

**The Valmiki Ramayana, an Archeological View**  
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Ramayana is a story of Rama Dasarathi of Ayodhya. The Rig Veda (2,000 BCE) mentioned the name Rama only once. Rama distributed gifts to people as was the custom in those days. The names Rama (10.93.14), Sita (4.57.6), and Lakshmana (5.33.10) were mentioned only once, in different contexts with no connection between them or to Ayodhya. We know nothing more about them. They have no recorded history. Apparently, Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana were popular names in those days.

There are many different stories of Rama: China, Japan, Laos, Indonesia, Buddha, Jain, and so on. The only thing they have in common is the skeleton of the story. Each story was set in a different location and time with its own social climate. The Valmiki Ramayana (Valmiki) tells us about the social climate in Central India around 400 BCE, the place and time of its composition.

What follows is an archeological, not a religious, view of the Valmiki.

Rishi Valmiki (400 BCE) did not invent the Ramayana; he presented existing well-known folk stories of Rama in a memorable metrical form that stood the test of time. Though the language was modern Sanskrit, the story was ancient Indian composed a thousand years earlier and in wide circulation in folk culture. The Valmiki contains both the skeleton of an ancient story (2,000 BCE) and the flesh of Rishi Valmiki's interpretation (400 BCE). Our interest is in the flesh, the social life of 400 BCE.

The Valmiki consists of only the first six books (Kanda). The seventh book, the Uttara Kanda, was added around 500 CE. Some publishers and translators ignore the Uttara. Religious zealots insist that the Uttara was composed by Rishi Valmiki. Here we treat the Valmiki and the Uttara as two separate and unrelated works. In the Valmiki, Rama was a mortal with human qualities. In the Uttara, he was a divine incarnation of Vishnu.

In all the Ramayanas of the world composed before the Uttara, Rama was human. Human Rama is required for the Ramayana to be relevant. For thousands of years, Rama was a human role model for virtuous living in cultures around the world. Latter-day Ramayanas are self-serving religious propaganda. In India, in all Ramayanas composed after 500 CE, in all languages, Rama is synonymous with Vishnu.

Why is it that stories of Rama of 2,000 BCE, with no recorded history, are repeated for thousands of years by hundreds of diverse cultures?

Around 3,000 BCE there was a great war in North India led by a King Sagara that resulted in massive death and destruction. People lost faith in the rule of kings and there was anarchy. At that time, Rishi of the Agni Cult, who believed in logic, were migrating from Syria to India. They saw an opportunity to convert the disillusioned public to their way of peaceful coexistence. Reign based on the power of might proved itself to be worthless. The Agni offered Dharma (equity) as a change of paradigm.

How do you spread the message that Dharma is a better social order to the masses? The message is Dharma, but it needed a medium to transmit it. The medium should be able to propel on its own power and carry the message without loss of information by corruption. The Agni Rishi used their brain power to solve the problem and Ramayana was their solution. The Ramayana is the medium and Dharma is the message it transmits. The story is so simple and absorbing that anyone can grasp the message and retell it without loss of information.

People discovered in no time that the Ramayana story can transmit any message, not just Dharma. There were as many Ramayanas as there were different cultures, each transmitted its own message. Each version of the story had its own stage setting and social values relevant to its message.

The Ramayana is not a biography of any person. It is not history. It is a captivating story to bring tears to the audience so they cannot rest until they go home and tell their friends about it. Only the names Dasaratha, Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, and Ayodhya were real, to make them easily recognizable and memorable.

Suppose you are an engineer in charge of a system design in 2,000 BCE tasked with composing a story of Rama to meet the stated objectives. What would you do?

A story must have a protagonist and an antagonist. It should contain all the nine emotions (Nava Rasa) to give the audience a wholesome experience. Tension should reach a peak, leaving the audience biting their nails, unable to predict which side will win.

The names of South India kings ended with the suffix Ravana, Raja, or Raya. Accomplishments of a king were stated before the generic suffix to distinguish between kings. Ravana from the South routinely invaded the North. They were unpopular and easily recognizable as villains. Ravana made a good antagonist.

Rama was a popular name in the North. Ikshvaku was a famous dynasty which had a king once by the name of Rama, son of Dasaratha, with no known history, a clean slate. A North Rajan Rama made an excellent protagonist.

They needed a reason for a conflict. Around 2,000 BCE a king needed to be strong enough to protect his cows and women. A strong king challenged a weak king to show his strength by stealing the weak king's cows and/or women. A weak king had the option to surrender and become a vassal (Samanta) or fight. The hostages held to declare the intention of war were treated with dignity and protected by the honor of the host. The Rig Veda is full of stories of stealing cows. Even as late as in the Mahabharata War (1,000 BCE) Kauravas stole cows of Virata to declare a war in order to flush Pandavas. The Ramayana needed something more dramatic, not any women, just the wife of the protagonist. Since she was held hostage to declare the intention of war, she needed to be protected by the antagonist as a guest of honor, as required by Dharma. The antagonist should also respect Dharma, the message.

To build up the climax, the antagonist needed to be a formidable foe and both sides had to show off their strength, step by step. The protagonist killed Vali and the antagonist killed Jatayu for the warm-up.

Finally, a war between the two parties. The antagonist was killed, the hostage was rescued, the protagonist was declared the winner, and they lived happily ever after.

The skeleton of the story has universal appeal. In fact, it is a recipe in the Bharata Natyashastra, a treatise on play writing. All it needs is some flesh and poetic imagination. Each culture supplies its own flesh to suit its message.

The Valmiki deals with the Dharma message. It offers us a unique window to observe social values, the flesh, around the time of its composition (400 BCE).

By 2,000 BCE, the Agni were on the north side of the Vindhya mountain range. Some Agni ventured to the south and set up a few outposts above the Narmada river. At that time, land to the south of the Narmada was ruled by Ravana. The land above the Narmada, Janastan, was occupied by Rakshasa tribes who were friendly to the Ravana and enjoyed protectorate status. They were upset by the encroachment of the Agni. They disturbed the Agni rituals to let them know they were not welcome.

Around 3,000 BCE, long before the Agni, some of the river islands (Lanka) of the Narmada were occupied by Arjuna Kartavirya of Haihayas. Mahishmati Lanka of the Narmada (50 miles SW of Indore, 22.13 N 75.31 E) was his Capital. According to the

Uttara, a Ravana was held as a prisoner (besieged) by Arjuna on a Lanka of the Narmada. Ravana took revenge and killed many Haihayas. By the time of Rama (2,000 BCE), Haihayas were nowhere near the Narmada. Most likely, the history of Arjuna, Ravana, and Lanka of bygone days was common knowledge in folklore in Janastan. They were used to set the stage for the Valmiki.

In the Valmiki, there was no mention of Rama crossing the Narmada river. The life described in it was that of the north bank of the Narmada, Janastan. It was the buffer zone between the Agni who lived above the Vindhya mountains and the Ravana who lived below the Narmada river. Rishi Valmiki was a native of Janastan and was intimately familiar with the geography, people, and culture. The Valmiki was Cultural Anthropology of the people in Janastan. It is the flesh of our interest.

Janastan (23-25 N, 78-81 E) is the geographic area of the Damoh, Jabalpur, and Katni districts of the Madhya Pradesh State.

In the days of Rishi Valmiki (400 BCE), people were identified by a Totem (Gotra, Nickname). Most likely, there was a group nicknamed Vanara (Vana, forest). Deliberate corruption introduced in the Valmiki treated them as forest monkeys.

Most likely, in the original, Vanara were Mundari-speaking Savara tribes who still lived in Janastan. Even today, Savara men wear only a turban and a loincloth (langoti) that hangs like a tail. Savara women do not wear a langoti. Vanara women, in the Valmiki, did not have a tail. Vanara wore clothes (4.10.26). Vanara men tightened their langoti before a combat (4.12.15, 4.16.15-17), just as Savara men do today.

Animal tails are of two types: (1) Cow tail with a tuft of hair at the end to chase flies, and (2) Monkey tail that tapers. In all existing paintings and sculptures Hanuman had a cow tail, not a monkey tail. Rishi Valmiki chose names to reflect characters. He called the officers Golangula (cow tail), and the soldiers Kapi (monkey tail) (4.35.22). Golangula and Kapi were nicknames that referred to their dress. The officer's langoti had embroidery at the end. It looked like a cow tail. The soldier's langoti was plain. It looked like a monkey tail. Golangula (officer) was not a cow; Kapi (soldier) was not a monkey. Even today, Savara wear a langoti with embroidery (Golangula) as a status symbol. Hanuman was an officer. He was painted with a Golangula (cow tail). Deliberate corruption introduced in the Valmiki mistranslated the word Kapi (soldier) as a forest monkey.

The Agni cremated the dead, whereas Rakshasa buried the dead. A slain Rakshasa requested Rama to grant his last wish to be buried, not cremated (3.4.22-33). When

Rama killed people, Rakshasa took the dead with them, with permission from Rama, for burial. It led to the deliberate misinterpretation that Rakshasa ate humans.

Rakshasa wore a face mask of a wild animal when they were celebrating, hunting, or fighting which led to another deliberate misinterpretation that they transmuted. They mastered camouflage. Even today, some Kui tribes in Janastan carry the tradition in their costumes.

What is commonly known as the Valmiki Ramayana is not the original, it is the corrupted version. It was deliberately corrupted to promote a political agenda.

In 400 BCE Janastan, Agni (Sanskrit), Rakshasa (Kui), and Vanara (Mundari) were human races. Rishi Valmiki was an Anthropologist. He recorded their social behavior.

Rishi Valmiki was faithful in describing social behavior of the tribes in Janastan. It was Cultural Anthropology of the Janastan tribes Guha, Sabari, Jatayu, Viradha, Kabandha, Rakshasa, Vanara, Agni, and many others. Rama was the excuse to introduce us to various tribes of Janastan and their social values. The people who deliberately corrupted the Valmiki were ignorant of the customs and traditions of Janastan.

Interracial marriage by consent or force existed. Ravana wanted to marry Sita. Surpanaka wanted to marry Rama. After rescuing Sita from Ravana, Rama informed her that she was set free and may choose to marry anyone she wanted, including Sugriva (Vanara) or Vibhishana (Rakshasa) (6.115.23). She chose Rama.

Widow remarriage was common in all the races. Vibhishana married Ravana's widow. Sugriva married Vali's widow. Surpanaka, a widow, tried to marry Rama. Sita remarked that if Rama were killed then she would be considered as Bharata's wife by protocol.

Ravana tried to persuade Sita, before and after abduction, to divorce pitiful Rama so she could marry him and live in luxury. Divorce by women must have been common.

Sita was respected as "another man's wife" and unharmed. Rama killed Vali for committing the crime of not respecting the rights of another man's wife. It was a capital offense. Marriage was honored by all races.

Wives of all the major characters (Rama, Vali, Sugriva, and Ravana) reminded their husbands of their legal responsibilities. Ravana's sister, Surpanaka, gave him a lecture on law. Sita presented a valid legal argument against Rama killing innocent Rakshasa who did him no harm.

Women were well educated. They were independent, outspoken, commanding, and demanded equal rights.

Around 500 CE, the Gupta empire collapsed and Greeks occupied India. The Greeks wanted to exploit the popular Rama as a temple god, to rob India. They paid the Kashmir Brahmin to rewrite the Valmiki, to portray Rama as an incarnation of Vishnu. There were no Brahmin in India before the Greeks. They existed only in Kashmir.

The Uttara was composed in haste. It was financed by the Greeks. There was no archeological evidence of Rama worship before the Greeks. The original Valmiki was deliberately destroyed. What is commonly known as the Valmiki Ramayana is the Brahmin version. It was actively promoted as the original.

The Uttara reflected the social values of Kashmir Brahmin around 500 CE.

The original Valmiki had no Vishnu or Shiva.

The Uttara transmitted the message that Vishnu was more important than Shiva.

In the Tulsidas' Ramayana (1,500 CE) Rama and Sita worshiped Shiva and his consort Parvati. It transmitted the message that Shiva was more important than Vishnu. It reflected the social values around Lucknow (UP).

There were hundreds of Ramayanas serving various political and religious needs, each transmitting its own message. They reflected social values of different regions.

The Jain religion was founded on nonviolence. The Jain Ramayana transmitted the message of nonviolence. Rama did not kill Ravana. Rama became a Jain Monk. Rakshasa and Ravana were praised as heroes for upholding the Jain tradition.

In the Buddha Ramayana (Jataka 461), after the death of Dasaratha, Bharata visited Rama and begged him to return to Banaras to become the new king. Rama decided to spend the remaining years in the forest and sent his shoes (paduka), Lakshmana, and Sita back to Banaras. The Buddha Ramayana had no Hanuman or Ravana. It was composed around 500 BCE, before the Valmiki. It reflected the social values around Banaras.

Each Ramayana had its own message. They all used the same skeleton supplied by the Bharata Natyashastra. Characterizations, the flesh, in each version of Ramayana were different and reflected the social values of the time and place of its composition.

Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita of the Buddha (500 BCE, Banaras), the Valmiki (400 BCE, Jabalpur), the Uttara (500 CE, Kashmir), and the Tulsidas (1,500 CE, Lucknow) display different temperaments. They provide us valuable insights on social values of the respective times and places.

Each Ramayana reflected prevailing social values of the time and place of its composition. By analyzing characterizations we can reconstruct a history of social values in India by place and time.

Ramayana had no history. It was a memorable captivating story told in a hundred different ways by people who lived in different places and times. It was a creative outlet for literary expression. They unwittingly provided us time capsules of their social values with precise dates and places.

Excavation of good archeological material on social values from the various Ramayanas would help us reconstruct Indian Social History based on science. All we need is scientific discipline to control our religious and political emotions.

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