

Epilogue of Ramayana

By

M. R. Yardi



Bharatiya Vidya
Bhavan
Pune Kendra

BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

place after his departure from Citrakuta. Hanuman does not mention the fire ordeal by Sita, which is ascribed by commentators to his lapse of memory. Again we get different accounts of this episode in the Yuddhakanda and Uttarakanda of Ramayana and in the Ramopakhyana in the Mahabharata. In the Yuddhakanda it is stated that Sita was restored to Raama by Agni (6. 106), while Raama told his brothers, in Uttarakanda, 44.8, that she was delivered to him by Lord Mahendra. The fire ordeal finds no mention in the Ramopakhyana added by Harivamshakara (Mbh. III 275), where he says that it was Vayu who testified the purity of Sita.

The whole of Uttarakanda is a later interpolation by Sauti, Harivamshakara and the author of the U-style. The Uttarakanda, as its name suggests, describes the later events in Raama's life after his victorious return to Ayodhya. But curiously it starts with the earlier history of Lanka, which came to be ruled successively by Malyavat, Sumali and Mali, then by Vaisravana, also known as Kubera and then by Ravana. This story is told by Agastya, who visits Ayodhya after Raama's coronation.

The sargas 1-22 and 33-40 have been added by Sauti and sargas 23-32 by Harivamshakara. Sage Agastya told Raama that Vaisravas was the son of Pulastya, a mind-born son of Brahmaa. His son Vaishravana practised severe penance, as a result of which Brahmaa gave him the Pushpaka chariot and made him the Lord of wealth and the guardian of the northern quarter. On the advice of his father, Kubera settled down with his thousands of Yakshas in Lanka, which was abandoned by the Rakshasas, and lived there peacefully until he was dispossessed by his step brother Ravana (1-3).

Earlier Lanka, which was built by the divine architect, Vishvakarman, was occupied by three Rakshasas Malyavat, Sumali and Mali, who grew up to be fierce warriors and started persecuting the gods. The gods prayed to Lord Vishnu to protect them and in the war that ensued Vishnu cut off the head

of Mali and routed the Rakshasa army with his Saranga bow. Dreading the might of Vishnu Malyavat and Sumali fled to the nether regions (patala) with their wives and followers. In course of time Sumali returned to the earth. One day he saw Vaishravana going in his Pushpaka chariot on a visit to his father. Filled with envy he persuaded his daughter Kaikasi to approach Vishravas and beg for a son. As she approached him at an inauspicious hour, he said that she would give birth to dreadful and cruel sons. When she appealed to him to give her a son like him, he softened and said that her last son would be a righteous person worthy of him. In due course, Kaikasi gave birth to cruel Ravana, terrible Kumbhakarna, daughter Shurpanakha and righteous Vibhishana. The brothers practised penance and obtained boons from Brahmaa : Ravana became invincible except to man, Vibhishana asked for virtue and Kumbhakarna sought deep sleep for six months in a year (7. 10). Ravana married Mandodari, daughter of Maya and had a son by name Meghanada (7. 12). He attacked Vedavati practising austerities, who immolated herself after cursing him that in her next birth she would bring about his destruction (7. 17). He claimed Lanka as his ancestral land and asked Kubera to leave it. On the advice of his father Kubera vacated it and settled down on mount Kailasa (7. 14, 15). Ravana started torturing gods, Gandharvas, sages and Yakshas, whereupon Kubera advised his brother to desist from such persecutions. Ravana set out to conquer the regents of the quarters. He attacked Kailasa and defeating Kubera and his army of Yakshas asked Kubera to leave it. On the advice of his father Kubera vacated it and settled down on mount Kailasa (7. 14, 15). Ravana started torturing gods, gandharvas, sages and Yakshas, whereupon Kubera advised his brother to desist from such persecutions. Ravana set out to conquer the regents of the quarters. He attacked Kailasa and defeating Kubera and his army of Yakshas, he seized his Pushpaka chariot (7. 12-15). He tried to lift Kailasa, but lord Shiva crushed his arms. When Ravana defeated Marutta, all other regents hid themselves

(7. 18). He even dared to challenge Yama, but the latter became invisible (7. 22). Ravana thereafter challenged all kings, but all except king Anaranya of Ayodhya, surrendered to him. In the fight that ensued, Anaranya was killed, but before he died, he cursed Ravana that he would meet his death at the hands of his descendant (Raama) (7. 19). Sauti then goes out to describe the exploits of Hanuman. The kings who had come to attend the coronation of Raama, including Sugriva and Vibhishana, left. Kubera presented the Pushpaka chariot to Raama. Bharata then gave a description of the benign rule of Raama.

Harivamshakara has added the sargas 23-34. Ravana fought with Nivatakavacas and concluded peace with them after a year (7. 23). He fought with the sons of Varuna and defeated them. Meghanada performed a sacrifice and acquired the tamasi maya (7. 25). Ravana went to war with Indra in which Sumali was killed. Meghanada captured Indra, earning the nick-name Indrajit but released him at the intervention of Brahmaa. Ravana goes to Mahismati ruled by Haihaya Arjuna, who captured Ravana but released him at the request of Pulastya. Ravana attacked Vali while he was performing sandhya, but was caught by him in his arm-pit (7. 27-34). This author also records Ravana's misbehaviour with beautiful girls and married women and his incestuous rape of Rambha, because of which he incurred the curse of her betrothed, his nephew, Nalakubera that if he were to molest any woman in future, his head would shatter into smithereens. This curse is said to have saved Sita from molestation by Ravana (7. 24-26). The author's intention is evidently to show Ravana in an unfavourable light both as regards his prowess as well as his character.

The author of the U-style has added as many as sixty sargas (41-100) in the Uttarakanda. These sargas principally deal with the events subsequent to Raama's coronation, of which the two most important are Sambukavadha and Sitalyaga. The Ramopakhyana does not refer to these episodes

which is an independent corroboration that they did not form part of the original Ramayana. It also includes such legends as those of Shveta (68-69). Danda (70-72), Indra and Vritra (75-77) and Ila (78).

Raama lived happily with Sita, who was now pregnant and expressed to him her desire (*dohada*) to go and spend a day in a forest hermitage. In the meantime Raama heard scandalous gossip about Sita's chastity while in captivity of Ravana. People had started asking as to how Raama could continue to live with a woman, who had lived a year in Ravana's house. Raama heard this report with shock mixed with sorrow. He could not understand how people could be so mean as to spread such a slander, since it was public knowledge that Sita had proved her purity by fire ordeal. His conscience told him that she was pure. Brooding over this, he summoned his brothers and said to them. " This public gossip about Sita rankles in my heart. As a result of this ill-fame I shall lose my honour and the doors of heaven will be closed against me. I shrink so much from it that I shall, if necessary, give up my life, even you, what to say of Sita (7. 44, 11-13). Raama then told Lakshmana, to take Sita to Valmiki's ashrama under a subterfuge of fulfilling her pregnancy-desire. There Lakshmana, to the utter dismay of Sita, acquainted her of Raama's resolve to repudiate her (7. 43-48). Valmiki took Sita to his hermitage. When Raama ordered Shatrughna to conquer Asura Lavana, on his way he passed the night at the ashrama and came to know of the birth of Sita's twin sons (7. 58). Shatrughna killed Lavana and founded the city of Madhura (7. 59-62).

The peace of Ayodhya was shattered by the untimely death of a Brahmin boy. A brahmin complained to Raama about the premature death of his son during his life-time. Narada told Raama that his death may be due to the practice of penance undertaken by a shudra, who was not authorized to perform it. Raama gave orders for the preservation of the body and set out in search of the culprit. Raama found Shudra Shambuka practising penance, executed the culprit on the spot and by restoring the dead back to life, upheld the social order based on

caste (7. 65-67).

The sequel of Sitayaga is continued in sargas (7. 81-89). Raama undertook Ashvamedha sacrifice, which was attended by Valmiki with Raama's sons. When Kusha and Lava sang Ramayana, Raama came to know that they were his sons and requested Valmiki to bring Sita to the assembly, so that she could prove her chastity publicly. Sita publicly affirmed her purity and called upon the mother earth to give her shelter. Mother earth appeared, took Sita in her lap and disappeared (7. 87-88). An inconsolate Raama performed the horse sacrifice after making a gold image of Sita as a substitute at the sacrifice.

After a long and prosperous reign, Kaala (Time) in the form of an ascetic reminded Raama that it was time for him to return to his original abode. Durvasa came and ordered Lakshmana to inform Raama immediately of his arrival. When he did so, Kala's condition of privacy was broken and Lakshmana gave up his mortal body in the river Sarayu (7. 95-96). After the tragic death of Lakshmana Raama decided to leave the mortal world and divided his kingdom between Kusha and Lava (7. 97). Raama sent for Shatrughna, the Rakshasas and Vanaras and when they arrived, he, along with his brothers and the Vanaras took a plunge in the waters of Sarayu to return to his original abode. (7. 100).

The subsequent authors of the Ramayana have added much of the marvellous and miraculous elements in that work. It is true that the miraculous element is not absent in Valmiki's Ramayana but it is in a low key. The birth of Raama and his three brothers is the result of the Ashvamedha sacrifice. Ravana and Raama fight with magic weapons (6. 87). Indra sends his chariot to Raama along with his charioteer Matali (6. 90), who reminds him to use the brahmastra against Ravana (6. 97. 2). Raama then kills Ravana with that missile. Suta has added the putresti sacrifices (1. 14) which Dasharatha performs to get a