

# संस्कृतबार्ता

रामायण विशेषांक

२०८० विक्रम संवत्

भाग २ संख्या १



*News & Review*  
*January, 2024*



संस्कृतविभागम्

दुर्गापुर सरकारी महाविद्यालय

पश्चिमबङ्ग सरकार



Ramayana manuscript, Mewari paintings, Rajasthan, 1653 CE

## In This Issue

- |   |         |
|---|---------|
| 1. Letter from the Principal              | 2       |
| 2. Letter from the Head of the Department | 3       |
| 3. Present Faculty Members                | 4       |
| 4. Departmental Highlights                | 6 – 10  |
| 5. Reprint                                | 11 – 34 |

The Ramayana in Historical Perspective  
H. D. Sankalia

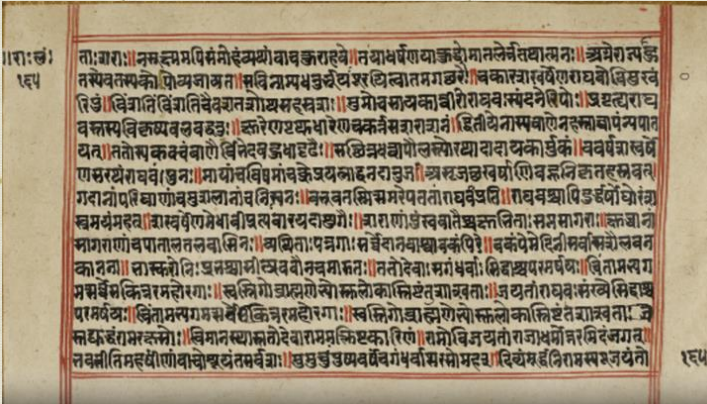
## Letters from the Principal

संस्कृत विभागेर संवादवाहीपत्र (News letter) संस्कृतवार्ता प्रकाशित हच्चे जेने तीषण आनन्दित ओ खुशि हलाम। एहि News letter प्रकाशेर



साथे युक्त विभागेर विभागीय प्रधान ओ अन्याय सहकर्मिंदेर जानाई आन्तरिक कृतज्ञता ओ धन्यवाद। विभागेर छात्रछात्रींदेर जानाई शुभेच्छा ओ आशीर्वाद। छात्र-छात्रींदेर बहुमुखी प्रतिभा प्रकाशेर अन्यतम माध्यम हल विभागेर News letter। संस्कृत विभाग साराबहरव्यापी प्रथागत लेखापड़ा वानेओ विभिन्न रकमेर अनुष्ठानेर

आयोजन करे थाकेन, ता सतई प्रशंसनीय ओ साधुवादयोग्य। आगामी दिने आरोो ভালो News letter एहि विभाग प्रकाश करवे एहि आशा राखि। एहि पत्रिकार प्रकाशेर सङ्गे युक्त संश्लिष्ट सकलके धन्यवाद ओ अभिनन्दन जानाई।



Ramayana Manuscript: Rāma slays Rāvaṇa



## Letter from the Head of the Department

According to Acharya Charaka, six primary qualities are necessary for proper obtainment of knowledge. They are Cognition, Argument, Science, Memory, Alacrity and Activity. Somehow this ancient thought has influenced our current educational policy and procedure in a broader way. So, it is clearly inferred that only basic classroom-oriented teaching procedure is not sufficient in our present academic system. If we try to analyse the sloka from *Charakasamhita* quoted above we will find that after collecting information from various sources, students need to acquire some more skill to comprehend as well as to apply particular cognition in practical life. For that reason, a sense of argument to build a proper logical structure is required; similarly, use of science or memory is needed. For the application of knowledge, alacrity, and activity these two attributes are important. Hence to form a proper academic environment in our department, we have adopted some activities in regular basis in our curriculum. A detailed report of those activities is hereby presented in our departmental newsletter namely संस्कृतवार्ता.



From the behalf of our department, I like to congratulate as well as to convey my heartfelt wishes to all.

Best Wishes.

## Present Faculty Members

**Dr. Debamitra Dey**  
Associate Professor & HOD

**Sudeshna Dey**  
Assistant Professor

**Dr. Sudipta Bhakat**  
Assistant Professor

**Kakali Ghosh**  
State Aided College Teacher



Ramayana Manuscript: Rāma slays Rāvaṇa

लवणाः क्रोभं स्रक्तो वरुणादाय विदितः ॥ आकर्ण्य च त्रिकलाय तद्वदं चिन्तितः ॥ सुमोचतं प्रज्ञावाणं शत्रुघ्नं तदा वरुणा  
 रसि ॥ सुव्यग्रात्तस्य तस्याश्च शशे तदा न भवत् ॥ रवी जया सिध्यमानं रूपं मधे विवाहसं ॥ दासमानः सता वृद्धका वृत्तं वलं शत्रु  
 धोपमः ॥ सचोरकस्य निज्जिद्युत्त विवेकास्मात्तलं ॥ स्नात्वा स्नात्वा तले दिव्याः शोरे विचक्षर जितः ॥ उग्रं वागं मन्त्रं लोकां कृत्वा कृत्वा  
 लुप्तं नृपं ॥ शत्रुघ्नं शत्रु निज्जिद्युत्त लवणाः सजिज्ञानरः ॥ पूपात्तं सुसुस्मात्तमौ वक्रास्तं प्रवाच लः ॥ सच्चक्षरं मद्रिद्यं हंतं लवणा  
 राकसः ॥ एष तौ सर्वं च तानां क इत्यकरं मुच्यतात् ॥ ततः संदेवर्षिगणाः सुपर्णां प्रचक्षिरे सा सरसं स्यासिद्यः ॥ दिव्या जयो दावा रये  
 तवाय दिव्या लोकाः सर्वं रव्यं प्रसन्नाः ॥ एक उपाते प्रनयं निहस्य लोकां प्रयुत्वा ॥ पिरुषु यवीरः ॥ ततो विराय्यो यर राजनीर सुयौ यो  
 यो वा कस हं प्रसिः ॥ ॥ इत्युत्तं कां डे लवणा वृष्ठा नाम संज्ञा ॥ ॥ इते तु लवणा देवाः सिद्धाः सापि उरोगाः ॥ कृष्णः स प्रक्षरं वाणी वा  
 उच्यते तामने ॥ दिव्याने विज्यो वक्तु दिव्या लवणा राकसः ॥ इतः उरुयवा ईलः वं वरुणा वव ॥ वरुत्तं सहाया हो मर्व रवस्य  
 गताः ॥ विज्यो को क्लिण क्लम्य म मोयं यो नैरना ॥ देवादीनां पितृकृत्वा तदा हृदि कृतो जलिः ॥ अत्युत्तं चमहो ते जा उच्यते ॥ पय  
 तास्य वा ॥ इत्ये म सुचुरी रम्या प्रधरा देव निर्दिता ॥ निवेनां छात्रुया सी ॥ इमे पवपरो वरः ॥ मुदेवाः ॥ अत प्रदेसा वा इति मिया घवो ॥ इ  
 दिव्यती यं मारी प्रधरे से वं चिह्नता ॥ तथा बोक्ता प्रहया हो दिवे ते वि विच्छसदा ॥ शत्रुघ्नो पिमहा ते जा कदा से तो सुमा ह्यं नृ ॥ सी  
 मना श्री इ माग ह्यं कृत्वा शत्रु विनाशने ॥ निवेनां मे च शत्रु विमः श्ववणं न तदा करो व ॥ सा उरी विद्यमं कात्रा वर्वं श्रु प्रशो भनवत्  
 निविशुचुरे से ना नो विषये वा कता मया ॥ केजा एि शो देवी निज्जको देवः अवहेते ॥ अतो मवीर उक्तो शत्रुघ्न उ न पत्निता ॥ व  
 प्र उक्तो रसे पद्मगो ॥ उरा ध्वजं संदृशा ॥ शो निता रा मशो गी ल ना ना पय्य विम्विता ॥ उचा न वेदमं पना सप हव ल संदृशा ॥ अ ई वे ई घ  
 ती का रो यं उ ना ती र मा छिता ॥ शो निता य ह सु लो च्यं वल रै रो षो क्त्वा ॥ नाना देवा गे ध्या वि प्र छि दि क्त वा ॥ निताः स पद्मो ना स पृ  
 हा र्यः शत्रुघ्नो लस्यो क्त जः ॥ निरीक्ष्य परम स्त्री तां परं ह वै उ पा ग मय्य ॥ अक्षते न म स्त तां तं लवणा म क्तं उपा ॥ शो प्रया मा स म् वी री ना  
 ना प प स ह दिदिता ॥ तनाः सता प्रम र उ रो पशो उरी निवेत्त प वि ल्यं य ग्रा ह ती त दा मी ॥ न रा वि पो र प प ति पा व द र्शने म दि त्थो र सु क्त



The Mewar Ramayan (selected folio), British Library Add. MS 15297(2) ff.87v  
 (text) and 88r (picture) Sita sent to the hermitage of sage Valmiki, gives birth to  
 twin sons Lava and Kusa, here singing the story



## Departmental Highlights

In this academic year (2023-2024), a departmental meeting was called at the beginning of the session to discuss the curriculum of the syllabus of the University and to evaluate our previous experiences. At that meeting fresh modalities were chalked out for the upcoming academic year especially how to teach our students whose school education was completed during the pandemic. We have taken some decisions to engage our students in their respective courses through various alternatives. Such as, we have decided to continue the extensive students' seminar (namely *Pathachakra*) at least twice in a month which was started last year. We have tried to involve students of all semester to create departmental wall magazine on a quarterly basis. We have conducted an educational tour and it was quite a successful one. We have planned to organize a programme namely 'Dhimahi' by esteemed scholars of our discipline. But due to lack of funds from the college we could not organize that. In this coming session we have a plan to conduct another educational tour as well as those invited lectures (the programme 'Dhimahi') by esteemed scholars of our discipline too. As we have to adopt the new educational policy prescribed by the UGC, so we have to form some interesting methods to bring back our students' attention, enthusiasm and engagement to their respective courses. With the heartfelt support of all faculty members of our department, we sincerely wish to continue the process in future.

## Wall Magazine Publication

Our students took great effort to publish our departmental wall magazine. We are proud to announce that this time the theme of our departmental wall magazine is **Srimadbhagavadgita**.





## Parent Teacher Meeting



We have organized a parent teacher meeting of 5th semester honours and programme students of our departments. It was a successful one and we have received valuable important feedback from them. We have plan to act as per their feedback received.

We have organized a parent teacher meeting of 3rd semester honours and programme students of our departments. It was a successful one and we have received valuable important feedback from them. We have plan to act as per their feedback received.



## Students Achievements

### Quiz & Extempore Competition



Our Student Pradip Das had participated in a Quiz Competition organized by Durgapur Women's College. It is our pride to announced that he has secured 2nd position in that competition. Our heartfelt congratulation to him.



## Students Achievements

### Marathon Race



Not only in academic sphere but our students have made their mark in sports also. Pradip Das, our student has participated in a Marathon race organized by Gopalpur Jatiya Sangha and secured a position.



## *Reprints*

*This article is taken from the 'Introduction' of the book titled 'The Ramayana in Historical Perspective' by H.D. Sankalia, first published in 1982 by Macmillan India Limited.*

## **THE RAMAYANA IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

**H. D. Sankalia**

For nearly two thousand years the Ramayana has been regarded as one of India's twin epics. Unlike the Mahabharata it is regarded both as a poem *adikavya*—as well as a purana, an *itihasa*, the source of all knowledge and wisdom, to be resorted to not only in times of need, but to be recited daily. Thus, in one way or another, the Ramayana has had a more pervading, all-embracing appeal. Its single theme, the characters of Rama and Sita, Lakshmana and Hanuman are popularly remembered by all whereas the Mahabharata with its varied themes and characters could attract a comparatively limited number of readers and listeners.

As a result of this universal appeal, Rama came to be regarded as a god, as an *amsa* (semi-incarnation) of Vishnu and believed to have ruled on this earth thousands of years ago—according to one view some hundred



thousands of years ago-and *ramarajya* came to be cherished as the ideal state.

A definite fillip to this age-old belief was given by the poet- saint Tulsidas. It is due to him that more than fifty per cent of the names of persons-both male and female-in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have Rama as the first part of the name; there are numerous temples of Rama and Hanuman and Varanasi is known today for its magnificent temples of Rama and '*Shankat Mochan*' (The Reliever of Difficulties, i.e., Hanuman). And what Tulsidas did for the popularization of the Ramayana in the north, Ramdas achieved in Maharashtra. It is due to this revival of the Rama-Hanuman cult that in Pune and in several villages and towns of Maharashtra every street-corner enshrines the figure of Maruti and has at least one temple of Rama and Sita.



To this long legacy, Gandhi added one more. He made it a practice to recite *Ramanama* at least twice a day in his *prarthanas*. This, in brief, is the traditional view towards Rama and the Ramayana. In this view there was at no time an attempt to question the historicity of Rama or his times or the various incidents in the *Ramayana* or to regard Rama as less than a god.

The historical and critical interpretation of Indian classics is generally believed to have begun over a hundred years ago, when European scholars started taking interest in Indian literature, particularly in Sanskrit literature.



Weber was probably the first scholar to write a critique of the *Ramayana*<sup>1</sup>, after the publication of Gorresio's edition of the epic<sup>2</sup>.

However, before we proceed, credit must be given to Bhavabhuti who, as early as the seventh century, in his *Uttararamacharita*, questioned through Lava and Kusha and then through *Prithivi* the actions of Rama—his killing of Vali, and his not accepting the purity or chastity of Sita, even though she had come out of the fire unscathed immediately after the defeat of Ravana. Earlier still, Kalidasa's *Sita* called him (Rama) a raja (a mere king) when she was exiled and poor Lakshmana had to carry out the delicate duty of leaving her in the forest.

The verses are worth quoting. Prithivi says:

न प्रमाणीकृतः पाणिर्बाल्ये बालेन पीडितः ।  
नाहं न जनको नाग्निर्नानुवृत्तिर्न सन्ततिः ॥

(उत्तररामचरितं, vii.5)

Sita says:

वाच्यस्त्वया मद्रचनात्स राजा बह्वौ विशुद्धामपि यत्मुक्षिम् ।  
मां लोकवादश्रवणादहासीः श्रुतस्य किं तत्सदृशं कुलस्य ॥

(रघुवंश, xiv.61)

These instances prove that Rama's acts did not go unchallenged as early as fifteen hundred years ago, when Brahminism reigned supreme, and Hinduism was still not corrupted.

---

<sup>1</sup> A. Weber, *The Ramayana*, trans. from the German by D.C. Boyd, Bombay, 1873.

<sup>2</sup> Guspere Gorresio, *Valmiki's Ramayana*, Parigi, 1843-67 (in six volumes).

### THREE PROBABLE LANKAS IN M.P.



A review of the studies shows that they may be classified into four or five groups. These groups represent the two extremes as well as the various stages in between. There is even a view that the *Ramayana* is a

mythological poem—the product of a poet's fancy, and thus falls beyond the pale of historical and critical interpretation.

This last point merits brief consideration since on its proper understanding will rest the superstructure of the present study. Granted the *Ramayana* is primarily a poem, still a poet any—where in India or elsewhere—must belong to a certain time and environment. Even Dante's *Divine Comedy* represents the religio-philosophical views of an Italian author who lived in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. A work like *The Divine Comedy* could not have been written earlier. Even a Sanjaya would see and describe only things pertaining to his times, however distant these may be. Once this point of view is accepted—and it must be as it is axiomatic—only then are we justified in studying a poem or a drama critically from the historical, archaeological, literary, psychological and other points of view.

We should enjoy the *Ramayana* as a poem, as we should continue to admire Rama and Sita, Lakshmana and Hanuman for the ideal of kingly and filial duties, of feminine chastity and fidelity and of selfless service that they embody. For centuries these virtues have struck the deepest chords in the human heart, and every one of these characters has been idolized and worshipped as a divine incarnation. Nevertheless, such an attitude should not rule out a multifaceted, critical study, either of the *Ramayana*, or for that matter of any of our religious or philosophical books. On the contrary, critical studies like the one I have attempted here will enable us to appreciate better the part played by each character.

Barring the poetic treatment of the Rama-theme and the casual criticism by Bhasa<sup>3</sup>, Kalidasa, Dinnaga or Dhiranaga and Bhavabhuti, the rest of the

---

<sup>3</sup>Two plays, *Pratima* and *Abhishekanataka*, are among the thirteen plays attributed to Bhasa. The latter play seems to be quite late, as in it Rama and Sita are identified respectively with four-armed Vishnu and Lakshmi. See T. Ganapati Sastri, *Abhishekanataka*, Trivandrum Sanskrit Series, No. 26, Trivandrum, 1913; and A.D. Pusalkar, *Bhasa—A Study*, Delhi, 1968.



critical studies belong to the last hundred years or so. These, as mentioned earlier, fall into several groups.

Before citing the modern, critical views about the age and growth of the *Ramayana*, a brief reference must be made to the traditional views. These are not unanimous and vary widely in their estimates of the period when Rama lived.

On the one hand there is the view that Rama lived in the *treta yuga*, nearly a million years ago, and on the other Rama is viewed to have lived in 8, 67 or 102 B.C.<sup>4</sup>

But this is contradicted by the *Ramayana* itself. In the *Uttarakanda*<sup>5</sup>, we are led to assume that Rama belonged to the *dvaparyuga*. According to one calculation this would be just before 3100 B.C., that is, more than 5000 years ago. Interestingly enough, this is roughly supported by a Sri Lankan tradition<sup>6</sup>. These traditions were accepted, uncritically we think, by a few European and Indian scholars like William Jones<sup>7</sup>, Count Bjornstjerna and Ramaswami Sastri<sup>8</sup>. And the result is that both the illiterate and the well-educated always think that Rama and Krishna lived thousands of years ago and very often demand visible proof of their existence from archaeologists. One of the aims of this study is to collect these 'visible proofs' and discuss their bearing on the date of Rama and the *Ramayana*.

---

<sup>4</sup> K.S. Ramaswami Sastri, *Studies in the Ramayana*, Baroda, 1944, p. 23; and Ananda Guruge, *The Society of the Ramayana*, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), 1960, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Even in the Critical Edition of *The Valmiki-Ramayana*, ed. U.P. Shah, (Baroda, 1972-75), Vol. VII, *Uttarakanda*, sarga xvii, verses 17-31, we are told that Sita was Vedavati of the krita, that is satya yuga, and was now born in the *treta yuga*.

<sup>6</sup> Guruge, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> V.S. Dalal, *A History of India*, Bombay, 1914, p. 196.

<sup>8</sup> Sastri, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

Majumdar<sup>9</sup> and Gorresio both agree in placing the Ramayana between the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries B.C.<sup>10</sup>

By a correlation of the Puranic data regarding the various ruling dynasties, Pusalkar reconstructed the chronology of dynasties and kings who ruled in India before the Mahabharata war. His Ramachandra period was assigned a duration of 400 years (2350-1950 B.C.), about 500 years before the Bharata war.<sup>11</sup>

Sita Nath Pradhan<sup>12</sup>, relying more on the Vedic data and also on the astronomical calculations of one Archdeacon Pratt, is bold enough to say that the Battle of Lanka was fought in about 1450 B.C. and that when he killed Ravana, Rama was 42 years of age. This would also be the approximate date according to Pargiter.<sup>13</sup>

Hemachandra Raychaudhari<sup>14</sup> after a very careful appraisal of the Vedic, Puranic and the Jataka evidence, arrived at a rather non-committal view, as far as the time and the historicity of Rama were concerned. He tells us that though the Gopatha Brahmana mentions Kosala, and though the Rigveda knows of river Sarayu and mentions an Aryan inhabitant on its banks, called Chitraratha, no city—not even Ayodhya—is said to have existed in Kosala. Many of the kings of the Ikshvaku dynasty, for instance, Mandhatri, Yuvanasha, Purukutsa, Harischandra and his son Bhagiratha, Rituparna and Ambarisa are mentioned in the Vedic literature. Surprisingly Dasaratha and Rama, though occurring in the Rigveda, are in no way

---

<sup>9</sup> A.K. Majumdar, *The Hindu History*, Dacca, 1920, p. 60

<sup>10</sup> Gorresio, *op. cit.* Both these references are after Guruge, *op. cit.*, p. 36, as the originals are not available to me.

<sup>11</sup> R.C. Majumdar, A.D. Pusalkar and A.K. Majumdar ed., *Vedic Age*, 4th ed., Bombay, 1965, p. 292.

<sup>12</sup> Sita Nath Pradhan, *Chronology of Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1927, p. 175.

<sup>13</sup> F. E. Pargiter, *Ancient Indian Genealogies and Chronology*, Delhi, 1910, p. 52.

<sup>14</sup> Hemachandra Raychaudhari, *Political History of Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1950, pp. 78 and 101.

connected either with the Ikshvaku dynasty or with Kosala, whereas Rama is the name given to a man in the Rigveda. Guruge further thought that this bore no semblance to the hero of the story.<sup>15</sup> More interesting and significant is the reference to Sita.<sup>16</sup> Though used in the sense of a 'furrow', the word is personified and addressed as auspicious Sita, come thou near, we venerate and worship thee'. Thus, some connection might be traced with Sita's origins in the Ramayana. Lakshmana is said to be a very old proper name.<sup>17</sup> The Dasaratha Jataka regards Dasaratha and Rama as kings of Varanasi, and says that Sita had no connection with Janaka.<sup>18</sup> Valmiki and the Puranas seem to have woven out a story and genealogies respectively from such floating, uncrystallized material. At most, these enable us to discover the deep-rooted seeds of the Ramayana. While studies like those described here do not take into consideration the question of the historicity of Rama but accept the entire Ramayana as historical, scholars like Pargiter, Pradhan and Pusalkar, have devoted their attention to a comparative study of the portions dealing with the dynasties in the eighteen Puranas and the two epics. According to these scholars, Rama might have lived as early as in 2800 B.C. or 1400 B.C., or between these centuries. If so, the main incidents might have been enacted during this time. The question is, 'Did we have at that time, say, in about 2500 B.C. or even 1500 B.C. an urban civilization in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and in the distant Sri Lanka if we for a moment identify Ravana's Lanka with this island?'

Such questions have to be posed every time we say that the times of Rama and Krishna are 5500 years old, or that the Ramayana and the Mahabharata describe the life of this age.

<sup>15</sup> A.A. Macdonell and A.B. Keith. Vedic Index of Names and Subjects, London, 1912, Vol. II. p. 222, citing Rigveda, X. xciii. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 451; Rigveda, IV. lvii. 6-7.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 230, Rigveda, V. xxxiii. 10.

<sup>18</sup> V. Fausball ed., The Jataka, London, 1887, Vol. IV, pp. 123-30.



We should mention that Guruge is perhaps the only scholar to warn us repeatedly that we should not regard the entire Ramayana as very old. It is futile to lay stress on these traditions because they are to a great extent prompted by religious, if not national, enthusiasm to ascribe great antiquity to national treasures. Paying due attention to the fact that the Ramayana, as we have it today, consists of both earlier and later materials, whose dates of composition range from the fourth century B.C. to the second century A.D., we should exercise the greatest caution in employing the material for the reconstruction of the history of India.<sup>19</sup> Further, we should regard every statement contained in the epic as a representation of the society of ancient India during the time it was composed and not the time it is supposed to represent.<sup>20</sup>

There are two ways by which we can believe or accept the things or events which are said to have happened in the past. First, the events described should have been seen personally by the narrator or heard from persons who have seen these events. These are contemporary or near-contemporary accounts which are regarded as most trustworthy and form the backbone of true history. Of course, how far the narrator has truthfully described the events must be examined by what is called 'internal evidence'.

Our two epics and the Puranas are sometimes called itihasa accounts which actually describe what happened. It+ha+asa. They might have been such, but Indian tradition unequivocally asserts that the Mahabharata and the Puranas were gathered together by Vyasa from the existing body of floating literature.

The Ramayana, on the other hand, is the work of a single author named Valmiki. And Valmiki is believed to have been a contemporary of Rama and described as such in the Balakanda. But unlike Vyasa he is invariably

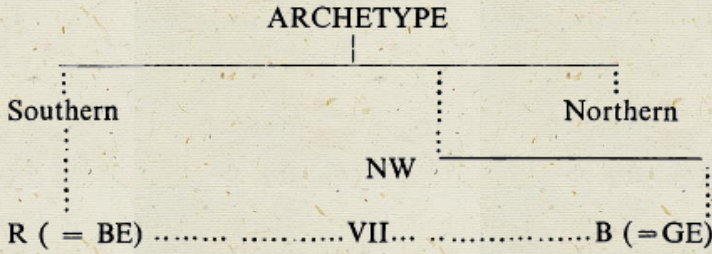
---

<sup>19</sup> Guruge, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

known as the First Poet. And as a poet he could have taken the liberty of interpreting the life of Rama as poets would normally do.

Several scholars in the past and now the editors of the Critical Edition have come to the conclusion that the Ramayana, though originally the work of a single author, has, in the course of centuries, grown like a banyan tree. They now recognize two main branches of this tree of the northern and southern recensions. Each branch has several sub-branches as shown in the given chart.



Various studies, historical, cultural and linguistic, show that the Ramayana as represented by these two main versions should be dated between 400 B.C. and A.D. 200.

These studies have further pointed out the line of development of the story. This development falls into the following stages: First, there were the ballads and cycles of ballads centring round Ayodhya, Kiskindha and Lanka. Secondly, they were put together by the poet Valmiki in an epic of 12,000 verses. Thirdly, the poem which was originally divided into adhyayas came to be divided into six kandas with tags (additions) of variant metres. Fourthly, the original text was revised further and geographical and supernatural interpolations appeared. Finally, the legendary portion of the Balakanda and the whole of the Uttarakanda were probably added under Brahminical influence and a new list of contents along with a mythical account of the epic's origin through divine inspiration experienced by Valmiki was included. After this, only minor additions were made, which were rejected by later commentators.

This development naturally took a long time. This has been variously calculated, since Jacobi<sup>21</sup> first wrote in the last century, by western and Indian scholars. The calculations were made on historical, geographical, religious, philosophical, linguistic and even on astronomical grounds.

Jacobi thought that since the Ramayana does not mention Pataliputra, known to be founded in about 380 B.C. or refer to Asoka's empire, it must have its kernel, kandas II-VI, composed in or about the sixth century B.C. This seems to be reasonable, because in the Balakanda (I. xxxi. 4-5), a pointed reference is made to the foundation of Kausambi, Kanyakubja and Kampilya. Again, Mithila and Vaisali are spoken of as twin cities under separate rulers, whereas by Buddha's time, they had merged to form the famous city of Vaisali.

Again, Ayodhya has been repeatedly mentioned as the capital of Kosala, whereas in the time of King Prasenajit, a contemporary of Buddha, the capital was transferred to Sravasti. In the time of Patanjali, we know that the capital was Saketa and not Ayodhya.

Jacobi's other argument that at the time of the Ramayana's first composition, there were small, petty principalities and not large provinces as described in the Mahabharata—is equally significant as we shall see while discussing the archaeological background.

Earlier, Monier-Williams<sup>22</sup> had also pointed out that the earliest portion of the Ramayana appeared to be pre-Buddhist and composed in about the fifth century B.C., because it had no reference to places in western and southern India.

---

<sup>21</sup> Jacobi's views were first summarized by G.A. Grierson in 'Indian Epic Poetry', IA, Vol. XXIII, pp. 52-6 from the German original H. Jacobi. Das Ramayana, Bonn, 1891.

<sup>22</sup> Monier-Williams, Indian Wisdom, pp. 316-19.



Jacobi<sup>23</sup> also drew attention to the non-existence of the custom of sati, while C.V. Vaidya<sup>24</sup> stressed on the performance of sacrifices and the non-existence of idol-worship, and the fact that the Kshatriyas competed with the Brahmins in learning and the Brahmins with the Kshatriyas in archery.

Jacobi's argument that the earliest Ramayana was pre-Prakritic was opposed by both Keith's<sup>25</sup> and Grierson<sup>26</sup>. However, on the ground that the kavya literature seems to have developed out of the style of the Ramayana, Keith<sup>27</sup> was prepared to place the kernel of the Ramayana not later than 300 B.C.<sup>28</sup> Winternitz<sup>29</sup> agreed with this opinion, while Macdonell<sup>30</sup> would date it before at 500 B.C. The nature of the philosophical data, according to Radhakrishnan<sup>31</sup> would indicate this date, though he maintained that changes were introduced till the second century A.D. Thus, the consensus of old scholars of Sanskrit literature and Indology were inclined to date the first stage of the Ramayana, viz., that of the ballads and cycles of ballads, before 500 B.C., or to the Age of the Brahmanas, though the exact beginning of this stage was difficult to ascertain.

P.V. Kane<sup>32</sup> went so far as to say that the core of the Ramayana might have been as old as 300 B.C. at the most. And that the Ramayana in its present form could not have been later than A.D. 200.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Jacobi, op. cit., p. 116.

<sup>24</sup> C.V. Vaidya, *The Riddle of the Ramayana*, Bombay, 1906, pp. 21-2.

<sup>25</sup> Keith, *JRAS*, 1915, p. 322.

<sup>26</sup> Grierson, *IA*, Vol. XXIII, p. 55.

<sup>27</sup> Keith, op. cit., p. 322.

<sup>28</sup> Grierson, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>29</sup> M. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, Vols. I and II, Calcutta, D. 517.

<sup>30</sup> A.A. Macdonell, *Sanskrit Literature*, London, 1917, p. 309

<sup>31</sup> Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, London, 1962, Vol. I, p. 272.

<sup>32</sup> P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, Poona, 1958, Vol. I, p. 396.

<sup>33</sup> Guruge, op. cit., p. 39.

Naturally, the second stage, when Valmiki composed the kernel of the epic falls between 500 B.C. and 300 B.C. The main reason for arriving at this date is that Panini in his *Ashtadhyayi*<sup>34</sup> does not refer to the names in the Ramayana except perhaps to Kosala and Kausalya in IV. i. 15 and IV. i. 171 and Kekaya, Kaikeyi and Bharata in VII. iii. 2.

This inference, based so far on literary evidence, is important and we shall see how it is supported by archaeology.

The third stage has been postulated by Ananda Guruge and is said to fall between 300 B.C. and A.D. 100. This is the time when the style of the mahakavya is said to have influenced the epic. It is also suggested that the poetic ornaments and imagery of the Ramayana are certainly earlier than those found in the Girnar inscription of Rudradaman (c. A.D. 150), and also those used by Asvaghosha in his *Buddhacharita* and *Saundaranandakavya*. The metres of the verses added at the end can also be regarded as older than the ones used by Asvaghosha.<sup>35</sup>

In the next stage the archetype is believed to have split into main recensions according to Bulcke<sup>36</sup>, or various recensions according to other scholars. This period was hitherto thought to be the first or second century A.D. because there are references to Sakas, Palhavas and the Pandyan capital. Guruge<sup>37</sup> says that this process could not be more accurately dated, because

---

<sup>34</sup> V.S. Agarwala, *India as Known to Panini*, Varanasi, 1963. However, S.M. Katre, *Dictionary of Panini*, Poona, 1969, Part III, p. 605 translates the word Sita as furrow, track, or line of ploughshare. Further, Kosala is accepted as the name of a country, Poona, 1968, Part I, p. 190. But Kausalya is not; Kekaya and Kaikeya are similarly accepted but not Kaikeyi.

<sup>35</sup> Asvaghosha, *Buddhacharita*, Parts I and II, Sanskrit with Hindi translation and *Saundaranandakavya* both published by Sanskrit Bhavan, Kathautiya, District Purniya, Bihar, 1948.

<sup>36</sup> Bulcke, "The Three Recensions of the Ramayana", *JOR*, Vol. XVII, 1937-38, pp. 1-32; Vol. XVIII, p. 27.

<sup>37</sup> Guruge, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

of the absence of external corroborative evidence. In fact, we have excellent socio-archaeological evidence in the Ayodhyakanda, as well as in the Aranyakanda and Sundarakanda, to date this stage. This is also the stage when portions showing increased knowledge of the world unknown before the Christian era, didactic portions more akin to the later Smriti literature, and sections dealing with supernatural elements, entered the Ramayana as they did the Puranas and the Mahabharata.

In fact, this was the last stage when numerous legends or references to Rama as an incarnation of Vishnu got into the Balakanda and Uttarakanda. But as we shall show, this must have been either anticipated by the poet when the first composition took place, or the entire Ramayana is a later product. This is because the story, as we have it today, depends upon the fact that Rama was a divine personage, or a hero of unusual strength, so that he and Lakshmana, single-handed, could defeat the Rakshasas.

Even in these very late additions we can distinguish between the Saiva and the Vaishnava-admittedly sectarian-influences. Both these can be archaeologically dated by the temples dedicated to Rama and the occurrences of names based on Rama in inscriptions.

The very last interpolation, according to Guruge<sup>38</sup>, was in the seventh century A.D., when the list of contents (anukramanika) and the story about the origin of the sloka metre were added. It is at this time that the Ramayana had travelled to southeast Asia, where at Tra-Kien in Champa, King Prakasadharma (c. A.D. 653-679) dedicated an image and temple to Valmiki.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Guruge, op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>39</sup> K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, 'Ramayana in Greater India', Journal of Oriental Research (JOR), Madras, 1932, Vol. VI, p. 117.



यस्य शोकात् समुत्पन्नम्  
श्लोकं ब्रह्माभिपूजति ॥

Thus though the latest date according to Guruge of the composition of the present Ramayana would be about the seventh century A.D., he thinks that this date might have to be pushed back because:

1. The Mahabharata knows of the present Ramayana with its later additions called *upakhyanas*.<sup>40</sup>
2. This Mahabharata with all its interpolations, about 100,000 verses, was known to the Khoh-copperplate inscription of *Sarvanatha*, dated A.D. 533.<sup>41</sup>
3. Further, Kalidasa also seems to have known this Ramayana including the Uttarakanda.
4. So also, *Vimalasuri*, the author of the *Paumachariya*, dated 530 years after Mahavira's nirvana, that is, in the middle of the first century A.D.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, the Ramayana as we have it today, seems to depict the socio-political conditions of India between the fourth century B.C. and the second century A.D.<sup>43</sup>

But though this might be generally true, certain portions were incorporated later, and such interpolations could have gone on up to the tenth century A.D. However, a very important conclusion<sup>44</sup> of Bulcke must be noted. After carrying out a careful comparison of the subject matter between the three recensions, he finds that 'the narrative itself has been changed little'<sup>45</sup>,

---

<sup>40</sup> Winternitz, op. cit., pp. 489-94.

<sup>41</sup> Fleet, 'Gupta Inscriptions', CII, Vol. III, p. 137.

<sup>42</sup> Winternitz, op. cit., pp. 489-94; and Guruge, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>44</sup> C. Bulcke, 'The Three Recensions of the Valmiki Ramayana', JOR, Vol. XVII, 1937-38, pp 1-32.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

though there is a wide divergence between the recensions as far as the number of slokas, say of the *Sundarakanda* is concerned.

The conclusion is significant for our studies for it helps us to be definite in saying something positive about the antiquity of the main story of the Ramayana. It also enables us to determine the time of the interpolations of the various details about the date of birth of the princes or the description of Rama's divine prowess in *Aranyakanda*, the description of Ravana's palace and the Pushpakavimana and the destruction of the Chaityaprasada. The former is indeed present in all the recensions, though it was omitted in the Bengali recension by Gorresio; the latter is absent both in the Bengali and the north-western recension.

The Balakanda is thus accepted to be a part of the second and third stage of the Ramayana, while the Uttarakanda, particularly those passages referring to Rama as an incarnation of Vishnu, are believed to belong to the fourth stage of the Ramayana.

All these questions have to be examined once again, and from the point of view of the higher criticism as well as textual criticism. Briefly, we should distinguish verses which portray Rama using divine weapons—the various astras to be used with the help of mantras, and Rama as an incarnation of Vishnu.

Such a study of the Ramayana does not seem to have been done. It must be said at the outset that when Valmiki thought of composing the first Ramayana, he must have had before him the extraordinary, almost supernatural feats of Rama (and Lakshmana) first in their adolescence, then while in exile, at *Chitrakuta*, and later in *Dandakaranya* and in *Lanka* which was certainly in eastern Madhya Pradesh, as shown in the sequel. They would truly belong to the Heroic Age. Later came the supernatural interpretation which culminated in Rama being regarded as an incarnation of Vishnu.

What is then the likely date or time of the composition of the Ramayana as we have it today? How far is the Critical Edition different from it?

An answer to the latter question will be attempted at the end of this study. At the moment, we may cite what is regarded as an extreme view, that of P.C. Sen Gupta.<sup>46</sup> He thinks that the Ramayana poet, or its final redactor whoever he be, lived in A.D. 438 about hundred years before Kalidasa. This exact date is calculated on the basis of certain astronomical data. Sen Gupta also thinks that Rama is later than Buddha because there are references in the Ramayana to Buddha, Tathagata, Bhikshu, Sramana and *Chaityaprasada*.

We shall have an occasion to refer to these views in detail, and see how far they can be supported archaeologically. Just now we would only say that while these data would justify one in placing the present Ramayana in a later period, it would be more proper to say that these reflect two stages of development, one that took place in about the third to the first century B.C. and the other that belonged to a later date.

When the Mahabharata acquired a written form in about the fourth or fifth century A.D., there was scope for further development through interpolations. I shall illustrate later how these interpolations or revisions of the story or a part of the story take place before our eyes, when we are listening to a *harikirtana*.

Linguistic analyses by Michelson,<sup>47</sup> Sen<sup>48</sup> and others show that the southern versions contained more archaic forms of grammar, which were not to be found in the grammar of Panini, who lived in about the fifth century B.C.

---

<sup>46</sup> P.C. Sen Gupta, *Journal of the Department of Letters, Calcutta*, Vol. XIX, p. 35.

<sup>47</sup> T. Michelson, 'Linguistic Archaisms of the Ramayana', *JAOS*, Vol. XXV, 1904, pp. 89 ff.

<sup>48</sup> N.M. Sen, 'Un-Paninian Sandhi in Ramayana', *JRAS (Bengal), Letters*, Vol. XVI, 1950, pp. 13-39.



These archaic forms were absent in the northern recension. It was found that in the Bengali recension these were regularly replaced by more elegant expressions. This attempt at polishing or 'sanskritizing' the *Ramayana* has been attributed to the fact that in the north, Sanskrit was a living language, so that the readers and listeners as well as the writers and *sutas* and *kathakaras* took the liberty of modifying the old, archaic language in which the original poem was composed by Valmiki. The south, on the other hand, being far away from this development and from the scene of the story, preserved the original language to a much greater extent. This is demonstrated by the remarkable conformity of the language and contents the number of *sargas* and *slokas*- in all the three principal south Indian versions. This phenomenon of change or alteration near the source and fossilization on the periphery is not peculiar to the *Ramayana*. It has been a normal feature observed in the study of several old languages and cultures in anthropological studies all over the world.

The Critical Edition of the *Ramayana*, therefore, leans heavily on the southern recension. However, enough care has been taken while going through the readings from the various manuscripts of each *kanda*, to reject the reading from the southern recension when the latter 'presents the text in a form which does not suit the context, or which evidently appears to be absurd'.<sup>49</sup> In all instances the text of the northern recension has been preferred. Further, no attempt has been made to amend or select a reading. A purely eclectic approach has been scrupulously avoided, the only test being the purity and antiquity of the reading. Hence, it has been claimed that the Critical Edition is not a blind copy of the southern recension'.<sup>50</sup> The latter

---

<sup>49</sup> G.H. Bhatt, *The Valmiki-Ramayana, Critical Edition. Vol. I, Balakanda*, Baroda, 1960, introduction, p. xxxiv.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xxvii-ix.

has added, no doubt, but has not tampered with the original text. These interpolations can be detected with the help of the northern recension.<sup>51</sup>

The important thing from our point of view is that the earliest manuscript on which the Critical Edition text is based is from Nepal, written in the Nepali script, and dated v.s. 1076, that is A.D. 1020. The other manuscripts all belong to later periods, the latest being of A.D. 1848.

Thus there is reason to assume that the Nepali version might contain certain events which took place or could have happened as late as in the tenth century A.D. Likewise the southern recension as represented by the Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam versions, though fairly uniform, is not earlier than the sixteenth century, the earliest known being of A.D. 1512.

The southern recension, though now almost universally regarded as archaic, as first pointed out by Jacobi nearly a century ago, and proved to be so by the collection of several hundreds of manuscripts and by detailed linguistic studies by N.M. Sen, could still portray things and events which took place in the fifteenth century A.D.

How do we detect these additions, interpolations or revised versions of the events?

Since the last century, various attempts have been made. The German scholars, Weber and Jacobi, applied historical and linguistic methods, which were then pursued by other scholars, Indian and foreign.

I have already referred to the preparation of the Critical Edition. This is a culmination of the line of investigation first suggested by Weber and Jacobi and later taken up by Ruben and Bulcke.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, the preparation of the Critical Edition of an old work with several versions is the foundation of all

---

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxiv.

<sup>52</sup> Ruben, *Studien zur Text-gechichte des Ramayana*, Stuttgart, 1936, and 'Vir Liebestragodien des Ramayana' *Z.D.M.G.*, 1950; Bulcke, *op. cit.*

other studies. Once this is ready, the superstructure may be built on it. This may take various forms: (i) linguistic, (ii) historical, (iii) archaeological, (iv) geographical and ethnical, (v) philosophical and religious, and (vi) floral and faunal.

All this may involve what is called 'higher criticism'. By a comparative study one may question:

- (i) the existence or propriety of the use of certain grammatical forms or other forms of expression;
- (ii) the existence of certain kings, persons or peoples;
- (iii) the existence of certain places and their location;
- (iv) the existence of objects and things—cities, monuments, images, ornaments and their raw material at the time referred to in the text;

(v) the existence of certain ideas, concepts and practices; (vi) the presence of certain trees, flowers and fruits, in the regions mentioned; and the presence of certain birds and animals at the time under discussion.

No doubt, every one of these six approaches has been tried in the past, but these attempts were hampered by the absence of a Critical Edition. In fact, Winternitz wanted not one Critical Edition but critical editions of the three main recensions. Nevertheless researches carried out so far in these fields have enabled scholars to fix the probable time range of the composition of the present Ramayana and its various stages of development.

In these researches archaeology has been used off and on, but only sparingly. The reasons for this apparent neglect were several. In the first place, the full scope of archaeology was not known. This is becoming clear only of late.

Secondly, until some twenty years ago, few sites were excavated in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and in south India where the events described in the



Ramayana took place, so that we had little reliable data about the antiquity of the cities and objects referred to in the Ramayana.

Thirdly, with the advent of stratigraphical excavations and the emergence of newer methods of dating, we are now in a position to date certain important episodes in the Ramayana more precisely.

However, the archaeological approach has its limitations. Archaeology deals with objects existing on the surface of the earth in the form of monuments and with objects obtained from excavations. However successful these excavations may be, the objects recovered from an excavation normally represent a very small—sometimes insignificant—fraction of the culture or civilization to which they belong. In India an archaeologist rarely discovers an intact tomb like the one of Tutankhamen, which, when cleared, indexed and photographed, revealed at once all the aspects of Egyptian civilization in the fifteenth—fourteenth centuries B.C.

Much less can one utilize the evidence of the surface monuments. Very few monuments exist today after centuries of destruction and devastation by floods and earthquakes and by repeated foreign invasions and numerous internal wars.

Archaeology, thus compared to written work, can tell us very little of the past. Still it has its value, particularly in India, where we have few contemporary historical records, where written records are comparatively recent and where both ideas and objects have the tendency to survive for centuries. Moreover, with the help of modern archaeology we can sometimes pinpoint an object referred to in our literature—in the Ramayana for instance—and thus use it for dating purposes.

This and other archaeological evidence, when used in association with other data, might also help us in ascertaining how and why certain objects, incidents and episodes have been described or crept into the Ramayana or

in any other similar work under study. When we look at the Ramayana in this way, we go outside the sphere of mere textual criticism or factual study and enter the realm of higher criticism. Archaeology is conditioned by what we know so far. In a sense, this knowledge is provisional, for one must always provide for the unexpected. Witness, for instance, the sudden emergence some 45 years ago of the Indus Valley Civilization which with one dig of the spade took India's history back by about three thousand years, and now, for the last ten years, this 'prehistory' is known to have had a still earlier beginning.

How an interpolation or a revision of the old story takes place adding a detail here and a detail there of the times in which the *sura* or the modern *kathakara* or *kirtanakara* lives may now be told. For this illustrates my present approach.

Some twenty years ago I was listening to the *harikirtana* by a famous and versatile scholar from Surat. He was not only a great Sanskrit scholar, but a first-rate story-teller with a melodious voice which could *enthral* the audience. He related the exploits of Sri Krishna from the Bhagavata Purana. The first episode pertained to Krishna's childhood among the cowherds of Gokula, near Mathura. Krishna was very mischievous. Once he and his playmates bolted all the doors of the houses of the cowherds. As a result, the cowherds had no milk in the morning, because no milkman from outside could come in.

The Shastriji did not further add that as a result of this prank, the cowherds could not have any tea in the morning because then this 'on the spot interpolation' would have been apparent to any-body in the audience. But the question still remains, 'Did the *Gopalas* (cowherds) in the times of Krishna, some 5000 years ago, receive milk from outside, as a citizen in Bombay, Surat or Pune or anywhere in the modern world does today?' The word 'Gopala' means that every resident in Gokula had his own herd of cows and no one was expected to get milk from outside.

Such an incident does not occur in the Bhagavata, but the *kirtanakara*, in order to make his story more telling and more appealing to the modern times, concocted something which we all experience some time or the other. But its inclusion in the katha is anachronistic, and absolutely inappropriate to the times to which the story belongs.

The second interpolation took place while describing the Rukmini-svayamvara. This pertains to Krishna's kidnapping Rukmini with her consent when she was to be married to King Sisupala. Here the Shastriji wanted to impress the audience with the magnificence of Bhismaka's court and the way the guests were received. He told us that among several other things, the brother and sisters of Rukmini applied costly attars on the assembled guests.

We do not know how old the custom is of besmearing the guests with perfumes. I think it is not older than two or three hundred years, and probably first came into existence when the attar of rose was discovered by Nurjahan. The Shastriji once again betrayed himself by introducing a modern, contemporary practice into the old story.

These are very insignificant and trifling details, and pass unnoticed among the listeners. But the modern archaeologist thrives on details. He must be a detective par excellence. Applied archaeology knows no limits, and may be reasonably applied to the Ramayana.

After completing the archaeological appraisal of the epic, I thought of viewing the various concepts—ethical, metaphysical, political, as well as social and religious—in a historical perspective. This required a change in the approach. Instead of viewing the Ramayana as a whole, I began to study each *kanda* again, as a separate unit.

This led to interesting results. I was able to discern variation in detail about the administrative concepts and machinery, the social customs, religious ceremonies as well as details of certain events in the story.



Not only important but probably shocking to many a reader will be my view that the *Sundarakanda*, *Yuddhakanda*, and a part of the *Kiskindhakanda* are late additions to the original story, if we accept the view that the ring incident has materially altered the denouement of the story, as the discovery of the ring did in the *Shakuntala* of Kalidasa. These additions could have taken place earliest in the first or second century A.D. It was at this time also, or slightly later, that Nagarjunakonda or a similar Indo-Roman city was probably used as a model by the poet for the description of Lanka.

Thus, in more ways than one, all the familiar and unfamiliar scenes and stories have been presented here in a new, highly critical perspective.



Raja Ravi Varma, Jatayu vadha, 1906

*Sanskritbārtā* 2024, Volume 2, Issue 1

Special issue on *Ramayana*

The News & Review Letter of Department of Sanskrit,  
Durgapur Government College, Government of West Bengal

Date of Publication: January, 2024