

RĀMO DHARMABHṚTĀM VARAḤ

I suppose that people in the West, as in India itself, are more likely to be familiar with Tulsī Dās's Rāmāyaṇa than with Vālmīki's¹. But, whereas the vernacular Rāmāyaṇas are religious poems, of which the main aim is to present righteous Rāma as an avatāra of Viṣṇu and to inculcate devotion to him, the original Sanskrit Rāmāyaṇa ascribed to Vālmīki is rather different, at least in its core, for even here the picture has been somewhat obscured by later developments, by the evolution of the epic. In the process of growth of the Rāmāyaṇa we may, for convenience of analysis, postulate a number of stages in what was undoubtedly a continuing process. These I shall take as being the original nucleus (Vālmīki's composition and the first few phases of transmission), those additions or expansion which occurred early enough to be recorded in most recensions and so to appear in the text of the Critical Edition, the additions common to all or most manuscripts of a recension, and lastly those found only in a few or even just one manuscript; the last two categories form the * passages and Appendix I of the Critical Edition².

In a way the theme of this article is summed up in the stereotyped expression *rāmo dharmabhṛtām varaḥ*, « Rāma, best of upholders of dharma », for it seems to me that it is in such phrases that the transfor-

1. This article is a revised form of a paper delivered at the Third Symposium on Indian Religions held at Durham in March 1977.

2. *The Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa*, Critical Edition, General Editors G. H. Bhatt and U. P. Shah (Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1960-1975). Perhaps I could at this stage make it clear both that my studies are based on the Critical Edition and that I first arrived at these stages of growth through a linguistic and stylistic study of the text. If other criteria are taken into consideration, then it is probably desirable to subdivide the second stage into an earlier part, consisting of expansions and additions to books 2-6, and a later part, consisting of the Bāla and Uttara kāṇḍas together with the first twenty to thirty sargas of the Ayodhyākāṇḍa and the last few sargas of the Yuddhakāṇḍa. However, it might be most accurate to say of the Bāla and Uttara kāṇḍas that they span the second and third stages.

mation of attitudes began which is my overall theme. From an original meaning which one might paraphrase as « a pillar of the establishment », with the emphasis on dharma as the correct social order, there was a shift to dharma as « righteousness, moral values (only) », to « Righteous Rāma »; but in a kṣatriya context an emphasis on dharma as the correct social order, even political stability, is entirely natural.

It is well over 80 years since Hermann Jacobi explicitly declared — and I paraphrase — « Rāma's deification, his identification with Viṣṇu, is constantly present in the mind of the poet of the first and last books. But in the five genuine books, apart from a few interpolated passages, this concept is absent and by contrast Rāma is thoroughly human. Such a transformation of Rāma's character could only have taken place over a long span of time »³. Although Jacobi perhaps goes too far in proposing instead an identification of Rāma with Indra, the Vaiṣṇava element is certainly secondary and the basic religious pattern found in the Rāmāyaṇa is decidedly more archaic than has generally been recognised so far⁴.

The frequency of Indra, and also Parjanya, is particularly striking. In the older Rāmāyaṇa, it is Indra who is normally the most active and influential of the gods and their leader against the Asuras; frequently mentioned is his victory over Vṛtra, but the Yuddhakāṇḍa also depicts him as checked or worsted by Meghanāda, more commonly therefore called Indrajit, by Kumbhakarṇa and by Atikāya. Rāma is frequently compared to Indra, and Sītā occasionally therefore compared to Śacī, but no real identification is ever made, despite Jacobi's suggestion that Rāma's battle with Rāvaṇa is « eine andere Form des Kampfes Indra's mit Vṛtra »⁵. Indeed, Indra as the heroic ideal finds general application, even with Rāvaṇa and other leading rākṣasas, and this is clearly shown by the existence of standard compounds comparing a warrior's bravery with Indra's.

The point is that Indra is the standard of comparison for any king *qua* king. Thus in the Bālakāṇḍa, Daśaratha, Janaka and Brahmadata

3. HERMANN JACOBI, *Das Rāmāyaṇa* (Bonn, 1893), S. 65: Die Vergöttlichung Rāma's, seine Identificirung mit Vishṇu, ist im ersten und dem letzten Buche eine Thatsache, die dem Dichter immer vor Augen steht. In den fünf echten Büchern aber ist diese Idee, von wenigen eingeschobenen Stellen abgesehen, noch nicht nachweisbar; im Gegenteil ist Rāma dort immer durchaus Mensch. Es bedurfte gewiss einer längeren Zeit, ehe sich die Umwandlung des Charakters Rāma's, wie sie in den beiden zugefügten Büchern zutage tritt, vollzogen hatte.

4. See my article « Religious Attitudes in Vālmiki's Rāmāyaṇa », *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1976, no. 2.

5. *Op. cit.*, p. 131. Jacobi's argument is that, since Sītā is in later Vedic literature the wife of Indra or Parjanya, Rāma must be a form of these gods. His views have recently been warmly endorsed by Jaan Puhvel in his « Transposition of Myth to Saga in Indo-European Epic Narrative », *Antiquitates Indogermanicae*, Gedenkschrift für Hermann Güntert, Innsbruck, 1974, pp. 175-184, esp. pp. 175-6.

are compared to Indra as rulers, and Vasiṣṭha is like Indra because surrounded by other sages, whereas Rāma with Lakṣmaṇa is compared twice to the Aśvins, since he is still too young for kingly status. In the Ayodhyākāṇḍa Daśaratha, Rāma and Bharata are all compared to Indra, and Rāma acts towards Sitā as Indra to Śacī (2.88.2cd). In the first few sargas of the Araṇyakāṇḍa Lakṣmaṇa compares himself to Indra as wielder of the thunderbolt in his anger against Bharata (3.2.23) and Rāma replies to a sage Sutīkṣṇa « as Indra to Brahmā » (3.6.12d). Still, there is no need to go on piling up examples. The comparison has become stereotyped in terms like *narendra* for king, and Indra himself can be addressed in the Uttarakāṇḍa as *devendra*, so formal has it become.

Brahmā occupies quite a prominent position, a significant feature in view of his later eclipse. Several of the most striking references to him belong to the second stage of growth of the text, including 2.102.2, on which Jan Gonda comments: « In the Rāmāyaṇa it is Brahmā who becomes a boar, raises up the earth, and creates the whole world; before all was water only (2,110,3). Yet, in the NW. recension Viṣṇu's name has crept in »⁶. Brahmā is a generous bestower of favours and in particular weapons, which he distributes with a fine impartiality to rākṣasas as well; indeed, once Indrajit is described as Svayambhū's darling (6.61.12d). Even in 6.105, where the gods gather to reveal Rāma's divinity to him, it is Brahmā who, after an initial chorus, acts as spokesman. However, in the Rāmāyaṇa it is Indra who then restores the dead combatants to life at Rāma's request (6.108), but, most interestingly, the Rāmopākhyāna substitutes Brahmā for Indra (Mbh. 3.275.40).

The attitude of the epic's first and second stages to the rākṣasas is equivocal. They participate in the action with great frequency from the Araṇyakāṇḍa onwards, as enemies of Rāma and his allies, and as such tend to be compared to Indra's opponents. Divine or demonic powers are limited to their protean proclivities — *rākṣasāḥ kāmārūpiṇaḥ* « rākṣasas changing shape at will ». On the other hand an offering is made to them (2.38.5) and some of them know the Vedas and perform sacrifice (5.16.2); they are granted boons by Brahmā and are given weapons by him, but this is admittedly something of a commonplace on both sides.

In general, the second stage sees an advance in the position of both Brahmā and Viṣṇu and the first suggestions that Rāma is divine, usually expressed through comparison with Indra. As examples of the latter, I might quote 2.2.19ab *divyair guṇaiḥ śakrasamo rāmaḥ satyaparākramaḥ* « the truly brave Rāma, equal to Indra in his divine qualities » and 5.56.17cd *rāmo dharmabhṛtām śreṣṭho mahendrasamavikramaḥ* « Rāma, the best upholder of dharma and equal in prowess to Mahen-

6. *Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism* (Utrecht, 1954), p. 140. We may perhaps compare with this the account at Mbh. 3.185 of how Brahmā, not Viṣṇu, as a fish saves Manu and mankind from the flood.

dra ». An example illustrating both aspects is 1.76.13: « Rāma, the truly brave, renowned throughout the world, surpassed his brothers in qualities, as the Self-born surpasses creation »⁷. This is repeated almost verbatim at 2.1.10, after which the Southern recension adds a passage declaring that Viṣṇu was born as Rāma to kill Rāvaṇa. Other examples could easily be adduced. The most striking, however, outside the Bāla and Uttara kāṇḍas, is at the end of the Yuddhakāṇḍa in sargas 105-108, where Rāma's divinity is revealed to him after the victory over Rāvaṇa:

There are many clear examples in the Bāla and Uttara kāṇḍas of a more developed religious pattern, from the Bālakāṇḍa's opening with the figure of Nārada to the Uttarakāṇḍa's closing with the first hints of bhakti (7.98.15 and 100.15). There is the greatly enhanced position of both Viṣṇu and Śiva. But, while Viṣṇu incarnates as Rāma at 1.14-15 and Paraśurāma recognises Rāma Dāśarathi as Viṣṇu at 1.75.17-20, in much of the rest of the Bālakāṇḍa Rāma's divinity is ignored and an older pattern is adhered to; thus, right at the beginning, Rāma goes to Brahmaloḥa (1.1.76d) and Vālmiki is promised residence there (1.2.36). Other late features of the Bālakāṇḍa are the story of Viśvāmitra's and Vasiṣṭha's quarrel over Vasiṣṭha's cow Śabalā (1.51-51), with its strong suggestion of veneration of the cow, the account of Kārtikeya's birth and exploits (1.35-36) as also of Gaṅgā and Umā (1.34-35), the performance of Daśaratha's aśvamedha sacrifice (1.11-13) and even more the putreṣṭi (1.14-16). This last item is instructive for, while the aśvamedha sacrifice is given in greater detail than would be natural for the core of the epic, it seems basic to the Bālakāṇḍa and it is the putreṣṭi which has been inserted very awkwardly at the end of the aśvamedha ceremony — itself sufficient to achieve the aim of securing sons (1.13.46) — and which contains the explicit details of Viṣṇu's incarnation as Daśaratha's four sons.

The aśvamedha is also prominent in the Uttarakāṇḍa, where two exemplars are narrated — that of Indra after killing Vṛta (7.77) and that to secure Ilā's restoration to manhood (7.81) — before Rāma himself offers one. Incidentally, we may note that in the first instance Viṣṇu advises Indra to sacrifice to him, whereas the second sacrifice is offered to Śiva. Śiva's position has improved as much as Indra's has declined, although Śiva is ultimately subordinate to Viṣṇu. For example, both Śiva and Viṣṇu, appear at 7.6 as protectors of the other gods, who go first to Śiva but are sent on to Viṣṇu who agrees to act against Sukeśa's sons. The enhanced significance of Viṣṇu and Śiva is reflected in their titles: both are called *devadeva* and *deveśa*, Viṣṇu is *tribhuvanaśreṣṭha* (7.76.17c) and Śiva is *sarvabhūtapati* (7.53.12b), for example.

On the other hand, a little later in the Uttarakāṇḍa, Indra leads the gods in battle (7.27-28), after first appealing to Viṣṇu as supreme deity,

7. teṣāṃ atiyasā loke rāmaḥ satyaparākramaḥ / svayambhūr iva bhūtānāṃ
babhūva guṇavattaraḥ //.

but is captured (7.29) and only released through Brahmā's intervention (7.30), to be lectured about his adultery with Ahalyā, just as the account of his performing an aśvamedha already mentioned stresses the guilt of Brahmahatyā in Purāṇic fashion. Bhrgu and various Bhārgavas figure to a greater extent even than in the Bālakāṇḍa. Most strikingly, in view of later emphasis on the concept of Rāmarājya, there is the account of the death of the brāhman's son and the summary execution of the śūdra performing penance who is its cause (7.64-67). Here we see the exaggerated emphasis on Rāma's moral rule, which is no doubt hinted at in passages stressing the proper ordering of the four varṇas found in the Bālakāṇḍa (1.1.75, 6.17, 24.15).

But if Viṣṇu and Śiva are called by such titles as *deveśa* and *īśāna* in the Bāla and Uttara kāṇḍas, so too are Indra and Brahmā; in fact, Indra is called *deveśa* by the second stage (e. g. 4.28.5a), though perhaps not in the later sense. There is a quartet of deities here, rather than a trio, for Indra has by no means faded out yet. But then he is the kṣatriyas' deity, just as Brahmā is the brāhman's and ascetics' deity; this is why already in the Ayodhyākāṇḍa Bharata, who has come to dissuade Rāma from the forest life, greets him 'as the devout Mahendra does Prajāpati' (2.96.27d[l.v.]). Indeed, were Indra and Brahmā too identified with particular castes and is this why in the long run Viṣṇu and Śiva eclipse them both?

Indra and Brahmā both still appear in passages of the third stage, as when Brahmā sends Indra as a messenger to cheer Sītā in Laṅkā (3 App.I.12). But certainly by the third stage. Viṣṇu and Śiva are regularly seen as supreme deities above the others. For example, a Southern insertion in the Bālakāṇḍa (1.467*) describes how a deputation of gods headed by Pitāmaha petitions Viṣṇu who declares that he will become incarnate in order to kill Rāvaṇa; during this he is called *deveśa* (1.7) and *devo devānām* (1.15). Again, another insertion of some Southern manuscripts (1 App.I.8) depicts the gods turning to Śiva for help at the churning of the ocean and gives an elaborate series of names or titles for him. Overall, of course, the latest parts make Śiva subordinate to Viṣṇu, as for example when the Uttarakāṇḍa narrates Śiva's thrusting back into position of Kailāsa shaken by Rāvaṇa, a few manuscripts reintroduce Viṣṇu (7.312*).

Let us now turn to a closer examination of Viṣṇu's rôle in books 2-6 and then to the question of Rāma's identification with Viṣṇu. Although Viṣṇu is one of the commoner gods, he is mentioned much less often than Indra, Yama and Brahmā, less even than Garuḍa. Moreover, an examination of the occurrences of his names in the text of these books shows very clearly that many of them occur only in the Southern recension, which has obviously introduced them for sectarian reasons.

In sargas 4 and 6 of the Ayodhyākāṇḍa, Kausalyā is described as meditating on Puruṣa Janārdana with breath control (4.33cd), as resorting to Nārāyaṇa (6.1d), and as meditating on the deity Nārāyaṇa (3c);

also in sarga 6, Rāma and Sītā sleep in Viṣṇu's holy sanctuary (4c) and Rāma praises Madhusūdana with bowed head (7ab); while at 17.6 Kausalyā performs pūjā to Viṣṇu. This concentration of references to worship of Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa within the first twenty sargas of the Ayodhyākāṇḍa is most marked. Not content with that, however, the Tilaka commentary a little later (24.7cd) attempts to discern an allusion to Viṣṇu in Sītā's respect for Rāma. There are only two further references to Viṣṇu in the text of the Ayodhyākāṇḍa. Envoys sent to recall Bharata see Viṣṇupada « Viṣṇu's footprint » (62.13e) on their journey. For the simile *yathā śrīr viṣṇum avyayam* « as Śrī graces unchanging Viṣṇu' (110.9d), the majority of the Northern manuscripts have *kāntā śrīr iva rūpiṇī* « like lovely Śrī in person », which suggests that Śrī's presence in the simile later prompted the inclusion of Viṣṇu.

This process of inclusion of Viṣṇu is taken further in the third stage, of which I mention a few examples. Insertions of the Southern recension refer to Viṣṇu's three strides (581* 3), to his heaven Goloka (707* 9) and to Gaṅgā as having fallen from Viṣṇu's realm (*viṣṇupāda-cyutām* 1061* 11). Various Northern manuscripts introduce a comparison of Rāma and his companions with Viṣṇu, Indra and Śrī (1307*), while in another substitution (1371* 4) Rāma has the valour of Indra and Upendra.

In the Araṇyakāṇḍa, sarga 11 contains a list of ten gods including Viṣṇu (17-18) and also mentions his bow prominently (29-33), on which I shall have more to say later. At 22.28cd, the text includes a simile alluding to Viṣṇu fighting the Asuras but the Northern manuscripts have reading meaning Indra and some Southern manuscripts omit the passage in which it occurs. The same thing happens with another full line simile (59.22cd) introducing Viṣṇu, where the relevant passage, containing a speech by Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa's reply, is omitted by several manuscripts and is clearly superfluous to the narrative⁸. There is also a further mention of Viṣṇu's bow (27.19) and one mention of his discus (30.10a). Among passages belonging to the third stage, we may note one tag stanza of the Southern recension which likens Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to Viṣṇu and Indra (*surendrāv iva viṣṇuvāsavau* 1253* 4) but, although the relative importance of Viṣṇu and Indra betrays a later date than the epic proper, the stage of identification has not been reached.

The grouping of references to Viṣṇu in the Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa is particularly illuminating. The region won by Viṣṇu (*padam viṣṇuvi-krāntam* 36.17a) is mentioned in the commissioning of the vānaras to search for Sītā. In the search of the east, Viṣṇu Puruṣottama takes three strides (39.52), while in the search of the west, Puruṣottama slays Pañcajana and Hayagrīva (41.22); however, the lateness of these passages has long been recognised. Many Northern manuscripts omit 57.13, where

8. I might also point out that developed similes, such as these are, are uncommon in the text but more frequent in interpolations. See my article « Figures of Speech in the Rāmāyaṇa », *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 97, 1977.

Sampāti says that he knows the worlds of Varuṇa and Viṣṇu. Then come three more references in the last three sargas of the Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa (64.15, 65.35 and 66.22), but these boastings and deliberations of the vānaras about the crossing to Laṅkā are quite likely to contain interpolations and anyway do not indicate any great esteem for Viṣṇu.

At one point in the Sundarakāṇḍa, Rāvaṇa's arms are described as scarred by Airāvata's tusks, the vajra and Viṣṇu's discus (8.14). There is one simile which approaches the developed view, since Sītā compares Rāma's rescue of her to Viṣṇu's rescue of Śrī from the Asuras (19.24). Elsewhere in this kāṇḍa, however, Viṣṇu is less prominent: he is by no means the first in the series of gods to whom Hanumān likens Rāma (32.28ab); and though Hanumān declares, according to the Southern recension only, that Sītā will soon see Rāma « like Viṣṇu at the slaughter of the Daityas » (35.24d), he also twice compares him to Indra. When, on another occasion, Prahasta successively asks Hanumān whether he has been sent to Rāvaṇa's abode by Indra, Kubera or Viṣṇu, Hanumān's reply is a denial that he has been sent by any of the three (48.5-7 + 10c-11b).

Interestingly, there are three occasions in the Yuddhakāṇḍa where Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa are compared to Indra and Viṣṇu respectively (24.29d, 70.4d and 87.9d). There are a number of comparisons of Rāma with Indra in the text, one of which is modified by a southern insertion (3114*) suggesting that Viṣṇu is a better comparison. When the rākṣasa Mālyavat declares « I consider that Viṣṇu has assumed a human body as Rāma » (26.31ab), the stanza is omitted by some manuscripts and others have « a god » for « Viṣṇu ». At one point Laṅkā is compared to Viṣṇu's middle step (30.22d), while rākṣasas are twice compared to Nārāyaṇa (49.2cd and 53.25cd); equally, the vānara Nīla is once compared to Viṣṇu (33.34b) and in a verse in longer metre (44.37d[l.v.]). Hanumān is likened to Viṣṇu killing Bali. In sarga 47, Lakṣmaṇa is three times called a part of Viṣṇu in human form (104cd, 107ab and 115cd), while Rāma attacking Rāvaṇa is like Viṣṇu attacking Vairocana (119cd); but the degree of definition here is only one mark of the lateness of this sarga.

Then in the short stretch of sargas 57-61 of the Yuddhakāṇḍa we have Trīśiras boasting that he will destroy Rāvaṇa's enemies as Garuḍa destroys snakes, Indra did Śambara and Viṣṇu did Naraka (57.6-7); the rākṣasa Narāntaka described as vying with Viṣṇu's form (57.30d) but also likened within a few verses to Indra, Yama and Kubera; another rākṣasa also likened to Viṣṇu (59.7ab); Indrajit's boast that the gods (named) « will see my immeasurable, fierce valour like that of Viṣṇu at the site of Bali's sacrifice » (60.7[l.v.]); and two similes involving Viṣṇu's discus (61.48d[l.v.] and 64d[l.v.]). The last three occur in passages in longer metre and can thus definitely be assigned to the second stage, but in fact a block of sargas here from 55 to 61 has been much expanded, and so all these instances reflect the second stage. Later on the mourning rākṣasīs ask whether Rudra or Viṣṇu or Indra or Death himself in Rāma's form has been destroying them (82.24) — but note

the order of enumeration. Then of course in sarga 105, after the victory is secured, the assembled gods declare to Rāma his divinity, which leads up to his identification with Viṣṇu, and at 107.17d and 30d Rāma is called *puruṣottama*. While there are thus rather more references to Viṣṇu in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, though mostly from the second stage, the range of individuals compared to him is catholic: not only Rāma, but Lakṣmaṇa, Hanumān, another *vānara* and several *rākṣasas*.

In the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas*, of course, Viṣṇu is more prominent and is referred to by a wider variety of names: *Indrānuja*, *Govinda*, *Janārdana*, *Nārāyaṇa*, *Padmanābha*, *Puruṣottama*, *Madhusūdana*, *Mādhava*, *Vāsudeva* and *Hari*. But their distribution is patchy. *Nārāyaṇa* occurs more or less throughout the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, but the rest occur in only one or two passages each. For example, *Hari* is found at 7.6-8 but in most of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, far from referring to Viṣṇu, *hari* is a term for the *vānaras*, the monkeys.

Nor is there much trace of Viṣṇu's other *avatāras*. The reference to *Janārdana* early in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* (4.33d), noted earlier, may mean either Viṣṇu or *Kṛṣṇa*. Also within this expanded passage, Rāma alludes to the story of Rāma *Jāmadagnya* killing his mother *Reṇukā* (18.29). In the *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, *Kṛṣṇa* is mentioned in a passage in longer metre (4.27.22a[1.v.]). We next find mention of any *avatāras* in 6.105.12-16, where Rāma is named or identified as *Nārāyaṇa*, the boar, *Viṣvaksena*, *Śārṅgadhanvan*, *Hṛṣīkeśa*, *Puruṣa*, *Puruṣottama*, *Viṣṇu*, *Kṛṣṇa*, *Upeन्द्रa*, *Madhusūdana* and *Padmanābha*, but even this bears little resemblance to the standard list and appears considerably more archaic. In the *Bālakāṇḍa*, *Paraśurāma* appears in sarga 75 and the *Vāmana* « dwarf » *avatāra* is referred to at sarga 28. The third stage also refers to *Nṛsiṃha* and *Hṛṣīkeśa*. However, the picture is transformed by the fourth stage, when one manuscript (D3 at 3.1191(A)*) lists several *avatāras*: the boar, *Nṛhari* (= *Narasimha*), *Rāma* (= *Paraśurāma*) and *Kalki*. Another insertion of a single manuscript (B3 at 3.148*) refers to Viṣṇu's female transformation as *Mohinī* « the enchantress » (also mentioned at 1.969* 4).

Now to Rāma himself. Perhaps the best illustration of his character lies in the basic plot, which hinges on his filial obedience and martial prowess. When, in the midst of the preparations for his installation as heir-apparent, his stepmother *Kaikeyī* suddenly contrives to have him banished to the forest, he accepts his father *Daśaratha*'s reluctant decree with absolute submission and with the calm self-control which regularly characterises him: « Rama did not tremble and replied to *Kaikeyī* " So be it, I will go hence to live in the forest wearing braided hair and bark-cloth, obedient to the king's command " » (2.16.27c-28). He even goes on to suggest sending messengers to recall his unwitting supplanter, *Bharata*, the more completely to fulfil his father's commands, and then makes preparations for his departure with no protest whatsoever, accompanied at their insistence by his wife *Sītā* and his brother *Lakṣmaṇa*. *Bharata* pursues them but fails in his selfless attempt

to deflect Rāma from his resolve; 2.98, in the second stage, further elaborates on the morality of Rāma's action. Attempts by courtiers to persuade him to return on worldly grounds are countered by an argument linking expediency to morality: since subjects copy their ruler's habits, a monarch must adhere to truth for « Truth is called the highest virtue in this world and the root of heaven » (2.101.12cd).

Rāma and Sītā are devoted to each other. Rāma treats his wife with courtesy and consideration, trying to dissuade her from accompanying him by emphasising the hardships involved, and instructing Lakṣmaṇa to protect her whenever danger threatens. His indignation at the attack made on her by the rākṣasī Śūrpaṅkhā leads indirectly to her abduction by Rāvaṇa, and Rāma's distress at this leads to the search for her and the eventual defeat of Rāvaṇa; thus devotion to his wife provides the mainspring of the second part of the plot, just as filial duty does of the first. Although Sītā is at all times meek and submissive to Rāma, he is no tyrant, and finds it impossible to dissuade her from doing or saying exactly what she feels to be right.

Despite Rāma's resolve to live like an ascetic in the forest, it is here that his rôle as the perfect kṣatriya is most in evidence. When the sages complain of harassment by the rākṣasas, Rāma sees it as his duty to afford them immediate protection, for they say (3.5.7-10): « You are the great warrior, chief and lord of the Ikṣvāku clan and of the earth as Maghavān of the gods. Famed in the three worlds for glory and prowess, devotion to your father, truth and righteousness are abundant in you. Having met you, noble, right-minded and devoted to the right, we will address you, lord, as suppliants, with your permission. It would be a great fault for a king to take the sixth part in tax and not protect his subjects like sons ». By the second stage, qualms about the morality of his position seem to have crept in. Sītā is made to put forward a limited version of the doctrine of ahimsā, saying that he should not attack the rākṣasas without direct provocation, and forcing Rāma to justify his action by asserting his duty both to protect the sages and to fulfil his pledged word (3.8-9).

The opportunity to do so, and to display his superhuman invincibility, soon presents itself. The rākṣasa Khara sends fourteen warriors to avenge the disfigurement of his sister Śūrpaṅkhā at the brothers' hands, but Rāma easily defeats them single-handed. Khara himself, at the head of a host of fourteen thousand ruthless rākṣasas, fares no better.

After Sītā's abduction Rāma makes an alliance with the vānara Sugrīva, by which he helps him kill his brother, the usurper Vālin, in return for the promise of aid in finding Sītā. However, moral scruples come to the fore again in the second stage, and Rāma is forced to justify what Vālin sees as his unfair tactics (4.17-18). He claims the duty, as Bharata's agent, of punishing Vālin's crimes and then rather lamely — and quite against the spirit of the earlier part, where the vānaras are effectively human — he adds that after all Vālin is only an animal and thus fair game.

Eventually Rāma, aided by the vānaras, tracks Sītā to Lañkā and the climax is reached with the battle scenes when Rāma finally kills Rāvaṇa. This of course affords the poet ample opportunity to display Rāma's martial prowess (6.90-97), but the second stage introduces a new incident (6.47) presumably to enhance not only his valour but also his moral grandeur. In this Rāma engages in a preliminary duel with Rāvaṇa, but spares him when he has him at his mercy.

After Rāvaṇa's defeat, Rāma and Sītā are joyfully reunited and they all set off back to Ayodhyā to a rapturous welcome, for the fourteen years of exile have conveniently expired. Such at least was the original ending, but this simple tale of duty, fidelity and heroism could not be left alone, and later generations questioned Sītā's virtue. Rāma is made coldly to spurn her, saying that he undertook the quest and combat to vindicate his own and his family's honour, and not for her sake, and not until she has been exonerated by the fire ordeal will he consent to take her back (6.102-4). Later still even this is not enough, and in the Uttarakāṇḍa Sītā has to affirm her innocence by an appeal to the earth. So again we see Rāma's character evolving from the martial to the moral, here even from the hero to the avatāra.

Before we go further into this, let us try to isolate the view of Rāma in the earlier levels of the work provided by the recurrent epithets linked with his name. Of these, much the commonest is *rāmasyākliṣṭa-karmaṇaḥ* « of ever-active Rāma » found 23 times in books 2-6; this adjective is specific to Rāma in the Rāmāyaṇa but in the Mahābhārata characterises both Kṛṣṇa and Pārtha, i.e. Arjuna. Next most frequent, with 18 instances each, are the simple patronymic *rāmo daśarathātmajaḥ* and *rāghavasya mahātmanaḥ* « of noble Rāma », where he is called by an adjective applied to practically every individual that the metre allows, not excluding Rāvaṇa, though *rāvaṇasya durātmanaḥ* « of ignoble Rāvaṇa » is commoner. « The truly brave Rāma », *rāmaḥ satyaparākramaḥ*, occurs 16 times, while *rāmo dharmabhṛtām varaḥ* occurs a dozen times. These last two stress the moral aspect of his character inherent in the story, but not necessarily the religious, for the emphasis of the first is on truth and valour and of the second on tradition — very much kṣatriya virtues. However, Rāma is occasionally described by other epithets incorporating the term dharma and these presumably in some measure contribute to the later elevation of his character.

Then, as we have already seen, there is Rāma's association with Indra to enhance his status. We may note that it is Indra who, in conversation with the sage Śarabhaṅga, predicts — in effect commissions — Rāma's future exploits (3.4.19). Equally, in the supreme crisis of his duel with Rāvaṇa, Rāma receives the aid of Indra's charioteer, Mātali, and is thus implicitly equated with Indra. Of the various similes, I would like to cite one for its explicitness: Mārīca, attempting to dissuade Rāvaṇa, says « Rāma is dharma incarnate, pious, truly brave, and king of the whole world, as Vāsava of the gods » (3.35.13). With this we may

compare the sages' declaration at the beginning of the Aranyakāṇḍa, which in a sense provides the rationale for much of that book: « Being a quarter of Indra indeed, a king protects his subjects, o Rāma » (3.1.18). Similarly, Sugrīva in his relief indulging in hyperbole says to Rāma « You are capable of killing with arrows all the gods along with Indra, o bull among men, how much more Vālin, o king » (4.12.8). In each of these Rāma is deliberately being extolled by the speakers for his martial abilities, with more than a hint of his kingly function, whether for protection or punishment; this is the basis for his comparison with Indra. I must insist that it is mainly in these terms that Rāma is viewed, not merely in the earliest parts but also to quite an extent in the Bāla and Uttara kāṇḍas. There are at least 60 occasions on which Rāma is compared to Indra in the five older books, against eight comparisons and four identifications with Viṣṇu.

Among these frequent comparisons with Indra are the three instances in the Yuddhakāṇḍa where Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa are compared to Indra and Viṣṇu respectively. The two brothers are also once compared to Indra's two arms (5.19.28c), as well as to various pairs of deities, twice in the Bālakāṇḍa to the Aśvins (21.7f and 47.3c), several times to Indra and Varuṇa, also to Brahmā and Indra (2.29.11d), Vāyu and Indra (5.36.40b), and Agni and Māruta (5.37.52c). Rāma alone is compared with various gods, for example Brahmā (2.1.10c and 93.27b), Śiva (3.23.27cd), Garuḍa (3.29.5d and 5.19.23b), Kandarpa (3.32.5c), Kubera (2.14.16a), and, most frequently after Indra, Parjanya (2.1.31d, 3.13cd, 14.21, 104.12d, 3.27.7d); as well as at least twice, in passages belonging to the second stage (2.1.32 and 5.33.9), to several deities at once for different aspects of his character. Rāma and Sītā are even compared to Rudra and Devī, once in the second stage (3.15.39[1.v.]) and at least once in the third stage (2 App. I.26.60).

However, emphasising the variety of deities to whom Rāma is at different times compared has diverted us from the point that he is viewed simply as human in the earliest stage of the text; indeed, so much is this the case that it is difficult to illustrate by striking examples what is part of the basic fabric of the work. Still, on one occasion Rāma declares himself subject to fate (2.98.15), elsewhere he is called in scorn « human footsoldier » (3.25.22d and 6.98.15d; cf. 6.99.5a+6d), and even in the context of his divinity being revealed at the end of the Yuddhakāṇḍa we find Rāma stating — through modesty perhaps — that he considers himself human. What too are we to make of it when we find Hanumān of all individuals denying twice over in successive sargas Rāma's identity with Viṣṇu (5.48.11 and 49.26) and on the second occasion explicitly calling him human?

Of course, as befits the hero of the epic, Rāma is of superhuman abilities. In the Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa, when Rāma first meets Sugrīva, to convince him of his prowess and hence his ability to defeat Vālin, he pierces seven sāl trees in a row with an arrow which returns to his

quiver (4.11.47-12.4); Sugrīva's response to this superhuman feat is, as we have seen, to declare that Rāma could defeat even the gods with Indra (4.12.8) and then to call him *mahendravarūṇopama* « equal to Indra and Varuṇa » (4.12.10d). A little further on, Vālin slain by Rāma will go to heaven, but this is rather the warrior's reward for death in battle than the consequence of contact with Rāma. Something like that is found in the Aranyakāṇḍa when the dying rākṣasa Virādha reveals that he is freed from Kubera's curse by being killed by Rāma (3.3.18-20). Possibly Hanumān's description of Rāma to Sītā as multilimbed (5.33.17-19) suggests divine status but the precise significance of this piece of hyperbole is unclear and this sarga belongs to the second stage of growth; indeed, Rāma is also described in it as the protector of the four varṇas (11b), a feature otherwise found only in the Bāla and Uttara kāṇḍas.

Even when Rāma's divinity is revealed in 6.105, we may note that it is Kubera, Yama, Indra, Varuṇa, Śiva and Brahmā who do so and that the first words they address to Rāma, *kartā sarvasya lokasya* « maker of the entire world » (5a), have just been applied to Brahmā (2c). It is also significant that the revelation takes place in two stages, the first in stanzas 5-8 identifies Rāma with various deities, while the second in stanzas 12-16 identifies him with Viṣṇu and his various manifestations, but even in the second of these the term *indrakarmā* « having Indra's deeds » appears. Though much briefer, these two stages are strikingly similar to the successive stages of Kṛṣṇa's self-revelation in chapters 9-10 and 11 of the Bhagavadgītā; no doubt the same factors were at work in each case.

What is more important are the traces of greater prominence for Indra at those very points where the Vaiṣṇava emphasis is now apparent. For example, the bestowal of divine weapons on Rāma by Agastya (3.11.29-33), elaborated if not introduced in the second stage of growth, is often referred to as the giving of Viṣṇu's weapons, but the text actually mentions Brahmā and Indra along with Viṣṇu, thus: « O tiger among men, this divine bow of Viṣṇu's, ornamented with gold and diamonds, was made by Viśvakarman; this unerring Brahmā-given arrow, supreme and sun-like, was given to me by great Indra, along with the quiver of never-ending arrows, filled with sharp shafts like blazing fires; here is a sword ornamented with gold and its silver sheath. With this bow, Rāma, did Viṣṇu of old slay the great Asuras in battle to rescue Śrī, the shining Fortune of the gods. Accept that bow and quiver, the arrow and the sword, o gracious one, as the wielder of the thunderbolt did the thunderbolt — for victory ». Even more significantly, in the first summary of contents in the Bālakāṇḍa, this episode is referred to thus: « At Agastya's bidding, he accepted Indra's bow... » (1.1.34a), while it is missing in the second summary of contents. Again, whereas at the end of the Yuddhakāṇḍa it is Agni who hands Sītā back to Rāma after the Fire-ordeal, in recalling this to his brothers in

the Uttarakāṇḍa Rāma says that she was actually handed back by Mahendra (7.44.8); since the Fire-ordeal itself is so late, the discrepancy is the more surprising⁹.

We have already seen how to a certain extent in the second stage, Viṣṇu is given more prominence and Rāma is compared to him in all eight times in books 2-6. Explicit identification is made at four places in the Yuddhakāṇḍa only, all but one at the very end of it (6.26.31ab, 105.5-16, 107.17 and 0). Such identification grows more frequent with the third stage, of which there is only room to give a few examples. At 2.1.9cd variant readings of some Northern manuscripts make Rāma an *aṃśāvatāra* of Viṣṇu, which the Southern manuscripts do in 10* 1-2; the lack of agreement between the recensions is noteworthy. The Critical Notes to the Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa have an interesting comment on 16.25: « After 25, D5.6.8-10 S (*i.e.* all S MSS.) plus D3.11 add the star passage 343*, which in 1.2 has a ring of treating Rāma as an *avatāra*. This tendency is not seen anywhere in the constituted text of this kāṇḍa. » In the Sundarakāṇḍa, Southern manuscripts enlarge Hanumān's description of Rāma to Rāvaṇa, making him declare that Rāma is capable of emanating the entire world with its inhabitants and that he is equal in prowess to Viṣṇu (5.1048*5-6,11). In the Yuddhakāṇḍa, the Northern manuscripts in two of their additions say that Viṣṇu, lord of the gods, has taken human form as Rāma (6.25* and App. I.17.40). The phalaśrutis at the end of the Yuddhakāṇḍa also include an identification of Rāma with Viṣṇu (3703(G)* 10-11).

To sum up, the general composition and character of the pantheon is markedly Vedic. In the earlier stages the dominant god is Indra: the most active of the gods, he is their invincible leader in battle and grants boons to mortals. By the later stages he is seen as fallible and no longer supreme; nevertheless he retains throughout his rôle as the standard of comparison for the warrior king, and remains the heroic ideal, the perfect *kṣatriya*. Brahmā is prominent in the second stage, where he takes over Indra's function of distributing favours, bestowing them on *rākṣasas* as well as men, but he is in his turn replaced by Siva and Viṣṇu.

Rāma himself in the earliest stages is, in Jacobi's phrase, thoroughly human and acts in ways that from the standpoint of later stricter morality must be carefully justified. But in the second stage it begins to be said that he displays divine qualities, and he is compared to a wide range of deities but especially to Indra. It is important to note that the virtues he exemplifies are the typical *kṣatriya* ones of valour, protection of the weak and upholding of the social order, rather than specifically religious ones. It is not till the end of the second stage that

9. On this point see Nilmadhav Sen « The Fire-Ordeal of Sītā - A later interpolation in the Rāmāyaṇa? », *Journal of the Oriental Institute, Baroda*, 1, 1952, pp. 201-6.

Rāma is identified with Viṣṇu, who by this time has so eclipsed Indra in importance as to take on the rôle of supreme god. This is then consolidated in the third and fourth stages, which attempt, though rather sporadically, to harmonise the older material with this new view, thus paving the way for the presentation of Rāma as the religious ideal found most fully in the vernacular treatments of Tulsī Dās and others.