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The Ruler with His Thousand Arms*

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The Ruler with his thousand arms
Built a barrage across the river,
Its serene flow caressing its banks
Where flourished civilizations through centuries,
Fertile fields grew food for the people,
In the dense forests dwelled sages in penance,
Curling smoke from their sacrificial fires
Rising heaven-ward at sunrise and sunset.

** ** * * *

Rising waters of the barrage
Flooded the banks
For long stretches on either side
Killing the fires in the hearths and hermitages,
Forcing all life flee to safer heights,
Rocky, arid and inhospitable.

*** ** *

The idol he was worshipping on the sands
Swept away in the rising waters,
The headman of the forest-dwellers
Rushed at the ruler, gave him a fight,
But was defeated and imprisoned.

*** ** *

The thousand-armed ruler
Then threw a challenge
At the Lord of the seas.
To engage him the Lord refused,
Bade him seek his foe in the forests,
Where, son to the chief of a warring tribe,
Penance and sacrifice their way of life,
Even while honing the skills of warfare,
Would give him battle meet to his might.

*** ** *

His young foe not present in the forests,
The ruler beheaded the chief at penance.
The son, on return, led a war on the ruler,
With his glistening battle-axe, a matchless weapon,
Severed his thousand arms,
And beheaded him, the way he did the chief,
Destroyed the barrage and restored the river
To its free serene flow to the sea.

Rulers from other clans,
Sensing threat to their existence,
Fought the young chief,
Wave after wave,
And thrice seven times
Did he defeat and decimate them.

*Freed from oppressive rulers,
Those fled from the river-banks returned
And celebrated the young chief
As true incarnation of the Supreme Lord.*

***Based on the story of Karthaveeyarjuna, also called Sahasrarjuna.**