

All the main participants in the story — Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā; Rāvaṇa, Śaurya and Hanumān — were human beings. They were endowed with divine, demonic and superhuman powers when the various miraculous elements were added in the story. At least two stages in this development can be clearly seen. And it is possible that when the Rāmāyana was first composed, the poet had already decided to invest Rāma with divine powers so that he could later accomplish single-handedly the various feats.

However, in the final stage, Rāma and Sītā are elevated to a fully divine state, and side by side — everyone, the Rākṣasas as well as the Vānars get a promotion, and are endowed with good or bad qualities as demanded by the occasion.

THE RĀMĀYANA AGE

Because of this late « promotion », it took some centuries before temples dedicated exclusively to Rāma came up.

Since all the actors are human beings they go through or observe the actions and activities and ceremonies suitable to or required by

After an analytical study of the objects, concepts, persons and places of each *Kāṇḍa*, we may now present a coherent picture of the *Rāmāyana Age* as seen in the friendship between Rāma and Hanumān. The story had its origin at Ayodhyā, in mid-Eastern India as suggested by reliable references to a few other places in this region as well as in the Northwest Frontier. Principal towns in the Gāngetic valley such as Mathurā, Kauśāmbī, Kānyakubja, Srāvastī and Vaiśālī, must have come into existence at this time. The country to the south of the Gānges was forested and very sparsely inhabited. The *Vindhya*s were known, but not the *Narbada*, and so also the country further south. This is proved by the river names in the *Bālakāṇḍa* and *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, detailed descriptions of the *Vindhya*s in the *Araṇyakāṇḍa*, and the interpolations in the *Kiskindhākāṇḍa*, and the fanciful descriptions of *Laṅkā* in the *Sundarakāṇḍa* and *Yuddhakāṇḍa* and the complete absence of any reference to places in the south in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*.

However, the interpolations in the *Kiskindhākāṇḍa* as well as descriptions in *Sundarakāṇḍa* and *Yuddhakāṇḍa* do show that the poet who added these had a vague idea that *Laṅkā* was on a hill or hilly place on an island in the Indian ocean.

This island should be no other than Ceylon (now called Sri *Laṅkā*) which from the fourth century B.C. until the seventh century A.D. was known in inscriptions and literature as *Siṃhala* and *Tāmaparṇī*. It is indeed surprising that the *Rāmāyana* nowhere mentions this place, whereas the other epic, *Mahābhārata*, several *Purāṇas*, and even a sixteenth century Sanskrit manuscript of the Muslim ruler, Mahād Begada of Gujarat, mentions both *Laṅkā* and *Siṃhala*. Late epigraphical evidence shows that Goa was known by both these names in the tenth century.

All the main participants or actors in the story — Rāma, Lakṣmana and Sītā; Rāvaṇa, Sugrīva and Hanumān — were human beings. They were endowed with divine, demoniac and superhuman powers when the various miraculous elements were added in the story. At least two stages in this development can be clearly seen. And it is possible that when the *Rāmāyaṇa* was first composed, the poet had already decided to invest Rāma with divine powers so that he could later accomplish single-handed the various feats.

However, in the final stage, Rāma and Sītā are elevated to a fully divine state, and side by side — everyone, the Rākṣasas as well as the Vānaras get a promotion, and are endowed with good or bad qualities as demanded by the occasion.

Because of this late « promotions », it took some centuries before temples dedicated exclusively to Rāma came up.

Since all the actors are human beings they go through or observe the actions and activities, rites and ceremonies suitable to or required by their position.

Thus the marriages of Rāma and Rāvaṇa were consecrated before a fire, so was the friendship between Rāma and Hanumān.

So also for a coronation, whether of Rāma or Sugrīva, waters from the seven seas were brought, though poor Sugrīva was not anointed by a Brahmin!

Likewise whether it was Daśaratha, Vāli or Rāvaṇa, cremation was the most acceptable method of disposal of the dead, though Virādha was buried as desired by him. It should be noted that at this time even women accompanied the corpse to the cremation ground, which was on a river bank, and it was permissible to go in a conveyance — a palanquin or a chariot.

When cremation was not immediately possible, or it was necessary to preserve the body, it was immersed in a large vessel containing oil.

Only a few towns or cities are mentioned; of these we have a fairly detailed description of Ayodhyā, to some extent of Takṣaśilā and Puṣkarāvati, and only fanciful descriptions of Kiṣkindhā and Iankā, and a mere mention of the rest — Mathurā, Vediśā and Aṅgadiyā.

If the reference to the two cities in Gandhāra Viṣaya, the present Northwest Frontier Province is to the cities founded by the Indo-Greeks or the Parthians, then it is more than probable that the description of Ayodhyā is either based on these cities or the Ayodhyā of this period, that is, the first century B.C. For as Professor Lal¹ informed the author he had not found so far any traces or remains of the Gupta period. This was also the impression of General Cunningham who had visited the site nearly a hundred years ago.

1. H. D. SANKALIA, *Indian Archaeology Today*, Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1979, p. 196.

Whatever be the exact period of this Ayodhyā, it was ruled by a king who was helped by a *mantri pariṣad* (council of ministers), and the *purohīts*. And in all important matters the people were consulted. Though their opinion was only recommendatory and not decisive or binding, still Rāma regarded it as decisive, or important enough to be heard and acted upon.

It was this, the *pauravāda* « the talk among the people » that made Rāma exile Sītā once again. « Rāmarājya » really connoted the acceptance of the voice of the people, though we are normally apt to regard it as a « Golden Age ». For it was in this age that a Brahmin's son died, and Sītā was exiled.

Some such council of ministers is also supposed to be there in Lāṅkā. For we are repeatedly told that Rāvaṇa consulted his ministers and others.

So did Sugrīva.

What all this suggests is that though the king was supreme, he did consult his advisers, and others, though he was not bound to accept their advice.

What other organizations were there in these cities we cannot say. For none are mentioned. But from the fact that when Bharata thought of going to meet Rāma in Citrakūṭa, he sent out in advance sappers, miners, road-makers and bridge-builders, we may deduce that there must have been in existence at this time a loosely knit body or guilds of architects, engineers, masons and carpenters. By this time all these had become hereditary professions.

So also was that of the ferryman (*Niṣāda Guha*) who carried first Rāma, and then Bharata's army across the Trivenī.

While we definitely rule out the existence of aerial travel which occurs comparatively more frequently in the *Rāmāyaṇa* than in any other *Purāṇas* or the *Mahābhārata*, we must give due credit to the author for imagining its use. Even in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* Rāma goes out in search of the Śudra who is said to have been practising penance. So Rāma had to recall the Puṣpaka which he had returned to Kubera, as we are told in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*.

Among other normal means of conveyance there were palanquins, and chariots drawn by horses and also asses. What the nature of these chariots was — whether they had a solid wheel or spoked wheel — we can only imagine. One thing is certain. These chariots could only be used on properly laid out roads. Hence it was used by Rāma, and Bharata only on the northern bank of the Ganges or the Sarayu. The journey on the southern bank after crossing the river had to be on foot.

The normal material for making clothes was *kṣauma* (linen). Women wore an *uttariya* as well as an *adhovastra* of yellow silk (*pīta kauśeya*).

Cotton clothes must have been in use, because *kārpāsa* (cotton) is mentioned as one of the threads of the rope used for tying Hanumān.

There was also the use of *śaṇa* (garments of hemp) and *una* (gar-

merits of wool). The latter were a speciality of the North West Frontier Province, and always figure among the goods sent by Kekaya. or whatever it was. However, what the exact type of dress was, we cannot say. Both the men and women, particularly the poorer classes, in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar wear a kind of *dhōṭī*, very often *sakāchha* or *akāchhā*, that is either they pass between the legs, or is worn in the form of a *sāmī*. However it was always short, almost touching the knee, or just below it, but not too long. *Uṣṇī* « *युष्नी* » might also be a name. Though so many preparations of food are mentioned in the *Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa*, and the *Sūchikāṇḍa*, still the most common or abundant food was rice. Shops in Ayodhyā are said to have been filled with this grain. Wheat or any other cereals is not even once mentioned. This is indeed surprising, for though rice is the staple diet even today of eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal, still Ayodhyā would seem to occupy almost a position in the centre of the two Uttar Pradesh, and wheat should have been available there 2000 years ago.

What is surprising is the frequent mention of meat and meat-diet, both in Ayodhyā and Lañkā and even in the *āshrama* of Bharadvāja. And Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa lived on it, until Sītā was abducted. (Among the drinks) sugar (anē) *madhu*, and *māreya* (from Mahā flowers occur frequently) (twice *Vāruṇī* is mentioned), and the name is definitely said to be from *Vāruṇī*, the lord of the western ocean. In *Sūrā* and *śūnāpāna* were definitely forbidden, as Kane has so well shown. And it is wrong to think, as some scholars do, that *surā* was used both in the society and religious practices. Hence their prominent mention in the *Rāmāyana* should be ascribed to the impact of new socio-economic events. This one name (*Vāruṇī*) for a kind of spirituous drink, along with the signifying the mention of Maricāpatana and the description of the scenes of revelry in the *āshrama* of Bharadvāja and in the harem of Rāvana, help us to place one stage of the composition of the epic in the first century A.D., when trade with Rome and the Western world had introduced Roman wine to large parts of India. This had been never suspected before by any previous scholar. We have been able to think of it, thanks to Sir Mortimer Wheeler, who was the first to draw the attention of Indian scholars to this source of influence on our culture. How deep and far-reaching it was, it is being slowly realised, and will be known further as our knowledge of archaeology of this period increases.

Unfortunately the epic refers in a most general way to the furniture and material possessions in the houses and palaces in Ayodhyā.

Surprising from the common man's point of view. For the Hindus always think or believe that Rāma and Sītā were vegetarians. As Kane has well summarised the then prevailing views among Buddhists as well as non-Buddhists, *ahiṃsā* was generally breached, though there were exceptions. See P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, vol. 5, (Poona, 1974), Part 2, pp. 944.

Kiṣkindhā and Laṅkā, so that we cannot pick out any of these for a further scrutiny. But how significant for dating purposes are the references to *Gaja-Lakṣmī* and *ihāmṛiga* as architectural motifs on the pillars in Rāvana's palace has been amply demonstrated, so are the references to *kridāgrīha* (sports stadium) as well as the scenes of revelry in Laṅkā. More than one sports-stadium has been found at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, and there are several sculptures portraying revelry. It is more than probable that Laṅkā's description is based on an Indo-Roman city like Amarāvati and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, while that of Ayodhyā is based on that of Taxila.

Hence it has been thought advisable to give a description of the « palaces » exposed at Taxila, together with their plans. As Marshall said more than twenty-five years ago this is the only city so far revealed by archaeology. Even now this remains true and would probably remain true unless a concerted attempt is made by the various agencies to find out what the ancient cities in India actually were.

At Sirkap (Taxila) no less than three palace complexes together with their temples were brought to light. Each palace complex has a number of « courts ». The various *kakṣas* mentioned by the *Rāmāyaṇa* while describing the residence of Daśaratha and Rama should be very similar to these. As the author of the present study pointed out long ago in an article on « Houses and Habitations through the ages », the square plan, that is, the central square (*catuśśālā*) around which various rooms or apartments were located, remained until recently the principal architectural feature of a small or large house or palace in India³.

Again this is the only city of the early historical period, most probably contemporary of the cities described in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, where such straight roads, flanked by shops have been found, Hence photographs of these have also been reproduced here from Marshall.

Along with these have also been reproduced scenes of revelry from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, the amphora, and wine cups from Taxila and elsewhere, and the photos of Romans or Indo-Romans found from the same city.

In this context, one should mention again the signet-rings from Taxila, as well as the *Gaja-Lakṣmī* and *ihāmṛigas* from Bharhut, Sanchi and Western Indian caves, particularly Nasik and Amaravati.

It should be emphasized that the signet-ring does not figure among the ornaments at Sanchi even in the later period⁴.

All these singly and cumulatively would demonstrate the impact of Roman contact on India in the early centuries of the Christian era. It is very likely that when further excavations take place in India or the existing finds are studied more critically we might find still more evidence of this contact.

3. H. D. SANKALIA, *BDCRI*, vol. XX, 1958, pp. 137-63.

4. M. K. DHAVALIKAR, *Ajanta - A Cultural Study*, Poona, 1973, p. 76.

Such excavations would be particularly welcome to understand the development of our conventional arms, such as the *gadā*, the bow, arrow, sword and the spear, and the shield and the defensive armour. At present we have the most reliable evidence, again from the excavations at Sirkap (Taxila).

This undoubtedly shows what tremendous growth in type and technique took place after the Indo-Greek, Parthian and Saka invasions⁵. This fortunately is distinctly documented by the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Anyway, the picture that we have from this study of the material aspects of life depicted in the *Rāmāyaṇa* is not unusual, and fully believable. What is remarkable, and what has remained an ideal throughout the centuries is the character of Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Sītā and Hanumān. This has remained constant in spite of interpolations.

The observance of *Dharma* has been regarded as an ideal. Whenever an occasion arises this has been emphasized by all — Rāma and Sītā, by the Vānaras — as well as the Rākṣasas — by Vibhīṣaṇa and Mālyavān, and at the end by Supārśva. It is this insistence on the observance of *Dharma*, one's duty to one's father, or parents — and one's profession that has caught the imagination of people in India. Naturally, among these the characters of Rāma and Sītā stand out most prominently. Rāma came to be regarded as an ideal king, and a dutiful son and husband; Sītā and ideal of Indian womanhood: ever chaste, bold, brave, but dutiful, so much so that she gave up her life to prove her innocence.

Rāma, as a true popular ruler, cares for the opinion of his people and exiles Sītā against his conscience, as we are told specifically.

Lakṣmaṇa once again carries out his elder brother's orders, at the cost of his life, first by stopping Durvāsā and then by allowing him to meet Rāma when he was told not to allow anybody to enter his residence. Thus the three main characters in the epic remain true to their *dharma*.

With regard to other concepts, moral or ethical, philosophical and metaphysical as well as some social customs we do observe some changes from *kāṇḍa* to *kāṇḍa*. All these have been noted and fully discussed. These, though few, reflect the changes taking place in the Hindu Society, owing to the impact of the political events. Specially noticeable is the hardening of the *Varṇa-āśrama-dharma* and the open or regular observance of the *Satī*. This was completely absent in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, and even in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, but is specifically referred to in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*.

Thus in one way or another this hypercritical study of the *Rāmāyaṇa* has helped to make our knowledge of the past more precise. It will

5. After this was written, have appeared, as noted earlier two works by G. N. PANT. Both these, but particularly the second one on *Indian Archery* corroborate what the author has been emphasizing. To make the point easily understandable, the arrows from Taxila as found by Marshall and the conventional ones illustrated by a manuscript of *Dhanurveda* have been illustrated.

become more so, as archaeology refines its tools and techniques. For it was with the assistance of the latter that the study was initially attempted.

As far as the problem of Laṅkā is concerned it can only be shown here on a detailed consideration of the epigraphical evidence, that from at least the fourth century B.C. Siṁhala and Laṅkā were regarded as different. The former was also known as *Tāmraparṇi dvīpa*. The original Laṅkā must be somewhere, preferably in eastern Madhya Pradesh, western Orissa-Andhra trijunction. However, by the fourth century A.D., it was believed to be in the Indian ocean but still not identified with Siṁhala. Thus both Laṅkā and Siṁhala, though believed to be islands in the ocean, were regarded as separate. Only in the last couple of centuries the Indian mind has come to identify Laṅkā with Siṁhala, and the same as Ceylon or Śrī Laṅkā. At the moment Sonapur on the confluence of the Tel and Mahanadi, District Bolangir, Western Orissa has been identified as the Western Laṅkā, mentioned in a 9th-10th inscription from Sonpur Inscription of Kumāra Someśvaradeva (*EI*. vol. 12, 1913-14, p. 37). Preliminary investigation also showed that the site is very old, going back to at least 5th century B.C. There are also remains of fortification and potsherds of various historical periods as well as iron tools and weapons were collected from the mounds. A large hoard of Silver Punch marked coins was also found here some 30 years ago. Excavations, which have been planned, should give very interesting results.

Finally, as far as the question of deification of Rāma is concerned, it can be definitely said that it was a very gradual development. In fact, almost all the deities, Vedic as well as non-Vedic or Puranic, figure but little in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Śiva plays no part in the main story, Viṣṇu appears very gradually, and prominently only in the *Bālakāṇḍa* and *Uttarakāṇḍa*, when Rāma is fully identified with Viṣṇu, Kriṣṇa, Nārāyaṇa, and Sītā with Lakṣmī. Though this identification took place about the fifth century A.D., still it took a couple of centuries for Rāma to be actually worshipped. This is proved best archaeologically, though it was well surmised by the late Prof. G.H. Bhatt, the General Editor of the *Rāmāyaṇa*⁶. First came the depiction of scenes from the epic in Viṣṇu and probably Śiva temples in Madhya Pradesh, then in Andhra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, in the south and Gujarat and Rajasthan in the north. It was at this time, seventh century that Rāmāyaṇa was carried across to the Indian colonies in south-east Asia.

6. G. H. BHATT, *The Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, vol. I, *Bālakāṇḍa*, Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1960, p. XXXIII.