

GODDESS AMBIKA

Raivatachal (Girnar mountain) was like a jewel of Saurashtra region. To its southern side was a city that was compassionately and lawfully protected and was inhabited by many rich people who were prosperous like Kuber, the God of wealth. Hence, the city was aptly named Kuber. It was full of beautiful and unmatched bloomed lotus gardens, which would unfailingly make the lotus-like eyes of a viewer blossom. There was a strong and heightened fort

unconquerable by enemies. There were temples which would destroy all the sins and each of these temples housed magnificent idols of Tirthankaras. People of Kuber town were greatly devoted to these Tirthankars and owing to the good merits acquired due to this devotion, they were gaining and enjoying all wealth related pleasures.

This land was ruled by noble King of Yadav Dynasty named Krishna. Owing to his Yash Naam Karma (a type of Karma that brings fame), he enjoyed fame that could be matched only by Indra – the king of celestial beings. Just like a brave lion capable of decimating an elephant of the

highest order, his prowess in defeating enemies was unparalleled.

In this city lived a Brahmin named Devdutt. His body was adorned with three twined sacred threads. His wisdom had been nourished and nurtured with the nectar-like words of monks and he was a bearer of astounding and beautiful art. He had a wife named Deval. With passage of time the couple was blessed with a son whom he named Sombhatt. As years passed by, Sombhatt crossed over from childhood and adulthood and became a young man. At that time, he was married to a young and righteous woman called Ambika.

Decorated with numerous virtues, Ambika

was an embodiment of Goddess Laxmi.

After a few years, Brahmin Devdutt departed from this the world. As his soul left the mortal body, the virtues of Jain conduct too left his house. During the days of Shraddh (death anniversary), his relatives fed the crows, worshipped the Peepal tree and other such customs began to be followed. Despite being in the middle of all these, the pious and good natured Ambika did not deter from her faith in Jain religion.

A day arrived marking the death anniversary of Devabhatt. Various sweets and cuisines were prepared on that day.

That afternoon, two Jain monks, whose faces expressed dispassion in the material world and utmost joy in their spiritual practices, approached Devabhatt's house for alms in order to break their month long fast. They resembled the sun for their penance and the moon for their compassion. Heartily admiring the two monks Ambika was filled with gratitude and happiness, every cell in her body expressed joy and she was immersed in devotional feelings. Ambika thought, *Oh Lord! On this wonderful day you have blessed me with the vision of these monks who can have the capacity to cleanse the sins of this cosmos with their holiness. How blessed am I? For they have come to*

my doorstep. My eyes have been purified on seeing them. My mother-in-law is not at home and the food is suitable to monks, as it will not cause them to break any of their vows, if at all they accept any of it.

Therefore, I should seize this golden opportunity!" She decided to offer alms to the monks and enrich her existing human birth! With this thought in her mind she requested the holy monks to accept the food and water of her house. The monks, with their profound knowledge, found that the food as well as water was suitable for their acceptance. They accepted the alms and blessed Ambika whole-heartedly.

Ambika's heart was exuberating with joy. She was multiplying her influx of punya by

appreciating the pious deed of offerings she made to austere monks.

Ambika's happiness knew no boundaries and it seemed as if she was soaring in the sky full of delightfulness. Her envious neighbor could not tolerate Ambika's elation. Her neighbor was so jealous of the offerings that Ambika made to the holy Jain monks that she came out of her house with a vindictive look on her face, which made her look like a vampire. She began creating a ruckus in the vicinity, called Ambika offensive names in front of the people of her society and began shouting at Ambika. She said "You tyrant, self-wiled daughter-in law! You should be

cursed! What kind of a strange behavior was that? The food has not yet been offered to either to the pitrus or the Brahmins or to the deities' of Hindu Gods/Goddesses and you defiled it by offering it to those bald-headed ones. You've taken disadvantage of your mother-in-law's absence and have acted as per your own free will. Your actions are like those of the low caste." In this way, the jealous neighbor went inside the house of Ambika and narrated the entire story to Ambika's mother-in-law as soon as she entered the house. They instigated her against Ambika. Ambika's mother-in law scolded her after completely believing the

wrong accusations put forth against her by her jealous neighbor.

“Oh! You wretched low caste! Characterless lady! Who has given you the freedom to act upon your own free will? What rights do you have for making such offerings in my presence, when I am very much alive?” said her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law accused her at one end and at the other end was her green eyed neighbor, they were like the storm and lightening from either side and Ambika stood in the middle like the moon – but the accusations started shadowing the moonlight and she started shivering upon listening to the dreadful sentences that were thrown at her. In the midst of all this commotion, Ambika’s husband arrived with other Brahmins. He was filled with anger on hearing his mother and neighbors’ complaints and in return, he started insulting Ambika. Immensely hurt by everybody’s harsh words,

Ambika quietly left the house along with her two sons.

As she walked on the road weeping, she thought – “Dear God! Till date I have never disobeyed any of my in-laws and have never done anything to make them angry. I have sincerely served my husband and have never caused him any pain.

Moreover, I have not resorted to any unpleasant act, which would disgrace my husband’s family or my father’s family.

Alas! I have toiled, in spite of my weak body and neglected it in order to fulfill all my household responsibilities. Even though I am innocent, this society is humiliating me. On this auspicious day, I

took the opportunity to serve alms to the ascetic Jain monks that had been fasting by consuming only water for the past thirty days. This gesture would benefit the family but their blind faith in Hindu customs has troubled me unnecessarily. The wrong faith and belief systems have led this family to believe that by irrigating barren trees they would be able to reap fruits out of them. In the same way they are making efforts to please the dead father-in-law by making offerings of food to him by his son, Somabhatt who, is still living. This entire exercise seems so futile. Just as the owl cannot see the daylight and thus thinks the sun is useless, similarly, these people are talking ill about the meritorious act of

offering food to Jain monks, as they can't see the influx of punya it would give them in the future. It's pointless for me to further add thoughts to this matter. I am not worried, and I am confident about the good result of this meritorious act. Nevertheless, I shall continue appreciating the good deed done for the day and thank God for giving me this golden opportunity. I shall renounce my household life and surrender myself to the Jain monks. With these thoughts she proceed towards the pious mountain, Girnar. I shall ascend the pious mountain and devotionally worship Lord Neminath. I shall resort to penance in order to annihilate the karmas I have accumulated in this life as well as the

infinite lives I have had before this one.”

With an optimistic outlook, Ambika proceeded towards the enchantingly pious mountain, Girnar. She seated her younger child on her waist and held the other child by his finger and started walking towards the pious mountain, Girnar!

Pained and insulted Ambika managed to reach the outskirts of the village, where her younger son, Vibhukar, who was seated on her waist started crying. He was extremely thirsty. He had been perspiring, his face had turned dull and tears rolled down from his eyes. At the same time, the elder son Shubhankar was very tired, as he had been continuously walking. He

asked his mother “Dear Mother! Please give me some food. I am extremely hungry.” The sons were very young and delicate. Ambika had tears in her eyes on seeing them suffer.

Ambika was upset with all the walking in the scorching heat along with her children who were thirsty and hungry for a long time. She thought to herself, “Shame on me! I am incapable of fulfilling my motherly duties of feeding my children and not leaving them hungry or thirsty. Dear Lord! Why is there so much of pain and misery in my life? Hey motherland! Please, give me the strength to bear all these troubles. The bad karmas I built in the past have

resulted in the present situations – it feels as if a lot of accumulated bad karmas of the past have come together to show their result at once. There is no point in me unnecessarily lamenting. Well, whatever happens, I will accept all my sorrows. Let only the Lord reside in my heart.” Ambika was thinking about the present situation as she seated herself and her children to rest under a tree. As she sat down she saw a lake in front of her, which had clean cold water. There were soothing voices of nightingales that were perched in the branches of the mango trees situated on either side of the wonderful lake. She reached out for the mangoes and fed them to her hungry children and quenched the

thirst of her children with the water from the lake. She felt as though this was the result of the alms that she offered to the Jain monks. Experiencing the instant result of her prayers, her faith in Jainism grew a lot stronger. She was relieved off some of her fatigue and sat to rest below the shade of the tree.

On the other front, Ambika's mother-in-law, Deval started preparing new food items as she assumed that the food prepared by Ambika had been contaminated as it was offered as alms to the Jain monks. She opened vessels to prepare new food. Just as iron turns gold with the touch of parasmani , in the way the vessels that

were emptied to offer food to the Jain monks had been filled with food. This was the repercussion of offering food to the ascetic Jain monks. Deval was surprised to see all the food; she thought, “I am so unfortunate to have banished my innocent, loving, goddess like daughter-in-law from the house for no fault of hers. Shame on me!” Just then, there was a divine voice from the sky. “Hey unfortunate lady! You have only seen an ounce of the great amount of merit that Ambika has earned by making offerings to the Jain monks. The extremely virtuous Ambika’s glory is miraculous. In the near future she will be worshipped by the king of the celestial beings as an outcome of the offerings she

made to the Jain monks.” Listening to these divine words Deval got frightened and ran towards Somabhatt. She narrated the incident to him and told him to find Ambika and bring her back.

Somabhatt was surprised to listen to his mother and was very guilt of himself. With a lot of respect for Ambika, he left his house in search for her. Sombhatt passed one town after the other in search for her, in vain; he then headed towards the forest. As soon as he entered the forest he saw Ambika with their two children walk past the lake. His heart was filled with immense love at the same time he was in agony of separation from her and their children. He

cried out loudly, “Oh Ambika! My beloved! Please stop walking.” Sombhatt was affectionately calling out to her and started walking swiftly towards her. Ambika heard Sombhatt abruptly and was nervously startled on seeing him walk swiftly towards her. She thought to herself, “I am sure he is coming to kill me. Who is going to save a weak woman like me in this deserted forest? There is no account as to what extent will I be troubled by this merciless wicked person. How should I save myself? I am helpless and I have no option but to die.” With these thoughts in her mind she started moving towards the well close to her. She prepared herself to jump in the well and before doing so she said prayed:

*"I surrender myself to the lotus feet of the
Arihant Bhagawantas,
I surrender myself to the lotus feet of the
Siddha Bhagawantas,
I surrender myself to the lotus feet of the
Sadhu Bhagawantas,
I surrender myself to amazing Jain religion."*

"I pray that I am not born as a brahmin, or
a poor, miser, stingy, schedule caste,
schedule tribe or the ignoble caste in my
next birth. I wish not to take birth in the
Anarya countries such as the Kuru,
Katchha, Bang, Sindhu, Anga and so on.
In my following births I hope not to be a
beggar, a fool, an illiterate, a miser, a false
believer, a commander or as a part of the
army. I hope never trade or sell poison,

weapons, alcohol, illegal substances and I hope to never buy or sell living beings in my lives to come. Let me be born in the community of those who know three gems that are the Tirthankaras, Jain Gurus and Jainism! Let me be born among people who are donors, philanthropists, honest rulers and ones who can discriminate between good and bad. Let me be born on the lands of Saurashtra, Magadh, Keer, Kashmir or any of the southern countries as a result of the alms I offered to the ascetic Jain monks.”

“Oh Lord! Make me wealthy by lawful means, healthy, generous and I hope that I am capable to being born with all the five

sense in their proportionate form in my forthcoming life.”

Climbing up the tower of her desires, Ambika jumped into the well with her two sons and took birth as a goddess in the category of the forest gods known as the Vyantar Dev . She was prosperous and was well served by many attendants. In the meanwhile Sombhatt was running towards the well and yelling out, “Hey Ambika, my beloved! Don’t jump in the well, don’t jump!” Unfortunately he was too late, Ambika had already jumped into the well by then and she committed suicide, taking her sons with her. On seeing the dead bodies of his family grieved by

saying, “I curse myself for being so foolish. What kind of an evil person am I? I drove my prince like sons and goddess like wife out of the house and to their death. My life has no significance left after their death. I have nothing to live for. Let me end my futile life!” He followed them by jumping into the well, and had Ambika in his thoughts till death took him away because of which he was born as a celestial lion who is the vehicle for Goddess Ambika, who was his wife in his previous birth.

Ambika’s body emitted radiance like the golden gloss of the rising sun, which would scatter in all directions around her celestial abode. She was gracefully riding on the

lion and looked extremely beautiful, adorned with exclusive, valuable diamond and ruby studded golden ornaments. Many gods and goddesses worshiped her. She had one child in her lap and the other standing next to her. She had four arms; out of which she used both her left hands to hold the noose and used both her right hands to hold bunches of mangoes. She was elegantly beautiful and poised in mannerisms. Looking at her graceful and majestic luster, her celestial guards, who stood by her on either side, asked her, "O goddess! What penance, donation, pilgrimage or virtuous deed did you do in your previous birth as a result of which you are being served by nymphs of the forest

gods and other celestial beings?” Goddess Ambika, with the help of her clairvoyance, saw her previous life. She narrated her past birth to her celestial guards and expressed devotional gratitude towards Jainism. Being grateful to Jainism, she left her celestial abode on a celestial airplane, which was made by another celestial being namely Aabhiyogik Dev and as she did so her surroundings illuminated in all directions. She reached Sahasaavan that was situated on the pious mountain, Girnar.

The echoing of the sweet voices of peacocks and the cooing of nightingales enchanted the environment of

Sahasaavan. Lord Neminath stood there; steady in meditation under the vetas tree, which was situated in one of the gardens of Sahasaavan. He had been fasting and meditating for the past three days in order to destroy His past karmas. On the dark auspicious night of aaso vad amaavasyaa, which is equivalent to bhadarava vad amaavasyaa according to Gujarati calendar, Lord Neminath attained the absolute supreme knowledge by destroying all the ghati or destructive karmas. According to the customary conduct, crores of celestial beings created the Samavasaran for Lord Neminath under the chitya tree, which was 120 dhanush (a measurement for height) high. Lord

Neminath ascended his royal throne and said word “Namo Titthassa” which meant, “Obeisance to the tirth”. The Samavasaran had a throne placed in four directions. Lord Neminath was seated on the throne that faced the east direction and the remaining thrones had the replica of Him created by the celestial beings. The lower most enclosure was the parking ground for the conveyances of the heavenly beings, made of silver. The middle enclosure was meant for animals and birds, made of gold. All the celestial beings, the four fold community comprising of the Jain monks and nuns and the male and female householders occupied the precious stone and gem studded highest enclosure. Lord

Neminath's throne was placed in the center of the highest enclosure. Goddess Ambika arrived in the Samavasaran and was thrilled to hear Lord Neminath giving a sermon. Everyone respectfully bowed down to Lord Neminath before He began the sermon by saying, *“Dharma is an unconditional companion, Dharma is compassionate, Dharma is the destroyer of all miseries. It looks after all beings. For these reasons Dharma should be practiced devotionally by one and all!”*

“The right faith is considered to be the seed of the Dharma which is like a wish – fulfilling tree known as the Kalpavruksh. The effort to practice Dharma is like the

trunk of the tree. Charity, noble conduct (the noblest conduct being celibacy), penance as per ones capacity and purity in feelings are like the four branches of the tree. Gentleness, concern for inflicted ones, belief in righteousness are like the leaves of the tree of Dharma. Devotionally making pilgrimages to holy places like Siddhachal and Girnar, worshipping Lord, following saints and chanting the holy Namaskaar Mahamantra are like the flower buds of the tree. The comforts of the heaven are like the flowers of the Dharma tree and bliss of salvation is the fruit of the Dharma tree.”

“Thus when the aforementioned elements

reside in one's heart then that soul would be exposed to opportunities for his spiritual upliftment and when he/she renounces laziness and follows this Dharma diligently he/she will soon experience the eternal joy of salvation.”

Everyone listening to the uninterrupted sermon of the Lord Neminath was extremely drenched in His grace. Along with 1000 attendants king Varadatt, with feeling of renunciation, ordained monkhood and held the position of the chief disciple of Lord Neminath among 18 disciples of Lord Neminath known as the Ganadharas, since they are the leaders of different Ganas i.e. groups. The princess

named Yakshini was ordained nunhood and she was instrumental in many other women ordaining nunhood. Dashaarha, Bhoj, Krishna, Balbhaddra are few among the male who became the prominent shravaks (male householders) and their wives became shravikas (women householders).

In this way, Lord Neminath established the four fold community and gave them sermons describing the darkness of the four states of existence of humans, animals including other inferior organisms, celestial beings and infernal beings, which could be illuminated by the lamp of four fold Dharma comprising of charity, noble

conduct (the noblest conduct being celibacy), penance as per ones capacity and purity in feelings. After hearing Lord Neminath describing Goddess Ambika's past birth, her deep faith in Jainism and her meritorious acts of offering alms to the Jain monks – the great devotee Indra Maharaja, on the request of other celestial beings, appointed Goddess Ambika as the presiding Goddess in the reign of the Lord Neminath. The semi god named Gomedha Yaksha , who was awakened by Lord Neminath words in his previous birth, was appointed as the presiding Semi God in the reign of the Lord Neminath. Goddess Ambika was responsible in helping eradicate obstacles and Semi God

Gomedh was responsible in helping people in the reign of Lord Neminath.