

## Anasuya-Priyamvada Charitkatha

**The Story So Far:** Shakuntala, the adopted daughter of Rishi Kanva and the real daughter of Menaka and Visvamitra, was separated from her husband, King Dushyanta, due to the curse of Rishi Durvasa who was quite infamous for his temper and curses. During this separation, she was carrying the child of King Dushyanta and their son, Bharat, would one day lead the Puru Kingdom and would also initiate the dynasty of Bharat. They did meet after the curse was lifted (most curses had an escape clause).

### **What happened when Shakuntala left the ashram of Kanva:**

Shakuntala had left the ashram with some escorts. Her close friends, Anasuya and Priyamvada, were left behind. They were roughly of the same age and were quite beautiful themselves.

Anasuya: O dear Priyamvada, Shakuntala has managed it quite well. Hooked a husband who is a big king; she is also carrying his child. She is all set.

Priyamvada: Anasuya, we should be happy for her. Shakuntala got a head-start, no doubt there, but we too need to set up ourselves.

Anasuya: What do you plan to do? Do we stand there below the Big Banyan tree and anoint ourselves with sandal-paste and other stuff? Good husband material is rare (it holds true even today, same goes for good wife material too).

Unknown to them both two brothers - broad shouldered, learned and of royal heritage - were heading towards the ashram of Rishi Kanva. Indrasen, the elder of the two, was a very learned person. He was tall, a little dark but was very handsome. Chandrasen, the younger, was endowed with a golden complexion, was equally learned, and was also quite handsome. As the tension level was less those days; people were generally quite calm and cool type. They had to learn their lessons, almost all of them, as it was a ritual which can only be compared to the coaching classes of the present days. And Gurus were not charging much, except that the disciples had to do all the household chores at the house of the Guru. They had to get up early in the morning, feed the cows, help the Guru's wife with the starting of the day's cooking e.g. getting good quality wood for lighting fire, fetching water, cleaning the courtyard etc. And in between, they also had to tend to thousand other small works. That was the fee.

When Indrasen and Chandrasen entered the serene atmosphere of the outskirts of the ashram of Rishi Kanva, they felt quite good. Finally they came to that famous Banyan tree which these girls were talking about. Anasuya and Priyamvada also came there almost at the same time. We will see these cosmic coincidences again and again. Now-a-days, some branch of science has evolved around these and one can almost accurately calculate the chances of various things happening. Here, as we are a few thousand years behind the present time, and as mathematics was still being taught at the feet of the Guru and not at the University level, we will proceed with our present state of affairs, without too much calculation. Some empirical values will be used now and then.

To carry the coincidence further, Madan, the God of love (what is a love story without HIM!) was passing by this area. And as he was tired due to his globe-trotting, he had decided to take a little rest. Brahma, one of the Trinity of the senior most Gods, had assigned the Department of Love to Madan. Madan was quite a cheerful character. He was also happy moving around the universe and making people fall in love. That was his main duty. He was given only a bow and a quiver full of arrows. When Madan saw any possible and probable couple, his job was to take his bow and arrow, and strike the couple with his shot. He was quite accurate in his aim, and he hardly ever missed. The very thought that he was making so many couples fall in love while he himself remained alone made him depressed and triggered acidity. Brahma therefore allowed him to have Rati, a beautiful Goddess, as his wife. As Madan was not really expected to shoot himself and Rati with his own love bow and arrow, Brahma gave a special blessing that they would remain in love through eternity. So Rati was safe from any chance of Madan straying away from her, then on. Incidentally, Madan was known to have a roving eye.

Coming back to the present moment, Madan too landed exactly on the spot where these people were there: Anasuya and Priyamvada; Indrasen and Chandrasen. Here comes a twist in the story. Madan was continuously doing his duty. Having an experimental temperament he had tried his hand on couples from many species: birds, squirrels, horses as well as the usual Homo sapiens. Incidentally, he had tried his luck on Lord Shiva too, with a disastrous consequence. His quiver was supposed to be always full (auto-filled from Heaven) but there was a short supply of this special arrows from Heaven. Vishwakarma, the God of Instruments, was paying over-time to the subordinate Gods in his

department, to keep up with this problem. It was a supply and demand issue.

Madan saw two couples, Anasuya and Indrasen; Priyamvada and Chandrasen. But he had only one arrow and the time was critical. Parties had just arrived, mild breeze was blowing, and there was Anasuya and Priyamvada who were both sad without Shakuntala. They were doubly sad with their own plight. Doing PhD and MBA was not so much in vogue amongst girls; they were told that before the age of 20 (empirically speaking), getting good husband is a necessity. And the hermitage was a rather sad place for match making. Madan was in a dilemma; he had only one arrow, and two sets of couples. It was a great chance but the situation was turning sticky.

By now, both the couples had seen each other. Anasuya got attracted to Chandrasen and Priyamvada to Indrasen. On the other hand, Madan had a different plan - Anasuya should hitch to Indrasen and Priyamvada to Chandrasen. As you may closely observe, even in those days, complex love-quadrangles existed. Later on, now-a-days, copious copying of these ideas is observed in various movies. But as no ancient scriptwriter was smart enough to think of copyrights, such copying is allowed freely.

Madan (to himself): What a rotten luck! Here I am within the bowshot of two girls and two boys of right and ripe age – and I have to run out of arrows now! This is not done! All I needed was one more arrow. Then I would have completed the job and would have gone home to Rati and could have relaxed with a little Somrasa (alcoholic drinks) and we could have taken in a dance by Rambha, as well. (Rambha was a famous

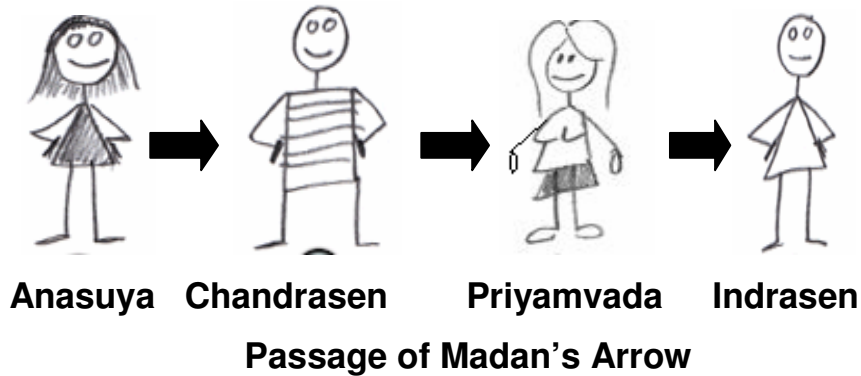
dancer in the heaven.) What should I do? Should I send an SMS to Brahma, and ask for his advice?

Of course, sending an SMS to God Indra would be more appropriate and effective as Indra has huge experience. (Indra, the king of all Gods, was quite high in the hierarchy of the Gods and was just lower than the Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. He was quite a character!) Madan was about to take out his cosmic mobile when a brilliant idea struck him.

Madan, during his early age, was an apprentice at the workshop of God Vishwakarma. He had a strong knowledge of Engineering Mechanics. He took out the bow, put the arrow in it, pulled the string up to the complete length, and let go. The arrow flew, and it struck people in this order (please be careful and pay attention): it first struck Anasuya, reflected from there to Chandrasen, then it again got reflected from there to Priyamvada and then finally to Indrasen. Madan had used a special technique (akin to Boomerang but more advanced) whereby the single arrow kept bouncing from person to person and of course made them fall in love with each other.

Now the real fun began. Anasuya and Chandrasen felt a strong attraction towards each other. It was not exactly what Madan had planned, but it was the best that could have been done with a single arrow, in a short time span. Priyamvada and Indrasen also felt a strong tug between their hearts' inner core. No issues there either. The main hitch came during the passage of the arrow between Chandrasen and Priyamvada. Priyamvada got in to a double whammy. The arrow passage was such that any two persons (of opposite sex of course) it

touches in sequence, fall in love. Priyamvada was caught between two persons, Chandrasen on the left and Indrasen on the right. Please refer to Picture below:



Priyamvada: Oh! Anasuya!! My heart is torn between the two sides. What should I do? What have I done? Girls in the ashram do not even get one man, and I am torn between two.

Anasuya: Mind, Priyamvada – we are very good friends. I would like to keep Chandrasen for myself and no sharing business here! Do we understand each other clearly?

Priyamvada: Of course Anasuya, I do. I also want to be with Indrasen only, but this arrow business has befuddled my heart completely (started crying).

Madan realized that he cannot remain invisible and keep playing his tricks. Time has come to show up. So he appeared in the scene. He had his bow in one hand, quiver with no arrow in the other hand, and his beatific smile.

Madan also felt quite distraught seeing Priyamvada crying her heart out. He had a very soft heart and was very sympathetic towards the female species. He had quite a few tumbles, with a huge number of girls, while he was an apprentice God in this business, before Rati had come in the scene. Rati, a tough lady, made sure that this got stopped.

Madan: What seems to be the trouble, my dear Priyamvada?

Priyamvada: (in half-choked voice) Oh Lord, I am being torn between two men. I want Indrasen, but you have complicated the issue by allowing your Engineering Mechanics funda. Now that the arrow has come from Chandrasen, my heart is not exactly under my control. Though you Gods are allowed to have consorts, I am one-man girl. Basically I want Indrasen; else I will start “priopavesana” (fast unto death).

[Note: there were special allowances here. During this “priopavesana”, one was allowed to take various liquids, juices etc, but those details are for some other time].

Madan: What can I do, my dear? I had only one arrow and I also had to complete my quota of the number of couples shot. Brahma had issued me a sharply worded memo the other day, saying that due to my backlog the total head-count of human race is going down. [Note: in those good old days of sparse population, special incentives were offered for early marriage and bigger families.]

Priyamvada: Whatever you want to do is your business. I want Indrasen, and not both. Already Anasuya has scratched my face thinking that I am

trying to snatch Chandrasen from her. And you very well know that that is not the case here. Your half-baked engineering knowledge has mucked up the whole situation. You better do something and NOW!!  
(Starts crying)

Madan realized that this is serious. He has to undo this complex connectivity. As mentioned earlier, there were lot of counteractions possible, and Madan was tugging at his moustache very hard, to find the optimal solution.

Madan to Priyamvada: Please find that arrow my dear and please be quick with it. It is still potent. But its potency will run out after 30 minutes (again empirical value). Then you will be eternally stuck between the two.

A frantic search was ON. Everybody was searching. Chandrasen was a little less enthusiastic as he did not mind having two girls. But Anasuya was also quite clear that she did not want to share her Chandrasen. Indrasen was equally forceful in his search for the same reason. Priyamvada was serious but was not able to see clearly as she had cried and her vision was blurred. Finally a squirrel came to help them. He was passing by. He simply picked up the fallen arrow by a make-shift tong and passed it to Madan without touching it. Madan had once net-practiced on a bunch of squirrels and there was a huge chaos amongst them. So our squirrel was quite careful.

Madan took back the arrow; he had to put some special spell on this arrow to make it act in reverse gear, and then made Chandrasen and Priyamvada stand next to each other. Then he let go of the arrow. It first

touched Priyamvada and then Chandrasen, in the reverse sequence. And the bond was broken.

Just to sum up, now it was two pairs, Anasuya and Chandrasen; Priyamvada and Indrasen. And by then Rishi Kanva had arrived. Much before any fresh complexity start again, both the couples asked for blessings from Rishi Kanva and got it too.

This part was somehow missing in all the stories of Shakuntala, but we were determined that the real story comes out to all. And of course, Chandrasen and Indrasen took their lovely brides home and there was a re-marriage (each girl unto her chosen man) with lot of pomp. Both the girls were quite clear that this marriage by arrow touching and a quick garland exchange is not enough. It gives no scope to show the ornaments. And they lived happily ever after!!!!