

## Author's note

Vali could be a highly overlooked character in Ramayana considering that he was one of the few who had defeated Ramayana's main antagonist, Ravana. A key moment in Ramayana is the fallout between Vali and Sugreeva. The trigger for this is when Vali chases a demon inside a cave after asking Sugreeva to wait at the entrance. Sugreeva waits for more than a year in front of the cave. He is unable to understand mighty Vali taking so much time to defeat the demon. This planted seeds of doubt in his mind and when he sees blood coming from the cave, he assumes Vali is dead. Sugreeva returns to Kishkindha after closing the entrance.

Later, Vali emerges victorious from the cave and is infuriated at Sugreeva for going back to Kishkindha and taking over the throne. Almost in none of the credible commentaries or in the original writing is it explained in detail as to why it takes mighty Vali more than a year to kill the demon inside the cave.

The story presented here tries to fill this vacuum with a completely fictional story imagined in that situation. This is to be treated as a fictional story for entertainment purposes only. Wherever possible, effort has been made to acknowledge the source and translations. Any missing reference is genuinely unintentional. Sincere apologies if inadvertently anything was misquoted or wrongly interpreted. The content uses actual quotes from various literatures like Ramayana, Upanishads, and other literatures. Some quotes may be post Ramayana period but have been added in the interest of the context.

# Vali's tryst with reality

अहत्वा न अस्ति मे शक्तिः प्रति गन्तुम् इतः पुरीम् ।  
बिल द्वारि प्रतीक्ष त्वम् यावत् एनम् निहन्मि अहम् ॥ \*

"My power will not let me return from here to the capital without killing that demon, hence you wait at this cavity's entrance, till I kill that demon and come out of the cavity.

Sugreeva barely heard Vali's command as he was gasping for breath. His heart was pounding, and Sugreeva could feel the reverberations right up to his brain. Thankfully the vernal breeze carrying sandal fragrance made streams of perspiration on his hot body feel like ice pellets gliding down. As he saw Vali turning around to enter the capacious cave, Sugreeva immediately protested his brother going in all alone. As Sugreeva bowed to his brother and fell at his feet trying to reason, it had no effect on Vali. "The Lord is with me. He is always with the brave" Vali said and made Sugreeva swear to stand by his words and turned to sprint into the cave. But just then, Sugreeva managed to hand Vali the fire torch he was carrying.

Under the moonlight Sugreeva saw Vali's silhouette recede into the cave. Vali's mighty bull-like build propelled by his muscular legs and arms quickly faded away. There was no hint of fatigue in Vali's gait from the frantic chase of Mayavi across the Danduka forest. While Sugreeva was no weakling himself, Vali was completely in a different league. Sugreeva was disappointed that he could not make Vali agree to accompany him. He had no doubt about the strength and valor of his brother, but Mayavi was a

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\* *Valmiki Ramayana: Book 4 Kishkindha Kanda, Sarga 10 verse 18*

cunning demon and could be dangerous when cornered inside a cave. Sugreeva thought that they could have returned later and taken on the demon in settings favorable to them. Sometimes he felt that it was Vali's larger than life figure which stopped Sugreeva from clearly making his point. Even though he was his brother, their relationship was more like a King and his loyal commander and minister. Deep down Sugreeva feared Vali's temper and anger. "Be careful brother ..." shouted Sugreeva and turned around to take guard. Amidst high pitched shrill noises of insects, he waited for his eyes to get adjusted to the pitch-dark Danduka forest in front of him.

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"Be careful brother ..." Vali heard Sugreeva shouting from the mouth of the cave. "Always a scared kid" smirked Vali to himself as he walked further into the dark cave. As the brother of a great warrior like Vali, Sugreeva, despite his own strength, was always relatively a 'scared kid'. Vali's heart was beating fast, not because of any sense of fear but because of the frantic pursuit of the demon Mayavi through the dense Danduka forest to this cave. The heated argument with Sugreeva had not helped. As always, Sugreeva was happy with the moral victory of chasing away Mayavi. He was pleading to accompany him, but Vali was sure that Sugreeva preferred to turn back. Vali knew he could defeat Mayavi even in this dark and tricky setting. Alone. He knew that the role of a King was not to just administer but also to keep the morale of his subjects high with crushing victories over foes.

The pitch darkness broke his train of thoughts. The fire torch had got doused. He knew the geology of Kishkindha like the back of his hand. Using some rocks from surrounding, he lit the torch by rubbing them together furiously. *Sugreeva is a handy aide*, thought Vali looking at the torch. Sometimes his timidity was infuriating but the fact was that they complimented each other well. His submission and loyalty to his King was praiseworthy. "Not everyone can be hot headed like the king" thought Vali. He hoped that Sugreeva would serve his son Angada, the heir apparent, equally well. The torch lit up the interiors of the cave. Beautiful rock art and inscription sprung to life in that light. A giant fish pulled a boat next to a turtle balancing a shaft being churned with a snake. A boar was balancing the Earth on his snout and a half man-half lion ripped a demon apart. The cave was a time capsule, holding the deepest thoughts of earliest tribes inhabiting the place. Vali rushed past them with a cursory glance.

Searching for Mayavi in a corner, he peered closer to a group of animals inscribed on a wall there. The glitter of his golden chest-pendant gifted to him by his spiritual father, Indra, reflected the torch glow on a bovine chiseled into the wall. "Was that the Vrishabha those cavemen saw in the sky among the stars?" thought Vali. "Or maybe, it's Dundubhi!" he said to himself as he laughed uproariously.

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Dundubhi was a mountainous buffalo demon, whose size shone forth like Mt. Kailash and who bore the strength of a thousand elephants. The colossal bodied Dundubhi was bemused by the vanity of his own vigor and wanted to prove himself the best warrior by defeating Vali. Arriving at the gates of Kishkindha, he bellowed clamorously like a war-drum as though to quake the earth. Responding to this call for fight, Vali had immediately accepted the challenge even though he was drunk. The sight of a huge buffalo demon with sharp horns scooping the earth with hooves and insolently goring the gateway with his horns was enough to throw Vali's pulse in pandemonium. In the ensuing battle, Vali had pounded the demon to death and thrown him to Mount Rishyamukha. While it was a gruesome fight for the world, it had been more of a drunken brawl for Vali.\*

And then today, Dundubhi's brother Mayavi had landed at the very same gate, seeking revenge. Vali's mind snapped back to the reason he was there. Vali felt strange that his thoughts had gone astray. It was rare for his mind to waver away from a fight.

Recollecting his thoughts, Vali roared "Shame on you, Mayavi! Your brother was no match for me, but at least had the dignity to fight me openly. You, on the other hand, challenged me. and when I accepted, you ran away and hid in a cave? Come out, you pathetic creature and let me end your miserable existence!" He hoped that the rebuke would bring out Mayavi. But the only response was his own voice echoing back.

By now, his torch was barely illuminating the darkness of the cavern. As the flame flickered precariously, he could hear the soothing Pampa river somewhere near the cave. As Vali started walking in cautiously, he could see the flame was beginning to die. Drowsiness started to dull his senses. Was it due to the darkness, or the soothing river sound? Or was it Mayavi at work? Vali never felt so unsure. Vali wondered how much time had passed since he entered the cave. As he walked further, he could slowly feel the ground becoming softer. The rocky pathway was slowly beginning to feel less sharp and hard. It was not like he was walking on soil or marshy land. It just felt very light. Undeterred as he kept walking the flame went out and pitch darkness engulfed him. It was like a new moon night. A quick glance around and his eyes registered nothing but a black void. Hopefully his eyes would slowly adjust to this darkness he thought. As he threw the extinguished torch away, he regretted the action instantly. He would have relit it under normal circumstances, but today his reflexes and thinking were betraying him. He started to feel around with both his arms as he walked. After walking a few meters, he felt something strange but could not figure out what exactly.

He soon realized that as he was probing ahead of his way for any obstructions for some time and had

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\*Verbatim in this para has been taken mostly from the English translation of Kishkindha Kanda Sarga 11 given at [https://sanskritdocuments.org/sites/valmikiramayan/kish/sarga11/kishkindha\\_11\\_frame.htm](https://sanskritdocuments.org/sites/valmikiramayan/kish/sarga11/kishkindha_11_frame.htm)

encountered nothing. Intentionally, he walked a bit sideways, hoping to feel something. Nothing! He frantically started to turn around and move in all directions but still...nothing. He stopped as he realized he had lost his sense of direction. Forget front, back, or sideways... he could not even feel the ground below. He tried to concentrate on the sound of Pampa for some clue about his direction. He tried hard to listen and walk towards it. After some time, he realized that the sound was coming from all around. Was the spot encircled by the river? As he frantically kept waving his hands, he was horrified as he figured out what was amiss! His hands were not even touching each other. Instinctively he felt himself all over only to find that his hands just swung around unobstructed.

He had no sense of himself or his surroundings. It was as if he was floating in a black void. Even his thoughts were beginning to slow down. Like an exhausted kid falling asleep in his mother's lap after a day full of running, laughing, fighting, and crying. His initial sense of claustrophobia gave way to a sense of tiredness that he had never felt before. He just wanted to sleep and rest his body.

*Had Mayavi succeeded in vanquishing the mighty Vali?* Vali could not reconcile with the fact that a weak demon had done what even the mighty Ravana could not. He remembered the praises heaped on him by his friends and foes alike.

समुद्रात् पश्चिमात् पूर्वम् दक्षिणाद् अपि च उत्तरम् ।  
क्रामति अनुदिते सूर्ये वाली व्यपगत क्लमः ॥ \*

"Before the dawn of sun Vali unweariedly strides from western ocean to eastern, and even from southern to northern for offering water oblations to the rising sun.

अग्राणि आरुह्य शैलानाम् शिखराणि महान्ति अपि ।  
ऊर्ध्वम् उत्पात्य तरसा प्रति गृह्णाति वीर्यवान् ॥ \*\*

"Ascending the heights of mountains and even rending their greatest peaks, that mighty one volleys them upwards and in turn catches them, as though they are play balls.

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\* Valmiki Ramayana: Book 4 Kishkindha Kanda, Sarga 11 verse 4

\*\* Valmiki Ramayana: Book 4 Kishkindha Kanda, Sarga 11 verse 5

And now, the great Vanara, with the strength of 7000 elephants, had been rendered invisible to even himself. A defeat with no dignity. This was not a warrior's death. How could such a great warrior meet such an anti-climactic end? Will he be remembered as the one who got slayed by that nondescript demon Mayavi? What was his life full of magnificent achievements and victories worth if he could not go out in a blaze of glory? Had the lord deserted him?

Something stirred inside Vali. He roared out in anguish. Only to hear nothing but deafening silence. Even the sound of the river had stopped. But Vali refused to meet such an end. He kept roaring. Each time his ears heard nothing. As his strained lungs started to ache, he was overjoyed to finally feel something even if it was pain. Buoyed by this, he roared even louder and this time, his ears registered a tiny decibel of sound. Suddenly, Vali felt a sense of astonishment. It was crazy since he could not see or hear anyone around him, but he could feel the surprise in his surroundings. Soon his roar was echoing all around. And then, for the first time, he heard a voice other than his. He strained his ears to listen and heard a faint chuckle. He was pretty sure it was a chuckle. While it was condescending, he did not feel insulted. It was almost like a mother chuckling at her baby as it learned how to walk. It was reassuring.

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"You won't give up, will you?" the voice said chidingly. Just like the river Pampa earlier, Vali could not trace the direction of the voice. "No, I will not." he heard himself saying, in a very soft and surprising tone. The voice spoke again.

"Give up, child. Give up! You have fought all your life! Aren't you tired? Relax. Let the flow control your senses and relax you. The eternal sleep will relieve you of all pains and worries"

"Who are you?" asked Vali.

"I am not something that can be answered to a question like '*who*' are you?"

"I don't know who you are, but you cannot be Mayavi..."

"Don't worry about these trivial things."

"I need to know. I cannot go down to an unknown force."

"I am not unknown Vali." said the voice gently.

Vali summoned the full strength of his voice and bellowed "I need to know!"

The voice chuckled again. "You are not someone who gives up, do you?"

Vali's senses were beginning to regain control. He felt that there was a resurrection possible even against this mighty force.

"Yes, I am the mighty King who swept aside many mighty warriors with my mace. I do not intend to go down like this. If you are not Mayavi then I will take you down first and then deal with that irritant."

Vali realized he had to resist submitting to this force or else he would just drift away to his end. He pushed his brain to start thinking of the task at hand. How could he overpower this force and then finish Mayavi? Was the dastardly coward Mayavi behind this force?

“Ha ha ha!” chuckled the voice gently.

“What is so funny? You think I am joking? Stop hiding and confront me. I will wear your limbs like a garland.”

“You are a mighty one, my dear, you indeed are! How can I, who created you, not know?”

“You created me?” said an astonished Vali.

“Well! Create is a tricky term when we are talking about something which exists in a dream and not in the corporeal sense.”

“A dream? Am I dreaming? Is this all a dream? That explains this ridiculous situation! You are right, I must be dreaming!”

“Ha-ha! Yes, this is a dream, Vali, but not yours.” The voice paused, as if searching for the right words.

“This is strange for me too. Not many times did I have to explain in this much detail. You are incredibly strong of mind and hence are not submitting without an explanation.” Continued the voice.

“You are making no sense, and yes, I do demand an explanation” Vali retorted.

*‘This is indeed strange. Never have I had to talk so much but I am enjoying this banter’,* thought the voice.

“O mighty ape, you are nothing but a figment of the Lord’s dream.”

“What are you speaking! You mean to say I do not exist? All my life that I have experienced, lived is just a dream? And that too not mine?”

“You do exist but not in the way you think. So, you are partially correct.”

“I, the mighty Vali, King of the Apes, ruler of Kishkindha, vanquisher of many a warrior, am just a character in a dream?” roared Vali.

“Partially correct again.”

“Ha ha ha ha...” laughed Vali trying to mock the voice but his discomfort was evident. He did not want to believe this but the circumstances he was in did make him unsure of himself. While he was able to speak and his mind was alert, the rest of his body was still in the state of, he disliked the term that came to his mind, nonexistence.

While his mind was infuriated initially, the soothing voice made him swallow his fiery temper and he found himself becoming inquisitive and curious.

“Then what were all the experiences I had? Happiness, love, anger? How do you explain that? All the wealth I own, all the people I rule over?”

“It is all him ...

न तत्र रथा न रथयोगा न पन्थानो भवन्त्य्  
न तत्र रथास् न रथयोगास् न पन्थानस् भवन्ति  
अथ रथात्रथयोगान्पथः सृजते ।  
अथ रथान् रथयोगान् पथस् सृजते  
न तत्राऽऽनन्दा मुदः प्रमुदो भवन्त्य्  
न तत्र आनन्दास् मुदस् प्रमुदस् भवन्ति  
अथाऽऽनन्दान्मुदः प्रमुदः सृजते ।  
अथ आनन्दान् मुदस् प्रमुदस् सृजते  
न तत्र वेशान्ताः पुष्करिण्यः स्रवन्त्यो भवन्त्य्  
न तत्र वेशान्तास् स्रवन्त्यस् पुष्करिण्यस्  
स्रवन्त्यस् भवन्ति  
अथ वेशान्तान्पुष्करिणीः स्रवन्तीः सृजते  
अथ वेशान्तान् स्रवन्तीस् पुष्करिणीस् पुष्करिणीस्  
स्रवन्तीस् सृजते  
स हि कर्ता \*

In that place there are neither chariots nor animals yoked to chariots. He creates the chariots and animals yoked to chariots. In that place there is neither happiness, nor pleasures, nor bliss. He creates the pleasures there. In that place there are neither streams, nor ponds, nor lotus flowers. He creates them. He is the creator.” The voice chanted

He is after all the ‘Satya Sankalpa’, whose every word and thought are translated into fruitful action, for He is the all-powerful Creator (Sa hi KartA).” \*\* It continued.

“What about my devoted brother Sugriva? What about my lovely wife Tara? And the apple of my eye, my son Angad? Are they not real too? What about the bond and relationship I share with them?”

“They all come from him.

एतस्मद एव पुत्रो जयते । एतस्मद भ्रता । एतस्मद भर्य । यद एनम स्वप्नेनभिहन्ती\*\*\*

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\* Brihad-aranyaka Upanishad (4.3.10)

\*\*verbatim taken from <https://ramanuja.org/sri/BhaktiListArchives/Article?p=mar2003%2F0096.html>

\*\*\*Smriti Shastra as mentioned in <https://nitaigaurangablog.wordpress.com/2017/01/14/epics-of-india-what-is-vishnus-dream-all-about/>

From the Supreme Personality of Godhead, a good son is born. From Him a brother appears. From Him a wife appears. From Him these things appear in a dream.

परभिध्यनत तु तिरोहितम ततो ह्य अस्य बन्ध-विपर्ययौ\*

The Supreme Personality of Godhead is the cause of bondage and liberation for the individual spirit soul.”

“What happens to me now?”

“Vali, you have played your part. This is the end of your saga.”

“So, is this the end of the dream? Can something which was not real to start with end?”

स्वप्नदी बुद्धी कर्त च  
तिरस्कर्त स एव तु  
तद्-इक्चय यतो ह्य अस्य  
बन्धा मोक्षौ प्रतिश्लिह्यतौ\*\*

The voice spoke. “The Supreme Lord creates and ends dreams and other states of being. By His will both bondage and liberation are manifested.

Therefore, because they are created by the Supreme Personality of Godhead, dreams are real.”

“How can a dream be real? Please elaborate”

“Brahman is absolute existence and pure consciousness. It is infinite, pure, supreme, self-luminous, of the nature of eternal bliss, non-different from the indwelling self, and without parts. It is the only reality. The universe which is superimposed on it is not different from it, just as the illusory snake is not different from the rope on which it appears. The snake which you thought was real in dark disappears once you realize that it is a rope. Brahman is the only Reality. Because of Maya, Brahman appears to us as the universe of names and forms. Maya conceals Brahman and projects the universe. Just as everything seen in dream ceases to exist as soon as the dreamer wakes up, the universe ceases to be real when Brahman is realized.”\*\*\*

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\* Vedanta Sutra 2.2.5

\*\*Kurma Purana as mentioned in <https://nitaigaurangablog.wordpress.com/2017/01/14/epics-of-india-what-is-vishnus-dream-all-about/>

\*\*\*Part of verbatim taken from <https://sanskritdocuments.org/sites/snsastri/viveka14.html> and <https://sanskritdocuments.org/sites/snsastri/advaitavedantainsrimadbhagavata.html>

“So, what happens now?”

“The show goes on. You were just one of the many characters in this great epic playing around the Lord himself”

“The Lord was there? How did I miss the Lord?”

“Not your fault, Vali, you did not cross path with him”

“I do not get to meet the Lord even once in this epic. What is the significance of this event then?”

“To the world outside this cave, you have died while killing Mayavi in this cave. Your brother, Sugriva, becomes the King of Kishkindha and later helps the Lord in his endeavors.”

“Look...I love my brother, but deep down I know he is no match to me and still he gets to meet the Lord? This is not fair.”

“Life is not fair.”

“No, no, no! I deserve better and you know that. I cannot bow out like this. I cannot be a minor footnote in this epic!”

No one had resisted the comforting and peaceful exit like this mighty ape had, the voice had to agree.

“Give me a moment.” Said the voice.

Vali waited in agony, resisting the temptation to fall into eternal sleep.

As moments passed, Vali grew more anxious. Finally, the reassuring voice broke the silence.

“I don’t do this generally, but I must confess you are something else. Can I propose something?”

“Yes, please.” Vali replied.

“You will walk out of this cave, after finish the demon in a bloody fight. Later you will have a conflict with Sugriva and indirectly, with the Lord Himself.” added the voice, a bit unsure.

After a brief pause Vali exhorted “Go on.”

“And you get to bow out with the Lord's arrow piercing you.”

There was another pause, a bit longer this time only to be broken by an uproarious laughter of Vali.

“Diabolical! You are diabolical” roared Vali.

“You have a valid reason to feel so.”

“No, you misunderstand. An ending at the Lord’s hand is any day preferable to this whimper of an end. I like this. I accept your generous offer!”

“It is not without consequence. You will not remember anything of our discussion here.”

“Of course, I understand. I will finish my battle with Mayavi and go back to my brother Sugreeva, who will be waiting for me anxiously. I await my newly destined exit.”

“Vali, I do not think Sugreeva will be waiting for more than a year at the cave entrance.”

Vali was thrown off. Confused, he replied, “More than a year? I just need a few hours to find and defeat that wretched Mayavi!”

“True, Vali, your valor and strength won’t need more time than that but Sugreeva has already waited for a year now.”

Relief paved the way to more confusion. “We have been talking only for an hour at the most, this makes no sense...please explain!”

“Have you ever had a dream? A dream in which you go through a period of years, but when you wake up you realize that you had been sleeping only for hours?”

“Yes, I have experienced something similar to that a few times.”

“So, the hour we spent here is almost a year in the dream. When you go back, the dream will have progressed by more than a year, Vali.”

“And when I go back, with no recollection of this conversation, I will be mighty upset with poor Sugreeva for deserting his post! You are truly diabolical!” guffawed Vali as he completed the description of the situation.

“Yes, Vali, you get it right. This will be the consequence of wiping your memory.”

“Can you tell me one more thing?”

“Ask.”

“Why this dream? Why not just the truth?”

The voice paused for a while.

“We are treading onto things which maybe even I do not understand completely. A short answer could be that truth cannot be digested by all. Sometimes one needs time to reach that level and till then they need to be kept preoccupied. Like a child is given toys before learning about the ‘real’ things. Hence this. But then I may be wrong. You will understand the truth...when you understand it”

“Maybe I need more time to reach that state hence my struggle to go back. I have one last question. Who are you?”

“The answer will emerge when there will be no you and no I. I may be you. Maybe not. We will need to postpone that discussion till our next rendezvous. As much as I enjoyed this discussion it’s time to send you back to tread your new path. Go O mighty ape, may you get what you ask for”

In a flash Vali found himself back in the cave. Far away, he saw the silhouette of the demon. Swinging his mace, he charged at Mayavi.

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