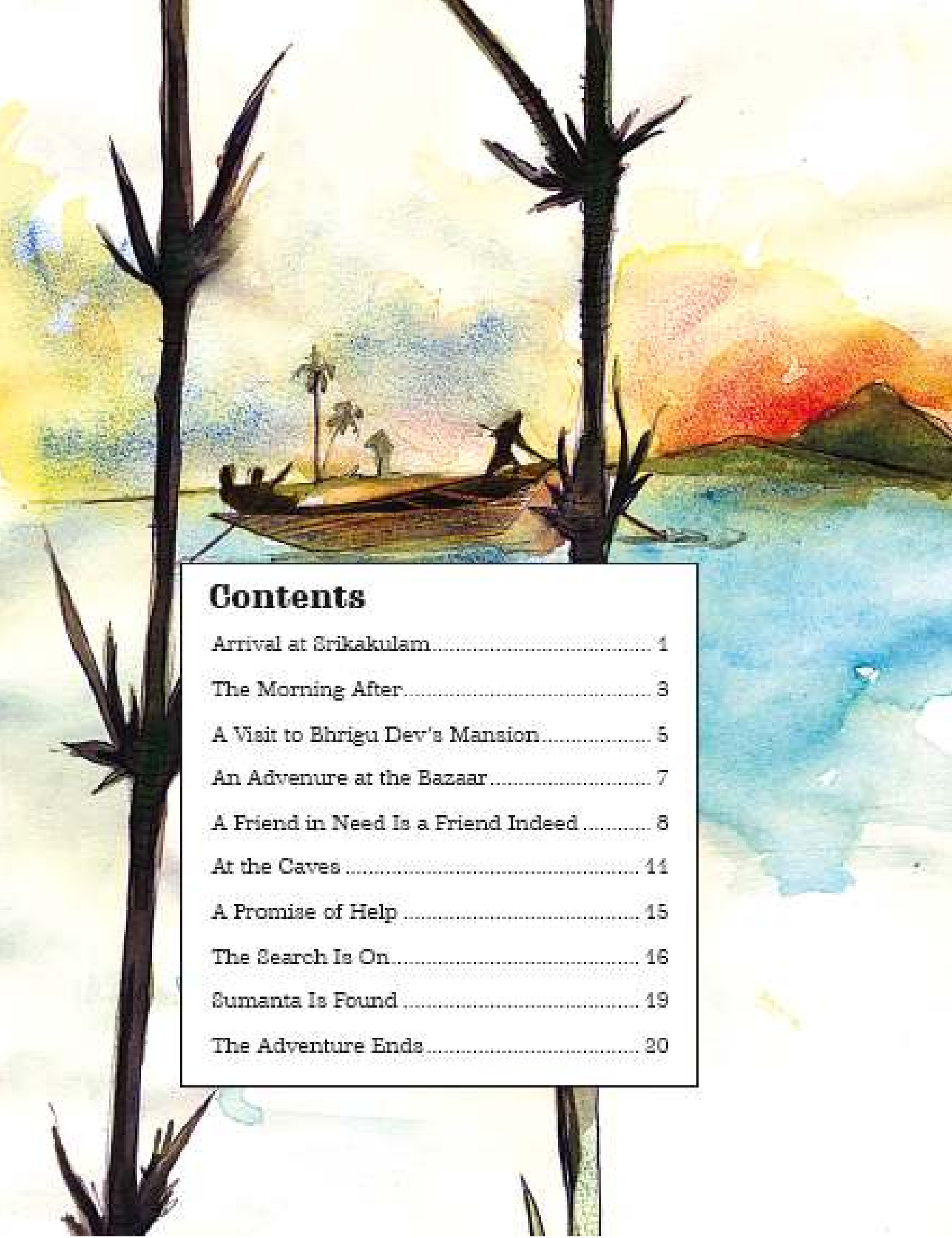


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## Arrival at Srikakulam

The sun was setting and the sky was a riot of colours. The river looked calm. The only sound that could be heard was of the water gently lapping against the boat.

Rudradutta bent down and stuck his tongue out at his distorted reflection in the water. Then he looked up and spotted the shore in the distance. They would soon reach the town for which they had been travelling for the last 30 days. His father Sumanta had nodded off to sleep.

"Father," said Rudradatta shaking Sumanta's shoulder impatiently. "We're almost there." Sumanta woke up with a start and looked around the boat. His fellow passengers were getting ready to disembark.

Bundles of clothes, food and merchandise were piled around in the boat. Sumanta himself was a cloth merchant. The cloth they wove in their hometown in the hills - the land of the Pallavas - was very popular in the plains. This was his third visit to King Hala's kingdom.

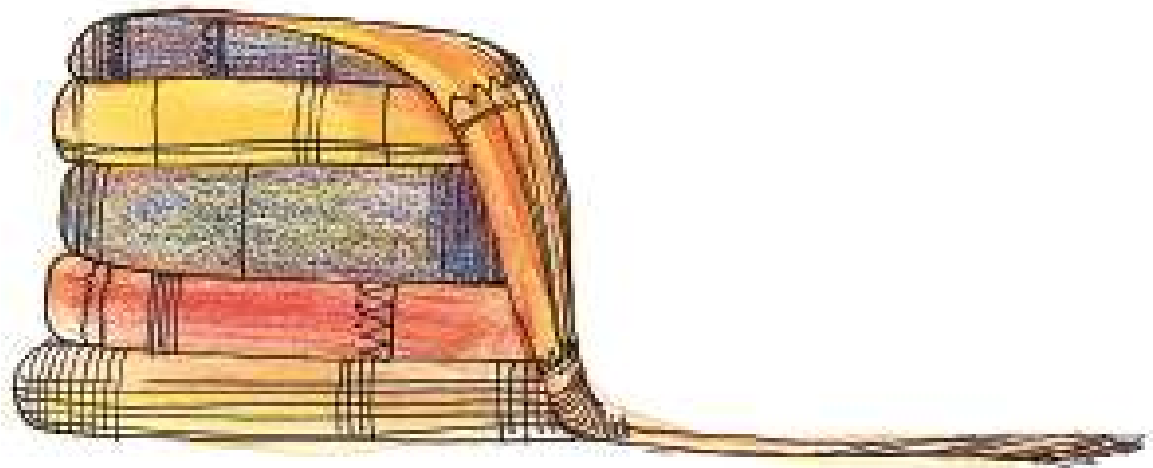
Splashing some cool water on his face he told his excited son, "Eat some roti if you are hungry. By the time we find a dharmashala and unpack, it will be quite late. Rudradatta obediently opened the cloth bag that carried the food packed by his mother. He was tired of eating sun-dried rotis as they had been doing for the last three weeks. His father had often talked about the food and the sweetmeats available in the town of Srikakulam and now he was looking forward to sampling these.

The boatman was singing a sweet song about his motherland – about the mighty Satvahana.

Rudradatta remembered what his father had told him about the Satvahana. "The Satvahana made this part of the world their home more than 300 years ago, around the time of Chandragupta Maurya. They were famous for their military strength. King Simuka was the founder of the Satvahana dynasty. At least five more kings had ruled before Hala came into power. One of the kings – Satkarni, had performed two Asvamedhas."

Rudra knew all about the Asvamedha. This was a ceremony performed by Brahman kings where a horse had to be sacrificed. Huge Dakshinas were given to the brahmins throughout the year in which the sacrifice was conducted by the king.

There was a sudden jolt as the boat lurched against the bank. They had reached Srikakulam.



# The Morning After

Rudradatta spent a restless night in the dharamshala. He tossed and turned as he remembered their journey. They had walked on foot, ridden on mules and on a couple of occasions, had travelled in boats. Along the way he had seen and met people who looked, dressed and lived quite differently from the way they did in the hills. He had seen birds and animals and trees, which he had only heard of – tasted food he could never have thought of. It had indeed been a great learning experience. His mother had not been at all keen on sending him on such a long journey. But Sumanta had stood firm. "He will learn a lot from travelling," he had said.

Rudradatta finally drifted into a deep sleep. He dreamt of his beautiful mountains and his pet goat, the gushing rivers and the biting cold.

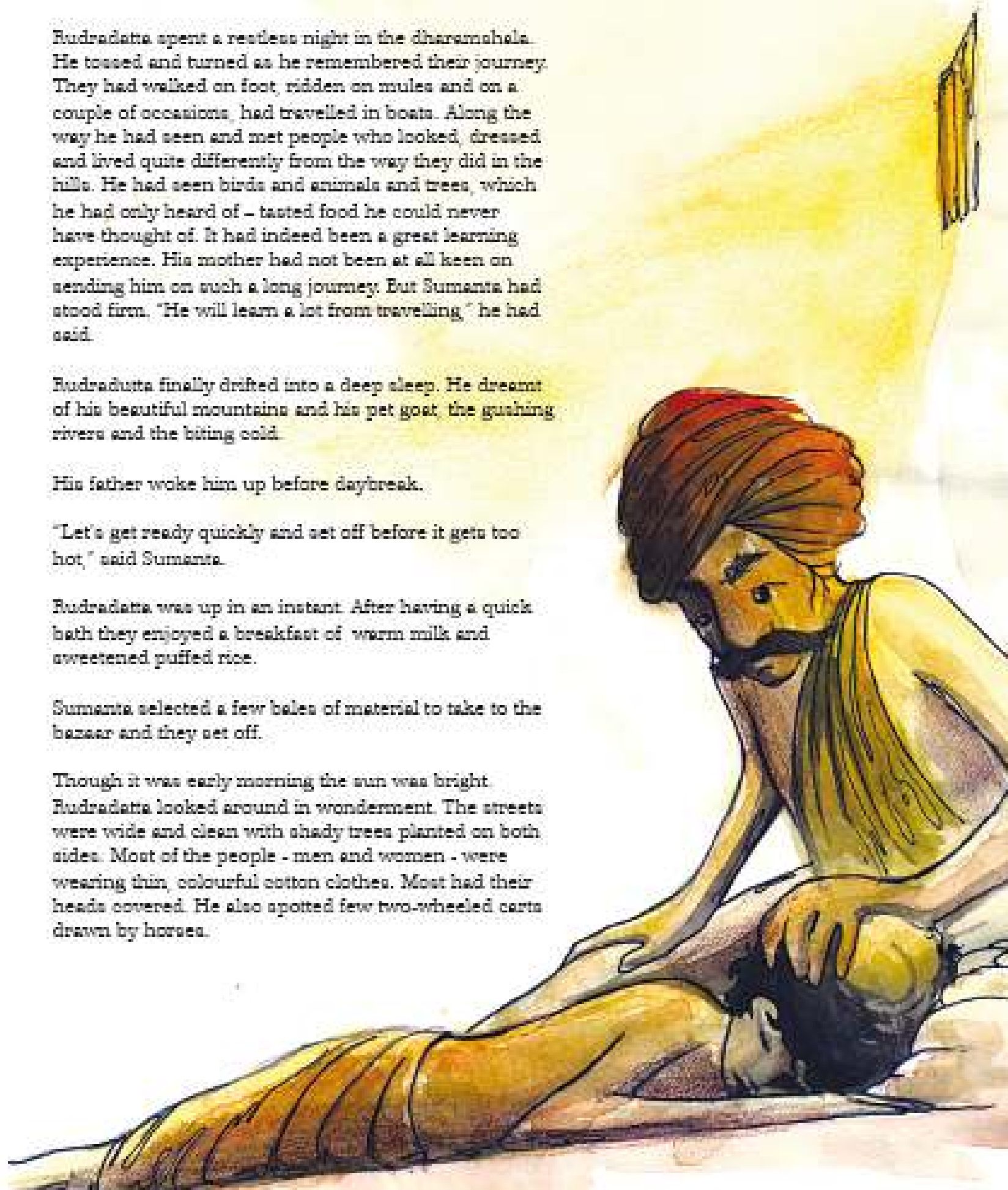
His father woke him up before daybreak.

"Let's get ready quickly and set off before it gets too hot," said Sumanta.

Rudradatta was up in an instant. After having a quick bath they enjoyed a breakfast of warm milk and sweetened puffed rice.

Sumanta selected a few bales of material to take to the bazaar and they set off.

Though it was early morning the sun was bright. Rudradatta looked around in wonderment. The streets were wide and clean with shady trees planted on both sides. Most of the people – men and women – were wearing thin, colourful cotton clothes. Most had their heads covered. He also spotted few two-wheeled carts drawn by horses.





# A Visit to Bhrigu Dev's Mansion

Among the material Sumanta was carrying, was a bale of beautifully embroidered deep blue silk cloth. One of his clients, a minister in King Hala's court, had specially ordered it. Once they got paid for it, they would take the rest of the material and head for the bazaar.

"We are going to be meeting Maha Aryak Bhrigu Dev," said Sumanta. "You must touch his feet to show your respect when you meet him."

"Who is a Maha Aryak?" asked Rudradatta.

"He is one of Raja Hala's ministers," replied his father. "He is a store keeper. There are other ministers like a treasurer, a chamberlain and also one incharge of documents."

Maha Aryak Bhrigu Dev lived in a magnificent mansion. It had a huge centre courtyard, which held beautifully sculpted figures. "I wonder what the King's palace is like," said Rudradatta aloud.

"Oh the palace is beautiful. And Bhrigu Dev is a simple man. His house is not as big or beautiful as the house of the Mahatarakas, Heranikasa (treasurers), Mahamatras, Pratihara, or Dutakas.

"The who?" asked Rudradatta, stunned.

"Oh, the Satavahanas live differently from the way we Pallavas live. The Satvahana Empire is divided into Janapadas and Aharas. A Janapada consists of a number of Aharas. An Ahara is taken care of by governors called Amachas. Each Ahara is further divided into a number of Gamas. These Gamas are taken care of by Gamika, who report to the Amachas. The king's court and his duties are handled by an administrative system taken care of by ministers and their officers like the Mahatarakas or the chief chamberlains, the Maha Aryaka like Bhrigu ji who are store keepers, the Heranikasa who are treasurers, the Mahamatras who are officers in charge of documents. Then there are the Pratihara and the Dutakas ... Did you understand anything?"

