For Greater Good

* His Royal Highness, King of the Seven Heavens, Ruler of the Earthly Paradise, King Ninnan, was in a bad mood. “Can’t you move that fan faster?” he shouted at the pankhawala. The poor pankhawala shook and shivered in fright. He pulled at the rope so hard that the heavily ruffled silken fan landed with a crash on the floor. “Good grief! Can nobody do anything right in this blessed palace? Out of my sight!” The little man scurried away fearfully. “It is all for the greater good Sire,’ said a deep, gentle voice. Out of the shadows emerged a tall man. His hair was silver grey and his beard was short and neatly trimmed. “Ah! Mantriji! Old friend! Come and join the circus!”King Ninnan said irritably. He clapped his hands imperiously and five servants came in bearing trays laden with fruits and sweets. “What ails you, Sire?” asked the Prime Minister, biting into a juicy guava.
* “Good thing you asked, Suman,” muttered the king. “It’s this blister on my little finger. It aches so much; it has made me really miserable. The royal physician, who is no more than a witch doctor, says that unless the finger is amputated, my whole body will be afire with blisters! Tell me, what am I to do? That charlatan wishes to cut off the royal finger!”
* “It is all for the greater good, Sire. Isn’t it better to have one finger off than a whole hand?”King Ninnan was furious. He would have to teach this upstart minister a lesson he would never forget! “Leave me alone for a while, Mantriji! Leave me to suffer in peace without your ridiculous platitudes.” Suman bowed deeply and backed out of the royal bedchamber. He heard the king call for his physician. A week later the king summoned his Prime Minister. “I wish to consult you on a matter of utmost importance. Come; join me on a walk up the mountain.
* Suman accompanied his king on a gentle stroll up the mountainside. The forest was dense. The slope was steep. They edged closer to the star – filled sky. “So,” began the king,” You think my losing a finger,” he lifted up his four- fingered hand,” is for the better?” “I did not say that, Sire,” protested Suman. “What I said was that it is all for the greater good. I believe that God’s will is supreme and that every incident in our lives has some meaning.” “I do not care what you said, or what you believe!” shouted the king, angry at his obstinacy. “You are a dim- witted fool!” And King Ninnan pushed his minister off the hillside! At first, Suman was in shock. Instinctively he reached out for a passing branch and hung for dear life. Then he slowly began to inch up the steep, rocky hill. The king, feeling much better now that he was rid of his know-it-all minister, turned away. Whistling a tuneless tune he ambled merrily in the direction of his palace. All of a sudden the half-naked, painted body of a tribesman leapt onto the path. It was Ninnan’s turn to be shocked. But he was a king after all. He pulled in his sagging stomach, pushed his shoulders back and stood tall at a full five feet one and a half inches. “Out of my way, janwar!” commanded the King of the Seven Heavens, Ruler of the Earthly Paradise. This only served as some kind of a signal for ten more tribals to surround him. At this point the king’s voice dried up. King Ninnan was manhandled all the way through the forest to a small clearing. There, beside a grotesque idol made of straw, stood a terrifying figure covered in grey ash. The tribesmen tied the king’s ankles together, and then proceeded to fall flat at the feet of this mysterious, grey figure. “Ah! You must be the Chief!” King Ninnan found his voice again, though it quivered somewhat. “Quiet!” ordered the priest, or chief, or whatever he was. Near the straw idol stood a large sickle gleaming wickedly in the starlight. The king found he was short of breath and began to feel quite faint. He was going to die. Soon, they would kill him. He had only lived thirty- two years. He had only six children. He had only fought three major wars! There was so much more to do. This must be punishment for murdering Suman. Oh God! There must be a way out of this. “Money! I know. You must want money! How much do you want? I will give you half my treasury.” The tribesmen looked at him strangely as he gibbered on, waving his hands nervously. “All right then. Take all my treasure. Every paisa is yours.” But the tribesmen could not take their eyes off his hands. Suddenly one of the tribesmen leapt forward and undid the rope around the king’s feet. “Go, nine- fingered man. You are not complete. You will not suit our purpose,” intoned the ash-covered priest. King Ninnan could not believe his luck. He talked his way out of a tricky situation. Well, maybe that was not completely true. They had also noticed that he only had nine fingers. Perhaps Suman had a point after all. As for ‘you are not complete’, how dare they say that to the King of the Seven Heavens, Ruler of----?!
* Suman! Where was his trusted minister? Had he killed him? The king rushed up to the spot where he had thrown the minister off the cliff. A few metres away, struggling up the hillside, was a bedraggled Prime Minister. The king took off his royal turban and let it unravel down to Suman. “Hold tight. Let me pull you up,” he shouted. Suman was exhausted by the time he was pulled up to safety. So was Ninnan. Breathless, they both sank onto a smooth rock to rest awhile. “Suman, can you ever forgive me? I nearly killed you for saying something that now makes a sense to me.” “It’s all right, Sire----Do not give it---- a second thought,” gasped Suman. “But I just want to say that you are right. It is all for the greater good. If my finger had not been amputated I would have been sacrificed at the altar of a straw idol.” Suman began to chuckle shakily. Then his laugh grew stronger. Soon the whole hillside shook with his booming laughter. “What’s so funny?” asked the king peevishly. “It’s just that it is so funny how right I really am. You see, even your pushing me off the hill was for the good.” “How?” asked Ninnan. “Well,” said Suman wiping the tears from his eyes. “If you hadn’t pushed me off the hill the tribesmen would have sacrificed me instead!”