

V. VENKATACHALAM

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

Mr. Chairman and friends,

*Lakṣmīm tanotu nitarām-itarānapekṣam
nḡhridvayam nigama-śākhī-sikhā-pravālam /
hairambam-amburuha-ḡambara-caurya-nighnam
vighnādri-bheda-śatadhāra-dhurandharam naḡ //¹*

*Kūjantam rāma rāmeti madhuram madhurākṣaram /
āruhya kavītā-śākhām vande vālmīki-kokilam //²*

*namo'stu rāmāya salakṣmaṇāya devyai ca tasyai
janakātmajāyai /
namo'stu rudrendra-yamānilebhyo namo'stu
candrārka-marud-gaṇebhyaḡ //³*

1. *Rāmāyaṇacampū* of Bhoja, 1.1

This is the first invocatory stanza addressed to the god Gaṇeśa for the removal of obstacles.

2. This *śloka* paying homage to Vālmīki is one of the many verses chanted by all devout Indians before commencing the traditional *pārāyana* (= ritualistic reading or recitation) of *Rāmāyaṇa*. This is the 4th *śloka* in the Smārta tradition, the 1st in the Śrī-Vaiṣṇava tradition and the 10th in the Mādhva tradition.

After this traditional invocation to God Gaṇeśa, the remover of obstacles and the homage to Vālmīki and to Sītā, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and the many gods guarding and sustaining the world, through the verse placed in the mouth of Hanumān by Vālmīki, I deem it my first duty to offer my homage, on behalf of all the scholars assembled here, to the memory of the late Gaspare Gorresio of this ancient town.

It is the pioneering work of this Italian scholar in the field of editing and translating the great epic of India that has been instrumental to our meeting here for the last four days under the auspices of CESMEO.

As I think of Gorresio's work, my mind takes me back to the other well known European savant who translated *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* into English verse sitting in Vārāṇasī, the premier seat of Sanskrit learning in India for centuries past. I am sure this celebrated translator R. T. H. Griffith needs no introduction to this scholarly audience. But not all of you may be aware that Dr. Griffith worked as a Principal of the then Government Sanskrit College of Benares, which has now become the Sampurnanand Sanskrit University of Vārāṇasī, of which I had the honoured privilege of being the Vice-Chancellor till recently.

I mention this here to inform this congregation of *Rāmāyaṇa*-scholars and the élite of this town that we have a beautiful symbolic monument for Griffith in the campus of the Sanskrit University, which is celebrating its second centenary this year. The monument comprises a small ornamental enclosure with a simple replica in stone of the *Rāmāyaṇa*-book, mounted on a decorated stone platform, with a verse⁴ from the opening *sarga* engraved on the page of the open book. There is also a beautiful Sanskrit verse by an anonymous *pandit* commemorating the event of Griffith's epoch-making translation of Vālmīki's monumental epic:

3. VRā., *Sundarakāṇḍa*, 11.59 (The critical edition published from Baroda has been used for citing references from *Rāmāyaṇa*).

This prayer is uttered by Hanumān just on the eve of his entering the Aśokavanikā, where his efforts to find out Sītā were going to be crowned with success after all the unsuccessful adventures he made earlier in Rāvaṇa's harem.

4. The verse engraved on the stone-replica of the book is
idam pavitraṁ pāpagnaṁ puṇyam vedaiśca sammitam
yaḥ paṭhed-rāmācaritaṁ sarvapāpāṅgāṁ pramucyate

VRā., *Bālakāṇḍa*, 1.77

«This is the very place where Griffith sat in comfort and translated into his own language the heroic life of Viṣṇu (as Rāma), sung by the bard on the bank of the Tamasā river, i.e. Vālmīki».

*tamasā-tāṭa-kokilena yac-caritam kūjitam-ūrjitam hareḥ /
tad-ihaiṅva niṣīdatā sukham griphithenātma-girāpyagīyata ॥⁵*

My purpose in referring to this monument and these details is only to suggest that Dr. Gaspare Gorresio's memorable work, which included an edition of the whole text – excellently brought out according to the standards of those days (it may be recalled that the first Volume of the text came out in 1843) as well as its Italian translation, certainly deserves a similar monument in this town, which was the centre of his activities.

I cannot think of a better forum than this august Conference of Sanskrit scholars assembled from all over the world to place my suggestion before Prof. Oscar Botto, the President of CESMEO and the *sūtradhāra* of this Conference, for his kind consideration and taking necessary steps to have it implemented at the earliest. I have no doubt in my mind that all of you will extend your whole-hearted support to this proposal. May I now hope, Sir, that you will take up this matter with the appropriate authorities of this town for having a suitable memorial erected for this great savant, who brought a name for Torino and made a distinct contribution to the cultural integration of humanity. I am equally sure that this will prove to be a golden bond binding together the peoples of our two nations, representing two of the most ancient civilizations of the world.

It is equally gratifying to note that the work of the late Gorresio did not stop with him but has acted as a source of inspiration to succeeding generations of scholars in this country to continue on his foot-steps. Prof. Carlo Della Casa has done us a great service by presenting his paper in this Conference on the work done by later scholars emulating the example of Gorresio.

5. A stone tablet with this anonymous Sanskrit verse engraved on it was installed in the Griffith Memorial mentioned above on Māgha 14 of the Vikrama Era 2000 (1943 A. D.) by Nāgarī Pracārīnī Sabhā, Varanasi, in connection with the Golden Jubilee of the Sabhā.

My next pleasant duty is to congratulate Prof. Oscar Botto and Prof. Irma Piovano, the President and Director of CESMEO, not only for organizing this Conference on this grand scale but also for the exemplary arrangements made for our stay, the very warm hospitality and the extremely cordial and affectionate attention we received from their whole team of organizers. In fact it has been a truly unforgettable experience and will remain as such in our memory for long.

If I am called upon to describe the hospitality and warmth we received during all these days in the context of *Vālmīki Rāmāyana*, I would immediately think of the hospitality which sage Bharadvāja extended to the huge army which accompanied Bharata on his way to meet Rāma in the forest. Vālmīki has a full *sarga*⁶ to describe this wonderful episode, when the sage created the whole outfit for cooking and feeding the hundreds of thousands of soldiers and the citizens of Ayodhyā following Bharata, by the miraculous power of his penance and also created the many million-strong army of young beautiful hostesses to serve them all. Apart from the troops of the divine *apsarases* who came down from heaven at his behest, the trees and creepers of the forest around were transformed in their thousands to beautiful girls in their teens to look after the personal comforts of the soldiers, the arrangements for their bathing, their cosmetics, their food and drinks and what not. The soldiers and the citizens were all lifted *en bloc* to a phantom dream-world!

Vālmīki turns to a light vein at the end of the grand feast while describing the response of the soldiers and the citizens to that fantastic experience, the like of which they had never had in their lives, nor were they going to have. Harnessing the immense power of suggestive poetry (*dhvani*, as it is termed by Sanskrit critics), Vālmīki writes that the millions of soldiers and civilians then declared in one voice:

*naivāyodhyāṃ gamiṣyāmo na gamiṣyāma daṇḍakān /
kuśalam bharatasyāstu rāmasyāstu tathā sukham ॥*⁷

6. VRā., *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, *Sarga* 85. This *sarga* is entitled *Bharadvājātithyam* (Hospitality of Bharadvāja) in the M. L. J. Press edition of Madras, which gives a caption for each *sarga*.

7. *ibid.*, 85.55

Freely rendered, this means: «We won't return to Ayodhyā. We won't go forward to the Daṇḍaka forest. Three cheers to Bharata. May he live long! Three cheers to Rāma. May God keep him happy!».

With the kind of hospitality we have enjoyed here during these days of the Conference, we are all in a somewhat similar mood and would say in one voice: «We won't go back to our countries and homes now. We will stay in Torino!».

On behalf of all the delegates from all parts of the world, I heartily thank you, Sir, Prof. Botto, the President, and you, Madam Piovano, the Director of CESMEO for such bountiful love. I am equally happy to say that your spirit was reflected in the same measure in all the members of your enthusiastic team of young men and women from CESMEO and otherwise who have all lavished their affection on us. I shall like to make special mention of Dr. Victor Agostini and Dr. Stefania Stafutti from the staff of CESMEO and of Mrs. Moschetti who willingly placed themselves at the beck and call of the numerous delegates and helped each one of them to solve their individual problems of journey-reservation, money-exchange, transport facilities and so on.

It will not be out of place if I look back in retrospect at the proceedings of the Conference sessions and say a word about the academic output of the Conference. In this connection, I should express my warm appreciation of the care taken by Prof. Botto in the choice of the scholars invited to the Conference to give it a truly international character and make it a fitting tribute to India's greatest poetic genius who used Classical Sanskrit as a vehicle for his poetry.

Apart from countries of the Far East and the east like Japan, Thailand, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and India, western countries are also fairly well represented in the Conference with scholars from Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Germany, United Kingdom and United States of America – all contributing their significant share to the academic quality of the Conference. It is in the fitness of things that the Indian sub-continent which gave *Rāmāyaṇa* to the world and which has an unbroken tradition of *Rāmāyaṇa*-studies for over two millennia should have received the lion's share and be represented by a large contingent of sixteen scholars, judiciously selected to cover the different parts of the country. I shall be failing in my duty if I don't offer a

special word of thanks, on behalf of the people of my country, to the people of Italy in general and to the organizers of this Conference, in particular, for this gesture of supreme goodwill in inducting this large number of *rtvik*-s from India to make their offerings in this *Rāmāyaṇa-jñāna-yajña*.

Vālmiki has universally been acknowledged as the *ādikavi* (first poet) of India; but his greatness did not stop there. Because of the universality of his appeal, his work crossed the Indian shores many centuries ago and struck deep roots in the soil of many eastern countries and became a vital part of the cultural milieu of those nations; thereby preparing the ground for getting a niche for him in the hall of world-poets. In modern times, thanks to the development of closer cultural contacts with the west, Vālmiki's poetry has earned ardent votaries in the west too, thus completing the process of India's *ādikavi* getting crowned as a *viśvakavi* (world-poet)! And in this process, Gaspare Gorresio, born in the soil of Italy, played a truly significant role by introducing the national epic of India to the west through his brilliant edition of the text and its complete Italian translation. To us in India, it is a matter of supreme spiritual satisfaction that the flag of our most ancient national poet is fluttering in the hall of International Poets! This is, in fact, the natural fulfilment of universal poetry, as beautifully stated in this verse of an anonymous poet quoted by Rājaśekhara in his *Kāvyaṁmānsā*⁸:

*ekasya tiṣṭhati kaver-grha eva kāvyam-
anyasa gacchati suhṛd-bhavanāni yāvat /
nyasyāvidagdha-vadaneṣu padāni śaśvat
kasyāpi sañcarati viśva-kutūhalīva //*

Here is my free translation of this *śloka* in English⁹:

«The poetry of a poetaster is confined within the walls of his home; the poetry of many others is a trifle luckier and reaches as far as the houses of their friends; but rare indeed is the phenomenon of

8. *Kāvyaṁmānsā*, *Adhyāya* 4 (p. 34, Chowkhamba ed.).

9. *Bhāsa*, by V. Venkatachalam, monograph published by the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1986; Second ed., 1992.

the inspired poet, whose magical word passes from mouth to mouth of legions of connoisseurs and, like the inquisitive world-traveller, continues its eternal journey till the world's end is reached!».

Vālmiki's poetry, which set out from India eastward on the first lap of its trek around the world, completed it with signal success by landing at Torino in the west towards the middle of the last century. And this International Conference is a fitting culmination of the first phase of the march of Vālmiki's poetry around the wide world.

Thus this first International Conference on *Rāmāyaṇa* may be described as at least a partial vindication of the prophecy contained in the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself that its story will keep circulating in the world as long as mountains stand and rivers flow:

*yāvat sthāsyanti girayaḥ saritas-ca mahītale /
tāvad rāmāyaṇa-kathā lokeṣu pracariṣyati //*

A specially noteworthy feature of this Conference, to my mind, is the wide variety of the themes of the papers presented and the diversity of approaches. I shall content myself with a few broad indications. Some of us from India like Prof. K.V. Sarma and Prof. N. R. Bhatt projected the typical attitude of the Indian tradition of *Rāmāyaṇa* exegesis, even while giving free play to independent individualistic approaches. My own paper was an instance of the immense possibilities of such an independent approach to the study of *Rāmāyaṇa* even within the framework of traditional exegesis.

Prof. Indranath Choudhury, the Secretary of the Sahitya Akademi (India), underlined the need to correlate the study of the ancient epic with contemporary socio-political conditions and problems. The paper presented by Prof. Ramashraya Sharma, on the political character of the Laṅkā state, was also another phase of a similar approach. On the other side, was the very interesting computerized analysis of the numerous names and attributes of Rāma used by Vālmiki and their implications by Prof. Brockington (United Kingdom), with which the Conference opened its deliberations. The paper by Prof. Van Damme (Belgium) attempted to add a new dimension to the character-study of Rāvaṇa by an in-depth probe into a single image used by Vālmiki. Prof. Verpoorten's study of the name Daṇḍakā with a wealth of infor-

mation from Buddhist sources was another instance of such in-depth study of a single word.

There were three papers on "Rāmāyaṇa in the far east". While H. H. Prof. M. C. Diskul (Thailand) made a lucid survey of the differences between the Thai *Rāmakīrti* (*Ramakien*) and *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, Prof. S. Pou (France) presented an incisive analysis of the Khmer-*Rāmāyaṇa* to drive home her point that it is an amalgam of the different cultures to which Cambodia was exposed in different historical periods. The paper by Kapila Vatsyayan (India) on the projections of *Rāmāyaṇa* on the different arts of Asia – a field in which she is an acknowledged authority – was read out. Prof. Sachchidanand Sahai (India) studied Indo-Chinese sources in the same strain; while Prof. N. P. Unni (India) surveyed similar developments in Kerala.

Striking quite a different note, Prof. Guruge (Sri Lanka) raised many issues as well as eye-brows by his erudite presentation of his original thesis regarding the imperviousness of Sri Lanka to *Rāmāyaṇa* exposure, in spite of close geographical and cultural proximity.

Prof. Van Daalen's (the Netherlands) incisive criticism of Prof. Pollock's (United States of America) translations of *Rāmāyaṇa* and his views about the divinity of Rāma, with the latter physically present to answer the criticism, likewise, added a new colour to the deliberations in the Conference. Prof. S. S. Janaki (India) and Prof. A. V. Subramanian (India) covered a different ground through their papers on the impact of *Rāmāyaṇa* on later literature. On the side of character studies, the Satyavrat Shastri *dampatī* (India) presented interesting papers bearing on the *Rāmāyaṇa-dampatī*, Sītā and Rāma. Dr. (Mrs.) Kamal Kumar (India) championed the cause of the women characters in the context of changed social values, whereas Dr. Mohapatra (India) attempted to unravel the mystery of Kumbhakarṇa. Prof. Banerjee (India) presented a thought-provoking paper on the philosophical thoughts interspersed in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, while Prof. J. P. Sinha (India) and Prof. S. Kantawala (India) presented the materials on *Dharmaśāstra* and the institution of marriage in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

The field of comparative studies which provide a fertile ground for fruitful research did not go unrepresented. Prof. Morgenroth (Germany) compared the *Rāmopākhyāna* with *Vālmiki's* epic, Prof. G. Pollet compared *Rāmāyaṇa* with *Brajabhāṣā* literature and Prof.

Hara covered certain unexplored linguistic aspects by a comparative study of the phrases in *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*. The Conference organized on the soil of Italy, naturally enough, included two papers written in Italian. Besides the paper by Prof. Della Casa which I mentioned earlier, there was another paper by Prof. Piano on the Rāmā-story in the *Purāṇas*.

The deliberations and particularly the discussions as well as the questions and answers were all carried on in the true spirit of what Indian logicians have described as *vāda*, defined as *tattva-bubhutsu-kathā* (a dialogue conducted with the pure objective of getting at the truth) with no trace of its other two counterparts: *jalpa* (where the aim is to browbeat or defeat the opponent) and *vitandā* which has the unhealthy distinction of a dispute carried on to bring about the discomfiture of the opponent without seeking to prove or say anything.

I have reserved for the last, what I consider to be the most important point of my address before the organizers of this Conference as the first phase of the progress of the march of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* around the world. It will be a truly fitting tribute to the universality of this *viśva-kavi* (world-poet) if his trek around the world with Torino as his destination does not stop with this Conference.

As a natural continuation of this activity and as its fitting culmination, I wish to place this humble suggestion before Prof. Botto that the time is now quite ripe for the establishment of a permanent International Centre for *Rāmāyaṇa*-studies on this very soil of Torino, which gave the world the first edition of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. Such a centre could do the invaluable work of coordinating studies on *Vālmīki* and his work and thereby serve as a perennial cultural bridge between the East and the West.

I need hardly say that there is infinite scope for directions of studies and other activities, which could be undertaken by such an International Centre. My vision of this Centre is as a fine meeting ground for some of the best talents in the Indological field in the East and the West and help to harmonize the western and eastern approaches and end the apparent dichotomy that sometimes surfaces between them. Such a meeting ground is, in my opinion, a desideratum for the development of international understanding.

Let me illustrate my point with a random example. It has become a sort of fashion now to speak of the European and Indian theories regarding the date of Kālidāsa, the greatest name in Sanskrit Literature – the former placing him in the 5th century with Candragupta Vikramāditya and the latter insisting on his association with Vikramāditya of Ujjain, the founder of the Vikrama Era in the first century B. C. This kind of branding theories as western and eastern is nothing but preposterous. The very idea of a European date and an Indian date for Kālidāsa – or for that matter, for any text or its author – cannot make sense. But it still persists. This is true not only of Kālidāsa, which I chose as a random illustration, but of many other texts and authors. This is nothing but the result of the absence of free intercommunication and the absence of a proper forum for fruitful dialogue on such issues affecting Sanskrit or Indological studies. The divinity of Rāma as opposed to his humanity – a problem which surfaced, for a while, in this Conference too – is another such issue relevant to *Rāmāyaṇa*. There are myriad such issues where properly organized dialogues in the true spirit of the *tattva-bubhutsu-kathā*, I mentioned earlier, can lead to a proper understanding and appreciation of the opposite side and help to narrow down the differences and eventually resolve the apparent deadlock.

What Kipling thought in the last century saying: «The twain shall never meet», meaning that the East and the West can never meet, might have been a true perception of his times but it can no longer be true under modern conditions when the world itself has shrunk beyond all imagination and the phrase “global village” has become a cliché. Such a true meeting of the East and West under the umbrella of the International Centre we conceive of can ultimately pave the way for the unravelling of the ultimate Truth (mark the capital “T”!), in the march towards which, we are all wayfarers.

Thank you.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The International Prize "Torino e l'Oriente"

On October 14th 1987, the **Regione Piemonte**, the **Provincia di Torino**, the **Comune di Torino** and the **CESMEO** (International Institute for Advanced Asian Studies) established the International Prize «Torino e l'Oriente». The Prize is awarded every other year to an outstanding scholar in the fields of Indology (including Tibetan, Nepalese and other South-East Asian Studies), Japanology (including Koreanology) and Sinology. It consists of a Prize of Lit. 80.000.000 and honours a life-work.

For the first Edition of the Prize, whose ceremony took place on May 18th, 1988, Professor **Jan Gonda**, Utrecht University, was awarded.

For the second Edition, whose ceremony took place on November 28th, 1990, Professor **Jacques Gernet**, Collège de France and Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, was awarded.

Cesmeo Prizes

CESMEO Administrative Board on November 30th 1988 established two Prizes of Lit. 10.000.000 to be awarded to a single work of particular cultural and scientific value in the field of Oriental Studies.

Prof. Christoph Harbsmeier, University of Oslo, for his works *Grammatica Universalis* and *Aspects of Classical Chinese Syntax*, and Prof. Richard W. Larivière, University of Austin (Texas), for his edition of the *Nārada-smṛiti* have been awarded.