contact of their persons with the great Bhargava. In order to get over these obvious anachronism a theory was promulgated at a later date that Parashuram was chirinjeeva (immortal).<sup>30</sup>

The whole story of the conflict between Parashuram and Haihaya is to be judged against the backdrop of historical

perspective. The Age of Parashuram is fixed at C 2550-2350 B.C Bhrigus came from Anarta (Gujrat) when Haihayas came to dominate the western India. Bhrigus became associated with them and Kartaviryas king of Haihayas bestowed on them immense wealth. But King's descendant illtreated them and wanted them to return the wealth. Because of Haihayas persecution they fled to central India. Richika, one of the great Bhrigus was skilled in archery and who married Satyvati the daughter of King Gadhi of Kanyakubja.

The Bhrigu Haihaya conflict started when Jamadagni was killed by Kartavirya. At the time of Parashuram's conflict with Kshatriyas, Haihaya were unpopular with some princely states. Haihayas were powerful and their sway extended all over India. To quote Dr. Pusalkar again:

It appears that on the strength of matrimonial alliances of the Bhargavas with the ruling families of Kanyakubja and Ayodhya and also the growing discontent due to the devastating raids and consequent unpopularity of Haihaya. Rama organised a confederacy of various kingdoms including Vaisali, Vedeha, Kashi, Kanyakubja and Ayodhya which fought the Haihayas as on various battle fields. These are probably referred to by the annihilation of kshatriyas twentyone times.<sup>31</sup>

Arjuna who was known by his patronymn Kartavirya as we have seen earlier was a great king of high order but was not given proper importance in relation to Parashuram. His victories have shown that he carried the banner of Aryan culture and the capital Mahismati was an outpost of Aryan colonies in those days. There is another view of this episode which is worth taking note of. According to Mr Karandikar who made a thorough study of Puranas and relevant sources Bhrigus were great sea faring clan and expert navigators. They had control over the overseas trade all through the western coast. They had flourishing business and close contact with foreigners which Haihayas did not like, they wanted to take over the maritime business and commissioned Atris who were equally expert navigators to build ship in order to check the Bhrigus, and Atris built thousand ships or ship with

thousand oars for Haihaya King. Hence Kartaviryarjuna got the appellation of Sahasrarjuna. And thus the supremacy of Arjuna King over the maritime trade was established. Bhrigus meanwhile led by Parashuram combined with the vanquished principalities such as Karkataka, Ravana, Naga and others who were nurturing grievances against Arjuna and thus posed a big challenge to his supremacy, leading to wholesale destruction.<sup>32</sup> From all these records we have two pictures that emerge. The foreign element that has been read in Parashuram episode must have originated from the fact that Bhrigus were a seafaring clan and this also shows contrary to popular belief as held by some that Brahmins of those days were not opposed to go abroad of overseas travelling by sea (samudrayatra). Surely, Bhrigus or Parasus as the case may be, were pioneers in maritime trade with the outside world. Secondly, we find that in order to impress the prowess of Arjuna and elevate him, the myth of thousand hands was started, whereas, in fact, it was he who as the Aryan King of Kshatriya clan built such a big ship as to show his own power and might.

Fourthly, saint Eknatha (1533-1599 A.D.) the great saint of Maharashtra has given philosophical explanation of Parashuram's action. He has started the interpretation of the Bhagavata by offering obeisance to Sri Renuka—mother of Parashuram who is their family deity. He says that Mother Renuka gave birth to Parashuram to destroy those warriors who were drunk with the sense of 'I-ness' by wielding the axe of knowledge (Jnanaparashu), by giving birth to him she dispelled the sense of Maya which in turn brings in the sense of Ahamkara (egoism) that creates the spirit of dualism. Kartaviryarjuna was a symbol of that egoism hence his axe fell on him.<sup>33</sup>

Fifthly: Parashuram by his act wanted to arouse the kshatrasakti for all classes (varna). He did not want that it should remain confined to a certain group or to be monopolised by the ruling class but everybody belonging to any varna should imbibe the spirit of strength without being indolent and negligent of his duty. It is a common experience of history that whenever a nation became indolent and too much pleasure seeking and ease loving it destroyed itself. A nation cannot live by cultural supremacy alone, hence there

should be harmonious development of the spirit of knowledge (jnanarjani) spirit of action (Karmarjani), physical fitness (shaririki) and that which gives us mental joy (chittaranjani). Hence a nation must imbibe the spirit of courage, fearlessness and strength for which kshatra ideal stood and stands. Hence the Vedas have given the national prayer of strength for all varnas which reads:

Thou who art Power, fill me with power. Thou who art valour, infuse valour into me. Thou who art strength give me strength. Thou who art the vital Essence, endow me with vitality. Wrath (against wrong) art thou, instil that wrath into me. Thou art Fortitude, fill me with fortitude. (Sukla Yajurveda XIX, 9)

Parashuram, we believe, wanted to rouse the nation from its slothfulness and indolence by showing the way of strength, courage and vigour.

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20. Mikir or Karbi is one of the plain tribes of Assam (Pop). They are scattered over Sibsagar Dist., Nowgong and on the North Bank bordering Arunachal. A Dist. known as Karbi Anglong bordering Nowgong Dist. on one hand and N.C. Hills on the other hand has been established with H.Q. at Diphu.
21. Premkanta Mahanta: Karbi Ramayana-Chhabin Alum: Prakas, Vol. IX, No. 1, Oct. 1983.
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critically examining all the prevalent versions of this legend as well as versions given in the Ahom Burunjis summarised the same as follows:

A King seeking refuge in the hills from the plains probably Mayamatta had built a fort at Ita. He came into conflict with another chief and was forced to surrender his wife who was on family way to him for breach of fishing rights. The queen was not allowed to live with the victor and was rehabilitated by him in distant places in the plains. The son born of her was ambitious and started extending his domains. In one of his conquering expeditions to the north he attacked Ita, took the Chief prisoner and killed him without knowing that latter was his father. But the patricide became known and there was great commotion among the people. All avoided him and looked down on him as a great sinner. Probably he was attacked by an ugly disease which was attributed to be his sin. Abhorred and shunned he submitted himself to an expiatory rite for getting rid of patricide sin. This is attributed to Arimattason of Mayamatta.

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