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VĀLMĪKI RĀMĀYAṆA - THE ENGLISH EXPOSITION
OF C.R. SRINIVASA AYYANGAR: AN APPRAISAL

The *Rāmāyaṇa* still enjoys the popularity in the world true to the prophecy made in the epic itself. Its story furnishes the subject of many other Sanskrit poems and plays. It still delights the hearts of myriads of Indian listeners as and when expositions are made by exponents, especially during the annual Rāmanavami festival lasting for nine days. During the last hundred and fifty years several editions and translations of the *Rāmāyaṇa* have been brought out. One of the English renderings is that of C. R. Srinivasa Ayyangar published during the years 1910 to 1932. A specific feature of this English rendering is that it is not a mere translation, but it incorporates the rich cream from the popular commentaries and South Indian manuscript traditions as well. It is intended to present here a few specimens from his English rendering and explain how the author has succeeded in his efforts to bring out the spirit and sentiment of poet Vālmīki.

He quotes the views of Max Müller and Mrs. Annie Besant about the translations of the Sanskrit texts in general and states: «*The best test of a translation is that it must not at all appear to be a translation.* Some hold that a translation must be a guide to the text, a 'crib' as it were, and should enable any one ignorant of the original language to master it easily and sooner. I believe that a translation is meant to convey to a foreigner, the thoughts, the ideas and the heart of the writer; it is not to be a dictionary and a grammar combined. A faithful translation and a literal are contradictory terms; no word-for-word, a

wooden rendering can be any other thing than faithless; and no good translation can be literal».

We find the following note at the end of his exposition of the first chapter of the *Sundarakāṇḍa* expressing his critical appreciation of Vālmiki. «Vālmiki's pen picture: this Canto is, as it were, a huge portrait gallery. Vālmiki has shown himself a master painter, equally at home and peerless in every branch of it, individual portraits, groups, landscapes and battle scenes. Māruti's wonderful leap over the sea is, in a way, a series of such pen pictures. His gradual passage through the air affords the poet a fine scope of presenting us with various views of it from the shores he left behind him and of the expanse that lay before him. We then have a bird's eye view of Lankā from his lofty perch on high, from the seashore, from the crest of mount Trikūṭa, from the city walls. He paints for us the capital itself as it lay under the eye of Hanumān who ranged over it».

I conclude my paper with a specimen from the exposition of the *Ādityahṛdaya* hymn imparted by Agastya to Rāma occurring in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*. Srinivasa Ayyangar begins his exposition thus: «Maharṣi Agastya was one of those that came there with the *deva* host to witness the wonderful battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa. He observed that Rāvaṇa was fatigued after a hard fight but faced Rāma once again with boundless anger; he also noted that Rāma himself was sunk in thought how to overcome Rāvaṇa without revealing his supreme divinity. So he drew near Raghuvīra and addressed him». Then Mr. Ayyangar explains the different names in the hymn.

At the conclusion of this hymn he writes: «The Lord of the Day cast a look of supreme affection at Rāma, who praised him there. He was supremely pleased at his devotion and the praise, his hair stood on end as he said: 'This Lord of the *rākṣasas* has met his fate'. With this blessing he addressed himself to Rāma from his place among the gods on high and said: 'Rāma lose no time in sending Rāvaṇa to his doom'». Mr. Ayyangar explains further thus: «The Sun came down from his orb to have a better view of the battle and stood in the sky near to the place taken by Rāma in the battle-field and blessed him with the fruit of his devotional hymn». But later on we find that Brahmā, Rudra and Indra and others proclaim with one voice that Rāma was the Lord Nārāyaṇa himself and so he is greater than the

greatest, the Lord Viṣṇu. But here we find that the sun is described as being endowed with all such perfections. The solution to this problem is - in the *Chāndogyopaniṣad* we find that Āditya is the presiding deity of the *Madhuvidyā*; however, it is the inner ruler of the sun, the Supreme Lord that should be adored thereby, he is verily the objective thereof as the Maharṣi Vedavyāsa teaches us in the *Brahmasūtras*. So this praise has as its objective deity the Supreme Lord that is the inner ruler of Āditya himself. This story of Rāma teaches us from the beginning to the end that the Lord Nārāyaṇa is the Supreme One.

The foregoing account highlights the method of the English exposition done by Srinivasa Ayyangar and his critical analysis.