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RĀMĀYAṆA TRADITION AFTER VĀLMĪKI
IN INDIA AND ABROAD

Late Shri Perala Ratnam (Ambassador of India to U.S. A., China, Laos and Indonesia) had very politely advised Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime-Minister of India to form the *Rāmāyaṇa* Commonwealth on the pattern of British Commonwealth so that the internal disputes could be negotiated amicably. Actually, Shri Ratnam had deeply perused the *Rāmāyaṇa* literature of the far-east countries and was aware of its predominating influence over the social and religious life of those territories. But Pt. Nehru did not pay respect to this proposal, possibly because he lived religion and culture only as a fashion. Moreover, up to some extent he was absolutely an atheist.

Nevertheless, we can claim that the two third part or the global dimension is intrinsically connected with *Rāmāyaṇa* culture. Right from the ancient Egypt up to the Indonesian archipelago, we still find the foot-prints of that egregious culture. The ancient history of Egyptian royal dynasties, dating back 5702 B.C. has been inscribed on stones and is still preserved. This historical account delineates the complete sequential progress of those eighteen dynasties which ruled over Egypt from 5702 to 1st century B.C. Now, the more interesting part of this history tells us that in between 1400 to 1100 B.C. thirteen kings, known as Rāma Sasu, remained on the throne. The word 'sasu' is the Śaśin of Sanskr̥ta which means the moon i.e. Candra. Thus, Rāma sasū means Rāma chandra and nothing else. The First Rāma sasū, bearing the ride of Rāma pati ruled in 1400 B.C. and the thirteenth one, who befriended with Harihara ruled in 1100 B.C.

I have quoted this Egyptian Historical-account only in order to prove the antiquary of the Rāma-episode. It is an eye-opener evidence to those Indian historians who still feel dubious in accepting the antiquity and authenticity of the *Rāmāyaṇa*-story and are fully reluctant to cross over the line of the Buddhist era, as if Pre-Buddhist India had no history. I think, it is proper time for them to change their narrow and stagnant mentality.

The historical account of the King Saṅkhakara, who sent his messenger Hanu (= Hanumān?) to the Panat totally seems to be coherent with that of Rāma who sends Hanumān, the monkey-messenger, 'to the island of Laṅkā. On the other hand, the Mitani history of the Asia Minor preserves the name of a king Daśarath whose detailed accounts are available in the remains of the Egyptian old city Tel-ul-Amarna (the capital city of emperor Akhanatan) and Bogaskoi (Turkistan).¹

Now, it seems easy to infer that the mighty episode of Rāma gained popularity in Asia Minor and Egypt even in 1500 B.C. I don't want to elucidate this context more but very politely pray the Historians to assess these illuminant evidences once again.

According to the Purāṇic evidences Lord Rāma was born in the 24th Tretā Yuga.²

Actually it was the joint period of Tretā and Dvāpara i.e. the last 700 years of Tretā and the beginning 300 years of Dvāpara. According to the exact astrological calculations he was present on this earth from Manu era 10, 23, 83, 300 to 10, 23, 84, 300. In other words, his presence on this earth was 1, 45, 56, 757 years before today.

But who believes it? Our historical vision is still guided by the westerners. We blindly follow them and feel proud of it.

However, this fact is beyond any doubt that the story of Lord

¹ See: History of Ancient Egypt by Georg Rolinson, 1881.

² Tretāyuge caturviṃśe rāvaṇastapasah kṣayāt
rāmaṃ Dāśarathim prāpya saṅgaṇah kṣayameyivān – *Vāyu*. 70.48
Rāmo nāma bhaviṣyāmi caturtyahassanātanaḥ - *Brahmāṇḍa*. 2.3.36.30
caturviṃśe yuge cāpi viśvāmitrapurassarah
loke rāma iti khyātastejāsā bhāskaropamaḥ - *Harivaṃśa*. 22.1.46
sandhau tu samanuprāpte tretāyā dvāparasya ca
Rāmo daśarathirbhūtvā bhaviṣyāmi jagatpatiḥ - *Mahā. Śānti*. 348.11

Rāma has been recited by the great Mahārṣi Vālmiki for the first time. Gradually it developed in several branches and frames, even controversial to each other. But the eternal theme of *Rāmāyaṇa* was not fragile. Since it grew and strengthened more and more. The *Rāmāyaṇa* culture, as I have stated earlier, spread over in the far Middle-west and Asia Minor regions in at least 1500 B.C. Afterwards it reached the Pacific islands also with the foundation of Indian colonial rule just in the beginning of the Christian era. *Rāmāyaṇa* became popular in Champā (Viet-nam). Kambuja (Cambodia), Suvarṇabhūmi (Myanmar). Sukhodaya-Dvārāvati and Ayodhyā (Thailand), Śrīvijaya (Sumatra) Katāhdveepa (Keddah, Malaysia) and Suvarṇadveepa (Java and Bali) between 1st to 5th century A.D. An exhaustive account of the origin and development of the *Rāmāyaṇa*-theme in the above-cited territories is available. I would like to add something more to this account just in the end of this arrive.

After this short material, regarding the expansion of the Rāma-episode. I will try to make an assessment of its manifold traditions. It has an interesting background.

In the 6th century B.C. two great super-human beings were born in India. One of them was prince Siddhārtha, the son of Śuddhodana, who was the ruler of the Śākya dynasty. Another was prince Vardhamāna, the son of Kuṇḍalpur-ruler Siddhārtha and Triśāla. Both of them relinquished the world in youth and practised rigorous penance to achieve Salvation (Nirvāṇa and Kaivaiya respectively). They became successful in their efforts, achieving the path of salvation and preached their sermons amid common persons. They wanted some radical changes in Vedic religion. Prince Siddhārtha, known as Lord Buddha or Tathāgata (the enlightened soul) opposed the caste-system. He didn't like the caste supremacy based on birth and declared:

*na jaccā bambhano hotti na jaccā hotti khattiyo
kammuṇā bambhaṇo hotti kammuṇā hotti khattiyo*

Prince Vardhamāna, known as Lord Mahāvīra, criticized the sacrifice of innocent animals in Yajñas and advocated in favour of non-violence. His principal motto was *ahiṃsā paramo dharmah!*

Both of these preachers were against the entity of God and didn't adhere to the testimony of the Vedas. In the beginning the

points of opposition and divergence were few. But gradually it widened to the extent of an incompatible revolt against Vedic religion. Being related to the reputed royal dynasties, these religious teachers influenced the contemporary ruling powers and were fully benefitted through their royal patron-ages. Under the regime of the Mauryan empire the Vedic religion was totally toppled down.

Although these sects, recognised as Bauddha and Jain, had their own scriptures, having the new concepts of Ātman (soul), Jīva (beings), Janma and Mṛtyu (life and death) they developed their own spiritual thoughts and philosophical speculations. They preached the new codes of conduct, social norms and way of life. In every sphere of worldly behaviours these sects were absolutely opposed to the Vedic Dharma (or Sanātana as well as Brahmaṇa Dharma).

But at the same time, they adopted Vedic themes in literary field and either renovated them or changed them completely. The effective themes of *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, *Śrīmadbhāgavata* and other *Purāṇas* were reconstructed by the Jain poets under their own frame-work and sectarian point of view.

Thus the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition (after Vālmīki) was divided into two branches - Vedic and Non-Vedic. The Non-Vedic tradition was further divided into Bauddha and Jain branches.

The Vedic tradition of *Rāmāyaṇa* portrays Lord Rāma as an incarnation of Viṣṇu, the Almighty God. The later literary works, composed under this tradition are – *Adhyātmārāmāyaṇa*, *Yogavāsīṣṭha* *Bhuśuṇḍi-rāmāyaṇa*, *Śrīmadbhāgavata*, *Mahābhārata* (*Vanaparva*), *Raghuvamśa* of Kālidāsa, *Rāmacarita* of Abhinanda, *Rāvaṇavadha* of Bhaṭṭi, *Jānakīharāṇa* of Kumārādāsa, *Setubandha* of Pravarasena, *Abhiṣeka* and *Pratimānāṭaka* of Bhāsa, *Mahāvīracarita* and *Uttarārāmacarita* of Bhavabhūti, *Anargharāghava* of Murāri, *Bālarāmāyaṇa* of Rājaśekhara, *Kundamālā* of Dinnāga, *Prasannarāghava* of Jayādeva, *Āscaryachūḍāmaṇi* of Śaktibhadra, *Adbhutadarpaṇa* of Mahādeva, *Rāmāyaṇacampū* of Mahārāja Bhoja and *Rāmāyaṇamañjarī* of Kṣemendra.

However, this list doesn't exhaust here. I have furnished only a few names. Otherwise hundreds and hundreds more titles can

be added. In modern era also the voluminous Mahākāvya like *Jānakīcaritāmṛtam* (Rāma Sanehī Dāsa), *Sītācaritam* (Prof. Reva Prasad Dwivedi), *Jānakījīvanam* (Abhiraja Dr. Rajendra Mishra) have been composed in the same tradition. This tradition still survives through the recent creative writings in Sanskr̥ta and other Indian languages.

The non-Vedic tradition of *Rāmāyaṇa* developed through the literary work? composed by Bauddha and Jain (Arhat) poets. Some prominent works are: *Daśarathajātaka* (Bauddha tradition), *Ādi Purāṇa* of Bhadrabāhu, *Padmacarita* of Raviṣeṇa, *Paumcarīu* (Apabhramśa) of Svayambhū, *Ānandarāmāyaṇa* of an unknown author so on and so forth.

Since the Bauddha and Jain poets were completely atheist, their characterization of Rāma, Sītā and others was totally different from those poets who followed the foot-prints of Maharṣi Vālmiki. Lord Rāma was an incarnation of Mahāviṣṇu. He was a Super-human being. He possessed innumerable divine qualities. He was polite, balanced, affectionate, compassionate and an unparalleled archer. He owned the most dignified human personality having high ideals. Actually Lord Viṣṇu himself was born as Rāma in order to kill the most tyrant demon Rāvaṇa, the ruler of Laṅkā. In short, Rāma was an embodiment of divinity or godliness in humanity. He established high ideals of human life in order to guide the future generations.

On the other hand, the non-Vedic poets had nothing to do with the godliness of Rāma. He was just a common man for them full of human weaknesses and discrepancies. These poets elaborated the character of Rāma on this pattern. The writer of *Daśarathajātaka* portrayed Rāma and Sītā as the brother and sister and as the issues of king Daśaratha. Advised by their father (Daśaratha) they dwelt in the forest along with Lakṣhaṇa Paṇḍita. But the grotesqueness of this story lies in its final touch, where Rāma and Sītā, after their return from the forest are presented as wife and husband. This distortion and disgracing twist of original theme authentically proves the obnoxious stand-point of the non-Vedic poets.

Raviṣeṇa in his *Padmacaritam* described Rāma as the heartless killer of Vidyujjihva, the husband of Candranakhā. The same

story developed later on in the form of Śambūka-episode. Svayambhū, the composer of Paumacariu, had developed acute hatred, peevishness, aversion and dissent towards Rāma. That is why he described Rāma as running after physical lust and sensual pleasure. In the end of his story Svayambhū delineates that Prince Lakṣmaṇa could achieve salvation i.e. NIRVĀṆA due to his unstained high character but Rāma was destined to enter the four walls of the hell in order to enjoy the punishment of his unpardonable offences.

The same degraded tendency can be seen in the *Rāmāyaṇa* story of Laos (Fa-Lak Fa-Lam), Thailand (*Rāma Kien*), Malaysia (Hikayat Maharaja Ram) and Śri Laṅkā (*Rāma Ketti*). These territories, being under the Buddhist regime, supported the non-Vedic tradition of the Rāma-episode. These *Rāmāyaṇas* narrate the story in their own way along with several alterations, additions, projections and interpolations. They put forth the utopian views of their poets.

A. context of the Laos - *Rāmāyaṇa* (Fa - Lak - Fa - Lam) runs like this: Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa are moving ahead in the quest of Sītā. They are hungry. Rāma beholds a tree laden with sweet fruits. He climbs the tree. The tree has two branches. One branch of this tree has got a divine power of converting a man into monkey. Unknown to this mystery, unfortunately Rāma climbs the same branch and turns into a monkey. On the same branch dwells a she-monkey. Actually she is an Apsarā, but being cursed by her mother, has become a she-monkey. Now the monkey (Rāma) and she-monkey meet together on the same branch, make love and consequent upon this a monkey baby is born. This baby is “Hanimon” (Hanumān). Beneath the tree, the younger brother Lakṣmaṇa is lamenting for Rāma. An ascetic tells him the device to bring Rāma in his human form. That is to climb on the other branch. Lakṣmaṇa allures the monkey (Rāma) to reach the cognate branch and ultimately becomes successful. As soon as Rāma gains human form, the she-monkey turns into an Apsarā and ascends Svarga directing her son to accompany his father Rāma. The most remarkable point in this theme is the blood-relation between Rāma and Hanumān.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* of Thailand (*Rāma Kien*) also presents

likewise strange versions. One of them tells us that the monkey-commander Hanumān had sexual relation with the daughter of Vibhīṣana, named Beṅjakayi and a male child Asurafad is born. This story seems to be coherent with the episode of Makaradhvaja, described in several other *Rāmāyaṇas*.

But the *Rāmāyaṇa Kakaween* of Yavadvīpa (Java) is an exception to the above-cited anti-Vedic *Rāmāyaṇa*-tradition. This epoch-making poetry, consisting of 26 *Sargas* and 2778 *ślokas*, composed in the Kawi language, had been manifested by the great ascetic poet Yogiśwara under the patronage of the central Java-ruler Vatukuru Balitunga of Mataram dynasty just in the end of the 9th century A.D. This majestic poetry completely follows the tradition of Vālmīki, portraying Rāma as the Para Brahma Parameśvara. It is evident from the Puṣpikā (last verses) of the Kakaween:

*jaya parameśvarātiśaya śaktinātha nikanan jagattraya kinta
praṇata hatin̄ku nityarisukunta tātanalupālanā matutura
ekanaphalāni bhaktini hatin̄ku rātyata tumūta bhaktyaṭi kita
kalavanikin̄ subhāṣitakathā sabhākin̄ ṛnaun rasanya subhaga
Rāmā. Kaka. 26.41*

“The most powerful ruler of the tree *lokas*, O Parameśvara! you are victorious. I enshrine in my heart firm faith to your exalted feet. You always reside in the temple of my mind and are never forgotten. This dedicated reverence of mine be the reverence and devotion of all those beings who are with me in your worship. O Lord! this sublime theme of yours, composed through the meaningful words be more and more popular and its auspicious as well as benign relish be enjoyed by the readers”.

The political history of Java clearly states the religious temperament of its rulers. They remained the worshippers of Lord Śiva and Viṣṇu. The great conqueror Eralanga (1010-49 A.D.) was considered to be the incarnation of Viṣṇu whilst Kameśvara I of the Kadiri dynasty (1106-35 A.D.) and his queen. Śrikiraṇa were understood to be the embodiments of Kāma and Rati. The founder of the Majapahita dynasty king Kṛtarājasa Jayavardhana (1294-1304 A.D.) was a staunch follower of Harihara. However,

Kṛtanagara (1254-92 A.D.) the great ruler of the Sinhasāri dynasty, adept in Bauddha Subhūtitantra and Śaiva Āgamas, stands unparalleled in the galaxy of Javanese rulers. He declared himself to be the joint incarnation of Śiva-Buddha. Still today, hundreds and hundred Śiva-Buddha images of copper, bronze, silver and gold are kept safe in the museums of Java and Leiden (Holland).

Since the Javanese rulers followed Vedic traditions in every sphere of life, consequently the same tendency prevailed in their literature also. We can't have even a single example of odiousness in the theme of the *Rāmāyaṇa Kakaween*.

I think it's enough. I have clearly stated the contrary viewpoints of the Vedic and non-Vedic traditions of *Rāmāyaṇa*. But one question still stands unanswered that why do we find different versions of the single context, even under the Vedic tradition? The background of Rāma's departure to the Daṇḍakāraṇya, for example, has various versions in the Sanskrit dramas. Why is this so?

Let me explain. It is not the distortion of the theme as done by the Bauddha and Jain poets. It is an example of poetic excellence in order to exhilarate the readers. The great rhetorician, Ācārya Kuntaka (10th century A.D.) names it as Prakaraṇa Vakratā. It is merely a positive alteration keeping in view the easy treatment of Rasa (relish). Such alterations have been admitted with praise, even by the Dhvanikāra Ācārya Ānandavardhana (9th C. A.D.).

*dr̥ṣṭapūrvā api hyarthāḥ kāvyē rasaparigrahāt
sarve navā ivābhānti madhumāsa iva drumāḥ
samvādāstu bhavantyeva bāhulyena sumedhasām
naikarūpatayā sarve te mantavyā vipāścītā
tattvasyānyasya sadbhāve pūrvasthityanuyāyapi
vastu mātitarā tanvyāḥ śaśicchāyamivānanam*

Dhvanyāloka, 4.4, 11 and 14.

Such positive, skilful and justifiable changes enhance the delight of the reader whilst the odious expressions always create panic and perplexity in the mind of a devoted reverent reader.

To explain and elucidate it more clearly I would like to quote Ācārya Kuntaka himself. According to the theme of the Vālmiki

Rāmāyaṇa, Prince Lakṣmaṇa, being motivated by Sītā, rushes for Rāma's rescue in the context of killing Mārīca. Now, Ācārya Kuntaka comments:

*tadetadatyantamanaucityayuktam
yasmādanucarassannidhāne pradhānasya
tathāvidhavyāpārakaraṇamasambhāvanīyam
tasya ca sarvātīśayacaritayuktatvena varṇyamānasya
tena kanīyasā prāṇaparitrāṇasambhāvaneti
etadatyantamasamīcīnam...*

How it is possible that a great archer like Rāma might be saved by his younger brother? Would it not be improper to delineate this? And if it is so, this impropriety will spoil the treatment of Rasa: 'anaucityādṛte nā'nyadrasabhaṅgasya kāraṇam'.

Every poet has full right to judge the propriety of each and every context, being incorporated in his poem. That is what Māyurāja did in his play *Udāttarāghavam*. Since he couldn't accept the propriety of the above-cited action (i.e. Lakṣmaṇa's effort to help Rāma), he slightly changed the theme. According to his version, it was prince Lakṣmaṇa, who went for hunting the deer i.e. Mārīca. Listening his cry for help, his elder brother Rāma rushed to the place and thus, the device of Rāvaṇa to make Sītā alone and helpless became successful.

Māyurāja finds propriety in this version. A younger brother must be helped by the elder, specially in perilous condition. What is wrong here? To experience the taste of the poetic relish is the only goal of poetry and it is not possible without its proper treatment. If the propriety will not be considered supreme and conclusive it would be rather difficult to refute the justifiability of Rāvaṇa's love for Sītā. That's why Ācārya Kṣemendra (11th century A.D.) declares *aucitya* as the soul of poetry.

But, the above-mentioned alteration made by Māyurāja is not only due to propriety. It is due to poetic excellence also as referred to by Ācārya Kuntaka himself '*kavinā vaidagdhyaśena... ityupanibaddham atra ca tadvidāhalādakāritvameva vakratvam*'

Another example of such alteration is available in the *Balarāmāyaṇa-nāṭaka* of Rajaśekhara (10th century A.D.). In

order to prove Kaikeyī and Daśaratha absolutely innocent, Rajaśekhara has changed the traditional theme of the Vālmiki *Rāmāyaṇa*. According to his plan, Rāvaṇa, the ruler of Laṅkā, maliciously sends Māyāmaya and Śūrpaṇakhā to act as Daśaratha and Kaikeyī. Thus, the banishment of Rāma etc. occurs through the conspiracy of Rāvaṇa.

Another version tells as that Rāvaṇa used Śūrpaṇakhā in order to full his wishes. Actually he wanted the banishment of Rāma so that he could avail of a chance to abduct Sītā, whom he loved viciously. For this purpose he commanded Śūrpaṇakhā to act as Mantharā. Thus, Śūrpaṇakhā under the disguise of Mantharā embitters the heart of Kaikeyī, resulting in Rāma's banishment.

Hundreds and hundreds of such other changes, alterations, additions, reproductions, renovations and imaginations, related to the original *Rāmāyaṇa* theme are available in Sanskrit drama, *Kāvya*s and other literary genres. It is hard to assess them collectively. In short, we can say that the *Rāmāyaṇa*-tradition after Vālmiki has developed in several ways. But two main factors, considered to be responsible for it, are: sectarian malignity (rather a negative approach, evident in the Buddhist and Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*-tradition) and poetic excellence i.e. alterations and deviations in order to produce literary sublimity, grandeur and other poetic merits. It is a positive approach, practised by poets and dramatists who composed poems in the sequence and accordance of the Vālmiki-*Rāmāyaṇa*. That effort is still going on. Today, the creative dimension of *Rāmāyaṇa* theme has crossed the limits of place and language. It is not confined to Samskr̥ta only. All the twenty-two languages of India, recognised by the Sāhitya Akademi (New Delhi) are producing fresh Rāma episodes, having a new outlook, new expression of facts and fresh interpretations.