A New Approach to The Rāmāyāṇa

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चन्द्राद्वि कठोराणि श्रूनि कुञ्जाद्वि।
ठोकोत्तराणां चतुर्सि को जु विषामहि॥

*Harder than even an adamant and softer than even a flower are the hearts of the supereminent. Who is there that can ever fathom them?*

*BHAVABHŪTI*
Transliteration Scheme

आ = ञ Rāma, Tārā. राम, तारा.
ई = ी Sītā, Sugrīva. सीता, सुग्रीव.
उ = ु Úrmilā, Hanūmān. उर्मिला, हनुमान.
ऋ = ृ Kṛṣṇa, Vṛndā. कृष्ण, वृन्दा.
ए = े Kekaya, Setu केकय, सेतु.
ऐ = ै Kaikeyī, Śrīśaila. कैकेयी, श्रीशिल.
ओ = ो Dronāchala, Omkāra. द्रोणाचाल, ओमकार.
औ = ौ Gaurī, Gautama. गौरी, गौतम.
ऋ = े Trijaṭā. त्रिजटा.
ढ = ढ Vasiṣṭha. वसिष्ठ.
ं = ं Tāḍakā ताड़का.
ऍ = े धिमारा धीमार.
ण = ण Rāvana, रावण.
श = ्ष Śiva, Śabarī शिव, शाबरी.
ष = ्ष Vibhīṣṇa, Dūshaṇ. विभीषण, दृष्ण.

N. B. The words कृष्ण, संस्कृत, and प्राकृत have been written as Rigveda, Sanskrit, and Prakrit according to usage, though they ought to be written as Ṛgveda, Samskṛta, Prākṛta.
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Foreward

The author has taken for granted that the reader knows all the events of the Rāmāyana and the order in which they are said to have happened. His aim in these pages is to present those events in their true perspective and deduce therefrom certain inferences of historical value about the life and times of Lord Rāma. Some of his statements are likely to jar on the reader’s mind and raise a storm of protest; hence in self-defence as well as to ensure belief he has thought it necessary to quote from Vālmīki and others in the original. The sense of these quotations is sometimes incorporated in the body of the narrative and sometimes given separately. But in either case he has looked more to the spirit than to the letter in rendering them, so that all that is implied in the original may be brought out explicitly in the translation. In a few cases where the points concerned were scattered over a number of verses in the original, he has contracted them into a couple of verses to save space, but retaining the very same words of the original and removing only the many-footed epithets and unnecessary repetitions which have only a musical value, but are otherwise irrelevant to the purpose. In the foot notes Kālidāsa stands for his Raghuvamśa, Bhavabhūti for his Uttararāmacaritanātaka, Māgha for his Śīupālavadha, Bhūravi for his Kirātārjunīya, Tilaka for Swāmī Rāma’s commentary on Vālmiki.

Lastly, the author earnestly requests that the reader will bear with him patiently upto the end and then form his judgement one way or the other.
Preface or Rather an Apology

The Rāmāyaṇa has exercised a peculiar fascination over my mind for different reasons at different stages of my life. In boyhood the story books dealing with the exploits of Rāma—shooting down thousands with a single arrow, turning lonely stones to lovely women by the casual touch of his foot, and setting huge rocks afloat on the sea by the magic of his name, appealed to my love of the marvellous; the adventures of Hanūmān—lifting up mountains, pulling down trees, and tossing off demons with his tail which he contracted and extended to any length at will, tickled my sense of the humorous; the pictures of the Rākshasas—with crocodile jaws dripping with human blood, with eyes flashing forth fire, with necks encircled with a lion’s mane, with hair bristling up like the quills of a porcupine, filled me with delightful horror. When I was in my teens, it was a part of my duty to read the Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa* to my father, the Rāmacharita-

* In Sanskrit and attributed to Vyāsa, in which the greatest possible stress has been laid on the divine character of Rāma, and every conflicting incident either explained away or omitted to bring his mortal career into harmony with his assumed incarnation. The narrative is put into the mouth of the god Śiva, who is supposed to be relating the story of Rāma’s life to his wife Pārvatī. As the pet doctrines of the Vedanta philosophy are squeezed into the narrative from beginning to end, the tone is essentially spiritual.
mānasa* to my uncle, and the Rāma-Vījaya† to my mother. Being of an imaginative cast of mind and having an ear for melodious verse, Tulasīdāsa held me spell-bound. Tears of joy and sorrow would stream forth from my eyes as I sang out his lines to my equally affected hearers.

But as the edge of my emotions began to wear off in course of time, and as my mind began to take a reflective turn with the growth of years, several doubts started cropping up here, there, and everywhere in the course of my reading the Rāmāyaṇa, and these left me altogether bewildered. In fact the entire career of Rāma seemed to me a clueless puzzle. Why, in the first place, said I to myself, did the gods deliberately bring about a catastrophe in Ayodhyā on the eve of Rāma’s installation? They had sent him from heaven mainly to kill Rāvaṇa on earth,‡ and he could have fulfilled their wishes even after ascending the throne. Indeed, like his forefather Raghu, he could have set out even as a crowned king for the conquest of the world and, in the course of his victorious march southward, called upon the lord of Laṅkā to surrender at discretion or

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* In Hindi and by Tulasīdāsa. It follows the Adhyātma in the main, but lays more stress on devotion as the safest and surest way to self-realisation and eternal bliss.

† In Marathi and by Śrīdhara. Based upon the Padma Purāṇa, it gives undue prominence to the legendary aspect of the story.

‡ The Adhyātma : I. 2.

भगवन्न रावणो नाम बाधते विश्वकर्णः ।
अतत्र च मानुषों भूतवा वहि देवार्पियु भ्रमोऽ॥
fight to the bitter end. This would have been quite in accordance with the time-honoured ways of the kshatriyas. Why, then, did the gods adopt the tortuous course of first corrupting the mind of Kaikeyī,* then sending Daśaratha to tragic death, thus causing disruption in the royal family, and spreading a mournful gloom throughout the kingdom? Can this be called the godly way, namely, to plan the destruction of a single sinner on the unmerited sufferings of several innocents!—Daśaratha dying in tearful agony, Bharata living in protracted turmoil, Rāma wandering without a home, Kausalyā withering in helpless widowhood, Kaikeyī branded with indelible disgrace, and Śītā doomed to endless trials! Even the malignant spirits of hell might shrink from causing so much distress, which the benevolent angels of heaven engineered with meticulous care and marvellous exultation!

Secondly, how did Daśaratha happen to forget Kaikeyī's son and Sitāji's father on the eve of Rāma's installation? Shortness of time can never be accepted as an explanation, because he is said to have arranged in time to invite kings and chieftains from

* The Adhyātma : II. 2.

रामाभिषेकविभार्तं देवं बाणिजविदायतेऽऽऽ
मथ्यर्म प्रक्षिप्तवादौ कैकेयिः च ततः परमः
ततो विचे तदीयप्रेषे पुनरेदि दित्यं दुमे॥
afar to grace this auspicious occasion.* And why Rāma too did not choose to point out this glaring error of omission to his father, though he loved Bharata most and revered Janaka best? Moreover, though it was the son of Kausalyā who was to be elevated to the throne, yet Daśaratha did not care to tell her personally this happy news, or pass the previous night in her joyous company: he went instead to the palace of Kaikeyī whose son he had utterly neglected! My head reeled over this strange behaviour.

Thirdly, if Sītā is to be extolled as a model of wifely devotion for saying that her place was always by the side of her husband, be he a king in the palace or a hermit in the jungle, what shall we say to Urmilā who stayed behind Lakshmana? Why are the poets so silent on this point? Why did she not, like Sītā, insist that she also would share the weal and woe of her husband, be he a slave of Rāma in exile or his second-in-command in sovereignty? If Lakshmana’s main object in accompanying Rāma was only to serve him,† who could have served Sītā better than Urmilā herself? On this ground alone

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* Vālmīki: II. 1.

The Tilaka: शेषा: नैक्रयज्ञनक्षतितिरिक्ता इत्यर्थे: ||

† The Adhyātma: II. 4.

यास्यासि पृष्ठो राम सेवां कँड़ तदादिवः ||
she could have compelled Lakshmana to take her with him. Or she might have used the same threat of suicide which Sita* and Lakshmana† both ultimately held forth before Rāma in order to leave him no other choice but to let them come along with him, though much against his will.

Fourthly, why did Rāma hide from Śūrpaṇakhā the fact that Lakshmana also like him was a married man ?‡ Why did he not tell her straight away that neither of them, being strict monogamists, could ever accept her hand? Why did he tantalise her with false hopes and make sport of her and exasperate her into a criminal mood?§ She was after all the sister of Rāvana, a great monarch, and does not

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† The Adhyātma: II. 4.

‡ Vālmiki: III. 18.

§ Kālidāsa: XII.

i.e. Lakshmana is still a bachelor and in need of a wife. As he is matchless in valour, he is a good match for you who are matchless in beauty.
the barbarous mutilation of her face extenuate to some extent his guilt of abducting Sītā in revenge?

Fifthly, why did Rāma kill Vāli surreptitiously, when, as the Supreme Being and Champion of righteousness, he should have punished him openly and honourably, without a blot on his own fair name? If Vāli deserved no mercy for his immoral conduct, in what way could Sugrīva be said to be superior to him in morality?—he who, while his own heroic elder brother was at close grips with his enemy elsewhere, had usurped the throne of Kishkindhā*

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* The Adhyātma : IV.

लोकः भूले मृतको वाली युद्धाया रक्षिता हुनः ।
तथा युद्धाया उपलितः स्वरूपसिद्धांमितिस्व।।

i. e. “Then I told (the ministers) that Vāli was dead, slain by his enemy in the subterranean cave. Saddened at heart on hearing this, they all installed me on the throne against my will.”

It is worth remembering that it is Sugrīva who is here presenting his case to Rāma in as favourable a light as possible. Even assuming that he sincerely believed in Vāli’s death, it is not at all clear why he should have overridden the claims of Aṅgada to the throne; for being Vāli’s son, he was the legiti-
mate heir. Nor can it be argued that Aṅgada was an idiot or a mere child at that time; for not long after he was given the ambassador’s job to plead the cause of Rāma before Rāvaṇa, and on his return he figured conspicuously as a general in the invasion of Laṅkā. Aṅgada’s own words in this connection are different:—

Vālmīki : IV. 55. कथं स घर्म जानिते चैन श्राणा दुसरतमना ।
युद्धायासमिनिरुक्तेन विज्ञप्ति पिलित सुलम।।

i. e. ‘Does Sugrīva ever know what virtue is? He is so wicked that with fratricidal intentions he closed up the mouth of the cave which Vāli, engaged in the pursuit of his enemy, had ordered him to guard.
and dragged his helpless wife upon his incestuous bed,*—he who, after assisting in the assassination of his liege lord, had forced his mournful widow into concubinage!†

Sixthly, does Vibhishana really deserve the praise that has been so lavishly showered upon him by all poets? Does not his loyalty to Rama mean at bottom his treachery to Ravana whose salt he ate? If he did not approve of his brother’s policy, all that he could honourably do was to hold himself aloof from him, to non-cooperate with him in the war that followed. But to go over to Rama with these words, “My kingship, my life, my happiness rest entirely in your hands,”‡ and to turn an

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* Bhāsa’s Abhiṣekanātaka : I.

सुप्रीवरभिमुद्रा सूद्रमौतल्लि गुरोमत 
तस्य दारामितिष्ठवतः कथे दुःखयो गिन्नि राशि ॥

Vali says, “By Sugrīva was outraged the lawful wife of me who was like a father to him. How, then, I alone become punishable in your eyes for the seizure of his wife, when he has been guilty of a much worse incest.”

† Valmīki : IV. 31. तत: सुप्रीवरभवन प्रविष्टेऽहितुः गावः।

व्रह्ममास्तिवन च वृद्धवस्तिय व्यवेदयन्।

तारया सदित: कामी वक्ता कपिलवस्तुः 

न तेषां कपिलितां दुःखित वचनं तदा ॥

“Then the monkey chiefs entered the palace of Sugrīva to inform him of the arrival of Lakshmana in anger. But the voluptuous king, sunk in carnal enjoyment with Tārā, the widow of Vali, heeded not their words.”

‡ Valmīki : VI. 19.

अत्रवीचा तदा वाचकेः सर्वप्रति विभीषण:।

भवद्विते हि मे राज्य जीवितं च निःवानि च ॥
informer against his liege lord, with an offer of fullest help in his destruction,* indicates clearly that in changing sides, his basic motive was not pure love of truth and justice, but sheer lust of life and power. Should we therefore call him a magnanimous soul or a despicable turn-coat?

Lastly, how is it that Rāma ordered a fire-ordeal for Sītā only in Lāṅkā but not in Ayodhyā? Did the so-called barbarians and cannibals of the south deserve to have their suspicions set at rest, but not the civilised vegetarians of the north? If the god of fire presented Sītā to Rāma unscathed in the island, could he not do the same on the mainland? If his own enlightened subjects refused to accept the report of the miracle at Lāṅkā on blind faith, and if they demanded a direct proof of Sītā’s chastity before their very eyes, why did his mouth dry up?†

4 Vālmīki : VI. 19.

तत्र्य तद्दच्छन्ते शृवा रागो वधनमानविते।
आर्याहि मम तत्तेन रावणस्य कल्याबद्धम्।
एववृक्तस्तदा सर्वात्माः समुद्यत्तुष्टदशकान्ते॥

So also the Adhyātma : VI. 3.

रावणस्य विनाशो तवं वायुभायं किंतुमहिंसि॥

1 Vālmīki : VII. 45.

उवाच वाक्यं काकुत्स्थो मुखैं परिज्ञाततः।
पौराणिकवः सुमहांस्त्यं जनपदस्य च।
ब्रजेत मरि वीरमस्त्य च मे मर्यादि इत्यति।

न हि पद्याम्यहं भूतं किंचिदृ हुऽकम्भो ।

i.e. With his mouth drying up, the descendant of Kakutstha said, ‘what a scandal has risen against me in town and village! That the people should have so loathsome a feeling towards me, cuts me to the quick.'
and his heart shudder at the idea of repeating the experiment? Though convinced at heart of her stainless character,* he yielded to the malicious clamour of his people† and, acting against his own conscience, mournfully cast her away into the forest and ate his own heart out for the rest of his life.‡ Why should he consign her innocent soul to the horrors of disgrace as an unchaste woman and his own noble self to the torments of remorse as an inhuman wretch?§

These questions kept revolving in my mind for days together and made me restless. Finding no answer in the sacred books I was reading, I referred them to my elders and other venerable people of the orthodox school. But they all closed their ears first and then stopped my mouth by saying that it was blasphemy even to raise such questions. Thereupon I turned to Kālidāsa, Bhavabhūti, Bhaṭṭi, Kumāradāsa and other classical poets, but here too I was sorely disappointed. For beyond splashes of the marvellous, extravagant conceits, verbal gymnastics, figurative acrobatics, and mawkish sentimentality they had

* Vālmīki : VII. 45.

† Bhavabhūti : I.

‡ Bhavabhūti : III.

§ Bhavabhūti : I.

उन्मुच्छ निःशक्तिपर्यायेः गृहस्य शोभा
कन्यादृश्यो विलिमित निर्भरणः विपामि ||
little to offer. I then looked to modern scholars of the East and West, but these instead of clarifying my doubts made the confusion in my mind still worse confounded. For, some exploded the whole Rāmāyaṇa as a mere fable or an allegory;* some discovered in it the influence of Homer's Iliad;†

* Lassen held that the story was intended to represent allegorically the first attempt of the Aryans to spread their culture and civilisation to the South and Ceylon. This view has been rejected by other scholars, but on grounds rather discreditable to Rāma and Vālmīki alike. For they say that the Indian hero is nowhere represented as having exercised a healthy influence on the life and thought of the natives of the South, and secondly that the Indian poet could hardly possess Bunyan's genius to transform systematically a series of abstract ideas into a narrative of visual images.

—Macdonell's Sanskrit Literature : Chap. X.

† Weber held that Vālmīki's Āḍi-kāvya is an adaptation of the Greek Epic. Really speaking, the forcible abduction of Sītā by Rāvaṇa and the siege of Lāṅka by Rāma bears only a factitious resemblance to the willing elopement of Helen with Paris and the siege of Troy by the entire warrior host of Greece. In one respect the difference is very striking: while the Hindu heroine, in spite of her purity being testified by the gods, was even then abandoned in the jungle by Rāma on mere suspicion, the Spartan heroine, in spite of her glaring faithlessness, was graciously received back into his arms by Menelaus, whom she had even attempted to poison on sick-bed! Moreover it is only the jaundiced eye which can see any similarity between Rāma breaking a bow to win the hand of maidenly Sītā, and Ulysses bending a bow to shoot the importunate suitors of his fairly old Penelope. Indeed, stories of such feats of strength are so common in the ancient literatures of the world that originality of conception need not be claimed for the West only, as Weber often did.
some averred that it was a fanciful enlargement of the Daśaratha Jātaka,* some opined that it was only a transformation of a celestial myth into a narrative of earthly adventures.† Some who were

* This again is Weber's theory. To examine it briefly, in the first place while the Epic deals mainly with the adventurous career of Rāma in the wilderness of the south, the Jātaka brings Rāma back home after a twelve years' sojourn in the northern Himalayas without a single achievement to his credit. Secondly, while the Epic practically begins with the marriage of Rāma and Sītā as persons of two entirely different families, the Jātaka ends with the wedding of Rāma and Sītā as brother and sister born of the same parents! This representation of Sītā as the sister of Rāma was purposely introduced in the Jātaka to create a parallel instance to the story of Buddha's ancestors having been born of a brother and a sister married to each other. Whatever the Buddhists may feel about it, such matrimonial connexions are entirely repugnant to Hindu sentiment. Apart from this, there is nothing in the whole Jātaka that can be said to be inspiring; rather much of it is sickening, and the rest a mere rigmarole. That the Jātaka itself is a hopelessly bad abridgement of Vālmīki's original Epic has now been proved on linguistic and other considerations.

† This is Jacobi's theory and is fully supported by Macdonell. According to these scholars, the Epic presents a curious combination of two Vedic myths. One myth tells us that when the cows of heaven were stolen away by Vṛtrāsura, otherwise called Indraśātra, their hiding place was discovered by the divine bitch Saramā and their recovery was effected by Indra with the assistance of Maruts or wind-gods. This, they say, corresponds to the abduction of Sītā by the well-known father of Indrajit, her consolation by Vibhīṣaṇa's wife Saramā, and her rescue by Rāma with the help of Mārvī, the son of Wind-god. Sītā's appearance from and disappearance into the earth, her pining for reunion with Rāma after her abandonment

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inclined to treat it as a piece of history, 'dressed in fiction,' advanced the most astounding view that the Rāma–Rāvana–tussel was in fact a struggle of Brahmanism versus Buddhism.* Some pretended to take a balanced view, but being obsessed by Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*, narrowed down the heroism of Rāma to the feat of abolishing cannibalism from south India!†

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are taken by these scholars to resemble another myth relating to Sītā as the Deity of the ploughed field, looking forward to the arrival of Pārjanya, the Rain God, in drought.

*Macdonell's Sanskrit Literature*: Chap. X.

* This is Talboys Wheeler's theory in his *History of India*, Vol. II. He says that since the Buddhists were bitterly opposed to the Brahmanical sacrifices and were driven out of the Dekkan by the worshippers of Śiva Linga who compelled them to take refuge in Ceylon, and since Rāma is said to have worshipped the Śiva Linga on the sea-shore and to have protected the sacrifices of Brahman sages from the violent attacks of the Rākshasas whom he finally expelled from the South to the island of Ālīka—these circumstances point to the identity of the Rākshasas with the Buddhists who flourished in India for a period of twelve centuries from 500 B.C. to 700 A.D. and established a seat of empire in Ceylon, which has continued to this day. The theory is too fantastic to deserve serious consideration. It will suffice to mention here that Rāma and Dāsaratha are mentioned even in the Rg-Veda, and that Vālmiki's original Epic has been accepted by all Sanskritists to have been composed long before the birth of Gautama Buddha.

† This is C.V. Vaidya's view in his *Riddle of the Rāmāyaṇa*. He says that like Cortez, the Spanish adventurer, Rāma was a hero who, under the wise dispensation of the Almighty, was brought into conflict with the man-eaters of the Dekkan,

(Continued on next page)
Dissatisfied everywhere, I threw myself at the feet of Rāma himself and cried for light, and then the thought flashed across my mind that I was unnecessarily running after rills and brooks, when the fountainhead in the form of the Ādikāvyya lay so close by. I plunged into it, and there amidst weeds of absurd, tasteless, entangling interpolations I discovered the genuine words of Vālmīki. And as I pieced them together and reflected over them, Lord Rāma revealed himself to me as the greatest political and military genius that India has produced—he who, working under the frightfully hopeless circumstances, raised the Aryan race from the lowest depths of subjection to the heights of glorious independence! Another fact which struck me as peculiarly significant was that after the era of Rāvaṇa, the Purāṇas spoke no more of Deva-Asura-sangrāma or Deva-Rākṣasa-Yuddha. The next Avatāra of Kṛṣṇa dealt only with the internecine strife among the Aryans themselves. Thus the war between Rāma and Rāvaṇa stood out before me as the final phase of the long-drawn-out struggle for supremacy between the Aryan settlers of India and the Non-Aryan

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as fierce, detestable, and implacable as the Aztecs of Mexico, and who, by exterminating them, purified this land of ours from the debasing practice of cannibalism, as Cortez did the land of Mexicans! The only answer to this view is our expression of pity that whereas in India there is not a single village but has a shrine of Rāma in it, in Mexico there should not be a single temple dedicated to the worship of Cortez for his humanitarian purge. May be that the inhabitants of Mexico are ungrateful folks, or the natives of India are idolatrous fools!
owners of this land, the former being spoken of as the Devas by Aryan sages and the latter nicknamed by them as the Asuras or the Rākshasas; just as Churchill dubs his own people the angelic saviours of mankind and daubs his enemies the ferocious beasts of prey.

The present book, thus, is an attempt to interpret the life of Rāma in this light. It is too much to expect that my readers will see eye to eye with me throughout, though I have taken care to support every unorthodox view of mine by quotations from orthodox works and by reasonings based upon them. However, my chief aim is to force upon the attention of my countrymen that the so-called mythical world of Rāma, though seemingly controlled by infallible curses and boons, was in no way different from our own world which is obviously dominated by inexorable moral and material laws, and to bring home to their mind that the causes governing the rise and fall of nations are in every age and in every epoch of history exactly the same. Whatever success I achieve in this respect is the measure of my reward. To bear out my point of view I have discussed in detail what led to the downfall of the Aryans before Rāma and what led to the rise of the Non-Aryans under Rāvana; and also how similar causes working in the opposite directions brought about their rise and fall respectively under Rāma and after Rāvana.

The Rāmāyana has been the solace of my life all these years. It has impressed upon my mind this truth that no great nation can ever be felled by
another from outside, unless it is morally fallen from within. Indeed, no big tree shall ever be blown down by a storm, unless it is first rotten in the roots. The decline and fall of India after Harshavardhana of Kanauj had always puzzled me. Neither the bombasts of historians, nor the phillipics of the congressites, nor the railleries of the reformers, nor the whimperings of the sanatanists helped me in the least to solve the riddle. It is Vālmīki alone who furnished the key to the problem as to why the sun of India set permanently after 650 A. D. In the long night that followed a few meteors did blaze across the sky, such as Rāṇā Pratāp who stood up against the might of Akbar and preferred to live in hard liberty rather than luxuriate under an easy yoke; Rājā Śivāji who founded the Mahratta kingdom under the very nose of Bijapur and in spite of the long arms of Delhi; Rāṇī Laxmībāī who struggled manfully against the tightening grip of the White Octopus. But these meteors blazed to no lasting purpose: they could not set afire the icy cold heart of the rest of India. Indeed, mutual animosities,* sordid selfishness, brazen-faced hypocrisy, lip service

* General Mansfield, Chief of Staff of the Indian Army, wrote after the Mutiny:— "It was not because the Sikhs loved us but because they hated Hindustān and the Hindustānī regiments that they flocked to our standard, instead of seizing the golden opportunity they had to strike again for their freedom. They were eager for revenge and for the loot of the cities of Hindustān. They were not attracted by mere daily pay but by the prospect of wholesale plunder and slaughter of their native enemies. In short, we turned to account the esprit de

(Continued on next page)
to truth but silent homage to falsehood, all attention to lifeless idols and utter disregard of suffering humanity, professing the oneness of all Hindus but clinging like a leech to thousands of incisions within the same caste*—these and other diseases have in us penetrated to the very bone and left us so weak that outsiders have for centuries feasted merrily upon our rotting body. Mahmud of Ghazni might come here any number of times and overrun the sacred Āryāvarta unchecked—sacking towns, plundering cities, desecrating temples, and carry away enormous piles of wealth! Here Baber might come and plant the flag of Islamic power in this soil, which continues to stream threateningly above

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corps of the old Khalsa Army of Ranjit Singh in suppressing the Mutiny of 1857."

When the news of the enlistment of the Gurkhas reached Lord Dalhousie in England, he wrote to a friend: "Against the Oudh sepoys they may be confidently expected to fight like devils." And they did.


* 'There is among the Hindus no passion for unity, no desire for fusion. There is no desire to have a common dress, no desire to have a common language, no will to give up what is local and particular for something which is common and national. A Gujarathi takes pride in being a Gujarathi, a Maharashtrian in being a Maharashtrian, a Punjabi in being a Punjabi, a Madrasi in being a Madrasi, and a Bengali prides in being a Bengali! Such is the mentality of the Hindus! And yet they have the cheek to accuse the Mussalman of want of national feeling when he says that he is a Mussalman first and Indian afterwards.'

Dr. Ambedkar: Thoughts on Pakistan.
us to this very day and compels us to yield on every point to the few well-knit Moslems. Here the Portuguese might come, the Dutch might come, the French might come, the English might come; and they might set up factories, build forts, keep armies, and enlist our own people to enslave this land of Rāma,—of Rāma whom we hallelujah in the temples, but whose name even we are not worthy to utter, much less to call ourselves his devout followers!*

Rāma was not a blind follower of religious dogmas and social conventions. He practised what Lord Kṛṣhṇa preached long after him to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra†:

‘One who walks in the light of pure reason, neither deflected by passion nor biased by sentiment, remains unaffected by good and bad acts. Strive, therefore, O Arjuna! to attain equilibrium; for one who is balanced in mind knows the right way of doing the right thing at the right moment.’

He sought to achieve his objects by fair means as far as possible, but if the use of hook or crook

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* Bhāravi: II.

अनुपाल्यतामुद्देश्यतीम प्रभुवाक्षित द्विषतामनीद्यय।
अपयात्त्वायस्मात्मयामाहोभौ जननिवैदमवादित्व श्रेयोऽ॥

i.e. Those who see their enemies growing stronger every day before their very eyes and yet remain supine, are forthwith forsaken by Royal Fortune which disdains to stay with such imbecile fools!

† The Gītā: II.

इंद्रायणां जहातीह उमे हुष्टलुक्ष्मी।
तस्माद योगाय युक्तस्म योगः कर्मणु कौशल्यम्॥
became unavoidable, he did not shrink from it: Witness how he stabbed Vāli in the back in order to strike Rāvana effectively in the heart. He covered much of his ground by sweet persuasion, but he never adopted non-violence as his creed; for he knew full well that in this world, where sinners are rife and saints but rare,* to connive at wanton cruelty, to tolerate gratuitous insult, to submit to intimidation was to degrade forgiveness to the level of pusillanimity and to put a premium on these noxious qualities.† On such occasions he did not go on hunger strike; he clenched his fist tightly and hit squarely between the eyes: Witness how he wiped out the entire lot of Tāḍakā and her brood, and stopped once for all further encroachment of the Rākshasas upon the Aryan settlements to the south of the Ganges! He guarded against rift or treachery among his own followers, but engineered it skilfully in the enemy’s camp to sap his strength: Witness how he pandered to the cupidity of Vibhishana and made him delve under the feet of his own brother!

* The Manusmṛti : VII.

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i. e. It is the fear of punishment which ensures orderly life in society and makes it possible for all to enjoy peace and happiness; for, persons righteous at heart are extremely difficult to find in this world.

† The Mahābhārata:

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Though conscious of his high birth and truly religious at heart, he was not squeamish or hide-bound: Witness how he appreciated the guileless love of Šabarí and ate her nibbled fruits with a relish; thereby he gained her precious help in the execution of his wonderful design* and the whole-hearted co-operation of the hill tribes of the south! He included the Vānaras and the Rākshasas among his own people and thereby spread Eternal Religion to the farthest extremity of India. But we of to-day, though of the same caste, creed, culture, custom, and language must abominate each other’s food for the glory of Sanātana Dharma, and demonstrate the superiority of our respective grades within the same circle by despising even each other’s glance as a pollution of each other’s cooking.†

Not to allow a single loophole in his plans, not to leave anything to the mercy of chance, not to make a start without adequate preparations, and not to waver but to go ahead when once the decisive step was taken, this was his fourfold policy: Witness his slow, steady, and silent toiling in Danḍakāraṇya for thirteen years, his anticipation of the enemy’s moves with unerring foresight, his timely substitution of a false Šitā in place of the real one, and his

* See Chapter V.

† ‘This has been my chief complaint against Hinduism that while a Muslim wants all to share his dish with him, a Hindu retires into the privacy of his kitchen and permits not even the shadow of his own caste-brother to fall on his food. I once asked Mr. Gandhi to justify this feature of his faith to me.’

M. Mahomed Ali’s Congress Presidential Address,
conquest of the vast empire of Rāvana within six months! If he made promises, he made it a point of honour to keep them and did not, like Napoleon, put his own brothers in places he had promised to others for loyal help; or like Warren Hastings, bleed the puppets white by constant extortions; or like Robert Clive, present his accomplices with a fictitious red paper in place of the stipulated bargain: Witness how he left Vibhīṣaṇa in full possession of the enormous wealth of Laṅkā! In praise of this generosity of Rāma's, I heard a verse in Benaras when I was a student there at Queen's College. It struck me as fine and has since then stuck in my memory to this day. Its purport is as follows:—

"When the son of Suddhodana proposed that the kingdom of Laṅkā might be handed over to Vibhīṣaṇa according to promise, but its treasury be claimed as spoils of war, the Scion of the Raghu race smiled, and said that when the elephant had been freely given away as a gift, was there any sense in wrangling over the retention of a mere goad?"

Indeed, Rāma had not the meanness to exploit the conquered territory in the name of co-prosperity, or to humiliate the fallen foe with a halter in the

* Anonymous:—

सौमित्रिविचविति विभीषणाय बंक्रां
देहि स्वमुज्जनते! विनैत्र कोषम्
तत्त्वं रघुविधियाह वाक्यमेतत्
संत्यस्ते करिणि किमैंहो विचाद: ||

\( \text{(xxvi) } \)
name of justice to humanity*: Witness his tribute of praise to the spirit of Rāvana who never gave in but fought to the death, and the stately funeral he ordered in honour of his body that lay still on the stricken field!†

Whether Rāma was or was not an incarnation of God is an idle question. What really matters to us is that he was born a man and as such, being himself imperfect and working in an imperfect world, he had to fulfill himself in a variety of ways, some of which can hardly be called above reproach, though undeniably indispensable to success. It is worth remembering that when the gods once came to him from heaven to remind him that he was the

*(a) Twelve out of twenty-one Germany’s men of light and leading were sentenced to death by hanging on October 1, 1946. If what Churchill said about Stalin’s cold-blooded massacre of thousands of his own countrymen, about his aggression upon Finland, Baltic States and Rumania was true, then Russia’s sitting in judgement over Germany marked the climax of mock justice. Indeed, this trial of Germany by the Tribunal of Victors reminds one of the famous trial of a helpless sheep, in Aesop’s Fables, by the tribunal of a fox, a monkey, and a wolf.

(b) Mussolini, the vanquished hero of Italy, was riddled with bullets, trampled under foot, and suspended from a tree to be spit upon by the riff-raff. Joan of Arc was burnt alive, and Tatia Topey, the hero of 1857, met a dog’s death at the hands of his victors.

† Vālmiki: VI. 109.
Supreme Being, he silenced them with a curt reply.*

“Look here, ye celestial hosts,” he said, “all that I care to know at present is that I am a man, a son of Daśaratha, and as such I shall behave. Do not pester me again with such reminders.” Thus before a man of action in this world there lies a choice of two alternatives only—either to vacillate between right and wrong, and die like Hamlet a tragic failure,† or to dash forward resolutely with a singleness of aim and live like Rāma a glorious success.‡

What was intended to be merely a Preface has ultimately turned out to be an Apology for my standpoint in this book. It has already run to a tedious length; hence it is time to close it and let the Prologue begin.

Nagpur, 7-7-1947.

N. R. Navlekar

* Vālmiki : VI. 117.

अबबीत्र निर्मलं श्रृद्धं तत्रं धर्मं सृजन्त वर्।
आत्मानं मानुषं मन्येन रामं दशरथात्मं जय।

† Hamlet : III.

Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment,
With this regard, their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.

‡ The Gītā : IV. व्यवसायिकाः बुझिरेकेह कुसनन्दनः

ब्रह्माज्ञब्राह्मणात्वः हुँडयोऽर्थता भवसायिनामूः

नायं लोको स्वतः न परो न दुःखं संशयात्मनः।

i. e. Whereas the resolute mind has all its force concentrated on one point, diffused are the energies of the irresolute. Indeed, for the doubting self there is neither this world nor the next, no happiness on this side of the grave or beyond it.
DEDICATED

to

Mahamahopadhyaya

V. V. MIRASHI, M. A.

as a Token of

Affection and Regard
## ERRATA

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A New Approach to the Ramayana

CHAPTER I

The Prologue

From ancient times to the present day the glory of Rāma has been sung by many, and they are all poets of no mean order. Their books are widely read in India, not so much for the enjoyment of aesthetic pleasure, as with a view to the enhancement of spiritual merit. The Ādikāvya of Vālmīki, the Adhyātma of Vyāsa, the Rāma-charita-mānasa of Tulasidāsa, the Rāma-vijaya of Śrīdhara, and the like are believed to be divinely inspired and to radiate blissful influence through their words; hence they are daily recited in families and in assemblies with intense devotional fervour. Thus the story of Rāma is already too familiar to young and old alike to need elaboration or elucidation. I am well aware of it, and my only apology for choosing so commonplace a theme is that since the conventional manner in which it has
been treated so far by pious authors, fails to carry conviction to the sceptical mind of today, and since the uncharitable way in which it has been dissected by critical scholars,* shocks the susceptibilities of a devout heart, one may without irreverence deal with it from a rationalistic standpoint and study the doings of Rāma, not as the Supreme Being, but as a human hero, divested of all the supernatural powers which his votaries have ascribed to him.

Without meaning any slur on the theory of Divine Incarnation, I should like to point out that those who have accepted it as the basis of their treatment of the subject, have unfortunately lost sight of the simple fact that if God chose to be born a man, He must also have meant to accomplish His purpose by such means as are available to man and

* Since Sītā, in spite of her constant association with Rāma for twenty-five years, bore no children to him until after their triumphant return to Ayodhyā, Weber is inclined to give credence to the Buddhistic legend, as recorded in the Daśaratha Jātaka, that she was the sister of Rāma, whom she married after the period of exile was over: possibly because, we may add, she could find none else willing to take her to wife on account of her pollution by the touch of the Demon’s hand!

† Since Rāma abandoned Sītā most heartlessly at a time when her delivery was drawing near, Talboys Wheeler thinks that she must have conceived of Rāvana; for, when the fact of her pregnancy, which Rāma could not conscientiously trace to himself, was discovered by him, he, who had become as jealous and peevish as Henry the Eighth, cast her away into the jungle; and later on, we may add, when the proof of her guilt appeared before the eyes of the world in the form of twin-sons, he buried her alive into a bottomless pit.
in such ways as are within his reach; otherwise there
would be no point in God's taking human birth at
all. He could as well have lightened the burden of
the world by the merest of a wish, right from His
abode in the seventh heaven, and there was really
no necessity for Him to descend from there in person
to this Earth! Having ignored this self-evident
truth, our poets have described the achievements of
Rāma with so extravagant a fancy and with such
idolatry, that the impression is irresistible that all
those achievements were but miracles, which God
alone could perform and which we, poor mortals,
can never hope to comprehend, much less to imitate.
Secondly, most of them, and especially Tulasidāsa,
have laid so much stress on the domestic virtues of
Rāma—his filial piety, his conjugal fidelity, his fra-
ternal affection, and his affable disposition, that these
alone occupy the forefront of our attention; whereas
his main qualities as the saviour of the Aryan race
in India sink into the background. The result is
that Rāma is chiefly remembered by the many as a
model of cordial family relations, rather than as a
man of light and leading who combined subtle poli-
tical wisdom with a superb spirit of adventure.

It is this aspect of the life of Rāma which is of
all-absorbing interest. But the pity is that much of
its educative value is lost to us, because while it
needed a material consideration, it has received
instead a mystical representation. There prevails,
therefore, a curious feeling in society—and our poets
are responsible for it—that the entire course of
events as depicted in the Rāmāyana was previously
ordained.* Thus, for instance, Rāvana was already doomed to death at the hands of man and monkey, and God simply fulfilled that doom in his sportive manner;† Kaikeyī was already condemned to eternal

* Some even go to the length of saying that Vālmīki wrote the Rāmāyaṇa long before the birth of Rāma, and that Rāma and others consulted this book before they took any step in life. This makes the persons of the Rāmāyaṇa as mere puppets, dancing on the world stage according as Vālmīki pulled his wires from behind. Thus in the Adhyātma Sītā says that she would accompany Rāma to the forest, because nowhere in the Rāmāyaṇa has she read that Sītā stayed behind. To put such an argument into the mouth of Sītā is to reduce her to the level of a mechanized doll, which has no will or judgement of its own and therefore deserves no praise: cf. The Adhyātma: II. 4.

रामायणानि बहुःः श्रुतानि बहुःमतिः
सीतां निना वर्णो रामो गतः कि कुत्रविहि

† Vālmīki: I. 16.

अधाता: पुरा तेन वर्तने हि मानवः
तत्सात्त्वः वधो देवो मात्रपृष्टः परंतप

The Uttarakānda, canto 10, describes in detail the terrific penance performed by Rāvana in order to obtain from Brahmā the boon of invincibility against the Devas, Asuras, Rakshasas, Yakshas, Gandharvas and other divine or semi-divine beings. Being conscious of his superiority to all earthly creatures, he scorned to include men and monkeys among his possible adversaries. God Vishṇu took advantage of this omission in order to destroy him. He was therefore born a man, his angels appearing as monkeys to assist him.

The Adhyātma also says the same thing in the Bālakānda: 2.

विषण्वानुपप्पेण मन्दिर्रति स्मोऽ कुत्रे
देवः सुग्रीवं संवृद्धमि वानरसंस्मर्नवत्
विष्णो: सहायं कुस्त यावत्तस्यास्त्यि स्मूतः

(Continued on next page)
disgrace by an ugly sage, and so was her mind suddenly corrupted by the malicious hunchback;* Daśaratha had already been cursed to fatal separation from his dearest son, and the curse simply took

(Continued from the previous page)

But it adds elsewhere that Rāvaṇa was destroyed by men and monkeys, not merely because in asking the boon of invulnerability from Brahmā, he had failed to name them as his dangerous rivals, but because in cursing him for his arrogance, Nandi had explicitly mentioned them as his mortal enemies in the end: VII. 2;—

रावणो विजयी लोकान्तर्वाचात्मित्वा क्रमेण तु।
कैलासं तोह्यामात्र बाहुभिः परिषोपम:।
तत्र नन्दीक्षेर्सैवं श्रम्भद्यं राष्ट्रस्वतः।
वानरेमार्गातुपैलैवं नाशं गच्छति कोणिता॥

* Vāmiki: II. 9.

कैलासेऽथ तृं सा वाणा ग्राह्यं स्वप्नलिपिणम्।
अधुतितवती बाल्ये, तेन शाप्ता महात्मना।
वसमादसूर्ये विरं त्वं रुपमदर्पिता।
तस्मादसूरोऽत्मनपि बोधके प्राप्त्वत्च कृत्तिताम्।
इति शापसभास्त्वना मन्थरावशास्माप्ता॥

The Adhyātma, however, says that the sudden change in the mind of Kaikeyī and Mantharā was effected by the Goddess of speech, not as a punishment for any fault of theirs, but simply at the pressing request of the gods to upset anyhow all arrangements made by Daśaratha for the installation of Rāma;—

The Adhyātma: II. 2.

एतत्सिद्धश्च देवा देवीं चाणीमचोदनन्।
गच्छ देवीं मुनो लोकमयोध्यायं प्रयत्तिः।
रामाधिपकविनायं यत्तथ व्रजवाक्यत॥
effect in due course*! Thus since the law of predeter-

* Valmiki: II. 64.

The Adhyātma also says that Daśaratha had once unwittingly shot dead a young ascetic, Śrāvana by name, and was in consequence cursed by his old blind parents that he too would suffer the agony of separation from his son and die, like them, of broken heart:—

Tulasiđāsa, however, refers but faintly to this curse and expatiates on another legend to give the mournful occurrence a beatific touch. In fact, according to him, the death of Daśaratha was not so much the effect of a curse inflicted upon him, as the fruit of a boon conferred on him. He says that God Vishnu, pleased with the devotions of Manu, promised him that he would incarnate himself as a son to him, when he was born in Ayodhyā as Daśaratha. Manu thereupon begged as an additional favour that his paternal attachment to the godly son should be such that in case there was separation from him, his own life, like that of a fish out of water, should forthwith depart from his body.

Tulasi: I.

चंद्रि चरन मदु कहेंद्र बढ़ोरी।
अङ्र एक किन्ती मदु मोरी॥

Tulasi: I.

चंद्रि चरन मदु कहेंद्र बढ़ोरी।
अङ्र एक किन्ती मदु मोरी॥

Muni बिनु फनी जिमि जल बिनु मीना।
सम चीन तिनि तुहारहि अभीना॥
mination worked through the entire course of happenings, independently of human will, the lovers of the Rāmaṇa naturally say that to discuss the logic of any event, or the propriety of anybody’s act, is sheer impudence, or why, a veritable sin. Brahmā in his contemplative mood ordered that it should be so and it was so. Who are we to challenge his design! Was Vālmīki a fool, or Vyāsa a dunce, or Tulasi an ass, when they acquiesced in his arrangement! They have interpreted to us the ways of Heaven. Let us ponder over their works in good faith! Away with all impertinent questions! Come, let us recount the deeds of Rāma and repeat his name and recite hallelujahs to him! That is the way to salvation; the reverse is a descent to perdition.* The rise and fall of the world around us are entirely God’s concern. Why need we bother about them? Has He not graciously assured us: “For the protection of the good and for the destruction of

* Vālmīki: I. 1.

ये पठित्रामचरितं सर्वस्यपौर: मयुरयेष्वे।
सपुत्रपृथी: सर्वा। प्रत्यय स्वर्गो महीयते॥

Every work on the Life of Rāma, great or small, makes a promise of unlimited reward to its readers. Whosoever reads a single line before breakfast or before going to bed must have flourishing prosperity while alive and everlasting bliss after death. It is these flattering assurances which, though not intended by their authors to be taken literally, have obviated the necessity of intelligent study and encouraged blind faith in mechanical reading.
the wicked, for the re-establishment of righteousness, do I take birth in every age?"* Therefore since God has taken upon Himself the heavy task of looking to the moral order of the world, all that remains now for us to do is to look to our own self and be, like Rāma, subservient to our parents, faithful to our wives, and genial to our brothers. If we do that, our heaven is secured!

In this way in Hindu society the cultivation of these homely virtues became the be-all and end-all of life. I do not deny that these are excellent traits of character, but I cannot help saying that they are conducive only to domestic peace and happiness. Homes may well thrive upon them, but nations thrive upon a much sterner stuff. They require for their prosperous rise, dauntless courage and impetuous vigour, enterprising spirit and resourceful genius, unshakable confidence in self and unflinching devotion to the native land. It is these qualities which make a people worthy of name and place in the world. Without them no nation can hope to survive in the dire struggle for existence, with vultures hovering above and crocodiles lurking below. And it is because we lost sight of these sterling, manly characteristics of Rāma and idealised only


परिश्रान्त साधु नाय विनाश कं हुष्कातामे ।
सर्वस्वस्वपननाथियं संहवामि गुरो गुरो ॥

So also Vālmīki : VII. 8.

नस्यवस्यवस्त्रानां काले काले प्रजाकरः ।
उत्पवच्छे दस्युवेच्य हरणागतवतत्सः ॥
the supposedly tender emotions of his that we fell, and so disastrous has been that fall that we have now no place of honour under the sun; whatever place we have is by sufferance and not by right.

Vālmiki alone in my opinion studied the greatness of Rāma from the national point of view. To him Rāma was great, not for how he behaved towards the members of his family, but for what he did for the members of the Aryan stock in India. Vālmiki therefore deserves the first place among poets not so much on account of his precedence in time, as because of his predominance in merit. Thanks to the careful investigations of Professor Jacobi, all scholars are now agreed that his original Epic consisted of five books only, from the Ayodhya-kāṇḍa to the Lankā-kāṇḍa; that is to say, it dealt mainly with the departure of Rāma from home in a hermit's garb, his daring march through the dreaded region of the south, and his return home from Lankā in glorious triumph. It is the later rhapsodists who, to meet the demands of the popular taste, prefixed the Bālakāṇḍa in the beginning and suffixed the Uttarakāṇḍa at the end, and made several additions and alterations in the body of the Epic itself, so as to transfigure a human hero into a divine incarnation. The Uttarakāṇḍa is obviously an outgrowth, not an integral part of the original Epic; for the Lankā-kāṇḍa ends with the customary benedictory pronouncement
upon the readers,* and this leaves no doubt in the mind that Vālmiki concluded his historical poem with the coronation of Rāma in Ayodhya. Again, the Bālakandā, besides having several passages that conflict with the statements of the later books, contains two tables of contents, one of which takes no notice at all of the first and last books, and must, therefore, have been made before these were prefixed and suffixed. In the remaining five books not only the original cantos have been altered and amplified, but new ones also have been inserted. The addition of the Bālakandā required the shifting of a few opening cantos of Book II to the beginning of Book I. All these changes are easy to discern. C. V. Vaidya has in his Riddle of the Rāmāyanā carefully pointed out how the interpolations are sometimes mere repetitions in a longer metre of what has already been said before in the usual shorter metre, sometimes fulsome exaggerations of the marvellous, sometimes loosely connected or altogether disconnected with the context, sometimes flatly contradictory to what precedes or succeeds, sometimes only conventional descriptions of sights and seasons, sometimes elaborate speeches on law and morality, sometimes long drawn-out lamentations and eulogies. In the course

* Vālmiki : VI. 128.

आदिकाल्यमिदं चार्ष पुरा वाशीकिनां क्षत्रम्।
यः भूषणोति सदा लोके नरः पापात्मयुव्यते।
रामायणमिदं क्रत्स्तं शृंगत: पठतः सदा।
शीतावतं सतबं रामः च हि विज्ञु: सनातनः।
एवमेतत्परं बृहस्पतिः स्मरः सर: ||

*
of our narrative there will be occasions to refer to some of the absurdities and inconsistencies that crept in the Rāmāyaṇa as it underwent modifications at the hands of its several editors. However, a considerable time must have elapsed between the composition of the original Epic and its enlargement to the present size. It is indeed interesting to notice, as one carefully goes through the whole work, how the tribal hero of the original poem has, in the revised portions of the five books, been transformed into a national hero, the moral ideal of the people, and finally, in the two additional books, been completely identified with Vishnu, the Lord of the Universe.*

However much we may regret this transfiguration of history into mythology, yet to be fair to the several editors and amplifiers of Vālmīki, we must admit that this deification of Rāma was chiefly necessitated by the phenomenal rise and spread of Buddhism, which threatened to sweep the esta-

* In its present form Vālmīki’s Rāmāyaṇa consists of about 24000 verses. It has been preserved in three distinct texts—the Bombay, the Bengal, and the Central Indian. About one-third of the verses in each of these three texts occurs in neither of the other two. Thus it is only 8000 verses which are common to all, and these may be supposed to constitute Vālmīki’s original epic. It is also interesting to notice that whereas the Bombay text preserves the irregularities of the old epic language, the other two texts are mostly free from these archaisms. For further particulars see Macdonell’s and Winternitz’s History of Skt. Lit. The Bombay text being obviously the oldest, I have used it exclusively as my authority in this book.
blished Vedic religion clean out of existence. The Buddhists in their zeal for the enlightened founder of their Faith began to worship him as an incarnation of the Supreme Being, and invented stories of his successive births in the past to trace the gradual passage of his benevolent Self from the lowest to the highest form of life and through the various strata of society. Naturally their religion, centred round so catholic a personality as Gautama's, made a lively appeal to the imagination and sentiment of the vast majority of people, and in consequence the orthodox Aryans found their own abstruse religion in danger of rapid desertion. For the masses can never feel real attachment to that religion which, instead of putting salvation within easy reach of all without distinction, makes it the monopoly of the select few,* which represents God as an Amorphous Being who sits invisible on Olympian heights and

* The Gitā : VII.

मनुष्याणां सहस्रेण कर्तित्वत्ति सिद्धये ।
वत्तामपि सिद्धानां कर्तित्वम् वै तत्वं तत्त्वः ॥
बहुनां जन्मनापमते शानवानां प्रपद्धते ।
वामुद्वे सर्वमिति स महात्मा मुद्देन्मः ॥

i.e. Among thousands of men scarce one striveth for perfection; of the successful strivers scarce one knoweth Me in essence. At the close of many births does a man acquire true knowledge and realise that every thing is God: then only does he come unto Me. Indeed, such a man whose soul embraces the whole Universe is very difficult to find.
looks down upon all with callous indifference,* who listens to prayers only when they are couched in a mystic language which the few are authorised to learn and the many are even forbidden to hear,† who strikes the sinners down without mercy and

* The Gītā:

यूँतरामे नामिज्ञानाति एको मामजमयम्।
अनिदेशमचिन्त्यं च अव्यक्तमचर्चं विचारं।
उदासीनवदासीनसमक्ते तेषु कमः।
न मां दुःखात्मी शुद्धा प्रपञ्चन्ते नराधमः।
मोहजालसमाविधः पवति नरशेषुश्रवी।
भामवत्नान्नमुत्तानि कदनास्थानि मायेः।

i. e. Immersed in ignorance, people fail to see that I am really unborn, immutable, ineffable, inscrutable, unmanifest, immovable, and eternal, sitting on high unconcernedly and unattached to actions. The sinful, the deluded, the vilest among mankind have no access to me: enmeshed in the web of delusion, they all fall into a foul hell. Indeed, all beings are fastened to the universal machine of cause and effect, and I cause them to revolve helplessly by My illusive power.

† Manu: VIII. X.

दार्शाय शुद्धः शूष्कोऽवृद्धी ग्राह्यणात्य स्वयंसुवा।
नास्याविकारो धर्मशास्ति न च संस्कारावहीः।
विवाहादि पुनरस्तरं मन्त्रवर्णं विशिष्यदेते।
वृद्धायमके दातन्ये जीवानि वसन्नानि च।
धर्मीयेदेति दूर्दशं विधायामस्य कुर्वेत्।
तप्तमास्येष्येति वचने श्रोचे च पार्थिवः।

i. e. Born for slavery only, a Śūdra has no voice in religious matters and deserves no sacrament. He is to be given only the leavings of food and tattered garments. Should he presume to teach a Brahmīn what the true meaning of religion is, boiling oil should be poured into his mouth and ears,
never cares to come down in person to heal their stricken souls,* who is a Puritan to the core and never a Samaritan by an inch. They are naturally attracted to that religion which represents God as a Humane Being† who lives in their midst and partakes of their humble fare with a genuine relish, who rejoiceth in their joys and grieveth in their sorrows, who helps them in need, comforts them in misery, and consoles them in calamity. The Buddhists presented their Gautama to the masses now as a bird, now as an animal, now as a man, but always doing acts of kindness, reconciling differences, cementing breaches, pacifying feuds, himself suffering to relieve

* The Gītā : XVI.

तनां द्रिष्ट। कूरानन्नलाभेणु नराधमान्।
श्रद्धापम्भजयमहामृ आसुरीभेय वोंगियु॥

† The Gītā : IX.

ये मन्त्रलि तु माँ भक्त्या मधि ते सेव चाल्लभू।
तेवा मित्याभिन्दुत्तान्या योगाश्च महायथम्भू॥
मां तु पार्थो ब्रह्माशिर्ष्य चेष्टिपि स्यू पापयोगय।
स्त्रियो वैश्वास्तथा भुवहस्तेष्वपि यात्वि परं गतिम॥
परं पुर्यं फलं तोर्यं यो गू महत्या मध्यम्भू।
तद्विर महत्युपादमस्त्ताय भक्ततमन॥
अपि चेतस दुर्याचरों मन्तो मारमन्वभक्तु।
साधुरैव श महत्या। सम्यक्यु व्यवसितो हि स॥

i.e. They are in Me, and I also in them, who worship Me with true devotion. I look to the moral and material welfare of my true devotees. Even those who are born in hidden shame, women, vaisyās, śādāras, they also tread the highest path, if they take refuge in Me. Whatever is offered to Me with devotion, be it a leaf, a flower, a fruit, water, that I accept gladly. Even the most sinful I call righteous, if he worships Me,
others; in short, mingling his soul with all irrespective of caste and creed, rank and wealth.

This conception of God naturally endeared Buddhism to the masses, whereas the Vedic conception, though sound in theory, made Hinduism repellant to them. The life of Rāma, however, apart from his political and military achievements, was in Vālmīki’s Epic depicted so pure, noble, and exalted that his hold on their mind as an ideal man remained firm as before. Hence the Buddhists tried to enlist him also on their side by transcribing his legend into their own language and representing him as a former Buddha in the Daśaratha Jātaka. The orthodox Aryans thereupon took alarm. They could not afford to sit idle any longer and let things go their own way. The *laissez faire* policy of theirs in religion was working distinctly in their disfavour. They took up the cudgels in self-defence after this theft of their national hero. He was their champion of the True Religion in the past and they could not tolerate his representation as a pioneer in Infidelism. They first started reviling Buddha and inserted the following condemnation of him in the Rāmāyaṇa itself*

‘This Buddha is no better than a thief. Know him to be a dangerous heretic as well as a down-


| यथा हि चोरः स तथा हि बुद्धः |
| तथागते नास्तिकमनि चिद्धि |
| तस्मादि यः शक्यतमः प्रजानां |
| स नास्तिके नाममुखो नुषः स्पातः ||
right hypocrite. He pretends to spiritual realisation and preaches unbelief in the divine Revelation. A wise man, therefore, should as far as possible avoid this arch-enemy of the Veda, this denouncer of the Eternal Order.'

But this did not in any way affect the growing popularity of Buddhism. The orthodox Aryans, therefore, changed their tactics and sought to beat the Buddhists at their own weapons. They took kindly to Gautama, called him an enlightened person, and spoke of his tirade against the Veda as only a condemnation of the brutal excesses that had crept in under the name of Vedic religion. They adopted the Buddhistic idea of God's incarnations in various forms to do good to the creatures in general and to mankind in particular. Having adopted that idea, they did not slavishly imitate it. They improved upon it and gave it a scientific form. They did not make their God descend to the earth oft and on to intervene, like Don Quixote, in petty squabbles, troubles, and affictions, as the Buddhists did theirs in their Birth Stories, but as a Saviour at tremendous upheavals and great crises, when human effort seems unequal and divine interference is sincerely prayed for by every one.* In this way, out of the confused mass

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यदा यदा हि वर्मस्वय ग्यानिनिवैति भारत
अस्युत्धानमथर्मस्य तसात्मानं शृजःश्राहम् ||

i.e. Whenever righteousness is helplessly on the decline and wickedness is aggressively in the ascendant, then do I myself come forth to restore order in chaos,
of the Jātakas they built up their grand *Dasāvatāra* theory, which is now the true backbone of Hinduism. It is this, rather than Śankarāchārya’s dialectical battery, which saved Hinduism then from the onslaught of Buddhism and has saved it against the successive impacts of other *isms* of the world till now. The orthodox Aryans showed their largeness of heart, as also their acute sense, by giving Gautam a place, in order of time, among the ten incarnations of God Viṣṇu.

But as the Vedic conception of the Supreme Being as impersonal, indifferent, and divested of form-quality-and-action had to be maintained along with this new idea of the Supreme Being as personal, interested and possessed of form-quality-and-action, discrepancies crept into the later sacred works, which the commentators were hard put to reconcile, and this gave rise to endless controversies. To quote one single instance out of many from the *Bhagavadgītā*, at one place we have—

> ‘The foolish think of me, who am the subtle Universal spirit, as having manifestation in a gross individual body. They know not my supreme nature which is imperishable and most excellent.’ *

At another place we have—

> ‘The foolish disregard me, when I incarnate

* The *Gītā* : VII. 24.

अनुपक्तं व्यवितमाप्पः मन्यन्ते मामहुँद्यः
परं मात्रमजानन्तो ममाववमुद्धममः

2
myself in human form. They know not my supreme nature which lords over all beings.’*

It is this opposition of the old philosophical view which could not be discarded, and the new mythological view, which had to be accepted, that gave the classical poets wide scope to indulge in quibbles and paradoxes, such as—

‘Lord Krishna, by whose very belly, while reposing on the ocean, the worlds innumerable were swallowed up at the time of universal dissolution—he was now drunk up all at once by one city woman, and with a single eye, and that too not fully open owing to intoxication of love.’†

However, opposed to the Vedic conception of Parabrahma as mere Entity, divested of form, destitute of qualities, and devoid of interest in the perpetual interplay of causes and effects in the moral and material world, the Dasavatara theory is peculiarly consistent in itself and highly thought-provoking. If we place the ten incarnations in serial order before our eyes and let our mind dwell upon them in all seriousness, the impression is irresistible that they

* The Gita: IX. 11.

अवज्ञानति मां गृहा मानुषीं ततुमाथितम् ।
परं भाववज्ञानन्तो मम भूतमहेश्वरस् ॥

† Magha: XIII.

विपुलेन सागरवात्स्य शुक्लिणा
भवनानि यस्य पपिरे युक्तनें ।
मद्विभ्रमाशकक्ष्या पपे पुनः
स पुरस्त्विशैवकत्तमवैक्षण्डया हेतु ॥
represent the gradual evolution of life from a lower to a higher stage. Both the scientists and philosophers say that in the beginning there was water everywhere and that land emerged thereafter. In the Brhadāranyaka as well as in the philosophy of Thales, a Greek sage of the sixth century before Christ, it is emphatically stated that the original stuff of the world was water. It is, therefore, natural that organic life should make its first appearance in water. Hence the first Avatāra is Matsya*, the Fish, an animal living in water only. Though it has a body, yet the body has no limbs, which means that when life manifested itself in visible form, the form was capable of movement, but had no complexity of structure.

Next we have Kurma,† the Tortoise, a much bigger and tougher animal which, though mainly aquatic, is yet not altogether helpless on land and hence is called amphibious. Another point to be noticed about the tortoise is that though it displays limbs, yet these are disproportionately small in comparison with the bulk of the body; hence its

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* Jayadeva:

प्रत्ययप्रयोगिन्ते धृतवानसिद्धे
बिहितमधितमचिन्मतादमु।
क्रेशाय धृतमीनशरीरि जय जगदीश हेरे॥

† Jayadeva:

धितिरतिविपुलवें तव तिरंभति पृथे
धरणिवारंगिकाण्डारिणे।
क्रेशाय धृतकाच्यपुपुरि जय जगदीश हेरे॥
movement, though fairly quick in water, is proverbially slow on land.

Next we come to Varāha*, the Boar, a strong and powerful animal with well-developed limbs. Though it really belongs to land, where its headlong rush scares all opposition out of the way, it is yet so fond of water that its special delight is said to lie in wallowing in marshy places and dipping in muddy pools, which shows that since life originated in water, it carried with it the love of its native element in passing on to the land stage.

Next we come to Narasimha,† the Man-lion, in whom we have the best of animals, lion, with a marked tendency towards a species of a higher type, man.‡ One point that is worth noticing here is that

* Ibid:

वसति द्रामशिलोरे धरणी तव छम्मा
शालिनि कर्कृकरुण निमग्ना ।
केशव बृहत्तुथकरुप जय जगदीश हरे ॥

† Ibid:

तव करकमलकवे नन्दमदुमतथर्पुरूङ्ग
दलितिहिरण्यकश्चिमलनुम्भाम् ।
केशव बुतनरहरिरूप जय जगदीश हरे ॥

‡ It is impossible for a scientist to believe that man was created by a process of clay modelling and woman by the transformation of a rib. All the evidence points to a different conception of the origin of life: the development from primaeval scum, through millions of years, of colloidal compounds in the great seas and swamps of the cooling earth; the timeless evolution of these protoplasmic forms, through the amphibians and reptiles, birds and mammals, to the apes and men—a truly remarkable process which makes us and monkeys brothers, practically under our skins.

—Dr. A. J. Cronin
in Narasimha the head is that of a lion and the body from the neck downwards is that of a man, which means that animal nature is still dominant at this stage and that human limbs are only accessory to the brute force: Witness the typically brutal manner in which God fulfilled his purpose in this incarnation. The demon Hiranyakaśipu was seized unawares from behind a clustered column, laid sprawling on the lap with a stifling grip, and torn open in the middle with pointed fingernails; and finally he had all his entrails pulled out from his gashful belly!

Next we have Vamana*, the Dwarf, who is completely human in form from top to toe, but altogether stunted in growth, with all his higher faculties in embryo. The scientists also tell us that man in the beginning was weakest in the whole creation and had to shift for himself as best as he could in the dire struggle for existence. Cunning and deception, disguise and concealment were his weapons then. And God also in this incarnation effected his purpose by pretended humility, by fraudulent begging, and by kicking the head of the very Demon at whose feet he had supplicated for a paltry gift. This can hardly be called a noble act. And God has shown by his own example that though one might succeed this way, yet one would never be happy in the end: God himself had to accept eternal slavery in the underworld as a

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* Ibid:
चतुष्षिष्य स्वामीमणे बलिमद्भूतवामन
पदनम्नीरज्जनितजनपावन
कैशवं भूतवामनरूप जय जगदीश हृरे ||
punishment for his underhand dealing. Our experience of life also tells us that tallness of stature often goes with loftiness of soul; whereas shortness of stature is generally seen to shelter meanness of mind.

Next we come to Paraśurāma*, the Axe-man, mighty of body and armed with weapons, vigorous in mind and versed in sacred lore, but lacking entirely the sweetness and grace of humanity. When man discovered the use of weapons for the first time and experienced their effectiveness, he felt that he was thereby the lord of all he surveyed. He relied solely upon weapon as the surest and shortest cut to success, but he soon learnt that it also cut short his peace and happiness, without which success itself was not worth having, nor life worth living. Paraśurāma cut off his mother’s head coolly at the impulsive wish of his father; and at the assassination of his father by a Kshatriya king, he vowed vengeance upon the entire royal race. This race he sought to exterminate twenty-one times with astounding success. He filled five lakes with the blood of slain warriors and therewith performed the funeral rites of his father. Indeed, vindictiveness could go no further. Dreaded and shunned by all, he led a desolate and disconsolate life. His logic was always blunt, and he compensated for its bluntness by pointing constantly to the sharp-

* Ibid:

श्रवणशशिरर्मेये जगद्धगत्वापि
स्माप्यति पवंति शर्मितभवतापम्。
केशव धूमत्सुपितिरूप जय जयादीश हृदे॥
ness of his axe. This point has been well brought out, with a touch of humour, by Tulasidāsa in his Rāma-charita-mānasā when, towards the end of his career, he had his last altercation with the Kshatriya prince Rāma about a trifle.

Next we come to Rāma*, the Lovable man, who joined a sweet temper to a heroic spirit, and a pleasing manner to a virtuous life. If Paraśurāma disregarded the feelings of others, Rāma had so much regard for them that he entirely disregarded himself. In consequence his life was one of suffering and sacrifice. Though he had the spiritual satisfaction of having done his duty, he had no physical comfort for all his pains. Even when he was invested with royal robes towards the end of his career, his soul remained in sackcloth and ashes owing to the abandonment of his beloved spouse under public pressure. Out of the four ends of human life, namely, fulfilment of duty, acquisition of wealth, enjoyment of pleasure, and attainment of bliss, he succeeded in achieving three, but failed to have enjoyment in life. Hence he is called in our mythology Aṃśūrtāra, a partial incarnation of the Supreme Being.

* Ibid:

वितर्शि विद्वं रोगि विद्वत्तिकमनिर्यां
द्रवमुखमौलिङ्गिः रमणीयम्।
कैश्व धृतरामवर्मीर जग जगदीश्व हृदे॥
Next we come to *Krishna*, the Perfect man, in whom we see the balance of all qualities—physical and intellectual, moral and spiritual, and the realisation of all the ends of human life. Throughout his career he displayed the vivacity of boyhood, the vigour of youth, and the wisdom of age. He performed his arduous tasks to the full, enjoyed the sensuous pleasures to his fill, and probed the problems of life to the bottom. Indeed, never shrinking from duty—howsoever painful, never sinking into despair—howsoever black, never stinting in effort—howsoever strenuous, he ran the race of his life with buoyancy in his heart, music in his soul, and a happy smile upon his face. Gentle, yet stern; just, but kind; attentive to all things, though attached to none, Lord Krishna remains for ever an idol to the devout and an ideal to the thoughtful.

Next we come to *Buddha*,† the Enlightened, in whom the masterly equipoise attained by Lord

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* The Bhāgawata:

अन्ये चायक्लव: पुः.
कृष्णस्तु मरावान स्वयमः।

Strangely enough, Jayadeva does not take Krishna, but his elder brother Balarama, to be the eighth incarnation:—

वहिन्ति चथुष्य बिचोद वसने जलदभो
हस्तविभविभिन्निविवस्यनमः।
केवल भूतहासम जय जगदिव्य हरे ॥

† Ibid:

निदम्य यशोविषेश्य शुक्तिवाते
सदयहार दर्शिततपहातमः।
केवल भूतविद्वरसीर जय जगदिव्य हरे ॥
Krśṇa was lost. Buddha had a decided leaning towards renunciation as against full realisation of one's responsibilities in life. He favoured detached contemplation in preference to disinterested action, passive forbearance of wrong for the sake of peace instead of active opposition to it in the interest of justice, exaltation of nirvāṇa, extinction, over nir-māṇa, creation. He forgot that man is neither body alone nor soul alone, but a composite, like air and water, of both; hence it is imperative to attend to both in due proportion. Indeed, it is as criminal to starve the senses as to stifle the self, as stupid to forego material happiness here as to forfeit ethereal bliss hereafter. The biased way of life and thought, as it spread among the masses, lifted them airily into—fool's paradise, and launched them imperceptibly into—political demise. The mighty and magnificent Maurya Empire, so assiduously built up by Chāṇakya and Chandragupta, fell to pieces immediately after Aśoka, because throughout his reign he encouraged monasticism and mendicancy: the former led to the unnatural suppression of natural appetites, and begot in its turn secret indulgence of lusts and sanctimonious hypocrisy; the latter offended against the economic and political laws, and brought in its wake stagnation of effort and indolent ease. The revival of India came under the Śungas and the Guptas who were both staunch Hindus. Harshavar-dhana of Kanoje again leaned on the side of Buddhism, and thereafter India fell helplessly under foreign domination. Though the circumstances had compelled the inclusion of Buddha in the galaxy
of ten incarnations, yet he has no place of worship in the Hindu household, nor any shrine worth the name in India.

Lastly we come to Kalki*, the Destroyer. This Avatāra is still to happen, but the coming event of total annihilation has already begun to cast its grim shadow before. With the upsetting of the social arrangement and the clear-cut division of labour established by the Aryan sages of old, the forces of disruption are gradually coming to a head. We have already arrived at the stage when, under the name of some ism, we preach insubordination to authority, contempt for law and order, irreverence of all that is holy and majestic, grand and sublime. The dregs of society are coming to the surface, spreading anarchy and confusion everywhere. Hunger and discontent; uncertainty and restlessness; outward controls and inner black dealings; suppression of truth and propagation of falsehood; class war, communal strife, industrial dishonesty and official corruption—all these are like the distant rumblings of a volcano. Those on the lowest rung are bent upon pulling the social ladder down, forgetting in the enthusiasm of the moment that when the crash comes, they too, along with the rest, will be smothered in the debris. This is what the ancient seers foresaw long ago and

* Jayadeva:

रेध्दन्निवहनिधने कर्मसि करवाय
भृगुकेत्तुमय किमपि कराधसि ।
कैवश भृगुकेत्तुकाशीर जय जागर्दिवा हेरे ॥
we now see with our own eyes. This is the meaning of Kalki-Avatāra.

Having considered how with the rise and spread of Buddhism, mythology came to the forefront and transfigured the historical heroes of the past into divine incarnations, we now come back to our Vālmīki. To Vālmīki himself Rāma was but a mortal being who had immortalised himself by his singular achievement. Therefore to him what appealed most about Rāma was his career in exile; that was the best part of Rāma’s life, that the solid foundation of his fame, that which gained him a shrine all over India and in the hearts of all. He, therefore, began his Epic with the circumstances which led to the banishment of Rāma from Ayodhya and ended it with his triumphant return from Lanka. Naturally the only appropriate name he could give his work was Rāmāyana, the wanderings of Rāma, the path he went by after his disinheritance. Thus the title has a peculiar significance and is meant to focus our attention on what Rāma achieved during his exile, because in that achievement lies the Rāmatva of Rāma. My purpose here is to indicate the supreme importance of the task undertaken by him and to expound the methods employed by him in carrying it through. Hence it is necessary to cast our glance back to a remote period of ancient history when the Aryans first set their foot on Indian soil.
CHAPTER II

The Background

Where did the Aryans come from? About their original homeland there is a bewildering diversity of opinion among scholars. Max Muller takes his stand upon the Pamir plateau in Central Asia; Dr. Latham suggests Scandinavia; Dr. Giles favours Hungary; Prof. Schrader holds tenaciously to the northern shores of the Caspian sea; Lokamāṇya Tilak argues ably for the Arctic region. The story of the Tower of Babel has guided some to the rich plain of Shinar in Asia Minor; whereas the discovery of the names of Vedic divinities in the Hittite inscriptions has led some to the upper reaches of the Euphrates and the Tigris. Howsoever widely the scholars may differ about the location of the Aryan homeland, there is a surprising agreement among them on two points; firstly, that whichever the homeland may be, it was not India; secondly, that the Aryans must have lived together in one place for a considerable time before spreading out and splitting up into a number of small communities, the nuclei of modern nations. Those who bent their steps towards India, says Grierson, did not come in one single invasion or wave of immigration; but clan after clan, speaking closely related and mutually understandable dialects, arrived during a long period of years and occupied in successive stages the whole of Hindustan.

(28)
This view, apart from linguistic considerations, is largely supported by Manu's mention of four regions of Aryan settlement in India. The country where the Aryans settled first was Brahmāvarta*, the five-river tract of the Punjab between the Indus and the Sarasvati. When their numbers increased, they moved to Bhrammarshidesa,† which extended over the valleys of the Ganges and the Jumna from the neighbourhood of Delhi as far as Muttra. Then they occupied Madhyadesa,‡ which stretched from the place where the river Sarasvati disappeared in the Hissar districts to the confluence of the Ganges and the Jumna at Allahabad. Lastly they expanded over the whole of Aryavarta,§ which extended from sea to sea between the Himalayas and the Vindhyas. The expression 'from sea to sea' is rather vague, in as much as the latitude of both Brahmāvarta and Brahmmarshidesa on one side, and of Bengal on the

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* Manu : II

सरस्नवीणांप्रदेश्योद्धरतांवैविभाजयते।
ते देवमनिः प्रभावः प्रचलते॥

† Manu : II

कुशक्षेत्रं व मत्स्याश्च पञ्चायतं धूर्तेनकथा॥
एवं प्ररोपरिदेशो वै प्रभावविभाजनं॥

‡ Ibid : II

हिमवदिकयोमथ्येव व वत्माविनिविनाशिः।
प्रत्यवै प्रवर्चाः मध्येऽच मकङ्कः॥

§ Ibid : II

आ समुद्रात्त्वं पूर्णातमसमुद्रात्त्वं पवित्रमात।
त्योऽशुष्काः निगतायां विनियोऽवशिः॥

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other, lies far to the north of the sea-coast. We may, however, assume that in ancient times the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal extended sufficiently far to the northwards to form the western and eastern boundaries of Aryavarta.

About Devas, the reputed denizens of heaven, Asuras, the aerial adversaries of the gods, and Rākshasas, the earthly enemies of mankind, there is such a bewildering diversity of Vedic and Pauranik account that scholars are not unanimous in assigning a definite historical meaning to these words. Taking the Devas to be the idealised forefathers of the Aryans who came and settled in India, some scholars argue that since the Devas and the Asuras are said to be the progeny of Kaśyapa by two different wives, they both were related as half-brothers and thus formed two separate branches of the same family; but in course of time they came to hate each other bitterly on account of the former’s indulgence in liquor and the latter’s abhorrence of it.* Thus, according to these scholars what the teetotallers are today to the bacchanals, so were the so-called Asuras to the Aryans of old. The Rākshasas, on the other hand, were entirely different; they were the barbarous aborigines—mostly addicted to canni-

* Vālmiki: I. 45.

दिते: पुजा न तो राम जगदहर्षर्षी सुराम्।
अदितिहस्त सुता बीर जगदहर्षतामन्नित्याद्।।
असुरसनेन दैवनयं सुरसनेनापि: सुता:।
हृदा: प्रसुरतिस्याचारनाखरीम्रुग्मन्तः।।
†alism, to sorcery, to woman-stealing and to other malpractices. As they are everywhere represented as dark complexioned and broad-jawed, these scholars are inclined to look upon them as the parent race of the Dravidians of south India.

Other scholars hold just the opposite view and say that the Rākshasas must not be confounded with the cannibal heathens known as the Ṡuras. Their argument is worth considering. They lay special stress on the fact that while the Ṡuras are sometimes shown inimical and sometimes amicable to the Devas, the Rākshasas are always shown irreconcilable in the Purāṇas. It is indeed curious, they observe, that while Rāvana and others are said to be the worshipers of Brahmā, the orthodox deity of the Aryans, they are always shown to be violently opposed to the Brahmanical sacrifices. This opposition of theirs to the sacrificing Brahmans, they argue, must be viewed in the light of a sectarian opposition, like that of Protestantism to Roman Catholicism, in which there is generally less toleration and infinitely more virulence than where the difference of religious belief is more thorough and complete. All this, they conclude, points to the identification of the Rākshasas with the Buddhists who flourished in India from 600 B. C. to 800 A. D. and established an empire in Ceylon which has continued to the present day.

A few scholars differ entirely from both and are of opinion that it is the aboriginal inhabitants of India who are alluded to under different names, such as Rākshasas, Ṡuras, Daityas, and Dānavas. These
names, they say, must have originally belonged to different tribes of aborigines, but at a subsequent period the names were applied indiscriminately to the aborigines in general. Their opposition to the Kshatriyas, they say, was the natural opposition of the people of the country to the advancing tide of Aryan invasion. Their intolerance of the Brahmanical sacrifices, they argue, was obviously due to superstitious fears, natural to the savages, at finding their country overrun by invaders who were irresistible in their might and whose might seemed to have been derived from the mystic rites which the Brahmin priests performed for them. It is this third view which appears to me most convincing and I have accepted it, with some variations here and there, in the treatment of my subject. I have taken Asura and Rākshasa as the significant names given by the earliest Aryan invaders to their inveterate foes in India. Secondly, I do not look upon the original inhabitants of this land as ignorant, uncultured brutes, but as a race of people far more advanced than the Peruvians and the Mexicans of old, and endowed with all those qualities which the German word Kultur conventionally signifies. With these preliminary remarks I now proceed to trace briefly the course of events which led to the decisive clash between Rāma and Rāvana.

Long, long ago when the Aryans first came to India in search of a fertile tract for settlement, this land of ours was in the possession of Non-aryan people. These are spoken of in our mythology as
Asura*, 'sound in breath', i.e. virile, and as Rākshasa†, 'whom one must carefully guard against,' i.e. dangerous. Both these words clearly indicate that they were not weak-kneed people, but hard of body, ferocious by nature, and willing to live, yet ready to die. Naturally they did not receive the new comers with open arms or with folded hands; they stoutly opposed them tooth and nail. Hence the struggle that followed was grim, lasting for several years. At length by virtue of superior tactics and

* In the oldest part of the Rgveda the term Asura is used for the Supreme Spirit and also applied to several of the chief deities, such as Indra, Agni, and Varuṇa. Afterwards it acquired an entirely opposite meaning and came to signify a demon or an enemy of the gods. The Brahmaṇas state that Prajāpati created Asuras from the lower breath, asu. The Vāyu Purāṇa says that Asuras were first produced as sons from Prajāpati's groin. Taking all these and other meanings into account, the Nirukta derives the word variously:

�शुः: प्राणस्तेन तदलो भवनित। सोः: प्राणस्तायदमनः प्रेदशादू देवामुखत
tadgrāṇिः सुतृतम। असोप्राणस्तायदमनः प्रेदशादुपरस्मृतमसधुतसम।
अथवा स्थानेषु सुप्रद सतस्तु ततुडः सुत्रा। सुप्रदेषु चपलस्ते असुराः: असुराः।
अथवा अस्ता: प्रत्याविता: स्थानेनस्ते असुरा हताः।

† रक्ष्यते ऐस्मादिति रक्ष्ये एव रक्ष्ये: स्वाभेकः i.e. from whom it has to be protected. The etymologists take havis, an oblation, as the object of protection. But the meaning need not be so narrowed down to sacrificial offerings only; for it is the life of the Brahmin sacrificers, who were the spiritual guides of the Aryans, that was constantly in danger and needed protection against the Rakshasas.
weapons, the Aryan invaders succeeded in throwing their tenacious opponents backwards and backwards as far as the Narmadā valley.* But here at this time there arose fortunately among them a mighty leader, Tārakāsura by name, who effectively checked the rolling tide of Aryan advance. Taking advantage of the terrain, his able engineer, Mayāśura, is said to have built along the entire stretch of the river Narmadā three huge fortresses, of enormous length;

* The Taittirīya Āraṇyaka says that Vishnū rose to the highest position among the gods on account of his bow and arrows: these were of divine origin, being produced from his left and right hand respectively. Though he was alone, yet his enemies could not overcome him in spite of their numbers; for he had the advantage of a bow, which they had not. It destroyed them at a distance; hence to them it was a miraculous missile. In World War I, when the German shells fell into Paris from over a distance of seventy-five miles, the Parisians for a time took the Germans to be genii and fell into a defeatist mood. In World War II, it was the possession of Atom bombs by the Allies which brought the truculent Japanese down to their knees in no time. The defeat of the numerous Asiatic armies by a handful of Europeans was mostly due to the superiority of artillery. Hence BHāravi rightly observes that:—

अत: प्रक्षर्त्य विविधविधेयः प्रक्षर्त्यतन्ना हि रूपे जवः | The Kirāta: III.
i. e. Hence every aspirant to victory must strive for superiority in weapons; for God is always on the side of superior weapons.

† The Matsya Purāṇa: Chapter CLXXXVII. The same chapter tells us that the mount Śrīśaila was formed on the spot where the first city fell and that the mount Amarakantaka sprang up on the spot where the second city fell. For further account of this decisive battle, see chapters CXXXIX to CXXXI of this Purāṇa, and also the Mahābhārata, Kṛṣṇa Parva, XXIV to XXVI.
with a triple enclosure wall, as massive as the spurs of a mountain, surrounded by deep ditches and hidden pits, and furnished with every device that science and ingenuity could supply. Having placed each of these three fortresses under the command of each of his three most valiant sons, Vidyunmālin, Tārāksha, and Tārakāksha, he established his headquarters at Tripūrā, near Jubbulpore. So impregnable were the lines of fortifications constructed by Mayāsura that the Aryans simply dashed themselves to pieces against them. At last they called a halt and fell back. But Tārakāsura was not the man to leave them in peace. He took advantage of their drooping hearts, and lashed them with such fury and caused so much havoc among them that they were now afraid lest they should lose all that they had so far gained. Thereupon Śiva, the Lord of Kailāsa, came forward and rallied their scattered ranks; and having made tremendous preparations, he fell upon those terrible defensive works with such fire and determination that each fort was literally reduced to a heap of ashes and no trace of fortification was left anywhere.

For the destruction of Tripura, God Śiva is said to have used one arrow whose disastrous effect, as described in the Purāṇas, very closely resembles the terrific explosion of an Atom bomb, as seen at Hiroshima. To quote a few words from the Matsya Purāṇa, chapter 188:—

"The arrow produced a sudden blaze of fire which, spreading in all directions with shooting tongues of flames, gave a gory appearance to
the whole place. Houses and temples, palaces and towers, all crashed in a moment. Gardens and lakes, with flowers and fruits, with swans and cranes, all vanished out of sight. Storm and smoke added to the chaos. Men and women, beasts and birds, horses and cattle, boys and girls—all were unsparingly reduced to ashes, whether awake or asleep, sitting or standing, walking or running. Mothers giving suck to their babies, or holding them to their bosom, or fondling them on the lap, were all burnt down before they knew what the matter was. Blinded and suffocated, speechless and paralysed, wailing and groaning, people died by thousands”.

Hence is our Lord Śiva called Tripura-dahana, i.e. one who set Tripura ablaze.

In this battle of Tripurī, as bloody and decisive as Tālikot, Tārakāsura lost his three sons, his armies and generals, his armaments and treasures—practically everything. With a few remnants of his followers he escaped southwards; and although, making the Satpura range his stronghold, he continued his policy of harassment, yet he ceased to be a serious menace that he was before. His power was so thoroughly crippled that he was now like a lion with his fangs knocked out and his claws pared off; hence there arose a popular legend that even a child of seven days could now smash him. And he was smashed all right in his own den, when his annoyance grew intolerable. As the march of the punitive expedition fortuitously synchronised with the birth of a son to Lord Śiva, and as the final victory was achieved
on the seventh day, the Aryans attributed it to Kumāra in grateful remembrance of his Sire's past services to them at the most critical time, a time when their whole future trembled in the balance.*

The Non-Aryans were now finally thrown beyond the Satpura range into the wilderness of the Deccan or Danḍaka. Mayāsura, the most ingenious designer, repaired to an unknown place in the sea to rebuild the shattered fortunes of his race.† But curiously enough, the Aryans, instead of pushing their advantage right up to the shores of the Indian ocean, themselves retired behind the Vindhyas. And we might ask, why? The only possible answer seems to be that in these battles with Tāraksura, the Aryans had suffered so much, and so deeply were they impressed by the fierce valour of their antagonists, that they preferred to remain content with the region they had secured rather than seek further territorial extension. History furnishes several instance of this kind. Though the British, in the Second Afgan War, had fully avenged the massacre of the Khyber Pass, yet being convinced of the irrepressible bellicose

* This, in my opinion, is the rational explanation of the current myth that Tārakāsura was slain by the son of God Śiva on the seventh day of his birth. Poets like Kālidāsa have no other explanation to offer except that being a child of divine parents, Kumāra grew to full manhood on the sixth day of his birth and led the heavenly host to victory on the following day. cf.

The Kumāra : XI. अल्मत परं बुद्धि पदे दिने नवमौथमसृ।
सक्कल सत्यं शास्त्रं शास्त्रं विषेद विमोचित।।
† The Matsya Purāṇa : 140. 75.
nature of the Afgans, they decided to remain content with the moral satisfaction of victory and, instead of pushing the Union Jack forward, as they had so far done after each decisive battle in India, they quietly retired behind the Hindu Kush and drew the line at Peshawar as the farthest limit of their empire in South Asia. So also our Aryan conquerors, instead of braving the terrors of jungle warfare against their inveterate foes, who though defeated were still unbroken in spirit, decided to seek peaceful safety behind the Maginot Line of the Vindhya. To this decision of theirs they gave the colour of a divine command that only the land between the Himalayas and the Vindhya, from the Eastern to the Western sea, was sacred and that alone was fit for Aryan habitation!*

Herein lies the starting point of Aryan downfall in India. In the Purāṇas what strikes our attention and provokes thought is the contrast that while the Daityas are always shown practising severest penances to attain invincibility, the Devas are generally seen indulging in sensual habits owing to prosperity. Their time is mostly taken up with drunken revelry, shameless gallantry, society of nymphs, dancing parties, musical concerts. These are the ills of plethoric abundance, which few have been able to guard against and many have succumbed to in the past. As Ruskin says:—

* Amara : II. 1. अर्थातःः पूण्यभूमिमं विन्द्यहिमालयःः *

Manu : II. 24. एततःः द्रिज्जातःः देशानुः संग्राहयानुः प्रक्षयतःः *

दुर्दर्थःः वर्षमनुः कर्मनुः बा निवयश्च दुर्तिकिक्षितःः
"What has been the source of the ruin of nations since the world began? Has it been plague or famine, earthquake shock or volcano flame? None of these calamities ever prevailed against a great people, so as to make their name pass from the earth. In every period and place of national decline, you will find other causes than these at work to bring it about, namely, luxury, effeminacy, love of pleasure, fineness in Art, ingenuity in enjoyment. What is the main lesson we gather from ancient history? Surely this—that simplicity of life, of language, and of manners gives strength to a nation; and that luxuriousness of life, subtlety of language, and smoothness of manners bring weakness and destruction on a nation. While men are scornful of all the arts of luxury and are in the sight of other nations as barbarians, their swords are irresistible and their sway illimitable; but let them become sensitive to the refinements of taste, and quick in the capacities of pleasure, and that instant the fingers that had grasped the iron rod fail from the golden sceptre. It is impossible to state the truth too strongly. For ever you will see the rude and simple nation at once more virtuous and more victorious than one practised in the arts. Watch how the Lydian is overthrown by the Persian; the Persian by the Athenian; the Athenian by the Spartan; then the whole of the polished Greece by the rougher Roman; the Roman, in his turn refined, only to be crushed by the Goth."*

* Ruskin's Inaugural Address at the Cambridge School of Art, Oct. 1858.
And our Aryans of old were no exception to the general rule. Enriched by the spoils of war, living on the fat of the land, and feeling secure against future aggression, they abandoned themselves to unrestrained pleasure. In consequence, weakness of nerve began to creep over them slowly and imperceptibly, but instead of shaking it off, they deceived themselves into a fool's paradise that if they left their defeated adversaries in undisturbed possession of southern wilderness, they would be left unmolested in their present state of blessedness. The result was that in course of time their adventurous spirit, their industrious habits, their indomitable will, which had so far characterised them, now began to ebb, so that by the time Rāvaṇa rose to power in the south, there was no will, no ability, no spirit left in the whole of Āryāvarta to oppose him.

Rāvaṇa was the last and by far the mightiest monarch among the Non-Aryans. So irresistible was his prowess that, in whichever direction he turned his face, he carried all before him; hence his figuative name Daśamukha.* He vowed bitter revenge upon the people of Āryāvarta, by whom his race had

* The poets and painters have taken Daśamukha actually to mean a monster with ten heads on his shoulders, though they refuse to take Daśaratha similarly to mean a petty chief having only ten chariots at his command. The reason for this inconsistency is obviously their prejudice against Rāvaṇa and partiality for the father of Rāma. The Sanskrit grammarians, however, rightly disallow the splitting of such names into their component parts and interpreting them literally.
been wronged in the past; and before his whirlwind tactics they proved no better than straw. Their kings had become so enfeebled by their love of luxurious ease and slothful contentment that, when he challenged them to open fight, they threw themselves flat on the face to effect a change of heart in him.* But the thick-headed Rāvana was no respecter of these finer ways of spiritual conversion; unconcernedly he rode roughshod over them. The deplorable condition of Āryāvarta at this time has been portrayed in a single verse by Māgha as follows:—

‘Day and night did that mighty Rāvana, after the commencement of hostilities with Indra, spread confusion worse confounded in the land of the gods, now storming their beautiful cities, now ravaging their smiling fields, now carrying off their richest treasures, now snatching away their loveliest damsels!’ †

Indeed, the moral and physical fibre of the Aryans was so undermined that instead of standing firmly together against the common danger to save their

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* Vālmīki: VII. 19.

† Māgha: I. 51.
honour, they all submitted one by one to these indignities to save their skin. Only one king, Anaranya of Ayodhya, took the field against Rāvana, but being isolated and fighting at a disadvantage, he was soon crushed. His prophetic words, uttered with the last flicker of his breath on the stricken field, are worth quoting:—

'I am conquered, not by Rāvana, but by a fateful turn of the wheel of Time. What a change has come upon us all! Once invincible, now despicable, we all lie grovelling in the dust. However, let my body fall, perishable as it is, but the spirit that has animated it shall rise one day and so inspire a scion of my race that he will succeed where I have failed.'*

However, the future would show how far his confidence was justified. For the present the prostration of Āryāvarta was complete. The fate of the Aryan race, of Aryan culture and civilisation in India, was utterly dark; for, the strength of character which is the very backbone of stability, prosperity, and progress was everywhere lacking. The glory of Rāma lies in this that he lifted the Aryan people of his time from the slough of despond into which they

* Vālmīki: VII. 19.

न द्वाँ निजितो रक्षसश्रवणा चातुर्मृत्युमाःसिना।
शाहनेत्र प्रपलो हृदेन्तु भवानु।
किं तितिवांगण मना शाक्ये बुद्धि प्राणपरिष्कर्सये।
न द्वाँ विमुजलो रखो युध्ययानमानसश्रवणा हुः।
बदि दत्ते यदि हुः वदि मे हुः तद्ये हुः।
उत्पत्त्वे कुले हार्षिन्यसते प्राणान्तुहरिप्ति॥
had fallen. He awakened self-consciousness in them; he strengthened their will-power and infused new life into their drooping souls. He did this, not by precept, but by example. He broke down for good the Non-Aryan menace in India and installed love of humanity in place of worship of brute force. He cleared the way for the spread of vedic ideals of life from the Vindhyas downwards to the shores of the Indian Ocean and beyond it.

The Adhyātma and the Rāma-charita-mānasā both lay great stress on the profound love and admiration which God Śiva has for Rāma. Tulasidāsa describes the raptures of joy which the Lord of Kailāsa felt at the birth of Rāma, at his boyhood sports, at his woodland experiences, and at his signal victory.* What can be the explanation of this attachment which the one has for the other? To my mind it seems that since Lord Śiva by his conquest of Tripura had stabilised Aryan advance upto the Vindhyas, and since Lord Rāma by his conquest of Lāṅkā brought it to the southernmost extremity of India, the spirit of the former has been poetically conceived as watching with supreme satisfaction from heaven the triumphant career of the latter on earth and as thrilling with ecstasies at the completion of the

* Tulasī: Balkānda:

अउरब एक कहूँ निज चोरी। सुतु गिरिजा अतिहाद मति ठोरी।
काकमुलुंडि संग हम दोठ। मनुजल्प जानइ नहिं कोठ।
परसानंद पे म-ख्या ल-फू के। वीथीन्द्र फिरहि मगन मन भूले।
यह सुभ चरित जान पै सोइ। कृपा राम के चापर होइ॥
great work of Aryan expansion and conquest, which Indra had started in the beginning, which Upendra had carried forward after him, which Śiva had saved from collapse in the nick of time, and which Rāma brought to a finish so well that thereafter the Deva-Dānava-struggle was no more heard of. In other words, there was none left after Rāvaṇa to dispute the Aryan occupation of India. The superiority of Rāma over his predecessors lay in this that he achieved his goal more by tactful conciliation and amiable ways than by bumptious dictation and sudden ultimatums. His alliance with Sugriva and Vibhīšaṇa was a masterly stroke of genius. By winning them over to his side and putting them in authority over their respective peoples he brought about gradually the conversion of South India to his Faith. By his life of self-denial he impressed upon his own people that man was born for duty, not for pleasure, and that man fulfilled himself best when he lived mostly for others. This is the lesson we ought to learn from God's incarnating himself from time to time—to fulfill Himself in many a way and not to give way to the lusts of the flesh.
CHAPTER III

The Stage is Set

How did Rāma set about his arduous task? From his early boyhood he had witnessed the demoralisation of his race, and his heart was deeply stirred with a feeling that his true mission in life was not to vegetate on the banks of the Sarayū, but to liberate the land of his forefathers from the crushing tyranny of the Rākshasas in general and of Rāvana in particular. The extent to which the Kshatriyas of his time had fallen in spirit can well be judged from the fact that when one Rākshasa woman, Tāḍakā by name, ran amok—killing, hacking, and molesting people at will, none dared to stay her hand: they all stood quaking in their shoes, or rather trusted to their heels at her approach, like so many rustics before a drunken Tommy of old. When the great sage Viśvāmitra complained to King Daśaratha about her and her brood, and prayed for deliverance from her wanton outrage, the king ruefully admitted his utter helplessness in this matter; for, he said, if he took any step against her and her sons, he would directly get into a scrape with Rāvana whose secret support they possibly had, and Rāvana was a rough customer to deal with, whom he shuddered to meet. His son Rāma, a mere stripling and hence inexperienced, might in a fit of impetuous folly (45)
volunteer his services, but he could never allow him
to do an act which entailed risk to himself and
threatened ruin to the whole family.*

Such was the prevailing atmosphere of his time! The Kshatriyas had developed inferiority complex,
and the Rākshasas taking full advantage of it waxed
more and more oppressive each day. It must there-
fore be ever remembered to the credit of Rāma that
though he was not yet turned sixteen, he saw aright
that the root of the enemy’s invincibility lay in one’s
own imbecility. To call oneself a Kshatriya, a
Redresser of wrongs, and not to respond to the call
for help even at the peril of one’s life was to belie
one’s own name†. His father’s caution seemed to
him little short of cowardice, and his spirit rebelled
against it. Without wasting his breath in argument
he left the palace with Lakshmāna and followed the

* Vālmiki: I. 20. मारीचिचञ्च सुवासुद्रव रावणेन मनोदिता ।
यज्ञय स्विनन्तः परायक्ष्य च महाबलौ ।
तत्र तु वीरचतां वीर्यमादेनुष्मि राणः ।
तें चाहि न शास्त्रोपस्म संयोग्यं तया वा बलः ।
ऊनपोष्यस्यां मे रामो राजीवलोचनः ।
न युद्धयोग्यतामस्य पवित्रामि सहु राख्सेः ॥
† Kalidasa: II.
श्वातु तिल नायक्त हत्युद्रः ।
शास्त्रय शाब्दो भुवनेनु गृहः ।
राज्येन कि तद्विपरीतसत्ते:
प्राणिकोषाध्रामलीमसेवी ॥

i.e. of what use is kingdom, or even life stained by ignominy,
to him whose conduct is contrary to heroic spirit,
sage to his hermitage.* Viśvāmitra was a warrior turned a saint, hence he was an excellent guide in offensive and defensive tactics. In fact Rāma made a beginning in military science with him. Under his directions the attack on Tādakā’s stronghold was so thoroughly planned and so well executed that, taken unawares, few escaped. What was once a dreaded donjon became over night a charnel dungeon. ‘Don’t hit unless you mean to hit hard,’ is a golden rule whose value can never be exaggerated, and this rule Rāma practised to utmost perfection throughout his career.

Out of the whole lot that was rounded up and mercilessly put to death, Mārīcha alone could escape, and he escaped by the skin of his teeth. Unnerved at the appalling slaughter of his kindred, he fled straight to the island of Laṅkā. The arrow of Rāma, says Vālmīki, sent him flying head-over-heels some hundreds of miles away to the sea.† What can be

* The region infested by Tādakā and her notorious gang was to the south of the junction of the Gogra and the Ganges, i.e., at a distance of more than a hundred and seventy miles from the city of Ayodhya. The hermitage of Viśvāmitra was situated just below it on the site of the modern town of Buxar. Thus from the junction of the two rivers Viśvāmitra and his party had to make a journey of nearly forty miles in a retrograde direction from east to west along the southern bank of the Ganges. It is this part of the journey, which, according to the Rāmāyaṇa, occupied two days. See the Map.

† Vālmīki: I. 30. स तेन परमाश्रेष्ठ मात्रबेन समाहतः || संपूर्ण योजनाशति किर्क्तः सामरस्त्रस्त्रे || विचरतनं वियुप्तौ शीतलयुक्तविहितम् || निरस्तः हदन्य मारीचे रामो लक्ष्मणमबबीव ||
the meaning of this figurative expression? To my mind the arrow of Rāma here signifies the change from defeatist mentality to pugnacious tendency, which suddenly manifested itself among the Aryans through Rāma. In this radical change of attitude Mārīcha, a shrewd person, saw a grave danger to his race. He therefore went post-haste to the capital of Rāvaṇa and informed him of the dawn of a new era in Āryāvarta. He did not advocate repressive measures against the Aryans; on the contrary he urged him to recognise their right of honourable existence. No one, however mighty, said he, could ever thrive on hostile relations with his neighbours; for hate begot hate, made each a veritable brute, and led both to utter destruction. Hence unless he gave up his present policy of highhandedness and restrained his own people from committing excesses in his name, the days of his empire were numbered.*

Rāvaṇa must have seen the force of this reasoning; for he admitted Mārīcha thereafter to his Inner Cabinet as a counsellor. But having been long accustomed to treat the Aryans with contempt as his inferiors, to treat them now with honour as his equals went against the grain. He could not bend, and a break-down did not seem likely to him. Still

* Valmiki: III. 41.

न चातिप्रतिकृतेन नानिन्दितेन रक्षस।
राज्यं पालितं शक्यं न तीर्थेन निशाचर।
अवश्यं बिनशिष्यति सवलं राजन राक्षसः।
चेष्टा तव कर्मश्री रजा दुधुधं विस्मितेष्वः॥
as a precautionary measure, he started strengthening and garrisoning the defences of his empire which was bounded in the north by the river Godāvari. He established military outposts beyond this line, as far as the Narmadā, through the hilly and forest region known as Danḍakā, a no-man’s-land. His idea seems to be that in case there was an uprising in Āryāvarta, he must be forewarned and be in a position to smash it down with one mighty blow. These outposts extended their operations as far to the northward as the right bank of the Jumna and the Ganges, and were a source of annoyance to the Brahmanical hermitages which lay scattered to the south of these two rivers as far downwards as the river Godāvari. It is indeed significant that when Rāma came to stay at Chitrakūta, the hermits dwelling there quitted the place through fear; lest his presence among them should bring them into serious trouble with the Rākshasas.* However, the point is

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रे तत्र चित्रकुटस्य पुरस्तावापरसाधः ।
नयमेवृद्धोक्तिभवतः रामं निर्विंद्यं शंकितः ।
अर्थविषयं श्रृव्यो रामं प्रोचवं सादर्यं ।
रावणावरजः कृष्णहरे नामेव राष्ट्रः ।
अगलिपितस्य पापस्य त्वां च तात न मृण्ये ।
सकलस्य संचिद्धो नित्यं युक्तस्य राजव ।
समार्थशापि सहितो वासो दु:निविद्यवे ।
इत्युत्सवः व्राह्यम् त्यवस्त्रास च जगाम कुलेः सह ॥

(Continued on next page)
that though Rāvana recognised the genius of Mārīcha, his nature acted contrary to his profound advice.* Thereafter Mārīcha took no further interest in the doings of his master. He let him have his own way without opposition. In fact, he turned a recluse and lived almost in solitude. But when Rāvana towards the end sought his active help in carrying off Sītā trickily, he gave him a bit of his mind and again warned him in clear terms that the step he had decided upon was not only disgraceful but might prove

(Continued from the previous page)

i.e. The hermits at Chitrākūṭa, becoming nervous, looked askance at Rāma and indicated by their frowns that he was the cause of their misgivings. Then their spokesman said to Rāma, ‘The demon Khara, younger brother of Rāvana, is nearby. He is too haughty and wicked to forget the old grudge he bears you for the destruction of Tādākā. Besides, your stay among us with your wife will itself invite mischief from the Rakshasas. We do not doubt your ability to cope with any situation, but we rather think it safe to be out of this danger zone’. With these words he and his fellow hermits left the place.

* The Gītā: III.

उदयं चिन्तं रस्स्मयं: प्रौढोत्साहनानां प्रेमविशेषतानां ।
प्रौढः यात्रि सूत्ताकर निमंह: किं कारिष्यति ॥

i.e. Even a man of knowledge cannot help acting in conformity with his own nature. Creatures as a rule follow their natural tendencies, against which external checks are of little avail,
suicidal in the long run.* But egged on by his sister and thirsting for revenge, Rāvana flouted the warning and demanded his assistance on pain of death. Māriča had to obey, reluctantly though, but he obeyed to the best of his ability. He did not spare himself. He brought all his ingenuity to bear on the task assigned to him and helped his lord on to his coveted object at the cost of his own dear life. In this way Rāvana lost the one sound man he had, farsighted and able, who always wished him well, who remained true to the salt in spite of snub and rebuff, who did not go over to the enemy, as Vibhīṣaṇa did, for life or lucre. He had started as a persecutor, but he ended as a prophet. Let us shed a few tears for him and go back to the point wherefrom we digressed.

When Tāḍaka and her gang were wiped out at one stroke, the people heaved a sigh of relief, but

* Vālmīki: III. 39.

रणं रूपाणि गुर्जरस्व क्षमां ब्रक्षणं ।
किं दुः दारापहरस्ते सर्वं भूखितो भवेत् ।
आनंदित्विः चेतसव्रतात्मा अभावीत्वाहि भव।
नेम त्यमापि नाहि! कै नेम वंक्त न रक्ष्यामि: ||

i. e. you may either challenge him openly to a mortal combat or forgive him mercifully for the wrong he has done your sister. But to carry off his wife stealthily is an act so cowardly and mean that it will surely bring down your prestige in the world; and once the prestige is gone, the empire will soon follow suit. I again warn you that if you kidnap his wife with my help from his cottage, you will be simply playing into his hands. And then neither I shall be alive, nor you will be safe, nor Laṅkā will remain intact, nor the Rakshasas will survive as a proud race.
the Kshatriyas must have felt panicky about it; for, to judge from the words of Daśaratha, they were all apprehensive of dire consequences to themselves from such a step. Hence they must have waited with bated breath for the worst. But no thunderstorm burst upon them from the south. The dare-devilry of Rāma turned out to be a well-judged action. Rāma had correctly guessed that Rāvana would never care to raise a finger in behalf of a few ruffians who treated murder, and arson as lively sport, and thus were a disgrace to any society, whether black or white. His guess was confirmed by the result. But what use did he make of his experience, of his success in the first brush with the Rākshasas? He is said to have returned to Ayodhyā as a married man and to have lived there for full twelve years before going into exile.* How did he spend this time? Vālmiki is altogether silent on this point, or rather the later rhapsodists who made

* Vālmiki : III. 47.

This statement of Sita's that she lived with Rāma for twelve years in Ayodhyā after her marriage is further corroborated by the Padma Purāṇa :

** References **

- [2] This statement of Sita's that she lived with Rāma for twelve years in Ayodhyā after her marriage is further corroborated by the Padma Purāṇa :—
drastic changes in his poem have expunged this particular portion as unsuitable to the divine character of Rāma. The subsequent classical and vernacular poets describe with gusto the various amorous pleasures which Rāma enjoyed with Sītā in the inner apartment during this period, a description which is rather a reflection of their own voluptuous nature than a correct appreciation of Rāma’s personality. The Western scholars express a significant surprise at the fact that Sītā should have no issue during the first twelve years of happy home life, nor any during the next thirteen and a half years of free forest life, though she was constantly with Rāma, and that she should be reported to be in the family way soon after her deliverance from the hands of Rāvaṇa! Obviously they hint that Rāma was possibly unsexed and Sītā very likely unchaste. In this way they seek to account for the extreme harshness of Rāma, as a jealous husband, in turning Sītā out of doors in spite of her being helplessly, or why, because of her being unexpectedly, in a delicate state.*

My reading of Rāma’s character is entirely different from either. As I have already said before, from the very dawn of consciousness in him he was inspired with the idea that he was born for a great purpose; hence until the main purpose of his life was achieved, his mind remained altogether detached from the pleasures of sense. All his energies were,

as it were, sublimated into one spiritual force. It is this which made him a superman and brought him a unique triumph in the end. I therefore hold firmly to the view that when he returned to Ayodhya after completing his course of training under Viśvāmitra* and thereafter winning the hand of Sitā at Mithilā, he did not sit idle, immersed in the joys of the harem, but spent the whole of his time in acquainting himself personally with the moral and political atmosphere of Āryāvarta and in devising his plans for the future according to his knowledge of the present. He must have visited the Kshatriya princes of his time and striven hard to bring them round to his point of view that if they all combined under one leadership, the myth of Rāvaṇa’s invincibility would be exploded in a moment and the problem of Āryāvarta solved for ever. But, as the future developments show, he did not meet with any success worth the name. The dread of Rāvaṇa had gone so deep into them that their hearts would not rise in response to his call for united action. Such has been the fate of several heroes in India. The case of Anaraṇya, who braved the might of Rāvaṇa alone and fought to the death, has already been mentioned before. Rāṇa

* According to Valmiki, Rama was twenty-five at the time of his marriage. He is said to have left Ayodhya with Viśvāmitra before he was sixteen. The difference is the period of his training. Sitā says to Rāvaṇa that her husband, of great prowess, was twenty-five at the time of her marriage and that she was eighteen:

III. 47. मम भरती महातेजः कवला पन्चविनशकः ।
अय्यादश हि भर्षीणि मम जन्मनि गण्यते ॥

II.
Pratāp is another case in point. Rāṇī Lakshmībāī stood a solitary figure in her war for independence; hence Sir Hugh Rose wrote in his Diary that 1857 produced only one man in India and that man was a woman—the Rāṇī of Jhansi! As regards Śivāji, he had no help from the Mahratta sardars of his time: they all scoffed at his ambition of winning political freedom for Mahārāshṭra. He had, therefore, to forge ahead with a band of mountaineers from the Western Ghats. Our Rāma, too, saw that there was no other course for him but to get away first from the discouraging atmosphere of Āryāvarta and then work for its salvation from within the hostile territory itself. Naturally he had to proceed so guardedly that the enemy should remain off his guard while the mine was being well and truly laid under his feet, and not wake up to a sense of reality until the time was ripe for the final explosion.

But how to escape from Ayodhyā was a problem which weighed heavily upon his mind. Daśaratha had begun to feel the effects of old age and needed rest from the more active duties of Government. His prospective co-adjutor in day to day administration was evidently Rāma, as he was the eldest son and already past his majority. His formal installation in the regal office seemed therefore imminent. This was, ordinarily speaking, a matter for hilarity to Rāma; but it caused him, on the contrary, deep anxiety. His soul cried from within that he must make haste to get away from home before the chains of royalty fettered him to the throne. This fact has
been allegorically described in the Adhyātma as follows: –

‘When the talk of Rāma’s inauguration to heir-apparentcy was in the air, Nārada one day came from heaven in a hurry and saw him in private. He reminded him that the gods had sent him to the earth to be the saviour of all humanity and not to rule the destinies of a small principality. He must therefore make haste to get out of the rut before it was too late. Rāma thereupon assured him that he was fully alive to the urgency of the task before him, but he would rather sit still for a while than make a stir prematurely. As far as he saw, the Fates had already begun to work in his behalf and so to shape the future course of events that his departure from the kingdom must follow as a matter of course. He would therefore wait patiently, keep his eyes open, and seize the right moment to say good-bye to Ayodhya.’

And so it happened. Indeed, so curious was the web woven by Destiny that the very persons who should have blocked his way, themselves made his exit inevitable.

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* The Adhyātma: II. 1.

राजपत्र वर्ज्जनीय जातोशिष्टि रक्मनदन।
यदि राज्यार्थिसवस्त्रवर्ग करणं न हुमिष्यसि।
प्रतिज्ञा ते कृत्वा राम भूमापर्नागम्य है।

राम उज्जवल।
लुभं नारद मे किंचिदृ विहंजेतविदिते कवचित्।
प्रतिज्ञात् च यथं करिष्ये तत्र संधायं।
किं तु धारणार्थम् तत्त्वात्प्रवधसंख्यात्।
हरिष्ये सर्वं मुमारं क्रमेणासुरसंज्ञानं॥
They say that Kaikeyī was the youngest and fairest wife of Daśaratha. Fascinated by her charms, he had solicited her hand at a fairly advanced age, though he had already two wives still alive and in the prime of life. Her father, King of Kekaya, had accepted his proposal only on two conditions:—firstly, the right of succession to the throne must descend to her son, whatever the law of the country or the tradition of the family might say on the point; secondly, if any or both of his first two queens attained to motherhood hereafter, whichever was the legal heir should be publicly disinherited. The agreement involved sheer injustice to Kausalyā in case she happened to give birth to a son, and to Sumitrā in case the former remained childless and the latter alone was blessed. But Daśaratha made it for the sake of Kaikeyī. She was a woman of ravishing beauty, and he a man of voluptuous tendency.* Blinded by carnal passion, he had little thought for cardinal justice; hence though the proposed terms were unfair and humiliating to his first

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* Even Sītā lays stress on this very trait of Daśaratha's character, when she accounts for her husband's exile to the forest. In Valmiki: III. 47. she says:—

कामार्तशः महाराजः पिता दशरथः स्वयम्।
कैसके दसरात्मा: प्रियकामाश्च ते रामं नाम्यवेचयन्॥

i. e. the royal sire Daśaratha was so smitten with lust that to win a gracious smile from Kaikeyī he called off the installation of Rāma.

Valmiki uses a still stronger expression in II. 11. He says:—

तं मन्यते देववंशं कामेववचवानुतम्।
उत्तर युधिष्ठिराय बैभेक्री दारण वच:॥

This was the state of Daśaratha’s mind just a few hours before his son’s installation. We rather expect an aged father to be conjuring up sweet images of his son’s future than reveling in thoughts of his own lustful pleasure!
two wives, he accepted them readily without reservation. This fact is the real nucleus of the subsequent tragedy. The later classical and vernacular poets have entirely suppressed it, as it reflects discredit on the father of Rāma, and twisted the narrative a good deal to account somehow for the unpleasant developments that followed. But in trying to shield Daśaratha from the charge of grave injustice, they have themselves done great injustice to the mother of Bharata. They have thrown the entire blame upon her head and painted her a beautiful white Devil, red in tooth and claw.

In Vālmiki, too, there is only a passing reference to this marriage agreement. It occurs in the confidential talk which Rāma had with Bharata at Chitrakūṭa in order to reclaim his mind from the bitter prejudice he had against his own mother. He consoles him thus:—

“Listen, O Brother, to what actually happened a long time ago. When our Sire married your mother, he made a solemn declaration to your maternal grandfather that his entire realm was a bridal present to her.”*

* Vālmīki: II. 107. पुरा घातः पिता न: स मातरं ते समुद्रहनु:।
मातामहं समाश्रीण्यत्वचुलक्मचुलाम्॥

C. V. Vaidya is of opinion that this was an Asura-vivāha, in which the greed of the bride’s father has to be gratified with a substantial gift of wealth. But since the kingdom of Kośala was not to be the property of the lord of Kekaya, but the inheritance of Kaikeyi’s son, I reject his view and agree with the Tilaka commentary which interprets the above verse as follows:—

तत्र पुत्रं यो जनिष्यते तस्मै राज्यं प्रदास्यतामिति प्रतिज्ञातवान् इत्यथः।
i. e. He solemnly promised thus, “I shall give my kingdom only to that son who will be born of your daughter.”
The reference is highly important. It is a clue to the mysterious proceedings of Daśaratha before Rāma’s installation. Vālmiki must have treated this matter at length and in its right place. But when his Epic fell into the hands of his successors, they dropped the whole portion as unsuitable to their design and substituted instead a story of the two boons. The story runs briefly as follows:—

"Once upon a time, while fighting with the demons, Daśaratha was mortally wounded. As he lay unconscious and almost on the verge of death, his wife Kaikeyī came to his rescue, braving the dangers of the battle-field. She administered him the first aid, carried him to a place of safety, and gradually brought him round. But there also came the demons hunting after him. She concealed him quickly from their view and sent them away on the wrong scent. In this way Daśaratha owed his life to her twice. Therefore out of gratitude to her for her timely help and presence of mind, Daśaratha promised her the fulfilment of any two wishes of hers in future."

This is that story, simple and believable, but a little too prosaic for the taste of later poets, who

* Vālmiki: II. 9.

तत्तत्रक्रोन्यायुद्ध राजा द्वाराधस्तदा ।
अद्वैत साक श्रीमेत् विकलिकूटः ।
अपवाहा क्षणा देवि संतानामागायेतनः ।
तत्तत्रिषितर्व श्रीमेत् पतिस्ते रक्षितस्वयम्
इत्येव तेन दत्ती ते द्वौ बरी चुम्बद्वैनः ॥
are never satisfied with anything unless it is clothed in thunder and lightning. There were also other reasons for their dissatisfaction with this story. In the first instance, they felt that to represent Daśaratha as worsted by the ungodly host was an insult to his dignity as the godly father of Rāma; in the second instance, they argued that the award of a ‘blank cheque’ to the youngest wife could hardly be excusable in a wise king, unless the act so rewarded was shown to be of transcendental nature. Therefore they changed Kaikeyī’s simple act of nursing to a feat of superhuman endurance. Their revised story runs thus:—*

“In the thick of the fight, as Daśaratha’s chariot pressed forward, crushing the demons underneath, one of the axle-pins flew off, leaving the wheel in a precarious condition. Kaikeyī who was sitting close by saw the danger ahead. It was a critical moment. There was no time to lose. She thrust her hand out, put the forefinger into the pin-hole, and kept the wheel spinning as before. In this way the threatened break-down was averted and the doubtless victory ensured. Daśaratha owed his triumph to her resourcefulness; therefore out of gratitude he granted her the choice of

* This is the most popular legend, originating from the Adhyātma: II. 2. युद्ध प्रकृतितस्तत्त्व सर्वसे: सह चब्बिनःः।
तदाश्चिनो न्यथादिविचारस्तत्त्व न वेद सः।
तले तु हरसं समाबेशं क्रीवश्रेष्ठ तिधीर्दः।
स्थिततत्त्वसिद्धाः परिपाणपरीप्पम्।
वर्धवं वृणीयं त्वमेवं राजा स वदस्वयम्॥
two boons, which she might ask of him at any time in her life.”

This is that story. It makes a heavy demand upon our credulity and may be dismissed as a fantasy. To the devout, of course, nothing is incredible and they cling to it as a fact. How Kaikeyi, sitting inside the chariot, could reach her hand out to the axle, and get to the pin-hole without putting it through the spokes, and yet keep the wheel in a whirl, and make her feminine finger hard as steel, are questions which never enter their mind. All is grist to the mill and nothing is indigestible to faith.

However, after this third marriage, as Providence would have it, the three queens gave birth to four sons in all at short intervals. That they were all brought to bed on the same day and in the same hour seems to me a purposeful exaggeration. It is obviously meant to give a miraculous touch to the birth of the four brothers who lived at peace and worked in unison as parts of one body. They are therefore poetically conceived as the four portions of God Vishnu himself. This is, of course, the later poets’ idea incorporated in Valmiki’s epic in the course of its expansion.* The Padma-Purana, however, makes

* Valmiki: I. 18.

कौष्ठ्यास्तत्र रामं विश्वलक्षणं सुकुमरः।
विष्णोर्धे महाभागः।
भरतो नाम कैष्ठ्यं जोिे सत्यप्राक्रमः।
साक्षादिभिष्णोस्मु दुर्भागः।
अथ लक्ष्मणशुब्धों दुमित्रा स जनयत्तितोः।
विष्णोर्धर्षसमायुक्तोः।
Rāma the full incarnation of Vishṇu, and the other three sons—Bharata, Lakshmana, and Śatrughna—the incarnations of the Conch, the Cobra, and the Disc respectively, these three being the necessary accompaniments of God Vishṇu. The same Purāṇa also says that the birth of these three did not take place on the same day with Rāma, but on two successive days after Rāma.* The Adhyātma follows Vālmiki in taking the birth of all to be simultaneous with Rāma's, but sides with the Padma in identifying his three brothers with the three inseparable objects of God Vishṇu. As regards the interesting question, which two were the twins, opinions differ. The Marathi poets take Bharata and Śatrughna to be the twin-sons of Kaikeyi; because both were hand and glove with each other; both lived together for a long time in Kekaya; and both ruled together in Ayodhyā after the departure of Rāma to the forest. Indeed, the Rāmāyaṇa has no incident to report in which Śatrughna was ever seen with Lakshmana. The view of the Marathi poets gains further support from the set order in which the four names are pronounced—Rāma, Lakshmana, Bharata and Śatrughna. The Sankrit writers, on the contrary, whether

* The Padma:—

अन्येष्टः पाण्डवाच्यतमस कैकेयार्त्वस्तीभरतस्वभवत् ।
तदन्ते दुर्मिहिताय अनन्तात्मस्व च वक्ष्मण: ।
दुर्दश्नात्मस्व द्रुगच्छति द्वी जातिय युगपातः ॥

पाण्डवजन = श्रेष्ठ; अनन्त = श्रेष्ठ; दुर्दश = चक्र; अन्येष्टः = on the next day. तदन्ते = on the day following that.
paurānic or classical, take Lakshmana and Śatrughna to be the twin-sons of Sumitrā, and give mystical reasons for the two pairs in which the four brothers divided themselves. Some say that since Vishnu sleeps on the Cobra and is therefore closely associated with him, Rāma and Lakshmana always kept together; and since the Conch and the Disc are complementary weapons and therefore necessarily together in war, Bharata and Śatrughna always went hand in hand. Others point their finger at the peculiar distribution of the sacrificial oblation which was meant to ensure pregnancy in the three queens. Daśaratha had at first divided it into two equal halves, giving one to Kausalyā, because she was the eldest, and the other to Kaikeyī, as she was the dearest. These two afterwards gave compassionately a portion out of their own share to Sumitrā, who thus had Lakshmana and Śatrughna as twins, but one naturally leaning towards the son of Kausalyā, the other towards the son of Kaikeyī.* Bhavabhūti's explanation is briefest and best. He says†:—

* The Padma:— युगं वृष्णुवत्तत्व सुनिग्धि रामलक्ष्मणी।
तथा भरतशुरुणाः पारसत्ववधात्स्यथः॥
i.e. It was owing to the peculiar distribution of the sacrificial oblation that Rāma & Lakshmana formed one affectionate pair, and Bharata and Śatrughna formed the other pair.

† The Uttaracharita: VI.

स्वतिष्ठति पदार्थोद्व आन्तरः कोंडपि हेतुः
न खलु बहिःपार्थीः प्रीतयः संग्रहयते।
विकसति हि पर्वस्यर्दये पुंडरीकः
इश्वरति न हिंसस्माहुद्वते चन्द्राः॥
“Some mysterious force working internally draws things together. Affections do not certainly rest on adventitious causes. Who can tell why the lotus should bloom at the rise of the sun and the lunar gem ooze at the snowy-rayed moon?”

Indeed, who?
And who can explain Daśaratha’s peculiar attachment to Rāma? He had almost despaired of even one son. He was blessed with four, and they were all healthy, strong, bright, and handsome. All were dear to him naturally, but dearest among them was Rāma. Considering his extreme coldness towards Kausalyā,* his excessive affection for Rāma was a strange phenomenon. The poets have no other way to account for it except by tracing it to their relations in previous birth.† That may be so. But

* This important point has been entirely suppressed by the later poets. Vālmiki makes no secret of it and puts the following words in the mouth of Kausalyā: *Vālmiki :Ii. 20:*—

अत्यन्ते निगृहीतास्मि भविष्यत्वमहस्मः।
न हप्पूर्वः कल्याणः सुन्तः वा पतिपौर्णे॥

The Tilak:—पत्तुरुपस्वागतः रंजनं तत्र प्राप्तं यस्मिन्द्राकर्मोपनितं हुलं न मया

हप्पूवृत्तिमत्वः॥

i. e. Having not a trace of liberty in the palace, I have been throughout shivering under the cold looks of my husband. Indeed, that happiness which marital affection alone can ensure has been entirely denied to me.

† The Adhyātma : I. 2.

कस्यपद्य वरो द्राक्षः लोकितमेति।
याचित: प्रसर्वाय तयाप्य गकृतं न मया।
स इदानी द्राक्षः शून्यवा विषालति भूतेषु॥
here we are concerned only with the facts of this life, and the curious fact was that Daśaratha's heart swelled most at the sight of Rāma only. But the unique joy that he felt carried with it the sharp prick of one anxiety. And that anxiety was:

"How shall I during my lifetime see my dear Rāma installed as Crown Prince!"

This should make us pause. His anxiety was, to all appearances, out of place. Rāma was unquestionably senior to his brothers in age, and he stood head and shoulders above them in every other respect. He had already endeared himself to the people by his strength of mind, largeness of heart, and pleasing ways. Thus law, tradition, and public support were decidedly on his side. His priority of claim to the throne was, therefore, not in the least in doubt. And yet Daśaratha's mind misgave him. This is certainly inexplicable, unless we connect his misgiving with the condition on which he had married his youngest wife. That condition he could never forget, and it preyed upon his mind day and night. His word of honour was pledged with the lord of Kekaya, and he must keep it as an honourable man, at least to avoid rupture between the two kingdoms. But he had

* Vālmīki: II. 1. ततो दशरथो राजा चक्रे चिन्ता रसेयं परंतपः ||
श्रीतिरेषा कथं रामो राजा स्वान्मचि जीवितं ||

† Ibid: II. 1. वीर्यवानू विचित्रकूषो बुद्धिमांस्त्यं विनयवदः ||
अनुरक्तं भ्रजाधिभ्यं भ्रजाधिभ्यं नुरुप्ते ||

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not the heart to deny the crown publicly to one who deserved it most by right of birth as also of worth; nor had he the courage to put it squarely on his head while Bharata stood by before the eyes of Kaikēyi. How, then, to avoid doing injustice to Rāma and yet lay not himself open to blame from the lord of Kekaya was the perplexing problem before him. At long last he decided upon a course which he believed would carry him safely to his destination. But Destiny willed otherwise. In steering away from the rock, he lost his bearings and ran directly into the whirlpool which engulfed him completely.

What was his plan? He sent away Bharata to Kekaya, ostensibly at the request of his maternal uncle,* to pass a few days with his old grandfather at Girivraja, his capital.† This visit of Bharata to his grandfather's place could not have taken place, as the Rāmāyaṇa in its present form seems to say, immediately after his return from Mithilā where all the four brothers were married simultaneously; for he is said to have come back from Kekaya only after the tragic death of Daśaratha, and this event, according to the words of Sītā quoted before, happened in the thirteenth year after her marriage. It is inconceivable that Bharata stayed away from his

* Vālmīki: I. 77.

† Ibid: I. 73.
father, his mother, and his newly married wife for twelve years at a stretch and with no other purpose but to enjoy sumptuous hospitality at his uncle’s place. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that Bharata’s visit to Girivraja took place in the thirteenth year after his marriage and just a few months before the banishment of Rāma. This supposition accords well with the following statement in Vālmīki*:

“All the daughters-in-law were delighted at heart on arriving at their new home and lived thereafter with their husbands in conjugal bliss. And the sons, too, passed their days happily, serving their father with respectful attention.”

These lines further prove that Sītā and her three sisters had attained to puberty at the time of their nuptials and were not only six years old, as some orthodox writers are at pains to make out in defence of child-marriage.† If the orthodox view is accepted,

* Vālmīki: I. 77.

† Sītā’s words, quoted before, that she was 18 and Rāma was 25, are taken by many to mean that these were their ages at the time of going into exile. But since both had lived together in Ayodhyā for full twelve years after their marriage, this would make Sītā to be 6 and Rāma 13 at the time of their marriage. But how could Rāma be 13 at the time of his marriage, when he had left for the hermitage of Viśvāmitra at the age of 16? And how could a kiddy of 6 ever enjoy erotic pleasures with a boy of 13?
the actual words of Vālmiki, then the newly married couples sported delightfully in the privacy of their bed-chambers will make sheer nonsense.

However, after the departure of Bharata from Ayodhyā, Daśaratha allowed some time to elapse quietly and then held a meeting of his select ministers to settle the question of succession.* He laid bare before them his personal inclinations in the matter and also his grave apprehensions about the result. They fully approved of his choice of Rāma and recommended that his idea be carried into effect without delay. To ensure unhindered success they stressed secrecy in design and celerity in execution.† When the plan was well thought out, he summoned a great Council of courtiers and counsellors, rulers and chieftains, officers and citizens, and people from town and village. When they were all assembled, he addressed them. He first referred to the growing infirmities of his age, then to his pressing need for relief from the burden of administration, and lastly,

* Vālmiki: II. 1. निषिद्धत्व सचिवः साधै वौराज्यमन्नतः \|
† Vālmiki: II. 1. न दु केकरराजां जनकः वा नराधिपतः
स्वरी चानंदामास परात्तो श्रोच्चतः पियम् \|

i.e. He did not invite his own father-in-law Kaikayā, or even Rāma’s father-in-law Janaka, who should have been glad to be present at the ceremony of installation, saying that they could very well wait till the news floated down to their ears in course of time.

The Tilaka:—अत्र केकरराजजयोरनानन्तः आभिषेकविषयत्वं हेतुः प्रोच्यते |
बुध्युतबद्धे तपोरामामने सिद्धो मवमहत्तिति भिष्म मन्निगस्ततः
बुध्यु राशि द्वन्दवत हि तत्पर्यं \|
having dwelt upon the exceptional merits of Rāma for the office of Yuvarāja, he begged that he be now allowed to transfer the reins of power from the older to the younger hands. Being altogether ignorant of his promise of the whole kingdom as a bridal gift to Kaikeyī in the past and being aware only of Rāma’s prior claim to the throne on moral and religious grounds, the Assembly received his proposal with deafening applause. There was not a whisper of doubt or dissent.* The voice of the majority, they say, is the voice of God, and the voice of God on this occasion surpassed itself. Daśaratha was mightily pleased and he thanked all in accents faltering with emotion. And then and there he ordered his executive officers to see that the necessary arrangements were complete over-night, so that the ceremony of Installation might be celebrated the very next morning.†

This feverish haste on the part of the king has a suspicious look about it. Secondly, how is it that though invitations were sent to several kings‡ before the convention of the great Council, no messenger

* Vālmiki: II. 2. ते तपस्विनीहाल्मानो, पौरजानपदं सह।
रामोद्युग्मोपजपन्यकारक्षीत्रस्माहिः।
† Vālmiki: II. 3. यौत्रान्तेऽरमस्य संहवेयोपकल्पतामुः।
सूर्ये ॐ स्मुदितमाधि हरि: प्रभाते स्वसत्वाचनम्।
‡ Vālmiki: II. 1. तत: प्रविष्णु: शेषा राजानो लोकसंभारं।

The Tilaka:— शेषा इत्यथां केकयां जनकवृत्तिरिक्तं एव नुमा इत्यथः।
i. e. Only with the exception of Kekaya and Janaka all other kings came to the Council Hall.
was dispatched either to the lord of Kekaya or to the lord of Mithilā in spite of their nearest relationship! This point has been slurred in Vālmīki and entirely skipped by other poets. The Tilaka commentary, however, briefly suggests that since these two were directly interested in the elevation of their grandson and son-in-law respectively to the throne, they were likely to fall out with each other and turn the auspicious affair into a scene of bloody conflict; hence they were both excluded. This deliberate omission of the two, this unwarrantable hurry in holding the function, this gigantic effort to secure the support of public opinion in a matter, namely, the transfer of power to the eldest and worthiest son, which was a time-honoured custom, a long established practice in the family of the Ikshvākus*—all this perforce leads us to one conclusion that Daśaratha had a guilty conscience from the very beginning. Indeed, it is this guilty conscience which left him so weak at the last critical moment.

In keeping Bharata out of the sight of Kaikeyī, in withholding from her all knowledge of the coming

† Vālmīki: II. 73.

Also Manu: IX. 105.

i.e. The eldest alone is entitled to the whole paternal estate; the others shall live under him just as they lived under their father.
event, and in seeking to rush through the ceremony, the idea at the back of Daśaratha's mind seems to be that while Kaikeyī remained forgetful of the right conceded to her long ago and had no time to think and protest, the whole show must be over.* For once the princely crown was placed on the head of Rāma in due form, and before the eyes of all including herself, and without anybody's objection, her tacit consent would be presumed and the old agreement would naturally lapse. This policy of secrecy in design and celerity in execution, which Daśaratha adopted in consultation with his ministers, was the greatest blunder of his life. It betrays his imperfect understanding of the characters of those very persons whom he sought to deceive out of their rights. If, on the contrary, he had taken Kaikeyī into his confidence and told her frankly the yearnings of his heart, in spite of his faithful remembrance of the old promise, if he had also made it plain to her that should Rāma, the legitimate heir and idol of the people, be set aside, it would spread unrest and make the kingship for her son too thorny to be worth having, this straightforward appeal to her judgement and higher self would never have

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* The Aāhyātma: II. 2.

मनस्प्रेष्यं निषाधियुष्तं त्वं वाचा प्रतिप्रायस्य इत्यं
भरते मातृवर्ज्जुः प्रेमशास्त्रा प्राधिव इति

i.e. With this very thought in his mind, O Kaikeyī, he flattered you to the skies with airy words, and while you were in the clouds, he sent away Bharata to his maternal uncle's place.
fallen flat on her ears. She had a touch of magnanimity about her and was capable of taking a broad view, if kept in good humour.* Bharata may have been the apple of her eye, but the solace of her heart was Rāma.† And in his favour she would have generously renounced her son’s claim to the succession, if Daśaratha had approached her the right way. But he rubbed her the wrong way. He sought to circumvent her in her unguarded moment, to attain his object by skilful manœuvre, and then laugh at her in his sleeve, or wipe her tears with dry sympathy.

This shady procedure scandalised her. She was a proud woman, rather vain and filled with a sense of self-importance. And her pride was deeply hurt. On top of all, her son, who worshipped Rāma as the guiding star of his life and loved him as none else ever did, was utterly neglected, not even remembered at the installation ceremony. Thousands were invited, they were welcome guests; he alone was left out as an unwelcome person. Others would add grace to the occasion; her jewel of a son would be a disgrace to it! What other

* Vālmiki: II. 8.

रामो राजसुतो येष्को यौवराज्यमतोऽहि ।
राज्यं यदि हि रामस्य भरतस्यायि ततदा ॥

Here Kaikeyī pleads for Rāma’s prior claim to the throne.

† The Adhyātma: II. 2.

भरतदानेष्को रामः प्रियक्रमे प्रियंवदः ॥

Here she says that Rāma is dearer to her than Bharata on account of his sweet nature.
construction was she to put upon this deliberate omission of him? Her motherly instinct was roused. She might overlook her own wrongs, but this gratuitous insult to her son she could not tolerate. Her blue blood was up and cried for revenge. She stood upon her dignity, grew utterly callous, and insisted upon the fulfilment of the old bond in disregard of all consequences. Daśaratha and his ministers were simply nonplussed at her recalcitrant attitude. In order to frighten her and to abash her into submission, they ground their teeth, rubbed their hands, rolled their eyes, and called her names.* To move her to pity and forgiveness, they bent their heads, fell at her feet, and shed copious tears.† But she neither budged an inch, nor did she relent. She was now a Goddess turned a Gorgon and she held them all helpless in her power.‡ She threatened them with a full exposure of their machinations and

* Vālmiki: II. 35.

पाणि पाणी चिनिष्णु दश्तान्तकटाद्य च ।
लोचने क्रोधसंरक्षिते वर्ण पुरोविच्छिन्ता जहत् ।
क्रोधवशिष्य कैके युद्ध: प्रत्यथाापत ॥

† Vālmiki: II. 12.

अज्जनकं कुमार कैकेि पादी मृणां स्पृहामि ते ।
इत्युक्तवाहुपरीताश: पादयोनिपात ह ॥

‡ The Adhyātma: II. 3.

शरीरमीलय नयने विलमुख परवा भिया ।
आखुलोके पुरसं पत्रौ व्यास्मिन्नित पुर: स्थिताम् ॥
they quailed before her.* Had her threat related to a billing-and-cooing affair between the ailing husband and his nursing wife, or between the driving gallant and his cautious belle, as the popular belief is, they would never have given a second thought to it, but faced the world with a clear conscience and gone on with the celebrations with a glare of trumpets. For, complimentary promises of gratitude, made courteously in vague terms, could never give the receiver, be she a king's wife, power to override Cabinet and Council decisions. Such promises have at all times a strictly limited application. On the strength of these Kaikeyī could never claim the rights of Queen Regnant, and if she did, they could not be conceded and no censure incurred. Such being the case, since Kaikeyī drove the king and his ministers into a tight corner and left them looking at each other in dismay, it is evident that it was not a case of two lovers' *tiff in a pet*, but a matter involving grave political issues between the two kingdoms of Kekaya and Kośala. Hence says Rāma†:—

* Vālmiki: II. 12. समवें मानूंतः कार्यं: पूर्वं कृतमनुसारसः। बधारमकटवं कथं वीर वृक्षियां कथप्रियसि। यदा समेता वहसत्वया राजप्रथं शाह कथप्रियालि पण्डः तत् किं प्रतिवेधं। ||
i. e. Remember the past agreement and don't be false to it; otherwise you will have no face to show in the world. How will you defend your duplicity before these royal guests?

† The *Ādhyātma* II. 9.

न स्मरितं: पिता दूराच जारी नैव भूषधे।।
पूर्वं प्रतिशतं तत्वं सत्यचारDO ददै भयात॥
“Not because our sire was uxorious, or infatuated, or softened in the brain, but because he had agreed to this in categorical terms that he had to implement it through fear of future complications.”

It is highly intriguing that Vasishṭha, the king’s advisor-in-chief, disappeared suddenly from the scene at this juncture and was neither enquired for, nor did he show his face again till Daśaratha had closed his eyes for good.

Daśaratha was so staggered by the collapse of his undertaking that he did not recover his balance afterwards. Smarting in conscience, unsettled in mind, and paralysed in body he remained shut up in Kaikeyī’s apartment and gave her a free hand to manage the sequel in her own way. From now on until the return of Bharata it was she who ruled in his name. She was virtually Kaikeyī Regina. If, at this stage, she had bethought herself a little and sent for Bharata immediately, and announced the suspension of all further proceedings until his return, she would have avoided the terrible crash that followed and earned for herself immortal fame. But having checkmated Daśaratha, she was flushed with victory, and being blinded by rage, she blundered on exultingly: she incurred instead eternal disgrace. Her tutoress throughout was Mantharā, an old nurse, as Daśaratha’s preceptor was Vasiṣṭha, an aged priest. Both guided their disciples according to their lights, but one by open exhorr-
tation* and the other by tacit approval.† They played at cross purposes, but erred the same way at a crisis, and sank into the background for ever. After the fall of Kaikeyi, Mantharā reverted to her menial tasks and passed out of notice; after the death of Daśaratha, Vasishṭha remained confined to ritual acts and became an unimportant figure afterwards. Mantharā frustrated the installation of Rāma in the interests of Bharata, but behind his back; Vasishṭha advised its celebration in the absence of Bharata, but against his claims. It is indeed strange that neither of them remembered to have him back home at the right moment, before it was too late. If they had dispatched a courier post-haste to Girivraja when the situation began to worsen, they could have averted the death of Daśaratha, the downfall of Kaikeyi, and the disruption of the family. But they sent for him after the crash was complete‡. It was

* The Adhyāya: II. 2.

† Ibid: II. 2.

‡ Valmiki: II. 67.
like calling for the fire-brigade when the house was already a heap of ashes. I do not understand why in each poem Manthārā alone should be the target of abuse and Vasishṭha the object of fulsome praise. *He let Daśaratha into a political intrigue, and left him to rot on the deathbed alone, and reappeared only for the disposal of his remains.* He is everywhere styled a spiritual guide, which I never thought meant a guide to funeral rites and formal condolences.†

Now to revert to Kaikeyī, her insistence on the banishment of Rāma was, really speaking, not covered by the terms of the old marriage agreement, but it was necessitated by the recent constitutional manoeuvres of Daśaratha. Rāma had been formally proposed and unanimously accepted as the next successor to the throne both in the Cabinet and the Council. This news was received with rejoicings through the length and breadth of the kingdom. Already popular before by: his heroic acts and

* Vālmīki says that Vasishṭha did not even care to see the king as he lay tossing mournfully in his bed, or to bid adieu to Rāma when he left for the forest. People had to cry vociferously at his door to inform him that the former was dead and the latter had already gone into exile. Thereupon the great Vasishṭha quietly said, 'Well, now is the time to send messengers on swiftest horses to bring Bharata.' See the quotation on page 76.

† Vālmīki: II. 78.

\[ सदर्ते भरतं प्रधान वसिष्ठः \text{"अक्षरः प्रभुसिधः\"} \]
\[ पाप्तकाछं नरपति: कृशं संस्कृतचन्द्रमम् \]
\[ प्रेतकुक्तयानि संवाणि कारणामास घर्मविद्याः \]
courteous ways, he was now hailed by the people as their ideal protector in the near future. Naturally his supplantation by Bharata at this moment would never be viewed by them with equanimity. Bharata was more likely to be detested as a base schemer than tolerated as a rightful claimant. Kaikeyī, therefore, was not wrong in assuming that if Rāma continued to stay in Ayodhyā after his disinheritance, he would be a thorn in the side of her son. For even if he kept aloof from all politics, his partisans would engineer a lot of trouble in his behalf and spread unrest through the kingdom. As a result, in the very first days of his reign, Bharata would find himself on his last legs. It is some such considerations which, I think, weighed with Mr. Baldwin, when he sent the Duke of Windsor out of England immediately after his abdication in favour of his younger brother. The point has been well brought out in the speech of Mantharā* :—

"As the throne has already been offered to Rāma, its occupation now by Bharata will mean a great deprivation to him. How can a dis-

* Vālmīki : II. 8. 9.

वदि चेद्यतो धर्मात् विच्यं राज्यमवाप्स्यति ||
रामस्व भरते पायं कुर्यांद्रव न संशायः ||
घ ते सुलोचितो बलो रामस्य सहजः रितुः ||
समुदार्थस्व नवग्राह्यं जीवित्यति कर्मे वदे ||
व्यवस्थाप्य महाराजं तस्मातेऽवृत्तं वरम् ||
रामप्राप्तवनं दुरं नवभोगानि पञ्चानि च ||
चतुर्दशा हि वर्गानि रामे प्रस्थापिते वनम् ||
रुद्रश्च कूटमूखश्च तव अुवो भविष्यति ||
appointed soul ever feel kindly to one who balks him of his legitimate expectation? Brothers before, they will be rivals hereafter. Strife and struggle will surely follow. The atmosphere will remain charged with intrigue, and cross currents will flow underground. In such a soil, seething with ferment, the authority of Bharata can never take root. Therefore, to enable him to establish his rule firmly, you must send Rāma out of the kingdom to the forest for at least fourteen years. It is a cruel necessity, this banishment of Rāma, in the present situation. As the situation is brought about by Daśaratha himself, he must also grant the remedy."

The argument was sound, as far as average humanity is concerned. But in applying it to the special case of Rāma and Bharata, Kaikeyī took no notice of their exceptional personality. She herded them with the common run of mankind, whereas they stood above the common herd. Herein lay her fatal mistake. Another irony was that when she turned relentless in what she considered to be her son’s interests, she never cared to enquire where exactly his own interests lay. The result was that while she thought she was doing him infinite good, she was actually causing him incalculable harm. She thus acted like a learned fool who took a fish out of water and put it tenderly in a pot of butter. She proceeded on the general assumption that sovereignty was more covetable than service. But rules have their exceptions, and Bharata was a glorious exception to the general rule. To serve under Rāma was
heaven to him; to reign without him was hell itself.* His was a soul cast in a different mould, and this she entirely forgot. Indeed, to apply general principles mechanically, without due regard to their limitations, is to court disaster, and this she had to the full. She lost everything—her name, her rank, her happiness. She lost the love and regard of her own son,† for whose sake she had not even recoiled from the horrors of widowhood ‡. Her triumph was of short duration. For, the very moment Bharata arrived in Ayodhya, she became a nonentity and passed out of the picture for ever—‘unwept, unhonoured, and unsung’—into mournful obscurity! She realised her mistake in the end, but it was then too late to mend.§


† Vālmīki : II. 74.

‡ Vālmīki : II. 12.

§ The Adhyātma : II. 9.

(Continued on next page)
What was Rāma doing all the while? He restrained himself from all action, because he saw the right action in inaction itself.* Thus by doing nothing he achieved a great thing. He had the whole situation clear in his mind. He let the things drift in their own way, because the end to which they were drifting was the only possible beginning to his future career. He knew the secret of Daśaratha and watched his faulty steps, but neither did he wake him up at the right moment, nor did he suggest to him the way of escape when he was cornered. He knew the pride of Kaikeyī and the extent to which she would go; also the mind of Bharata and the danger that would spring from him to his design. True to his own purpose, he fortified his heart and maintained throughout studious silence. He did not even raise a protest when his father cast reflections on the character of Bharata in defence of his

(Continued from the previous page)
i.e. With her eyes streaming with tears, Kaikeyī said to Rāma in private at Chitrakūṭa, ‘It was through sheer wickedness that I came in the way of your succession. I was then blinded by rage and passion for revenge; hence could not foresee the consequences of my act. But now I repent sincerely of what I did. Have mercy upon me, Rāma. I implore you with folded hands.’

* The Gītā: IV. 18. कर्मणुपकर्म यः पश्चेदकर्मिणि च कर्म यः।
सुद्रुक्तामानुष्मुखे च युक्तः इत्भनकर्मिणिः॥
i.e. Among men he is said to be gifted with superintelligence who, while performing all his duties in a calm and composed manner, sees inaction in action and action in inaction.
own deliberate neglect of him at the Installation ceremony*:

"I have purposely chosen to install you during the absence of Bharata, because while he stays away from here, that in my opinion is the safest time to hold this function. I grant that Bharata has virtuous looks, but my experience of the world teaches me that we must not trust too much to appearances: they are as often as not deceptive. Even a saintly heart turns sordid when personal interests are at stake. Therefore, if we wait for him, I am afraid he may create insurmountable difficulties in our way. Hence his absence from this place is the most opportune time for our purpose".

It is highly significant that Rāma listened to these insinuations against his selfless brother calmly.


The Tilaka:— भरतस्वारंभानात्येक् तत्र विभिन्नक्षेपेऽप्राप्तः कालो योगः; अन्यथा भरतः प्रतिवचनीयात् इति भावः । ननु भरतेऽकर्मेऽएव शोकः युक्तः इत्यत आहः । मनुष्याणि चिन्तं स्नेहादिस्रसि अनित्यम् । विकारानिमित्ते सति विश्रितेयत इत्यथः । यतः सतामपि चिन्तं तत्त्वार्थमिच्छलेन रागद्वेद्यादिना शोभते युव्याते । न दुः सत्यस्य स्वतः नियतकिन्तुवस्तुवाचारिनिः।

This clearly bears out my previous assertion that Daśaratha had a guilty conscience from the very beginning and that Bharata's visit to Kekaya was a part of his design.
He did not betray in look, voice, or gesture any resentment that he must have felt deeply within. Why did he let his father labour under so ridiculous a misapprehension about one who wore his heart upon his sleeve? The only explanation is that he did not wish to put his father wise to the true nature of Bharata. He knew full well that if Bharata was informed of his forthcoming installation, he would come immediately and that, if on his arrival Kaikeyi dared to stand in the way, he would throw her aside without a thought, and renounce his claim to the throne in public, and offer the crown to him on bended knees with his own hands. How would he then have the heart—and on what grounds too—to refuse the offer so lovingly made, with such humility, in the presence of his parents, before the eyes of the people, all cheering with one voice! A poet observes*:—

"Of all the bonds in the world, the strongest and most unbreakable are the bonds of love. The black bee, when confined, makes a passage even through the toughest wood and sets itself free; yet such is its love for the lotus that when its frail petals close upon it in the evening, it lies unresisting within in spite of suffocation."

Thus the presence of Bharata would mean an exceedingly delicate obstacle in his own way: he

* Anon.

भन्नान्ति किरुं सन्ति बहुनि
स्नेहज्वस्तिवनन्यन्यन् इ।
दांमेड्यिषुपुणोपरि प्रायस्करि
निषिद्धं भवति पंकजाः॥
would be tied down to the place by the chains of royalty, and these would not leave him the freedom he needed for the main task of his life. On these considerations he kept his own council and thanked the gods for sending a cloud on the intellects of his parents and ministers.

That Rāma had foreseen the impending crash is evident from his own suggestive words on two occasions. When his mother Kausalyā received the news from him that he was to be coronated the next day, she could hardly contain herself with joy; the blessings which rose to her lips her voice failed to articulate. Drawing him close to her bosom, she bathed him with tears. He withdrew himself gently from her arms, and smiling sadly, said to Lakshmana*:

"To you also, my second self, has befallen the same sovereignty as is in store for me. Henceforth lies before us two the vast earth, unlimited and free, which let us both join our efforts to rule. Enjoy, my dear, to your heart's content the fruits of royalty which, by virtue of your intimate association with me, shall within your reach be."

* Vālmīki: II. 4.

रामो भ्रा तरम अभिविश्व स्मयक्षित

व्हामणेमत्ता साध्य प्रशाविकं त्वं वचस्यरामः

ह्रेवैयं मेन्तरमां त्वामिवं श्रीवस्थिता

सौमिन्ते सुंदरं भोगा स्वस्विभाष्याच्छायानि च

बीविहितवापि राज्यमेव तवदर्शमभिकांषये
The bitter irony in this speech is too obvious to need elucidation, though to his own mother, beside herself with joy, it was scarcely noticeable. The second occasion was when Sumantra, the minister of the Chamber, reported to him at early morn that Mahārāja Daśaratha and Rāni Kaikeyī both desired his presence immediately. From the minister’s report that the king, who was hale and hearty the day before, had suddenly fallen ill in Kaikeyī’s apartment and was too weak to stir out of bed, he forthwith concluded that ‘the engineer was hoist with his own petard’, that his father’s sudden break-down was not due to exhaustion of work, as many believed, but to frustration of his design, which few suspected. While leaving for Kaikeyī’s palace, he said quizzi-cally to Sītā*:

* Vālmiki: II. 16.

The Tilaka:— अभिक्षेपार्कम् वनगमनरूपमस्माभिविचित्रणमानं संग्राति मनोयेत्रे कैकिये महाराजस्वरूपः परम गभित:। रावणनश्वरूपः मद्भिष्मायामस्मात्ते वनरुपोत्सवं कैकिये मद्मीक्षिणथस्य सत्रथः मज्जविद्वियोजनरूपः कपनगमनार्थः महाराजे त्वर-वतित्वः।
"I believe, my dear, that the king and the queen are in close consultation together about some important thing connected with this very affair of my installation. The keen-sighted Kaikeyī has, I am sure, correctly divined my inmost wishes, and always attentive to my true interests, has after all prevailed upon the king to allow what I have been waiting for so long. The forthcoming interview is thus of a very delicate nature, and very secret too; hence has the king dispatched his confidential messenger to me at the glimmer of dawn. Well, as far as I see, it will prove the dawn of my future; for the king will surely invest me, this very day, with power to proceed unhindered with my royal task”.

It is worthy of note that Sītā, gifted as she was with quick intellect, understood the full implication of these words; for she said in reply*:

“Yes, my lord! It is in the supreme kingship of mankind that your Sire intends to place you. I already see you clad in a deer’s skin, armed with a bow, intent upon sacrifice of self, and

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* Vālmīki: II. 16.

The Tilaka:— सर्वप्रथमः को नाम राजा सुखे तत्र तत्र ताहशस्त्रेण तत्वाभिपक्ष करिष्यति महाराजः। तस्मिन् राजसुरे श्रद्धेते त्वामहें भजिष्य। अभेनाहमपि त्वायं सह वर्न यास्वामीति सूचितम्।
therefore destined to rule over all. I wish you
good luck in the trial ahead”.

If we take a comprehensive view of all facts con-
cerning the behaviour of Rāma on this eventful
occasion—Nārada’s deep anxiety about the future
and his definite assurance to him, Daśaratha’s dis-
trust of Bharata and his connivance at it, Kausalyā’s
inexpressible joy and his implied warning, Kaśikeyi’s
urgent call at dawn and his correct forecast of the
interview, his smiling hint to Sītā and her willing
amen to it— there is no room for doubt that Rāma
knew all along what intrigue was afoot and how it
would end in a fiasco. If he had so chosen, he could
have by timely action prevented the tragedy that
occurred in his family. But in that case it would
have been impossible for him to avert the doom that
was fast descending upon his race. Conditions in
Āryāvarta, as we have seen before, were not at all
favourable to open warfare against Rāvana. He had
striven hard to bring the kshatriya princes together
into “a serried phalanx tight”, but in vain. Alone he
was not a match for him. The fate of Anarannya,
fighting single-handed, was fresh in his mind. To
take the field, therefore, openly against Rāvana was
not bravery, but sheer bravado. Wisdom suggested
that Rāvana must be hoodwinked first, and then
only could he be overthrown. But how? As the
crowned king of Ayodhya, he could not enter his
territory except to fight him as an enemy, or to
make him obeisance as his liege lord. Both the
alternatives were out of the question. But as a dis-
inherited prince, debarred from the throne by his
father, stripped of everything by his mother, expelled to no-man's-land by the logic of events, he could, without rousing the least suspicion, take up his quarters on the very borders of Rāvana's empire, then creep gradually inside, and weave a noose imperceptibly around him and tighten it at the right moment so well that the knot must catch his throat and make all his struggles futile. As he visualised his future course, he saw nothing but success at the other end. Should he forgo it for the sake of a few individuals of his family? Let them err and by erring leave the path open to him. With these thoughts uppermost in his mind, he shut his eyes to whatever might happen at home and maintained a diplomatic silence throughout. Finally on the plea of "dutiful obedience to my mother Kaikeyi's orders," he made a sudden departure from Ayodhyā, notwithstanding the critical condition of his father, not even waiting for the return of Bharata, or why, in order to avoid a meeting with him, he made his marches so rapid and his halts so short that by the time Bharata was back in Ayodhyā, he was scores of miles away at Chitrakūṭa, with his body clothed in bark garments, his hair matted with the milk of a

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* Valmiki: II. 19.

श्रुत्वा गत्वयथे राम: कैकशी वाक्यमनवीतिः ।
अनुमोद्यतमवत्ता भवत्या वचनादहसौ ।
चने वल्स्यांविचनव वर्षाण्विह चतुर्दशः ॥

i. e. On hearing the words of Kaikeyī, Rāma cheered up and said, "Although my revered father does not say anything, yet if you wish me to go into exile for fourteen years, I shall deem it an honour to fulfil your wishes."
fig tree, himself in secret conclave with venerable sages—of whom a few daring spirits had long left for Dandakā to prepare the ground for him as pioneers!

Before we proceed any further with Rāma, let us settle a few knotty questions about Lakśmana, Sītā, and Ürmilā. Why did Rāma take Lakśmana away with him at a time when his father was sinking fast? His hour had come, anybody could see that. All lustre had vanished from his eyes. The shadow of death was upon his face. Indeed, the flame of life could hardly be expected to burn long under a ceaseless flood of tears and a storm of unceasing sighs! Bharata and Šatrughna were far away, so far that even if they came at a run or flew back on wings, they would still be too late. He himself had to quit immediately at Kaikeyi's behest. But she had no grudge against Lakśmana. He could very well stay behind, and 'upon his filial breast the parting soul could recline.' All the same Rāma did not think it wise, or even kind, to leave him behind. The plain answer to this riddle is that Lakśmana, instead of being a solace to his father in his last moments, would have become a source of lasting unrest in the kingdom. He was notoriously irascible by nature. Whenever he was stirred by a sense of wrong, his instincts of justice were apt to degenerate into mere vindictiveness. It is on this account that mythology conceives of him as an incarnation of the divine Cobra.* He had no reasoning, only an excess

* The Paśma: अनन्ताहमाच्छंकमः।
The Tilaka: तस्य श्रेपानतवार्थे तमोभुव्यास्तताः।
of feeling. He held Bharata responsible for all that happened, because whatever happened was for his sake. If he had not come into the world, nothing untoward would have come to pass, and the world would have been much better off. Lakshmana, therefore, wanted to kill him. But that much only would not satisfy him. He must slaughter all his relations on the side of his mother and all his well-wishers on this side of the grave! As regards Daśaratha, he doted upon a temptress of a wife and turned against an angel of a son. He was thus senile as well as hostile. For the first offence, Lakshmana would clap him by the heels and let him rot in prison; for the second offence, he would squeeze him by the neck and toss his head off to the winds†!

Rāma was much vexed to hear Lakshmana go on in this blood-thirsty strain. But he did not stop him; he let him fulminate to the top of his bent and thus let off all his fury in threats and curses. When he

* Vālmiki: II. 21 & 23.

† The Vālmiki: II. 21.
calmed down a little, Rāma brought him round gradually to a more sensible view of the situation. He appeared peaceful for the time being, but he could not be trusted alone for ever. In no case was it safe to leave him behind. He was good at heart, but his nature was at fault. Under provocation he lost his head, flew into a rage, never betought himself, but only thought of sending whosoever stood in his way to hell*. Rāma alone could control him and keep him steady; none else could. Hence in his absence what might not happen! Lakshmana was remarkably brave and absolutely chaste. But his nature was fiery, and like fire he could be exceedingly useful as well as extremely dangerous. Rāma, therefore, determined to take him along with himself rather than leave him to his own self. He knew accurately what sterling qualities he had, and thoroughly appreciated one trait of his—implicit obedience to Rāma under any circumstances. He would therefore take him in his hand, and use him as his right arm in the execution of his great design, and lead him along with himself to a place sublime in the Temple of Fame.

There was one more danger in leaving Lakshmana behind, namely, his mother Kausalyā’s present state of mind. Her relations with Daśaratha and Kaikeyī were none too cordial before; the former slighted her,

* Vālmiki: II. 21.
the latter snubbed her. Though in the outside
world she was known to occupy the exalted rank of
Eldest Queen, yet actually in the household she was
degraded to the lowest place. Even the toilette-maids
of her co-wife had the precedence of her in every
respect.† She was even stinted in the ordinary com-
forts of life.‡ Under these humiliating conditions

* Valmiki: II. 12.

न मया सत्कर्णा देवी सत्कारार्ही हुते तव।
इदानीं तनपति मां यन्त्रणा सुकुट्ते त्वचि॥

Here Daśaratha confesses to Kaikeyi, “For your sake
I never treated Kausalyā with honour, though she deserved
honourable treatment. Now it burns me with remorse that
I should have yielded to your wishes to such an extent”.

Valmiki: II. 20.

तद्वाय महृदुः दुःखेलोत्साहसे सहितु चिराग।
विप्रकारे च कैशिका एवं जीर्णस्मि रायव॥

Here Kausalyā says to Rāma, “I have grown old, bearing
humiliations patiently at Kaikeyi’s hands. But now I cannot
endure mental tortures any longer.”

† Valmiki: II. 20.

परिवरोण कैशिका: समा वाप्पोशरा कर॥

i.e. Although I am the eldest queen, yet less regard is paid
to me than to the servants of Kaikeyi. I have to hang down
my head before them.

‡ Valmiki: II. 20.

न द्युःपुर्वं कल्याणं सुलभं वा पतिपौशिषे॥

The Tilaka:— पतिपौशिषे पत्नुपाने सति, यत्त्वाणि कल्याणं प्रवस्तवस्त्रा-
मरणांदिकं, सुलभं पतिसंभोगं, तन्त्रया न यों
द्युःपुर्वतः॥

i.e. Owing to the absence of marital affection I have had no
fine clothes, no costly ornaments, nor even amatory pleasures
from my husband.
her only joy, her only hope, her only support of life, was her jewel of a son, Rāma. He, by his amiable ways, had softened the obdurate heart of Kaikeyī,* brought good will and harmony in place of rivalries and jealousies. To Kausalyā, therefore, he was as it were the sun, flooding her otherwise gloomy world with light. To his installation as Crown Prince she looked forward with intense longing; for, as Rājamātā at least, she would have that place of honour which, as Rājamahishī, was unfairly denied to her. But all her fond expectations suddenly proved castles in the air. The morning fixed for the ceremony, which she believed would be the dawn of her future happiness, turned out to be the dusk of eternal night. It brought to her the news, not of her son’s elevation to the throne, but of his transportation to Daṇḍakā, the darkest spot on earth. From the summit of joy she fell headlong into abysmal gloom. Darkness came over all her faculties. Blank despair surrounded her on all sides. Who were responsible for this? Assuredly Daśaratha and Kaikeyī. What other feel-

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* Vālmīki: II. 8.

यथा वै भस्ती मानसस्तथा भृगृहिणि रास्तनः ।
कौशल्यानागतिरस्तत्वय मम दयाण्वते ब्रह्म ||

i. e. I love Rāma as much as I do Bharata; for he pays me greater regard than to his own mother,
ings could she have for them but of bitterest hate!
Convulsed with grief, she exclaimed* :—

"Daśaratha may concede to Kaikeyī whatever within his power lies, but what right has he to tear away from me my own flesh and blood? He may raise Bharata to heaven, I do not grudge it; but what justification has he to send my son to hell? What merits Bharata has evinced to deserve such partial treatment, I do not care to ask, nor am I interested in it; but what I am vitally concerned about and have every right to know is, what faults has my Rāma committed to merit such brutal punishment? In the face of such brazenfaced, inhuman, gross injustice to you who have always been so dear to both, what hope now is left for me who have all along been an object of neglect and scorn? What shall be my lot here when you are there in


Also Vālmīki: II. 20.

Also Vālmīki: II. 20.
exile? Have you no pity for your helpless mother, Rāma? Will you leave me a prey to one swelled-headed and the other hen-pecked? You are, as you say, a champion of justice. Let justice begin at home first and let my wrongs be righted forthwith."

While Kausalyā was thus in a distracted mood, altogether crazed with grief, up rose Lakshmana with a resolution to go a cutting, hacking, and killing all those who dictated or desired or occasioned Rāma's expulsion to the forest. His terrible words were music to her soul. They promised a clear-cut solution of all her difficulties, and that was the only possible solution under the present circumstances. It was no doubt a parricidal proposal, but she did not condemn it outright, as Rāma did. She rather acquiesced in it. Indeed, to her, situated as she was, even stark widowhood with her Rāma close by, reigning gloriously, was hundred times preferable to wretched wifehood without him—him trudging his weary way through the dark forest, subject to hunger and thirst, and to dangers unthinkable. She looked at the countenance of Rāma; it registered vexation at the fiery speech of Lakshmana. She hesitated a little, then stammered out*:

"Dost thou hear, my son, what thy brother Lakshmana says! If it meets with thine approval,

* Vālmīki: II. 21.

उवाच रामं कौसल्या रुद्रिः सोक्लालसि।
भावृत्तेवदत: पुनः लक्ष्मणस्य श्रुति त्यया।
यद्यान्तरं तत्त्वं कुश्रुष्य वदि रोचते।
I for one shall not object to thy giving effect to it.”

Rāma silenced both, the proposer and the second. But he saw the danger of leaving them together. The association of the two, one storming with rage and the other inflamed with grief, might prove a source of conflagration in the royal family behind his back. This eventuality must be put beyond all possibility of occurrence. Rāma took no chances in his life. He did not rest contented with their assurances to keep peaceful. He took Lakshmana away with him. Sumitṛa, who had her wits about her, saw the wisdom of Rāma and did not object to separation from her own son. That Rāma was right in not trusting Lakshmana alone was fully borne out by what happened at Chitrakūṭa. At the approach of Bharata there, the first impulse of Lakshmana was to shoot him.* But Rāma was there to hold him

* Vālmiki: II. 96.

i. e. Here comes Bharata, our enemy, on whose account you have been turned out of the kingdom. He certainly deserves to be killed. I shall also put to death his mother Kaikeyī, and all her paternal and maternal relations. They are all our enemies; hence I will Pierce their bodies with my sharp arrows and drench the forest ground of Chitrakūṭa with their blood today.
back, and he held him back from rashness at all times.

As regards Sīṭā, Rāma was most unwilling to take her with him, and rightly too. His object in leaving Ayodhyā was not to idle away his time in forest sojourn, but to utilise it in purposeful action. He stood alone and helpless against the mighty power of Rāvana. He could not grapple with it openly; he had to delve under it as well as infiltrate through it. For this he had to study the land, formulate suitable plans, find the necessary material, and procure the right sort of men. This required taking counsel with some and giving directions to others, winning over some and inveigling others. He had to move about briskly, covering his steps and weave a vast net of organisation, interlacing each thread so carefully that a tangle might never ensue. In the performance of such a task, so intricate and so strenuous, Sīṭā would rather be a drag on him than an asset to him. He would have to regulate his pace according to her ability to sustain fatigue. Her safety would be his constant anxiety at all times. He, therefore, sincerely wished her to stay behind. But she sternly refused to stay behind—she who never disobeyed him either before or after. Why?

The poets, in answer to this question, only idealise her wifely love and devotion. Some say that she could never live, for a moment even, without Rāma.*

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* Vālmīki: II. 29. पतिभीना तु या नारी न सा शस्यति जीवितम्।
त्वद्योगेन मे श्रम स्थवर्यितं जीवितम्॥
i. e. How can a woman live without her husband? The moment you part from me, life will depart from my body.
of this Rāma was convinced; hence rather than leave her corpse behind he preferred to take her bodily with him. They forget that she could live all right without Rāma afterwards, for twelve long years, in disgraceful abandonment. Others say that she was bent upon suicide, if Rāma left her behind;* by this Rāma was impressed; hence rather than have her blood upon his head he chose to bend his head to her wishes. They forget that such threats were uttered by many, but Rāma never listened to them. His own mother Kausalyā said†:

“Listen, my son, if you do not stay with me here in obedience to my legitimate wishes, or go away without me in submission to Kaikeyi’s unjust demand, I will in either case starve myself to death; for I can never live without you.”

But Rāma remained unmoved. He neither stayed with her, nor let her follow him to the forest. Similarly his selfless brother Bharata said‡:

* Ibid.: II. 29. यदि मां हुँगितानेवं वं नेतुं न चेच्छसि। विष्णविन जर्तु वाहमस्थाये मूर्त्तुकारणाय।।
i. e. If you do not take me to the forest with you, but leave me here in affliction, I will either burn myself to ashes or drown myself to death.

† Vālmīki: II. 21 & 24.

शा 5 हं त्वा नातुज्ञानामि न गतवृत्यो बनस। शुष्क भारमस्थायं व च चारस्यां वचः शून्य। ।
वदि तं गार्त्यवि वते त्यक्तवा मां शोकशालसामु। अही प्रायमहाविग्येन न च शाश्यामि जीवितमु।।

‡ The Adhyālma: II. 9. also Vālmīki II. 111.

अहमप्रायागम्यामि सेवे त्वा वक्तमणो यथा। नोंचित्तायोपेष्येन त्यजात्मेतक्लेवरसु॥
“I will also accompany you to the forest and serve you like Lakshmana. If you do not allow me, I will abstain from food and drink, and let my body drop dead here.”

But Rāma turned a deaf ear and sent him back to Ayodhyā from Chitrakūṭa. So also his unsophisticated friend Guha said*:

“Let me come along with you, I pray. If you object, I will forthwith embrace death.”

But Rāma paid no heed. He charged him to stay at home and turned his face away.

From all these instances are we to conclude that Rāma was sentimental and solicitous about his wife only, but callous and indifferent to his mother, brother, and friend? Even the biased inference about his softness of heart towards Sitā is vitiated by what he did to her later on. He cast her away lightly like a piece of straw and made no fuss about it.† The correct view, therefore, seems to be that there was no room for sentimentality in Rāma. Unless the action proposed was seconded by reason, approved by conscience, and justified by circumstances, he would never consent to it, be the threats as terrible, and appeals as tender, as they liked. He had a genial soul no doubt, but a stern heart.

* The **Adhyātma**: II. 6.

**गुहोः पि राष्ट्रं प्राह गमिष्याभि ल्यया सह ||**

**अनुजाः देहि राजेन्द्र नोचित्माणांस्यजाम्यहम् ||**

† **Bhavabhūti**: III.

**दृष्टांचिव वने शृङ्खऽत्यकता न चाप्यदुःशोचिता।**
without question; hence he stood, sweet in smile but firm as a rock, amid the rolling waves of life. He yielded to Sītā on this occasion, not because of her tearful looks, or pathetic appeals, or bitter taunts, not even because of her threats of suicide, but because her insistence was just and her argument unanswerable. She said:—

“My lord, you have not only lost your claim to the throne, but even your right to stay inside the kingdom. What right then can I, your second half, have to continue here? What place of honour is there now for me in this household, which is dominated by the very same Kaikeyī who has thrown my lord of life out of inheritance into wilderness, away from his own native land, to be a homeless wanderer in future.* You have been stripped of even your clothes and given instead coarse garments of bark.† What covering

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Here Kaikeyī says, “Since the king will not speak, you have now to take orders from me. Give up all thought of installation, and having put on the dress of an hermit, go straight to Dandakāranya for fourteen years”.

† Vālmiki: II. 37. अथ चीरणिः कैकेयिः स्वयमाहत्य राजवसूः

i. e. Kaikeyī brought bark garments with her own hand and said to Rāma, without the slightest touch of shame, in the presence of a crowd of people, “Put on these in place of your princely clothes”.
is now left for me, but bark to hide my shame? A hermit’s dress, my lord, the only dress now for me, is altogether grotesque in the palace without you, but quite graceful in the forest with you. Let me remind you, my lord, that when your own self-respect is concerned, you are very particular. Now that you are under orders to quit Košala, you think it undignifying to touch even a morsel of food as long as you are inside the kingdom. You have even refused to comply with the wishes of your father who has begged of you so pressingly to dine with him at least once before parting. Evidently you feel, and rightly too, that now all food in Košala has turned to ashes for you.* How do you then, my lord, expect me to


अचतिवदार्जर्जनी रजनीं गुन्या मा गच्छ सत्तार्‌
एकाह दर्शननानि तापु ताचाचर्चर्चारस्त्रयम्‌
अथ रामस्तवं शुद्धवा तितुरचताशि भागितम्‌
न च शक्ये मया तात स्थायिः क्षणमयो प्रभों‌
प्राप्त्यामिं धात्रुण्यु पुण्यान्‌ नै शवस्तानार्दायति‌

i.e. “Don’t go away at least for one night, my son. Let me have the pleasure of dining with you for the last time.” On hearing the appealing words of his father who was smitten with melancholy, Rāma said coldly, “I cannot stay here now even for one moment, my father. Whatever sumptuous dishes you will order for me today, none is going to offer them to me from tomorrow. So it is better to relinquish the pleasures of the table from today. Adieu, my father”.

(Continued on next page)
feed on these ashes which you leave behind for me? You may have conceded everything to Bharata, but certainly not your honour. Is not my honour included in yours? If you give me away into the hands of one who has dispossessed

(Continued from the previous page)

It is worth noting that when his friend Guha offered him edibles and drinks of all kinds on the bank of the Ganges, Rama thanked him heartily for his kindness, but refused to touch any of the things served before him. He excused himself by saying that he did not like to live on charity. He asked Lakshmana to fetch him water from the river, and this only he drank. It is only after he had crossed the Ganges and was out of Kosala that he killed a deer, which the three ate after cooking and worshipping the deities.

_Valmiki_ : II. 50.


So keen, indeed, was Rama's sense of self-respect that once the kingdom of Kosala was declared to be Kaikeyi's property, he thought it a shame to eat anything, fruit or root, fish, flesh or fowl, belonging to that kingdom. He broke his fast only after he was beyond its boundary line, the Ganges. Hence says the _Agnivesya_:

 نيরামন্দकাহারস্থচ্ছড়েতি হচ্ছি মুগাশ্চান: ||
পঁচমে চিত্রুত্রে তু রামে চাসনেরাস্যত॥
you of all fortune and cast you out of your native soil, what other status can I have but that of a slave to him, living by his sufferance, at his mercy, by no earthly right of my own? You say that Bharata will treat me well, Perhaps he may. But his treatment will reflect credit on his goodness; it can never add lustre to my shameful existence here.* You talk of difficulties and dangers on my account, but a true hero grapples with them manfully, does not boggle at them.† If you do, I call you a coward and cry shame upon your white-livered self! What did my father mean by giving me to one who has only the form of a man but really the spirit of a woman‡? If you seek to smoothen your path by leaving me behind in the hands of your successful rivals, you are no better than those contemptible wretches who solve their problem of life by

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* Valmiki: II. 30.

यस्य पश्यति रामात्थ यस्य चार्ये ।
तवं तस्य भव वश्यति नाहं स्थास्त्राभिमि तदः॥

† Valmiki: II. 30.

कैं कर्त्तव्य विषेशस्त्र्यं क्षत्रियस्त्र्युक्तो भवम्।
वत्तप्रतित्यक्तकामस्त्र्यं मामनन्दरावणम्॥

‡ Ibid: II. 30.

कैः तत्वाध्ययते वैदेहाः पिता मे सिद्धिभिः।
राम जामातारं यथा स्त्रियं प्रुषवंतिमहम्॥

The Tilaka:— यदि मे पिता त्वां केवलमाकारेण पुर्णं क्रियया ।
स्त्रियं जानियात्तद्विं मां हुन्म्यं न प्रयेच्छेदिति ।
placing their wives at the disposal of others.* Having taken my hand in marriage for better for worse, if you wriggle yourself out of your responsibility to me, what credit, I ask, is there in fulfilling what you call your duty to your father who does not want you to perform it † However, I am bound to you body and soul before the sacred fire: those bonds are unbreakable. If you still do not take me with you, this soul of mine shall not rot in bondage to another, but fly free out of this body to be for ever with you” ‡

Rāma had to admit the force of her reasoning and take her ultimately with him.

* Vālmīki: II. 30.
स्वयं दुः मायेः कृष्णाः चिरकठुषितां सतीम्।
शैलूः इव मां राम परेम्यो दातुमिच्छि॥
शैलूः: one who leads a life of ease and comfort at the cost of his wife’s honour.

† Vālmīki: II. 34.
उच्छव राजा संग्रस्य वमवाचय राधवम्।
अयोध्याम त्वमेव भव राजा निगृह माम्॥
i.e. When Daśaratha saw that Rāma was determined to go to the forest at the words of Kaśyapa, he lost his patience and said, “I command you to stay in Ayodhya and assume all power in your hands irrespective of me”.

‡ Ibid: II. 30.
नविष्ष्ठे नैव वनं मां समं दुःखुदुःखयोः।
चिरमचैव पास्यामि मा वनं हि तथा गमम्॥
The Tilaka:— द्विपत्तां भरतादीनामित्यर्थः॥
Why was Ürmilä left behind? The poets have one and all waxed eloquent over Sītā, but are unaccountably silent about her. They have, so to say, cut her dead for no fault of hers. She was not a whit inferior to Sītā in the intensity of her love and devotion to her husband. Her soul must have struggled as wildly as Sītā’s for permission to accompany him. She must have expressed her wishes as earnestly as Bharata, Kausalyā, and Guha did. She must have uttered the same threat of suicide. But like theirs, her argument could only be sentimental. Hence like them, Rāma dissuaded her also from her resolve to follow him, along with Lakshmana, to the forest. He had allowed Lakshmana to come along, not because he was also ordered into exile by Kaikeyī. She made no reference to him in her demands: for he was not a rival claimant to the throne; hence no thorn in the path of her son. Nor did he allow him to come along because of his unflinching devotion to him or even because of his threat of suicide. Bharata’s self-surrender to Rāma stood even higher; still he was forcibly sent back to Ayodhyā, as his stay there was absolutely necessary in the interest of the whole kingdom. Rāma took Lakshmana with him mainly to preclude the possibility of fratricide in the family, and secondly, in view of his potential usefulness in the task ahead. But though Lakshmana accompanied Rāma in exile, he did not forfeit thereby his rights as a younger prince in the kingdom. He still retained them, and by virtue thereof Ümilā could live honourably in Ayodhyā as the wife of a prince who went out as a volunteer in a noble spirit of self-sacri-
fice. Sītā, on the other hand, could claim no place of honour in the kingdom, from where her husband was banished, with no vestige of property behind and with nothing but a void before him. In short, while Ūrmilā could hold her head erect, though staying behind Lakshmanā, Sītā would have to hide her face in shame, unless she followed in the footsteps of Rāma. As regards Kausalyā, she must stay where Daśaratha was, be the kingdom a heaven or a hell to her. As regards his friend Guha, he owed a duty to his family, which he could never be allowed to forsake on an impulse of sympathy with Rāma. Hence did our Rāma leave all others behind and took only Sītā and Lakshmanā with him.
CHAPTER IV

Behind the Scenes

George Bernard Shaw in his *Man of Destiny* has commented, in his usual incisive way, on the British policy of expansion and colonisation all the world over. He says:—

"Whenever the Englishman wants a new tract of land for his hungry brethren, he does not say that he wants it. He simply sends a missionary to teach the natives the gospel of peace, non-violence, and brotherhood. The missionary goes and builds a church there. Outwardly he spreads enlightenment, but inwardly he studies the environment, and gradually he brings over as many natives as possible into his fold in a mood of philanthropy. The natives smell a rat and rise against the missionary. Then the Englishman flies to arms in defence of suffering humanity and Christianity. He fights for it, he kills for it, he conquers for it, and finally he takes the whole region as a gift from heaven.

"No Englishman is too low to have scruples, or high enough to be free from their tyranny. But every Englishman is born with a certain miraculous power that makes him master of the world. When he wants a thing, he never tells (107)
himself that he wants it. He waits patiently until there comes into his mind, no one knows how, a burning conviction that it is his moral and religious duty to conquer those who possess the thing he wants. Then he becomes irresistible. Like the aristocrat, he does what pleases him and grabs what he covets. Like the shopkeeper, he pursues his purpose with the industry and steadfastness that come from strong religious conviction and deep sense of moral responsibility. He is never at a loss for an effective moral attitude. As the great champion of freedom and national independence, he conquers and annexes half the world, and calls it colonisation. In defence of his island shores, he puts a chaplain on board his ship; he nails a flag with a cross on it to his mast and sails to the ends of the earth, sinking, burning, and destroying all who dispute the empire of the seas with him.

"There is nothing so bad or so good that you will not find Englishmen doing it. But you will never find an Englishman in the wrong. He does every thing on principle. He fights you on patriotic principles; he enslaves you on imperial principles; he robs you on business principles; he bullies you on manly principles; he supports one king on loyal principles and cuts off another king's head on republican principles. His watchword is Duty; and he never forgets that the nation which lets its duty get on the opposite side to its interest is lost."
The passage is peculiarly interesting; hence with slight omissions and alterations I have quoted it almost in full. But what Bernard Shaw calls an exclusively British policy has always been the Aryan way of conquest from time immemorial. This is amply borne out by several Brāhmanical legends. With our forefathers religion was not a means of attaining heaven beyond the clouds, but of creating one on earth; and a heaven on earth, as Kalidāsa aptly puts it, is a free, powerful, and prosperous kingdom.* In the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, 1. 2. 5, we are told that:

"When the Asuras thought that the world assuredly belonged to them alone, the gods placed Vishnu in the shape of a sacrifice at their head and, having approached the Asuras, said that a part of this earth might be conceded to them for the purposes of a sacrifice. The Asuras, suspecting nothing, replied rather grudgingly that they would give them only as much as Vishnu lay upon and nothing more. Now Vishnu was a dwarf, but the gods were not offended by the smallness of the area measured out to them. They said joyfully that much indeed the Asuras had given them, who gave them what was equal in size to the sacrifice. Thereafter having enclosed the sacrifice on three sides and having placed Agni on the east side, they went on worshipping and toiling with it, and by it they obtained this entire earth. Therefore, the sacrificial ground is

* Kalidāsa: इ. मद्रित्वमवष्णमात्रभिमयः नवं यि रश्ये पद्ममाहुः॥
called Vedi, because the sovereignty of the world is obtained thereby, Vidyate prāpyate anaya iti. For this reason they say that as great as the Vedi or altar is, so great is the earth; for by means of this Vedi or altar they obtained this entire earth. And verily, he who understands this wrests likewise this entire earth from his rivals."

In the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa, III.2.9, we have a similar legend that the gods, having been granted by the Asuras as much as they could enclose for their sacrifice, went on gradually pushing forward their enclosure and obtained the whole of this earth in the end. And I say, craving the reader’s indulgence for the startling statement, that the conquest of the south by Rāma proceeded similarly on these very lines!

According to Vālmīki, Rāma spent about thirteen years of his exile in wandering amongst the different Brāhmanical settlements which were scattered all over the region between the Ganges and the Godāvari. His wanderings extended from the hill of Chitrakūṭa in Bundelkhandha to the modern town of Nāsik near the sources of the Gadāvari river. Having crossed the Ganges at Śṛngavera, an important frontier town between the Rāj of Kośala and the country of the Bhils, he went in a south–easterly direction to the hermitage of Bharadwāja, which was situated at the junction of the two sacred rivers, the Ganges and the Jumna. From here he was directed to Chitrakūṭa, a celebrated hill, some sixty miles to the south of the Jumna. This was the seat of the inspired poet and sage Vālmīki who dwelt with
a number of disciples and led the same life of austerity, devotion, and sacrifice as Bharadwaja did at Prayag. Here he intended to stay for some time and therefore put up, with the assistance of Lakshmana, a cosy little cottage for the accommodation of the three. But after his meeting with Bharata the place acquired a publicity which left him no time for quiet meditation. Moreover, some faint-hearted hermits expressed apprehensions that the presence of Sita among them might expose them all to constant trouble from the Rakshasas whose outposts were now reported to be within a few miles’ distance of the place.* Rama thereupon cut short his stay at Chitrakuta and set the fears of all at rest by himself moving southwards to the hermitage of Atri.

This hermitage was situated on the skirts of the notorious Danadaka. Here poured in daily the horrid tales of atrocities committed by the Rakshasas on the Brahmin ascetics dwelling within. Atri, therefore, did not detain him long; but gave him leave to depart southward without delay and showed him the way to the hermitage of Sarabhaanga. This sage was so worn out by the infirmities of age and the hardships of life in the very heart of Danadaka that having at length been blessed with a sight of the young hero, whom only he had been yearning to see before closing his eyes, he had no longer any desire to live. He therefore begged of Rama to let him make an offering of his body to the sacred fire in

* See pp. 49–50
his presence. But before he consigned himself to the flames, he implored Rāma to proceed straight to the hermitage of Sutikshna. From Sutikshna he gathered information about the exact location of the several penance-groves that lay in the secluded parts of this wilderness and were under the direct supervision of the sage Dharmabhrta. These he visited in succession, sometimes abiding only a fortnight at one place, and sometimes as long as one full year at another place; sometimes two months, sometimes four months, sometimes six months, he remained in these penance-groves according to their respective importance. In this way passed away the ten years of his exile.*

Having completed his round of visits to the inner circle of the hermitages of Daṇḍakā, Rāma returned to Sutikshna, with whom he stayed for a considerable time;† Then he asked the sage to show

*Valmiki: III. 11.

†Valmikī: III. 11.
him the way to the hermitage of Agastya. This was some thirty-two miles further south in close vicinity to the source of the Godāvarī. Here he was presented with a sword of the finest temper, two quivers that carried an inexhaustible stock of arrows, and a bow shooting with an automatic string—a new mechanical invention of Agastya’s.* Having stayed a few days with this sage, he moved to Panchavati, a beautiful spot on the river Godāvarī, well-supplied with water and wood, and abounding in fruits and flowers. On his way to this place he had a chance encounter with one Jaṭāyus the Vulture, so nick-named on account of his rapacious tendencies. He was obviously an outlaw of the Robin Hood type, at enmity with the rich and powerful Rākshasas, but in sympathy with the poor and helpless Aryans. He offered his friendship to Rāma, which Rāma gratefully accepted.† This was the first of many alliances formed by Rāma in his southward career—an alliance which was of immense use to him. It kept him fully informed of the enemy’s movements and helped him to identify the abductor of Sītā. When the trio arrived at Panchavatī, Lakshmana built for their abode a large hut on a raised floor of


† Ibid : III. 14.
earth, with firm posts of bamboos wrought together with wicker work, roofed with branches of trees, thatched with grass and leaves, and containing one room specially reserved for Rāma himself. Thus ended the first thirteen years of exile and thereafter began the real drama itself.*

In the foregoing narrative one point that awakens great curiosity and calls for critical enquiry is the appearance of Brāhmanical hermitages far to the south of the Rāj of Kośala, in a notoriously unhealthy, unsafe, and unfriendly country. If the aim of these Brahmin ascetics was only to practise religious austerities and meditations, then certainly they need not have come to the south at all. In the north itself there were many sacred rivers,† countless holy places, and not a few peaceful retreats, where they could keep their sacrificial Fires ablaze and lead an ideal life of enlightenment undisturbed, unhindered, and unmolested. There stood towering before them the Himalayas, the favourite abode of the gods, rich in sacrificial material, and diffusing spiritual influence all around, where the earlier sages had lived in tune

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* The Pañama:— तत्र चक्रयेद्वान्यानि रामस्य अतिचक्रक्षुः।
तत्र: घुर्णिला नामे भेजे ते प्रजानानुजा॥
† Rg-veda: X 75. 5. हृदि मे गंगे युने सरस्वति
श्रीद्रि स्तोम सचता परशुः।
अतिकन्या मल्लदुभे विख्यता
55 जीनीये श्रुण्ड्या मुषोभयाः॥

i.e. O ye rivers swelling in monsoon, you Ganges, Jumna and Saraswati, ; ou Sutlej with Ravi, Chenab and Jehlam, you Bias with Indus, may you hear and accept this prayer of mine!
with the Infinite.* There lay Kailāsa, and Mānasa-Sarovara too, most suited to the contemplation of the Sublime, the Beautiful, the True.† Where was then the necessity for these sages to turn their backs upon this land of milk and honey, and bend their steps towards the dreary waste beyond the Vindhya range? Why did they transgress the command of their own law-giver Manu, namely, that the twice-born shall, at all events, keep within the four corners of Āryāvarta? Why did they first take a leap in the dark with their eyes open and then raise a shout for help with their mouths awry?

Secondly, in the previous portion of the Rāmāyaṇa there is no mention anywhere of Rāma’s having met any of these sages before. Nor could the news of the unexpected happenings at Ayodhya have reached them before the arrival of Rāma; for he is said to have left the city the very day he received the orders to quit, to have crossed the Ganges in three days and reached Chitrakūṭa in two days, thus covering a distance of two hundred miles in five days; nor the hermitages in Daṇḍakā were so easily accessible that the ease-loving people of the north would ever take the trouble of ranging over the forest merely to gossip with those whom they

* The Kumāra: I.
अस्पुत्रस्यां दिव्यदेवतामन्म हिमालयो नाम नग्निराजः ।

† Valmiki: I. 24. कैलासशंकरेऽर राम मनसा निर्मितं सरः ।
ब्रह्माण नरशाहुल तेनेदं मानसं सरः ॥
did not know at all. Yet nowhere does Rāma come as a stranger. Everywhere he is welcomed as a person well acquainted before and long expected to arrive.* None of the hermits ever refer to the sudden, unforeseen turn of affairs in Kośala, or sympathise with him in his loss of the throne, or express any regret at his banishment from the kingdom, or even praise him for his refusal to accept the Rāj from the hands of Bharata, as if all these events were already anticipated by them and therefore were too stale to bear talking over.† By every one he is hailed as the hero true to his word, the deliverer of humanity, the future conqueror of Rāvāṇa.‡ Some gave him, on account of their long experience of

* Vālmīki: III. 12 ततोमात्य उपश्रुत्य रामं वचनमर्जीति।
दिष्ठया रामविचित्रस्या दर्श्ये मा सचुपागतः ॥

The Adhyāṭma: III. 3.

तवदागममनेवाहि प्रतीकात्मनाविविधताः।
भूमेभारापुर्ववयं राधापत्य वधाप ॥

citaśī māṁ ॥

तस्मात्सुनिष्ठेऽसि सर्वेव लघुकेन परिचिततयः ॥

† Vālmīki: II. 55 मर्द्वाजेशाश्चिमात्मण्ययक्ष्यिः ऋषीतममू।
चिरस्वऽनु सङ्कुच्यते प्रस्थायासमसूरोतमू ॥

The Adhyāṭma: II. 6

शान्त राम तवेदन्तं भूतं चागामिकं च यतः।
वद्य वनवासस्ते यत्करण्यसि वै पुनः ॥

इति: परं कि कव्ये त्वं इत्यत्थो सः रघुकरः ॥


वाल्मीकिन्द्र राजव: प्राह क्रंडकानामिगता वयमू।
यदशं भवन्तो जानसि कि मित्रामो ॥

† Vālmīki: III. 7. रामं सुनीतिः बाहुः सामसिर्मेदमब्रह्म्र।
स्वागतं ते सत्रेष्ठं रामं सत्यभूतां वर॥

विश्वंतिः कोकिण्डु विकृण्डेण मधविचित्सः ॥
forest life, the knowledge of edible roots and fruits to allay the torments of hunger and thirst; some informed him about medicinal herbs that cured illness or healed wounds caused by thorns, insects, and weapons; some initiated him into the mysteries of new missiles invented by them; some assured him that his quiver would remain inexhaustible, that is, he would regularly be supplied with everything necessary for the execution of his task. Thus though these hermitages were in appearance places of spiritual contemplation, sacrificial performance, and religious worship, yet in reality they were the hidden workshops, arsenals, and depots, from which supplies came to him continuously throughout his one year’s eventful career in the south, beginning with his first few skirmishes on the enemy’s frontier up to his final decisive battle in the enemy’s capital. Indeed, in his rapid march from the river Godavari to the southern seas his mighty bow never wanted a string, nor his two quivers a deadly shaft!

Thirdly, with the exception of the six or seven principal sages, the rest of the hermits* throughout

* Valmiki: II & III.

उत्पिछद = One who having lost his way has strayed alone from the rest. प्रमतर = One who is off his guard.
his successive sojourns with them kept continually
dinning into his ears how their altars were being
defiled, their homes being destroyed and their
brethren being decoyed to death by the Rākshasas;
short, how their stay in Daṇḍakā was getting
altogether unbearable. They also showed him the
skulls and bones of ascetics who were waylaid and
slain, when straying alone a little too far, or moving
about off their guard.* Rama lent a sympathetic ear
to their wailings, but beyond giving verbal assurances
that all would be set right in due time he did
nothing.† It is indeed significant that in these
thirteen years he never once in their defence or on
their behalf bent his bow or drew his sword against
the emissaries, snipers, and frontier guards of Rāvana,
who were responsible for the daily, cold-
blooded slaughter of pious hermits. The orthodox
poets say that he had no justification to lose his
temper with the Rākshasas until he had lost his Sītā
to them !‡ This, I say, is the grossest misrepresenta-

* The Adhyātma : III. 2.

† Vālmīki : III. 6.

‡ The Adhyātma : VII.
tion of Rāma. Indeed, to look on quietly while hundreds are falling victims to wanton cruelty and to make a stir only when one’s wife is rapped is certainly not heroism, but sheer instinct of revenge which the brutes share in common with us. The true explanation of Rāma’s inaction is that he did not wish to open fire, until he was sure that the fire could be maintained to an increasing pitch till the last moment. The struggle with Rāvana was bound to be titanic; hence the preparation therefor had to be gigantic. Till it was complete, Rāma avoided all encounter with the Rākshasas. Indeed until the huge machinery was well set up, it was foolish to start the engine. During these thirteen years he did not once disclose his true character to them. He successfully deluded them into a belief that he was only a harmless, homeless wanderer, frequenting hermitages for food and shelter, more an object of pity than a portent of disaster. In this long period they are nowhere spoken of as coming in his way or doing him the slightest mischief, with the exception of one Virādha on the very threshold of Daṇḍakā, whom he is said to have strangled to death and then carefully buried deep underground so as to leave no trace of this solitary ugly affair.* This fact has been


तत्स्यो विराधमाक्रम्य क्रुद्दे पदेन वीर्यवान् ।
अजनसर्वत्रस्त्तस्तव व्यक्तम: श्वभ्रुधामम् ।
तत्स्यु सुक्तकथां तं सभुजियुख्यापद्यविदेः ॥

श्वभ्रुधामम — a spacious hole for receiving a corpse.
acknowledged by Sītā herself*:

"These Rākshasas have so far done you no harm. Then, my dear, why do you meditate the destruction of these who are without enmity towards you".

It is also significant that the principal sages did never speak of their troubles to him or hurry-harry him to precipitate action. Though they loved him intensely, yet they did not detain him for more than a couple of days, but sent him forward to visit every nook and corner of Daṇḍakā personally. They were his guides. They knew him and he knew them, and both knew the difficulty of the task ahead, the necessity of self-restraint, and the danger of an initial false step.

I am of opinion that when Viśvāmitra took Rāma round the hermitages on the Ganges, his main object was to bring him into contact with these Brahmin sages† who, like himself, were both warriors


† Hence says Bharadwaja, 'Welcome to you, O Rama! It is long since I saw you last.'

Cf. Vālmīki : II. 54. विशेष वचन कार्तव्य सप्त स्याप्स्याप्स्यागतम् भवति ||

On this the Tilaka remarks:

अतन्त सूक्ष्मस्वरूपं क्रिष्णीद्र अभागमनं भविष्यतं ।

Agastya also says, 'We are well known to each other. I have been waiting for you all these years and looking forward to the destruction of Rāvana.'

and saints, and who, like modern scientists and explorers, lived in solitude and pursued their respective branches of knowledge patiently in spite of constant annoyance from the far-flung military outposts of Rāvana. Impressed by their bold spirit, and by their genius for discovery and invention, Rāma must have talked over his scheme of conquest with them and solicited their co-operation. And it is in accordance with a carefully formulated plan that these sages, headed by Agastya and followed by several hermits, penetrated deep southwards in spite of great hazards and established colonies through the wilderness of Daṇḍakā upto the northern bank of the Godāvari. This river bordered on Janasthāna, the flat rich contry of the modern Maharashtra, and formed the northern frontier of the empire of Rāvana. These sages could have entered the south from the north-east through Orissa and by the southern coast. But this route was circuitous and swampy; hence they chose the shorter way across the Vindhya and Satpura ranges. This mountainous region was till then considered dangerous, unsafe, and almost insurmountable. But Agastya was not a man to shrink from difficulties. He inspired confidence in his followers and guided them skilfully across this un-negotiable tract. He humbled the pride of the Vindhyas and earned a conspicuous place among the stars of the southern hemisphere.* He was the first

* The Brahma Purāṇa:

अगस्त्यो दक्षिणामात्रामाधिवित्व नभसि सिंहतः ।
निन्दितानन्म मुनिनां हुर्षपी दक्षिण हि दिक्ष।
and foremost pioneer of Aryan settlement in the south and took a principal part in the civilisation of the people there; hence he is regarded to this day as the first teacher of science and literature to the primitive Dravidian tribes. It speaks highly of his intrepidity that he chose for his Āśrama a site close to Janasthāna.

The Rākshasas naturally hated the sight of these adventurous Brahmans so near their empire and therefore sought to oust them by intimidation, molestation, and even by assassination. This is the explanation of the skeletons which Rāma saw bleaching here and there in Daṇḍakā. The early pioneers, therefore, were often required to bend their bow in self-defence. Experience of fighting against heavy odds led to the marvellous improvement of this weapon, and Agastya is said to have invented a bow which could shoot much farther, quicker, and with deadlier effect. In mythology he is represented as unsurpassed in the science of archery. He gave Rāma, in addition to his newly perfected bow, two quivers of wonderful capacity and a sword of durable edge. Viśvāmitra had already trained him in the art of war and taught him the use of several missiles.* Now he learnt from Agastya the ways

* Valmiki : I. 27.

दण्डकम महादिव्यं तत्र दास्यामि राष्ट्रव ।
धर्मेन्नक ततो वीर कालचक्रं तथैव च ।
विष्णुस्वरद्र स्तुतायमेन्द्र च चक्रं तथैव च ।
गान्धर्वमेष्टं दृष्टते मोहने नाम नामस्तः ।

(Continued on next page)
of Rākshasa fighting, the power and range of their weapons. And as he looked at the bow of this sage, it seemed to him almost divine; for while it kept him out of the range of his enemies, whatever their number, it brought them helplessly within his range. Thus equipped, enlightened and confident, Rāma took up his abode at Panchavaṭī in the beginning of the fourteenth year of exile and in full view of his future enemies, to all appearances a hermit devoted to the pleasures of solitude, but in reality a hero hiding his own light and waiting for something handy to turn up.

If Rāma succeeded in his gigantic task, half the credit goes to these much maligned Brahmin sages who, in a spirit of self-sacrifice, had infiltrated before him into the wilderness of Daṇḍakāranyā and who, working silently, had prepared the ground for him. Hence says Śītā:—

“When the bow of the Kshatriya and the altar of the Brahmin come together, i.e. when the martial valour of the former and the spiritual fire of the latter work conjointly, there is

(Continued from the previous page)

प्रत्यापनं प्रवर्तनं द्वं श्रीम्यं च राष्ट्रं।
वर्षार्यं श्रोपणं चैव संतप-Time-रिचापने।
आनेयमस्तं वायुं ब्रह्मस्थ्रमन्त्रसम्।
वायुं कात्यपादीं च छौँचमस्तं तथैव च।
द्वैरामायैन्युप्येतो मन्त्रामान्त्रसम्।।
produced from their combination a mighty flame of power and energy.*

Living in the most uncongenial surroundings, ever subject to privations, always open to the attacks of wild beasts, poisonous reptiles, and jungle fevers, continually harassed by the spies and soldiers of Rāvana—these Brahmins held on as martyrs to a noble cause, and in full faith that their sufferings would not go in vain, but would bear fruit on the arrival of Rāma. The Adhyātma tells us that when the gods heard about the coming installation of Rāma, they became extremely uneasy and sent Nārada to remind him of the promise he had made to them. Who are these gods? None else but these very Brahmin sages, who in Sanskrit are regularly called Bhūdevas, the gods on earth. It is they who were smitten with anxiety when the rumour floated to them that Rāma was about to accept the reins of Government from his father. It is they who sent him a courier secretly with a message that he must on no account swerve from his original intentions.†


† The Adhyātma: II. 1.

When
the desired assurance was brought to them by Nārada, they felt greatly relieved at heart; and when he actually appeared before them, they fell into his arms and wept for joy. Indeed, some of them, like Śrābhāṅga, had suffered so much that, somehow holding their body and soul together, they only waited for his arrival. And when he at last arrived, they feasted their hungry eyes upon his face that reflected the gratitude of his heroic heart. Thereafter they communicated to him all the valuable information they had collected at a terrible cost,* and then sought, on the funeral pyre, final release from all those ills which their flesh could no longer endure.†

The first thirteen years of his exile were spent by Rāma among these Brahmīn sages, not in enjoying their hospitality, but in listening to their experiences, in receiving instructions from them, and in coordinating their activities. About the aims and objects of his preparations there was maintained so close a secrecy that even Sītā was puzzled at the contrast between his garb as an ascetic and his conduct as a militarist. It is apparent from her admonition to him that he had not made her privy to his design. She says:—

* Ibid : III. 2. अथ मच्छिसा तिद्विषः प्रत्युपय बहु विचते।
  तत्स्वर्थव तव दास्तिषाभ समो सुनित्र ब्रजाम्याहम्॥
† Vālmīki : III. 5.
  जहावामि जीणगान्त्राणि मुदृतः पद्य तत भास।
  इत्युत्स्वा शरस्मोगोष्ठी श्रविकेत सुतिस्वमानम्॥
"I do not like this coming of yours to Daṇḍakā, armed with a bow and arrows; for, you have actually engaged yourself to compass the extermination of the Rākshasas who bear no malice towards you. This intention of yours to commit violence in the absence of personal enmity is certainly reprehensible. It belies your pious appearance. Cast away, my dear, this weapon of yours; for its very possession has a strange effect on the mind. It turns a man into a brute. Once upon a time Indra entrusted his scimitar to a devotee. The devotee always carried it as a sacred trust. Its constant association produced in him a desire to use it. This desire grew to a passion in course of time. And then it is the scimitar that possessed him. The more blood he shed, the more he wanted to. In this way by the blood-stained path he went straight to hell. If you say that as a Kshatriya it is your duty to protect the good and punish the wicked, I say that this duty does not belong to a Kshatriya who has chosen to lead a life of renunciation and piety. You may claim it as your duty when you go back to the world and hold the sceptre in hand. But till then, friends and foes are alike to you. Remember, my dear, that as long as you wear matted hair and bark garments, you ought not to wish injury to any
fellow-creature. Be true to yourself, my dear, and let your present dress be the badge of spiritual elevation and not the cloak of blood-thirsty ambition.”

The reply of Rāma was rather dialectical and dogmatic than logical and convincing. He says:—

"Change of dress, my darling, does not mean change of character. Though I may be a devotee, yet I do not cease to be a Kshatriya. As a man of the warrior caste, it is my inborn duty to promise protection against the evil-doers. And as a man of the religious order, it is my sacred duty to keep that promise. These hermits have chosen to take refuge with me against the

\[1\] Vālmīki : III. 9.

तव वाणवन्याणगीमण दण्डानू प्रति ।
न हि मे रोचते वीर कारण तत्र श्रुतात्म।
कर च शर्कर च वर्ण च शर्कर तथां कवच ।
व्याविष्ठतमस्माभिभिष्ठशमस्तु पूवंतम।
कपदर्कत्तु बुद्धीजयते शस्त्रशेषोभाव ।
अभिसंयोगवेदु: शस्त्रसंयोग उच्च्यते ।
प्रतिज्ञातस्ततवा वीर वर्ग: संप्रति शशास्य ।
निंद्रवं नियते मोहादुः वच्च प्राणाभिष्टवनम।
तृतीयं तद्वर रूपः व्यवस्त ते हस्तुपस्थितम ।
पुरा न्यस्तो महेन्द्रेण लड़ो मुद्दमसीमीत: ।
न स शाति बिना लड़ो: न्यासर्नाशतपाः ।
नित्यं शस्त्रं परिवहनु: कमेण व तपोवन: ।
चकार रौद्रीं स्वां बुद्धि र्यात्वा तपस्त निर्भयम ।
तस्य शस्त्रस्य स्वावासाज्जगाम नस्कर मुनि: ।
स्तम्भालु शस्त्रं संवशय भस्तस्त सिरोत मुनि: ।
पुनर्गौत्म ल्योध्याय झटपटम चारियतिः।
Rākshasas. Now it will neither be manly nor saintly to withdraw my support and let them down. You are my companion in homely virtues, my honey, but not my guide in practical politics. Leave this sphere entirely to me. Remember once for all that I shall relinquish life, even you, and Lakshmana too; but having once pledged my promise to these Brahmin sages, I will not fail in my duty to protect them at all cost.”

This interesting conversation took place before Rāma entered the borderland of Janasthāna, where Rāvana had stationed a large army under the command of his two cousins, Khara and Dūshana, the Wardens of the marches.† It was here that Rāma made his first appearance before the footlights of the world-stage and became the centre of attraction. Let, therefore, the curtain now go up and the Leela of Rāma begin.


† Valmiki: VII. 24.
CHAPTER V

The Curtain Rises

The disguise of Rāma as an ascetic was well-supported by his rejection of the Rāj at Chitrakūṭa. Bharata had earnestly offered the crown to him, but he had publicly refused it of him. Naturally such a person, who was altogether indifferent to the Royal Fortune at home, could hardly be suspected of coveting another's sovereignty abroad. Therefore, when Rāma stepped into the hostile territory clothed in garments of bark, crowned with a spiral mass of twisted hair, subsisting on wild fruits and roots, and practising silently the vow of renunciation which the many preach eloquently to others, none could have the slightest inkling of his real intentions.* His magnetic personality, his bewitching smile, his mellifluous tongue spread a web of enchantment wherever he went, so that whosoever came into his presence was charmed and impressed. Even

* The Aḍhyaśta : III.

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Śūrpanākhā, sister of Rāvana, was so fascinated that she offered her own hand to him. But Rāma had gone to the south to shed the blood of Rāvana, not to contract blood-relationship with him. Being a diplomat, he did not say no to her flatly, and still avoided saying yes definitely. He only gave her equivocal replies, which raised false hopes in her and set her a dancing about him, much to the amusement of others.

The question that needs careful consideration here is, what was the motive of Rāma in tantalising Śūrpanākhā with vague assurances which he never meant to fulfil? Several poets seem to imply that his object was simply to expose her to ridicule and seek for himself some comic relief at her expense from the dreary monotony of life. This explanation I reject as derogatory to Rāma. In this apparently frivolous affair, or as you might call it a game of flirtation, there was a much deeper meaning than mere idle amusement. It must be borne in mind that Śūrpanākhā was the sister of Rāvana, and as such she had intimate knowledge of his private life, his household, his relations with his sons and brothers. This knowledge was indispensable to him for the purpose of sowing the seeds of dissension in the enemy's camp. As Mānu puts it:

*Ibid*: III. 5. कन्दरितहि शाकां रुषमानां भलिंएक्षापम्।
हट्या तं राहस्यस्य भविष्येक्षापम्।

Also *Valmīki*: III. 17.
सप्तेवास्तिम भवेन भविष्यं त्वं नरैयांम्।
चिरायं भव भविष्यं मे, सीतया किं करिष्यासि।
'Let him, intent upon conquest, first ascertain which on the side of his enemy are at heart inclined to treachery and therefore susceptible to temptation. Let him then win them over by secret negotiations, and through them keep himself informed of the enemy's doings.'

This secret information he could never draw out of her by snub or rebuff, but only by humouring her to the top of her bent. Flattered by his attentions, she revealed to him the ins and outs of his future enemy. From her he learnt that Indrajit was a chip of the old block in bravery and leadership, that Kumbhakarna, though doughty, was habitually drunk and rarely awake, that Vibhishana, though sanctimonious in form, was really envious at heart; for Ravana himself spoke of him as follows:

"I know it, my dear sneak, that you cannot bear to see that I should command the homage of the world, and rise to universal sovereignty,"

* Manus : VII. 197. Kullaka's comment :—

उपजापानूँ उपजापेद्व बुधेत्रैव च तत्क्षतम् ।
भृक्ते च दैवे बुधेत्रयस्मपर्येयतभ: ॥

जयेन्द्र: राज्याधिन: रिपुरंकेश्यानृः उपजापस्यानृः, कुम्भानृः अमात्यायोऽच्छ
जात्वा मेधयेतूः। एवं कशीक्षणाय तेनां द्वारा शतुचेत्यां च जानीयात् इत्यर्थः ।

† Valmiki : III. 17.

शारणो नाम भेष च भृति ते शोभ्याभासः।
तत्सैैं हित्रोधिशाम पितृवत्स्य सिद्धोऽपि वा।
मृतुकमिनीयस्य दत्ता तर्कार्याय यावाल:।
तविर्मोणिनुपपो धमार्मम न दु: राजस्वेष्टितः ॥
and walk over the heads of my enemies.*

This piece of information was precious, and Rāma treasured it in his mind and made the right use of it at the right time. When Hanūmān was sent over to Lāṅkā, his real task there was not to trace the whereabouts of Sīṭā and warble into her ears the greetings of Rāma, but to have secret whisperings with Vibhīṣaṇa and ascertain the price at which he would be willing to sell himself, his honour, and his country. Hanūmān was a pastmaster in diplomacy; for Rāma speaks of him as follows†:

"Look here, Lakṣmaṇa, how charming is this man's address and how adroitly he broaches a subject. He can disarm anybody's fear or anger, and crack the hardest nut in no time. It is ambassadors like him who win political battles for their masters, before the military operations are actually under way."

Hanūmān successfully broke the ice with Vibhīṣaṇa and eased the qualms of his conscience by dangling before him the prospect of coronation in the near

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* Vālākāli : VI. 16.

† Vālākāli : IV. 3.
future. He must have added weight to his negotiations by reference to the recent happenings at Kishkindhā; for when Vibhīśaṇa alighted on the coast to meet Rāma, he said*:

"Here comes Vibhīśaṇa, my lord. Having heard from me how Vāli was quickly disposed of and Sugrīva installed in his place, he has come personally to bargain with you for the kingdom of Laṅkā. You will do well, my lord, to strike hands with him and retain him; for he will be a useful tool in our hand to break open the citadel of our enemy."

Rāma promised Vibhīśaṇa solemnly what he wanted to have, but on condition that he told him unreservedly what he wanted to know. The throne of Laṅkā was a bait too tempting to resist. Vibhīśaṇa closed his jaws upon it greedily and was hooked. Thereafter, as he had a selfish interest in Rāma's victory, he helped him heart and soul in the successful conduct of the war, and with a vigilant eye warned him beforehand of several dangers which Rāma-himself could never have forestalled in time. In this way Vibhīśaṇa worked in an exemplary manner for the destruction of his brother,—of Rāvana who had raised his people from their long continued state of obscurity to such dazzling prosperity that there arose a saying that Laṅkā turned to gold at

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1 *Ibid* : VI. 17. वाहिनि च हले श्रुत्या सुमायस्यामिषेन्वन्म।
राज्य मार्यस्मानस्तु वद्द्वियूषीस्मिस्नागतः।
एततःकल्पु पुरस्तः वन्ते तस्य स्माहः॥
the touch of Rāvana. In exchange for his brother's glorious independence Vibhīśaṇa accepted for himself inglorious vassalage. While Rāvana lived, he had not to bend his head before anyone in the world, but after his death, he had to kiss the very feet of one who had trampled his brother in the dust. I do not understand why our poets should eulogise Vibhīśaṇa at all and call him magnanimous, virtuous, sublime in intellect, and disciplined in self,* who said unblushingly to Rāma†:—

"While life throbs in me, I shall help you unsparingly in destroying my countrymen, in storming my mother city, and in working insidiously through the gallant defenders of my native soil."

We might as well praise Quisling for his loyal co-operation with Hitler, which made the conquest of Norway a child's play; or admire Meer Jafar for his secret dealings with Clive, which decided the future of Bengal before the battle was joined at Plassey! Indeed, when Vibhīśaṇa was bought over by Hanūmān, the fate of Laṅkā was sealed before the deed was actually written out in blood on the stricken

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* Vālmiki: VI. 19. विभीषणो महाप्राणो धर्मसात्मा विविधेन्द्रियः ||
The Adhyāya: VI & VII.
विभीषणो बुद्धिमत्ता वरिष्ठः ||
विभीषणो धर्मशीलः प्रजापतिरशाहविनीतः ||

† Vālmiki: VI. 19.
राक्षसारथी वधे साहिष्ठ लंकायास्च प्रवर्जः ||
करिष्याति यथायाणं प्रवेश्यामि च वाहिनीयः ||
field. Rāvana had seen through his brother, for he says to him*:

"I am not afraid of fire and sword, but of treachery from my own relatives who, I know, for a paltry gain, will not hesitate to play into the hands of my enemy."

But instead of putting him in chains, Rāvana allowed him to slip through his fingers. He realised the gravity of his mistake some time later, but it was then too late to mend.

Let us now return to Śūrpanākhā whom we left dancing attendance upon Rāma. Having wormed out of her all the family secrets of Rāvana, he told her ruefully that as he was a monogamist, he could not marry her while his beloved spouse lived.† She was then directed to go to Lakshmana, but he gloried in abject slavery to Rāma; therefore to be his wife was rather undignifying.‡ Naturally she cast her evil eyes upon Sītā whom she now hated with the bitterness of disappointed love. Why, she said, should this hussy stand between herself and her lover? She was a thorn in her way and must be

* Ibid : VI. 16. नामश्रीन्यानि शस्वाणि न नः पाशा भवाच्छाः।
     धोरा: स्वार्थाध्युक्ततास्त्व जावयो मेभयाच्छा:।
     उपायमेते वश्यतिः प्रहणे नान्न संशयः।
     कृत्तनाद्रवाद्य शालिमयं सुकृति तिरिति च नः।

† Valmiki : III. 18.
     कृत्तवयोः स्वतं भवति भाघेयं दृष्टिः मम।

‡ Ibid : III. 18. कथं दासस्य ने भायाः दासी भविष्यत्मकः।
rooted out as such. In her hysterical mood, born of passionate despair, she made an attempt on the life of Sita. Lakshmana, who always remained on the watch, caught her in the act, and being by nature a Hotspur, he inflicted upon her face a horrid disfigurement which, though bravo'd by the poets and applauded by their readers, can hardly be set down to the credit of any man, much less to the honour of a chivalrous hero. Rama could hardly have ordered this barbarous act, though the poets say so;* for he himself warned Lakshmana in these words:—

'Take your hands off and let her go. Practical jokes should be avoided, especially with Non-Aryans who are peculiarly unforgiving.'†

Thus ended the opening scene with Surpanakh. Rama was fully alive to the fact that Lakshmana had in his rashness sown the wind and that he would now have to reap the whirlwind. His predictions proved true. Khara and Dushana, brothers of Surpanakh, vowed revenge and, holding Rama cheap, first sent a posse of policemen to catch him, then platoon after platoon of soldiers to kill him. But both the police and the soldiery, coming in a careless, disorderly way, dissolved into a rabble rout before his quick-shooting bow. In this way

* The Adhyatma: III. 5.

† Valmiki: III. 18.

विन्दुर्यज्ञ: राज: कुपितस्तो वक्ष्णमाक्षणेऽविवैत।
हृदेणीतायामिनः कर्ममः पश्चात्तस: कर्णाचन ॥
the effectiveness of Agastya's new contrivance was conclusively proved.* Then there followed a spell of calm. A report reached him that Śūrpuṇaṇkha had gone personally to Rāvaṇa. Serious developments were apprehended by many. But the only 'tit' that Rāma anticipated for his 'tut' from Rāvaṇa was the abduction of Sitā. He was perfectly right in assuming that Rāvaṇa would not be so foolish as to declare war upon a homeless wanderer, and for the sake of a sister who was a disgrace to his family for running after an Aryan vagabond, and who had now no face to show in the world for her notorious attempt at murder. He, therefore, concluded that Rāvaṇa's retaliation would fall in a line with the conventions of his time—tooth for tooth, eye for eye, blood for blood, and woman for woman! The life and honour of Sitā thus seemed to him to be in imminent danger. Should he make his escape in good time, or resign himself to fate? None of these two courses appealed to him. He had come purposely to pit himself against

* Vālmīki: III. 25.

शल्ययुद्रखस्ताद्वारा पाश्रस्ता महावल्ल: ॥
रामनेनाध्वात्स्तव साल्तालिकायुर्द्व: ॥
तत: शरसहस्तानि निर्युक्त्वर्त्त्वमद्वृत्तात: ॥
नादान्म शारस्योरानु विद्वुच्छतं शरोचामान: ॥
विकृष्णमं प्रवत्ति राक्षसास्ते शरयुताः: ॥

i. e. The Rākshasas came upon him in strength, some wielding spears, clubs and nooses, others hurling rocks and stocks. Then from his large bow flew forth thousands of arrows, so thick and fast that they neither saw him taking them from his quicker, nor fixing them to the string, nor even pulling the string—all the three actions happening automatically.
his wily enemy. To reel back now would be sheer cowardice; to sit idle, an egregious folly. He must stay where he was and save her from the intended outrage of the enemy, and yet make her the cause of a righteous war with him! The plan whereby he succeeded in achieving these two contrary objects was a masterstroke of genius. Indeed, he ate the bread to his fill and yet had it intact in his hand.

What was this plan? Tulasidāsa,* who draws

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* The Rāmācharita: III.

i.e. When Lakshmana had gone to the forest to collet roots and fruits, Rāma, smiling gracefully and at ease, said to the daughter of Janaka:—‘Hearken, most lovely, amiable, and faithful of wives! I am going to have a bit of fun and weave a delightful plot in keeping with my character as man. Do you enter the fire till I have completed the destruction of the Rakshasas.’ When Rāma had fully unfolded to her his plot, she pressed her Lord’s feet to her heart and entered the fire, leaving only an image of herself, exactly alike in appearance and gentle disposition. Even Lakshmana was not made privy to this secret.


1. Now Rāma, having known all that Rāvaṇa intended to do, said to Sītā as she was alone, “Hear, O Janaki, what I say.”

(Continued on next page)
largely upon the Adhyātma, has indicated it in his own charming way, which I crave the indulgence of the reader to elaborate in a matter-of-fact language. One day when Lakshmana had gone out to hunt, and Rāma was alone with Sītā in his woodland cottage, he took her into confidence and explained to her the great purpose of his life. He said:

"My dear, it is high time that Rāvaṇism must be eradicated from earth, and heaven has so willed it that I must undertake this great task. I have, therefore, to fight this arch-enemy of humanity and progress to the bitter end. But no Aryan ever commits the folly of starting a war without first creating a cause to justify it. His wisdom lies in this that he first

(Continued from the previous page)

2. "Rāvaṇa shall come to thee in the guise of a mendicant. Do thou enter the cottage, having placed a shadow of thyself outside."
3. "Do thou live in the fire unseen by my order for a year. After Rāvaṇa has been killed, thou shalt, O good lady, come to me as before."
4. Upon this, having placed an illusive Sītā outside, the real Sītā entered the fire.

अथ रामोऽपि तत्स्वर्भ शाल्वा रावणेषश्चितम्।
जनाय सीतामेकान्ते भूयु जानाने मे वचः।
रावणी भिक्षुलोण आगमिश्यति तेतेन्तिकमः।
ल्ले दु छाया तदाकारं स्थापविलोक्ते विचः।
अन्नाकदस्यश्लोण वर्ष तिष्ठ ममाश्चा।
रावणस्य कथाने मां पूर्ववत्पद्यस्यसे दुःवमे॥
शुल्वा रामोदितं वाक्यं सम्पि तत्र तथाक्रोऽ॥
मायेसीतां बुःः स्थाप्य स्त्रयमन्तरेश्चन्दने॥
indirectly provokes the enemy to fury; and when the enemy has been successfully thrown off his balance into a false step, he quietly lets him stagger from one error to another until he stands totally in the wrong. Then does the Aryan hero come into the open and call upon the whole world to witness and support his righteous struggle in the cause of truth and justice. You already know how Rāvana has been rubbed the wrong way by us: his sister has lost her face, and therefore he is sure to carry you off to spite my face. Caution demands that you should now vanish from the eyes of the world and remain in hiding till the war with Rāvana is over. From now on it is your double who will stay with me as Sītā. It is this false Sītā whom Rāvana will carry off trickily—to my dishonour in name but to his own discomfiture in fact. All the same it will give me a solid ground to take a hostile stand and commence my war of right against his might in right earnest.'

Who was this double? Both the Adhyātma and Tulasi mean to suggest that she was either the tangible shadow of Sītā or the mental creation of Rāma. But since I have discarded miracles as such, I am inclined to the view that it was Śabarī who played the role of Sītā, after Sītā was concealed in a safe place. We are told in the Rāmāyaṇa that Rāma appreciated her platonic love for him so highly that when she offered her partially tasted fruits to him, he ate them with pleasure, though Lakshmana
spurned them in disgust. Such partaking of food, which has previously touched the mouth of a woman, has a peculiar significance in Hindu society. It means the merging of two souls into one. Among certain sections of the Hindus when a man has eaten from the same plate with a maiden, their marriage is said to be cemented. Rāma had met several devotees before on his way, but nowhere did he accept food from the mouth of anyone of them. Then why did he make an exception in the case of Śabarī? She loved him ardently. So did Śūrpaṇaḥkā too. But there was a radical difference between the two. The love of Śūrpaṇaḥkā was of the nature of a carnal passion, sordid and mean; that of Śabarī, of the spiritual type, pure and sublime.

Her long contact with the sages of Daṇḍakāranya had vastly improved her mind. She understood the greatness of Rāma and his work. She admired him as the worthiest of the worthy and fixed her affections upon him for the realisation of her higher self, not for the gratification of sensual appetites. The *Padma Purāṇa* tells us that after eating her

* The *Padma*: 

śvānyāśvāntaḥ kāntasya kṣadhitaḥ parināmānām
śvayamāśvāntaḥ mañjuḥ prītya parimānāṃ
śvāriṇiḥ kṛṣṇeṇa rājya-vyāpanaiḥ vastra-bhūṣāṇaḥ

i.e. Having tested the sweetness of each ripe fruit or root by first tasting it herself, Śabarī offered it to Rāma with true devotion. Having eaten such fruits and roots, Rāma set her free from the shackles of low birth and gave her an abode of bliss.
uchchhishta, Rāma gave her muktī. This literally means that he absorbed her into himself and made her a part of his Being. To put it in a matter-of-fact language, her existence as Šabarī ceased on that day. She became a part of himself, his partner in the work he had undertaken. In other words, she identified herself with his other half and appeared thereafter as Sītā by his side. This view is supported by another account in the Adhyātma. There we are told that when Rāma had finished eating, he discoursed with her at length on the various forms of devotion. To dedicate one’s life and person to the cause of God was one of them. She chose this form of worship and placed herself, body and all, at his disposal. He accepted her offer of her own self to his cause. He called her his own, made her his confidante in the scheme of conquest, and gave her a place by his side as Sītā.

The question that I anticipate here is, how could Šabarī, a dark-coloured woman of the jungle, ever impersonate Sītā, a fair-bodied princess of the palace? It does not seem unlikely in view of what Rāma himself says about Sītā at Panchavatī*:

“Look here, Lakshmana. Our Sītā is so darkened by constant exposure to the sun that while her form is recognisable, her beauty is entirely missing.”

* Valmīki : Ml. 16.
This is Vālmīki's account, and what he says is in accordance with the laws of Nature. He further tells us*:

"At the time of leaving Ayodhyā, Rāma said to Sītā, 'My dear, part now with these jewels and silks of yours. Adopt a plain dress befitting our forest life.' He then called the son of Vasishṭha and said to him, 'Sir, my Sītā gives you today her bracelets and armlets; also her pearl necklace, her golden chain, and her jewelled girdle. Please take them to your wife.' When Sītā put on a garment of bark, she looked like a female mendicant unaccustomed to ascetic life."

This is what Vālmīki says and what he says accords well with the fitness of things. But his editors and interpolators, as also the later poets who sang in their tune, thought otherwise and put in everywhere, irrespective of all considerations, florid descriptions of Sītā's charms, decorations, and garments, possibly because they could not explain otherwise why Rāvana should have gone mad after her. Thus they say:—

*Vālmīki: II. 30, 32, 38.

आरम्भम | श्रमश्रोणिः बनवासिलमः किमयः |
भूमण्डो महाबृह्णिः वरवस्त्राणि यवनि |
दैति भाषण्वर्गस्य क्रियायोऽच्छाप्लुक्करः |
सुमवंस च तद्वचाच रामः शीताम्बोदितः |
ष्ठान्गदानि च चित्राणि क्रेयूर्णि श्रम्भानि |
हुरर् च हेमसुन्तः च रट्टैशः रचानाः तथा |
प्रवच्छलति सती दुःख्य भार्याँचै गच्छती वनम् |
आदाय चीरं संजाता चिंत्सा श्रमीत्र सा ||
‘There, in the leafy hut, the lord of Laṅkā saw her wearing a yellow garment of silk, her complexion dazzling like molten gold, her face shining like the full moon, her breasts sparkling with a profusion of jewels, her nails glistening red and full, and her lips tinged with rosy hue.’

They further say that:

“When she was being carried through the air by Rāvaṇa, her ornaments blazed forth like fire and fell, with a jingling noise, to the ground like meteors from the sky.”

These flights of imagination betray utter disregard of time, place, and character. Such descriptions might apply to a princess living in a palace, amid pomp and splendour, in comfort and luxury, but never to the wife of an ascetic trudging through the dreary forest. Indeed, after thirteen years of hard, irregular life, moving constantly on foot, now in the scorching sun, now in the biting cold, now in the torrents of rain, how could her body retain the

* Vālmīki III. 46.

† Ibid. III. 52.
lustre of liquid gold, or her face bloom like a full-blown rose? The laws of Nature, set in motion by the Almighty, would not lapse in her favour! Secondly, it casts a slur upon Sītā to say that having once adopted a pair of bark-garments to share the ascetic life of Rāma, she changed to silken robes and blazed forth with anklets and armlets, girdles and ear-rings, pearl necklaces and crest-jewels, as if to make herself presentable to Rāvana! Nor did she carry a toilette box with her to dress her hair smooth and glossy, and to paint her lips and nails red. The glowing description of her charms and decorations must therefore be rejected as an interpolation in bad taste. Thus my assertion stands that as Sītā, according to the testimony of Rāma, had grown swarthy in thirteen years of exile and was ill-clad, unkempt, and unembellished, it was not impossible for Šabarī to impersonate her. Moreover, in order to effect in her a passable resemblance to Sītā, Rāma may have employed some of the processes of metamorphosis, which Chāṇakya describes in his Arthaśāstra and which are largely in use in the political world of to-day: Hitler is said to have had four doubles to represent him on several occasions.

Lakshmana, kept purposely in the dark by Rāma,* did not notice the substitution of Šabarī in place of Sītā, because as he was constitutionally shy of women, his gaze did not travel beyond their

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* The reasons are discussed fully in the last chapter.
toes.* Ravaṇa could have no suspicion at the time of carrying her off, because he had never seen her before, nor had he the time then to examine whether Śabarī answered to a T the description he had heard of Sītā. Moreover, my contention is that in carrying off Sītā, the motive of Ravaṇa was not lust for beauty, but thirst for revenge. In support I refer to the Adhyātma which pays this compliment to Ravaṇa that he always treated Sītā, during her captivity, with as much consideration and regard as if she were his own mother.† In direct opposition to this, several poets and dramatists have, as downright propagandists, put horrid threats and passionate


नाहं ज्ञातामि केवले नाहं ज्ञातामि कुण्डले।
नुपुरे लब्धज्ञातामि नित्ये पादालम्बन्दनात॥

Here Lakshmana says: — “I do not know whether these armlets and ear-rings belong to Sītā or not. All that I can vouch for is that these anklets are hers: my sight has grown familiar with them owing to constant salutations to her feet.”

† The Adhyātma: VII. 4.

मात्रवत्पलवत्यामास सो पहुँचणानीकुताम॥

N. B. Besides representing Sītā to be a paragon of feminine charms, the poets have also represented her to be in budding youth at the time of her abduction. This is another silly mistake. She was 18 at the time of her marriage, then lived for 12 years in Ayodhya, afterwards passed 13 years in Daṇḍakāranya before she came to Panchavatī, and there she was for 6 months before Ravaṇa came in. Thus she was on the wrong side of forty-three at the time of her abduction. In India a woman at 44 is not in the morning but in the evening of youth. If Ravaṇa carried off Sītā in her declining age, his motive can hardly be said to be amorous!
speeches into the mouth of Rāvana in regard to Sītā, so as to represent him a monster of vice and cruelty. So was Napoleon painted an ogre in England, and Hitler, a ferocious beast! All the same, this fact is acknowledged by all that Rāvana did no harm to Sītā. He could have mutilated her as Lakshmana did Śūrpanākhā, or have committed rape upon her as Indra did upon Ahalyā. But he did nothing of the kind.* The poets are hard put to it to reconcile this moral restraint of his with their description of him as a gross libertine. As a last resort, they have invented a story that he was by certain celestial damsels forbidden on pain of death to violate any woman.† Curse or no curse, the fact remains undisputed that though Rāvana carried off Sītā, he did nothing dishonourable to her. And why?

In this connection there is a beautiful story. It is widely popular in the Mahārāṣṭra, though its source is not traceable. Since it shows a keen insight into the character of Rāvana and fully elucidates

* Vālmīki: VI. 84.

अभिमार्यं तु जानामिः राजणस्य दुरारमनः ||
सीतां प्रति महाताहो न च धाते करिष्ठति ||

Here Vibhīśaṇa assures Rāma that though Rāvana might be wicked, yet his heart towards Sītā was pure and that he would do no violence to her.


यदा ध्रुक्षामां कामातो धर्मविष्यति योषितम् ||
मूर्घी तु सततत्व तस्य शकत्येवाविता तदा ||
श्रुत्वा तु स दर्शानिवस्ते शार्यं रोमहर्षणम् ||
नारीशु मैथुनीभावे नाक्रामास्तत्वरोक्षति ||
the above quotations from the Adhyātma and Vālmīki, I should like to narrate it here in full. When Indrajit, the last hope of Rāvana, was slain in the fight, Mandodarī was convulsed with grief. Weeping bitterly, she scolded Rāvana outright for the calamity he had brought upon himself, his family, and his empire for the sake of Sītā. She said:—

‘Send away that witch at once. Ever since she came here, our luck has been down. Bad omens attended her arrival and carried in their train worse misfortunes. What have we not lost by now? Everything. Still there is your precious life. Save it for my sake, O save it! I implore you with folded hands. End this war, my lord, restore Sītā to Rāma and make peace with him.’

On hearing these words Rāvana smiled sadly and said:—

‘With all my sympathies in your sorrows, my dear, I pity your abysmal ignorance. The cause of the present struggle lies much deeper than you think. The abduction of Sītā is only a pretext for it.* This war is fought to settle once for all the question of Aryan or Non-Aryan ascendancy on earth. That is the main issue involved. The two races have been at clash of arms over this question for hundreds of years

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* Just as the murder of the Austrian Prince at Serajevo was only a pretext for the Great War of 1914–1918. In the Adhyātma, Rāma says that he will make Sītā a pretext for the destruction of the entire Rakshasa race. cf. II. 1. 39.

सीतामिश्रेण ते दुर्गु कुले नाशयाम्बहम् ||
in the past with varying fortunes. And to-day you are witnessing the final phase of that struggle. Whosoever wins now will stand supreme, or sink for ever if he fails. I had realised my ambition of world sovereignty. But victorious everywhere from the beginning, I was intoxicated with pride, with the result that now, driven into a tight corner, I find myself fighting at bay. Having beaten the Aryans flat on the face, I took no further notice of them. I underrated their genius for machinations. When Rāma made his initial moves, I was so drunk with the idea of invincibility that I did not care to see their ultimate end. When there grew up a network of hermitages on the very borders of my empire, I did not wake up. When there was a coup d'etat in Kishkindhā, Vāli going down to the grave and Sugrīva coming to the throne with magic suddenness, I did not open my eyes. When Hanūmān came and went, buying over my brother and leaving my Laṅkā in the hidden flames of treason, I yawned a little but slept over it. When the enemy crossed over to my island over-night and hemmed me in on all sides, I was startled out of my drowsiness, but then I found to my horror that there was no room left for me to move my hands and feet. That very instant I saw plainly the ruin of me, my family, and my race.

You ask me why I brought Sītā at all. I admit it has been an egregious folly, though I must say it did not so look then. You already know how our Śūrpaṇakhā was brutally disfigured,
Whatever her faults, she was after all my sister. I had to vindicate my honour, if not hers. I played the game of tit for tat laughingly, but soon after I had to laugh on the wrong side of my face. Rāma had already anticipated my move. Having placed a counterfeit in my hand, he laughed in his sleeve and grew maudlin over his pretended loss. On that very pretext he ranged over my empire, shedding copious tears of melancholy and shooting secret arrows of diplomacy at the same time. In this way my power was gradually soaked to softness and perforated with holes. I was the mightiest of the mighty. But I depended entirely on the might of my sword and belittled the power of intellect. And Rāma, the cleverest of the clever, hit me where I was weakest. He was born to save his race, as I to exalt mine. Our methods differed. He has succeeded, whereas I have failed. But we understand each other and admire each other’s greatness. There is no personal enmity between us. If there were, it would have been settled by a duel, as in the case of Vāli. But Rāma did not seek the death of Rāvana only. He aimed at Rāvanism which is innate in our race and which flares up every now and then. He has already started sucking up that spirit. Witness the defection of Vibhishana, which is the first of its kind in the history of our race. Now, by and by, our race will be absorbed in the other race. The very name Rākshasa will disappear from earth. That end cannot now be averted, even if I submit.
Then, tell me, why should I bend my head before those whom I trampled before under my foot? Let my body and spirit perish in heroic independence rather than pickle for ever in shameful submission. To convince you that I have no real Sītā with me and that Rāma bears no personal grudge to me, I shall invite him and Śankara with their wives to dinner tomorrow. Do the cooking yourself and maintain absolute secrecy."

Mandodarī was speechless with surprise on hearing these words. She arranged everything as she was told. At the appointed hour came the distinguished guests. But Rāma came alone. As the table was set for six, one seat remained vacant. Rāvana said that the meal would not begin until Sītā came to take her seat. Thereupon Rāma replied to him naively that as she was in his captivity, the matter rested entirely with him. Upon this Rāvana turned red in the face and said:—

"Can you not, Rāma, lay aside for a while your theatrical attitude and meet me with an open heart? Here we are not at the chess-board of diplomacy, but at the festive board of fellowship. Do not for a moment think that I have not seen through your game. I know who is in Aśokavana. She is free. I have not put her behind the bars or in chains. Hanūmān could have carried her as secretly as he met her stealthily. But you did not want it. You purposely wanted her to remain here as the outward cause of the present Armageddon. She has truly served your
purpose, though false. But why should I call her false, when the fruit she has borne you is so sweet, to me so bitter? By her you have deceived the world into a belief that the war you have been waging with me is one of righteousness against wickedness, though the truth is, as you already know, that from beginning to end it has been on your part a war of insidious infiltration, uncalled-for provocation, and downright aggression. However, let us not turn this friendly affair into an acrimonious debate. The dinner is waiting. Please bring your Sītā. I do not mean any harm to her, nor do I pine for her. I am supremely happy with my Mandodarī and my heart does not hanker after another’s wife.”

Thereupon Rāma brought his Sītā in Pushpaka aerial car and then the dinner began. When it was over they both embraced each other, Rāvaṇa said:

“Tomorrow we meet again as enemies on the battle-field. I have no delusions in my mind as to the end of this war. Your victory is certain. But remember while life flickers in me, you will not have it cheap.”

Thus ends this beautiful story. It unfolds the nature of Rāma-Rāvaṇa-struggle, throws light on the character of Rāvaṇa, and stresses the point we are considering, namely, that whom Rāvaṇa carried off was not the real Sītā but only her counterpart. On this point the Adhyātma, Tulasī, and the Padma Purāṇa are at one. I have already given my reasons why I am inclined to honour Ṣabarī with that

* This story reminds one of Scott’s Talisman.
important role. Both Vālmīki and Vyāsa say that her ultimate end was self-immolation on a burning pyre.* But they do not explain why she should burn herself to death immediately after receiving instructions in the various forms of devotion. It looks so absurd that she should first solicit enlightenment on the path of devotion and thereafter, having been told by Rāma to dedicate herself entirely to him,† should do nothing else but light a fire and throw herself lightly into it. She was young; for in the Adhyātma, Rāma calls her bhāminī, which, in Sanskrit, is a term of endearment in addressing a young loving woman. It is inconceivable that Rāma, the man of action, would ever permit a young woman, who was spiritually devoted to him, to commit suicide unnecessarily before his very eyes. I am therefore of opinion that a period of one year elapsed between her meeting with Rāma and her disappearance in the fire. The events that happened in this interval, though attributed to Sītā, really happened to her. If this view is accepted, then two questions are satisfactorily solved; firstly, why there was a fire-ordeal in Lāṅka, but none in Ayodhyā in spite of the sameness of circumstances in both places; secondly, why Šabarī

* Vālmīki: III. 74.

† The Adhyātma III. 10.
requested Rāma to allow her to pass away in a blaze of glory.*

With the death of Rāvana her role as Sītā also came to an end. It was obvious that real Sītā would now emerge from her concealment and take her legitimate place by the side of her husband. If Śabarī thereafter continued to pose as Sītā, she would be hooted out as a mad woman. Nor could she continue to stay with Rāma as Śabarī; for she was adhamajāti, a woman of the lowest caste, an untouchable. Thus the only course left open to her was to go back to her old home and take her place again among the outcasts of society. This was, indeed, ‘a consummation not to be devoutly wished for.’ As one poet rightly observes†:

“How could she who had once occupied the position of a queen ever like to be enrolled in the menial staff! A marble once inscribed with the form of a deity does not deserve to be used as a pebble in the pavement.”

Hence when Rāma was compelled to put Sītā to the test of fire to convince the people of Laṅkā that she was pure in mind and body,‡ Śabarī offered herself

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† Anonymous : देवीमार्ग गमिता परिवारपं देवं मात्येया।

न बहु परिसोगोस्येमेव देवलक्ष्मिन्तं रत्नम्।

‡ The Adhyātma : VI. 13.

राजस्वे मर्त्य जात्वा लक्ष्मणोऽपि तदाच्छ हि।

विवेकसार्यें न रामस्व लोकानां प्रत्ययायः च।

महाकाष्ठं चतुं च ज्ञात्यायामात्स पावतस्।
willingly to undergo the ordeal,* so that Sītā might be saved from the flames and live thereafter happily with Rāma as a woman whose character was attested by the gods! Indeed, Śabarī loved Rāma spiritually and sacrificed herself for the sake of his wife, as Sydney Carton, in Dickens' Tale of Two Cities, loved Lucy ideally and sacrificed himself for the sake of her husband! The part played by her was so important and her sacrifice so noble that the poets feared lest she, a woman of the despicable class, should eclipse Sītā altogether. Therefore they purposely killed her immediately after meeting Rāma and placed this meeting after the abduction of Sītā. Some even represented her as an old hag, vṛddhā, so as to obliterate all trace of her important role. It is only the Adhyātma which, while suppressing the truth to honour the prejudices of its time, yet gives a glimpse of it, as is evident from the quotations given in the foot-notes.

The prevailing opinion that Sītā walked through the fire unscathed is absolutely wrong. Vālmīki says†:

"Then the gods and sages saw her falling


आभासिनि प्रवेशमयि तवांगे रघुनंदने।
इति रामेऽक्षित समासमयः प्रविष्ट सुकृताः।
पश्चात् धर्मजननां पिण्य शांती पुनर्जनमापन।

† Vālmīki : VI. 116.

दद्ध्यूस्तः महाभारातः पत्नीं हथ्यवाहनः।
वहपो देवान्धरस्वः यथे पूर्णांहृतीमिव।
शापतां पत्नीं निरन्ये नितिव्रद्धे देवतामिव॥
into the fire ablaze; like a generous offering of butter, poured into the sacrificial fire and becoming one column of flame; like a deity hurled from heaven by a curse and consumed in the fires of hell."

The Kūrma Purāṇa says* :-

"For the sake of convincing all living beings, the illusory Sītā entered the blazing fire, and the fire also burned her up."

Tulasi says† :-

"The living image of Sītā and the stigma cast upon her name by the world were both consumed in the terrific fire. The gods, men, and sages looked on, but none knew the hidden secret of Rāma."

Vālmīki further says‡:—

"At the sight of that burning form, the mind of Rāma was suffused with gloom and his

* The Kūrma, quoted in the Tilaka on III. 45. 37, says :-

सा प्रत्ययाय भूतानां सीता मायामवी पुनः ।
विवेशा पावकं दीर्घं वदाहं ज्वलोंस्य पि ताम् ॥

† Tulasi : VII. प्रतिविच्छ और लौकिक कल्पक, प्रवण्ड पावक में जोे ।
प्रभुत्रित काठ न जान रहें, चुर-नर-शुनि देखत खेलें ॥

‡ Vālmīki : VI. 118.

तस्यामभिन्न विशालत्वां तृतीयं विपुलं स्वनः ।
ततो हि दुर्भूता रामो वामपत्यावृक्षेऽविना ।
ततात् स्वतः दुर्भूतः वाक्यं पितामहसमीरितम् ।
अइकृतानादय वैदेही तथाप्रभासनिनिधिताम् ।
देवी राम सुप्रत्यक्षतः इत्यवा विपुलं ॥
eyes were filled with tears. Then at the request of the Creator, there came the god of fire in person, carrying the real and unblemished daughter of Janaka in his arms, and presented her to Rāma."

Thus from all these passages one thing is clear that whosoever the māyāmāyi or pratibimba may be, she was burnt first and then the tathārūpā Sītā was brought before all by one who called himself Agni, but had a human form. Now I again repeat that the so called illusory Sītā was Śabarī who is said to have died, according to every poet, voluntarily in a blazing fire before the eyes of Rāma. I differ from these poets only in one respect, namely, that whereas they all make out that Śabarī died in a fire unneces-sarily just after meeting Rāma near Panchavaṭī, I, on the contrary, hold that she made a generous sacrifice of herself for the sake of Sītā in the fire ordeal at Laṅkā one year after. If what was burnt by Rāma in Laṅkā was a mere phantom or a shadow or an hallucination, it is impossible to understand why, at its vanishing in the fire, his grief should be of such a type as to cause agitation in heaven. But if we take it that it was Śabarī who died magnanimously for Sītā and out of platonic love for him, then it is easy to understand why his heart should melt with sorrow and his eyes burst into tears. It also explains away the apparent inconsistency in his conduct at Laṅkā and at Ayodhyā. In Laṅkā he set at rest the suspicions of his enemies and accepted Sītā; in Ayodhyā he submitted to the suspicions of his own people and abandoned Sītā!
Indeed in Ayodhya his heart shuddered at the idea of testing his innocent spouse in the flames, because he did not expect her to come out alive and unhurt. Rāma had no more faith in the fire-ordeal as a test of moral purity than we have today, and he had as much faith in the inexorability of Nature's laws as we have now. Indeed, if moral purity could alter the laws of the physical universe, then Jesus Christ would never have bled to death, when he was nailed to the cross by the Jews to test his godliness; then Socrates and Mīrābāī, too, would not have turned their eyes white, when a glass of poison was poured down their throat to test their goodness!

Having discussed the Sītā-Śabarī question in detail, we now return to the point from which we digressed. In anticipation of Rāvana's move Rāma hid away his Sītā somewhere in the maze of Daṇḍakāranya hermitages and left her under the protection of the sages who were ever willing to brave any danger to further his design. Thereafter he resumed his usual life at his cottage with Śabarī as his helpmate in the future dramatic developments. Before long, according to expectations, came Rāvana, or more likely his agents, on the prowl. Rāma allowed himself to be lured away by the trick of a golden deer. Śabarī, growing suddenly wild, raved madly at Lakshmana and forced him to leave the premises.* The prowlers found the coast clear and carried off their prey without let or hindrance. On the way they had a sharp encounter with Jatāyus who,

* This interesting topic is discussed in the last chapter.
true to his words, fought desperately to rescue his friend's wife until he fell bleeding profusely to the ground. Rāma, in his frantic search for the missing Sītā, found him at his last gasp, waiting only to make his report. Somehow he whispered a few words and died with a happy feeling that he had done his duty.

Thereafter started the masterly propaganda of Rāma to enlist the sympathies of the southerners for himself and create public opinion against Rāvana. He pretended stark madness through grief and went about addressing birds, embracing creepers, and asking trees where his sweet little darling was.* An object of pity to all in the south, a prince once but stripped of everything before by his cruel step-mother and now robbed of his only solace by their despotic monarch, he went from place to place, unsuspected and unchallenged, shedding copious tears, heaving long sighs, and uttering doleful cries. In the Adhyātma, Rāma says†:

"If I sit at home nursing my grief silently, how can I find out the ways and means of exter-

* Vālmīki: III. 60.

† The Adhyātma: III. 8.

यद्यहि विरोधे भूल्या तुम्ही स्थास्यामि मन्त्री 
तदा रामसकोट्टीनां वशोपायः कथं संतु तु 
यदि शोचामि तां दुःखसंतप्तः कामुको यथा 
तदा अपेयानुचिन्तनं सीता यत् यास्य ् सुरालयम् 
एवं दुःखी ् वप्यत्वशोचताम् अवचलो ् व्युष्णावति
minating the Rākṣasa race? But if, in a paroxysm of grief, I go about in quest of my Sītā, I may ultimately get an access to the very centre of my enemy’s stronghold.” Thus mightily pleased at heart, he bewailed her loss, and though firm in mind, he ran about in flurry.

In this way Rāma accomplished the moral and diplomatic conquest of the south simply by raining down tears. Nowadays the national leaders rain down pamphlets from the skies. The methods may differ, but the motive behind is just the same. However, the sympathy of the southerners was gained to such an extent that when the armies were raised in Kishkindhā for the invasion of the island, Rāma met with no obstruction anywhere and had a free passage to the sea. And when the battle was joined before the very walls of Rāvana’s capital, there was no serious attempt made from the mainland to attack Rāma in the rear, or even to cut off his retreat, and thus relieve the pressure on Rāvana, the mighty emperor of the south.
CHAPTER VI

The Action Moves Forward

How to secure a powerful ally was the next question before Rāma—an ally who was thoroughly conversant with the terrain and had under him troops well trained for sea, mountain, and jungle warfare. There lay at this time near Mysore a small kingdom of Kishkindhā under the rule of Vāli the Fearless. The people of this place were renowned for their warlike spirit and love of independence. They had so far successfully resisted the rapacious soldiery of Rāvanā and given it a taste of defeat on more than one occasion. They were dwarfish in stature, but tough of body, with muscles of steel. They were remarkably swift and agile, with a dash of playful cunning in their nature. Their rare physical powers combined with curious intelligence, their instinct for organisation with a sense of discipline, their attachment to the native soil with unyielding assertion of their birth rights—all these qualities had made so deep an impression upon the Rākshasas that they called them half derisively and half admiringly the Vānaras, just as the Russians nicknamed the Japanese monkeys and the Mahomedans styled the

11 (161)
Mahrattas rats. Rāvaṇa had found it impossible to subjugate these people. He had several encounters with Vāli, but each time he was so adroitly tripped and finally so entrapped that he had to make peace with him on equal terms. He said*:

"Wishing to hem you in, I came, O lord of the Vānaras, but have been hammered by you instead. I am pleased to find in you my match and should therefore like to be your sincere friend."

In despair Rāvaṇa had to leave this kingdom alone and bypass it, when he extended his empire up to the Godāvari and pushed his military outposts as far as the southern bank of the Ganges. What Rāvaṇa failed to achieve by the might of his sword, Rāma succeeded in gaining by the power of his tact. He got round these people so skilfully and handled them afterwards so lovingly, yet firmly, that they became the truest instruments of his policy. They toiled for him as labourers, worked for him as spies, acted for him as scouts, fought for him as warriors, and finally put the crown of victory on his head, and yet remained for ever his most loyal and devoted servants. Such was the spiritual force of Rāma, such the charm of his personality, and such the nature of his love, along with all his other traits as a political genius! Vālmīki must have described these people exactly as they were. But when

* Vālmīki: VII. 34.

वाल्मीकी महेश्वरम राजसेन्द्रो विद्मं रावणः ।

वृद्धस्य विद्मा संरक्षितः स च ब्राह्मणादिविवेच्यम् ।

तवया सहं चिं नस्थिन्द्रभामि पायकामितः ||
the later bards enlarged upon his Epic, they could not resist the temptation to play upon the name *Vānaras* in order to tickle the fancy of their credulous hearers. They actually affixed a tail to their backs and made them jump from tree to tree, sometimes swinging head over heels and sometimes walking on all fours, while at the same time they narrated their manners and actions as human beings. They noticed the contradiction involved in their description, but they explained it away by saying that these *Vānaras* were the gods of heaven who had purposely taken this form on earth to assist Rāma, because Rāvana, by virtue of his boon or curse, could be killed only by men in league with monkeys. We may not, for amusement's sake, take exception to this imagery based upon pun and its explanation based upon myth; for it is the poet's special privilege "to body forth the forms and shapes of things unknown." But when the poet descends from his airy height and comes to discuss seriously the questions of law and morality, as in the case of *Vāli-vadha*, it is highly objectionable on his part to mistake his own fancy for fact and declare always 'heads' for Rāma and 'tails' for Vāli, and thus make his argument-in-defence a mere tissue of childish fallacies.

However, there is time still to come to this part of our narrative. For the present we have to follow Rāma in his search for a suitable ally. When Rāma arrived on the borders of Kishkindhā, he found the affairs there in such a state that an outsider with brains might easily throw himself in and make himself virtually the master of the whole kingdom.
There had occurred an irreconcilable split between Vāli and his younger brother Sugrīva for the possession of the Rāj. Sugrīva, who had been plotting against his elder brother during the latter’s campaigns abroad, had just been turned out of the realm disgracefully along with all his conspirators such as Hanūmān, Jāmbavān, Nala and Nīla. The tension between the two parties was on the increase and Rāma decided to turn it to his own advantage. Should he side with Vāli or with Sugrīva? The former course appeared attractive; for with the help of Vāli the conquest of Laṅkā would be a much easier affair. As Vāli himself says on his deathbed:—

"O Rāma, if you had confided your troubles to me and left the matter in my hand, I would have captured that Rāvana alive on the battle-field and brought him to you, bound hand and foot."

Rāma knew full well that this was not a vain boast. But the shorter and easier way to victory was fraught with dangers which, as a farsighted politician, he could not ignore. There is an important rule in foreign politics that it is always risky to enter into an alliance with one who is likely to prove dictatorial in the end and feed you for ever with humble pie, and that it is safer to choose for an ally one who will remain under your obligation and play

* Valmīki: IV. 17.

मामेव यदि पूर्व त्यथे मैत्रेय योऽवः |
राजस्त्रे च दुरस्त्वानेन तव भार्येवहार्यमः |
केते वद्धं ग्रहणं वेस निहतं राजां रणे ||
second fiddle to you. It is the neglect of this warning of political science which brought dire results to India in the past. The Mahrattas sought the help of the English in their quarrel with Tippu; the English destroyed the Tiger of Mysore and afterwards sat so tightly on the back of the Mahrattas that they were brought down to their knees in no time. Jaychand rushed to Mahomed Ghory against Prithwiraj; but no sooner was Prithwiraj taken captive than Jaychand was trussed up for the Grand Feast.

Rāma, of course, did not fall into this error for the sake of a short cut to victory. In weighing the advantages and disadvantages of an alliance with each of these two brothers, Rāma found that Vāli was notoriously arrogant and imperious; whereas Sugrīva was remarkably meek and submissive. Secondly, he had nothing substantial to offer to Vāli in return for his help; whereas to Sugrīva he could promise the throne of Kishkindhā. Thirdly, whereas Vāli needed nobody’s protection against Sugrīva, Sugrīva was entirely helpless without Rāma, and Rāma could supply him the necessary brains to get rid of his brother in such a way that everyone, without suspecting foul play, should accept him as the next successor to the throne, in spite of there being Angada. Fourthly, both Rāma and Sugrīva were fellow-sufferers in respect of the loss of their thrones and the abduction of their wives; hence like birds of the same feather they were likely to fly together in full sympathy and perfect agreement. Therefore, a pact of life-long friendship was signed between the two, in which the terms were that
Rāma must fulfill his part of the contract first, i.e. place Sugrīva on the throne of Kishkindhā, and then Sugrīva should place his army and treasury at the disposal of Rāma.*

But how to get rid of Vāli was an exceedingly difficult problem. Open war with him was out of the question; for he was already so powerful that even if the two exiles attacked him in combination, he could shatter them to pieces in no time. In addition, Rāvana was likely to join his forces with him in this war, as Rāma was the common enemy of both. This possibility could not be ruled out of consideration, though there was really no love lost between them. History furnishes several examples of how circumstances often make strange bedfellows in politics. Till 1940, Churchill and Stalin had done nothing else but scratch each other’s face. But when Hitler, who had already fallen out with England, also fell foul of Russia, the two suddenly beamed and smiled, and never ceased hanging on each other’s neck until the war was over, when again they bared their teeth and resumed their growling in right earnest. Rāma, therefore, had no other alternative but to plan the assassination of Vāli with a heavy heart, but none the less in a machiavellian manner. Those were the days of chivalry when personal disputes were often

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* Vālmīki: IV. 7.
settled by the award of duels. Sugrīva had been branded as a usurper and robbed of his wife. On these two points he could demand satisfaction from Vāli.† Rāma therefore advised him to challenge his brother to a mortal combat in vindication of his honour, and to make it a condition that it should be fought outside the city, in a sequestered place, away from the eyes of the citizens who had nothing to do with this purely fraternal affair. Thereafter they all bent their steps quietly to the city of Kishkindhā and in the forest outside stood concealed behind the trees in a circle, while Sugrīva went alone to give his challenge to Vāli.†

Vāli had one great defect in him and this defect was born of consciousness of superstrength: he was willing to meet his rival at whatever time and on whatever ground he proposed. In short, he suffered from superiority complex like Afzul Khan, and like Afzul Khan he was lured into a death-trap. He was


| यदस्तवं गाढः सा राज्याति विक्रोण्वते ।
| हृता भारवीयो देवेश्वरं सिरं ग्रहं ततो अप्रतं ।
| गत्वा चाहुः सुमीर्ग, तत्र शब्दं तथा कृतु ।
| निष्पत्तिः सत्यसूर वालीं च प्रियसूरुः ॥

i. e. Since you have been banished from the kingdom and deprived of your wife by Vāli, you should go ahead and challenge him in such insulting terms that he, being sensitive and bellicose by nature, will rush out alone to fight with you, without any supporter to guard against foul play.

† Vālmīki: IV. 14.

| संहै ते त्वसि गत्वा चिन्तिन्त्वो शालिनि पुरिम ।
| वृक्षस्पर्शमानास्वव्यव्य व्यत्रिष्टिनाहि वने ॥

a hero to the core, who never played others foul and never expected them to play him false. He went about the world unguarded, flinging all caution to the winds, and in this utter lack of circumspection lay the cause of his ghastly destruction. As Bhāravi puts it*:

"Those simpletons are bound to go down in the world who have not learnt how to meet cunning with cunning, who go through life unwary and unarmed, thinking that they are proof against all harm."

His wife Tārā, who had a bitter experience of Sugrīva during the absence of her husband, knew him to be a coward with a corrupt soul. She was naturally surprised to see that he, who never ventured to show his face to her husband, now vaunted openly to his face. She rightly suspected that some sinister force must be working secretly at his back to put this unnatural courage into his heart.† She was smitten with anxiety and warned her husband with tears in her eyes. But Vāli said‡:

* Bhāravi: I.

† Valmiki: IV. 15.

‡ Valmiki: IV. 16.
"Don't worry, my dear. As regards Sugrīva, I can crush him like a fly between my two fingers. As regards Rāma, whom you suspect to be in unholy alliance with him, I do not think that he will ever do any evil to me; for I have heard that he is conversant with moral code and is upright in conduct."

Indeed, he had too much charity in him to think of perfidy in others. He went alone with a firm step to the appointed spot, and while he was at close grips with his brother, Rāma shot an arrow callously from behind a tree, which tore open his noble heart and laid him flat on the ground, never to rise again!

In this way, contrary to all laws of sport and war, the death of Vāli was compassed. The deed having been done, the arrow which was the tangible evidence of a third party interference, was carefully hidden. Thereafter Rāma appeared before the people of Kishkindhā in his saintly garb and told them in his exquisitely convincing way that he had been accidentally present to witness the two brothers' fight to the bitter end. He assured them upon his honour that Sugrīva had won fair and square, and that Vāli had fought bravely to the death. Howsoever much he regretted Vāli's death, he could not help saying that possibly it was the life of dissipation he had been leading of late that had put him out of form; or rather it was his guilty conscience which had left his arm so weak. Whatever it might be, it was not his business to discuss. What he could say unhesitatingly as an eye-witness was that it was a clean fight, altogether above board. Who could disbelieve
the words of Rāma? — of Rāma who lived in the 
odour of piety and was the spirit of renunciation 
icarnate. When the citizens were hypnotised, he 
assumed the role of a judge and declared authorita-
tively that as the throne of Kīshkindhā was at stake 
in the fight, it must go to the victor for his life-time 
according to the law of duels, and as Aṅgada was 
the legitimate son of Vāli, heir-apparentcy must go 
to him according to the law of succession.* The 
decision proposed was indeed so clever that it satis-
fied both the parties concerned. The subjects must 
have hailed it as an excellent solution of the problem 
created by the rival claims of Sugrīva and Aṅgada. 
At any rate there is no hint in the Rāmāyaṇa any-
where that there were signs of uprising or even 
whispers of discontent among the people when 
Sugrīva ascended the throne in spite of Angada’s 
right to succeed his father.

Several poets and dramatists have unnecessarily 
attempted to justify this Vāli-vadha on moral 
grounds. The attempt is sheer nonsense. There could 
really be no moral justification for an act which was 
a deliberately planned murder. The plain truth is 
that it was for Rāma a dire political necessity, and 
without it he could never have moved even a step 
forward towards his ultimate goal. Hence the utmost


सुग्रीवो विचित्रदीर्घं विषं राज्येः मितिच्यत्तम्।
इमम् यथागां श्रीं योवराज्येः स्थितिचय।

ज्ञेयस्य हि सुग्रीवेऽ ज्ञेयः सत्यो वित्तं न च।
अहं दोषमदीनात्मा योवराज्यमोऽहि।
that we can say in his favour is that the greatness of the object he had in view justified the baseness of the means he employed to achieve it. The defence that has been put into the mouth of Rāma by the subsequent editors of Vālmīki is exceedingly irritating and not in the least convincing. But since the Sanātanists applaud it highly, it is worth while to examine it here in detail and see for ourselves whether the orthodox poets have done service or disservice to Rāma by waxing eloquent upon a point on which Vālmīki himself observed judicious silence. To start with, Rāma says:

"I take this whole earth to belong to the family of Ikshvāku, of whom the present illustrious descendant is Bharata reigning at Ayodhyā. By his orders I have turned a knight-errant to punish the transgressors of law and morality, wherever they may be. Know that in slaying you stealthily, I have only carried out the instructions of my liege lord, Bharata."*

The presumption here is worthy of the wolf in Æsop’s Fables. So did Hitler rant that the entire world belonged to the German race and that he was entitled to trample under foot all those who committed the sin of embracing communism as their national policy. Besides, first to stab a man from

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* Vālmīki: IV. 18.

\[\text{वाल्मीकिः परि }\]
\[\text{वर्ण \& जीवनकालना।}
\[\text{भरतस्व महीपालो वर्ण त्वादेशवतिन्त।}
\[\text{चरणो वदुष्ण ज्ञातना निगृहामी निमार्गंगानु।}
\[\text{त्वंद्रिज्ञानू कर्तवेदशाचिदर्हाँवेयरस्वर्थं।}
\[\text{॥} \]
behind and then to say to his dying face what his fault is, is the most inhuman way of punishment, nowhere sanctioned in Law, much less could be approved by Bharata. Such punishment, inflicted unawares, gives the man concerned no chance to defend himself or to amend his conduct or to repent of his sin. He is thus deprived of all hope of seeking self-improvement on earth and deserving salvation in heaven hereafter. The Tilaka commentary remarks, 'as far as we know Bharata never gave such orders to Rāma at Chitrakūṭa; hence what Rāma says here is a black lie.' Rāma further says:—

"To cohabit with a daughter, sister, or sister-in-law is a sin deserving death-penalty. By seizing the wife of Sugriva you have offended against the Sanātana Dharma whose champion I am. I have therefore punished you according to law."

Such indeed may be the law of Āryavarta, but what right Rāma had to apply it to those who were outside its jurisdiction. Laws and customs differ in every place. Even today in certain sections of Hindu society in the north western provinces

* The Tilaka on IV. 18. 25.

† Vālmīki: IV. 18.

और्तिं भियनी वापि माति वाप्त्यनुभवस्य यः।
प्रचरेत नरः कामाचास्य दण्डो वश: स्तुतः।
आद्वंक्तिसि मायवाण्यं त्यवस्त्रा भरम सनातनम्।
इत्यायं वत्सी कामान्तुष्णाय पापस्नातत्।
आत्मादयकाव्याम् इस्मिन्द्रद्धोऽवं प्रतिपादित:।
two or three brothers have one common wife. Custom allows it and law recognises it. Will it do if a Maharashtrian butchers these brothers in cold blood and calls it an act of religion? Moreover, did Rāma represent the international court of justice? Besides, if it is a sin to enjoy the younger brother's wife who is as good as one's own daughter, it cannot be a virtue to ravish the elder brother's wife who is as venerable as one's own mother. But while Rāma kills Vāli mercilessly for the former transgression, he allows Sugrīva graciously to indulge in the latter transgression, though it is still worse.* His third argument is as follows:—

* Vālmiki: IV. 18.

व्येष्टो भ्राता पिता वापिय यत्न विवाहं प्रयत्निति ।
वायस्ते पितरो श्रेयं वनमें न पवित्र विलितः ||

Here Rāma himself says to Vāli in the same breath:—‘One who precedes in birth, one who gives birth, one who imparts learning—these three are fathers to him who follows the path of righteousness.’ Naturally their wives are mothers to him.

Vālmiki: IV. 55.

स्थ्येष्यमार्गमम: ब्राह्मणानुतांस्मथत्वार्जो मम ।
विक्रमशरीर प्राप्ते च सुप्रीवे नोपपद्धाते ।
भ्रामुर्ज्ज्वो यो मायाः जीवति महिः प्रियाम् ।
प्रभवेण मातरं यतु स्वीकृतं ज्ञातिः सुन्मितः ||

Here Aṅgada says:—‘In my uncle Sugrīva there is neither firmness of mind, nor purity of heart, nor humanity, nor straight dealing, nor true valour, nor even ordinary courage. During the life-time of his own elder brother Vāli, he committed incest with his wife who was morally his mother. Such a man deserves downright condemnation.’

(Continued on next page)
"Having made friendship with Sugrīva, I called him my own and promised him that I would not only recover his wife from the hands of Vāli, but also install him in the kingdom of Kishkindhā. Being a Kshatriya, how could I go back upon my word, or how else could I carry out my promise except in this manner*?"

Here the cat is out of the bag. The utmost that Rāma could promise Sugrīva in the name of justice was to intercede on his behalf with Vāli for the sake of his wife. But to promise him the throne of Kishkindhā which by right of primogeniture belonged to his elder brother and from which he had been rightly kicked out as a traitor and usurper, then to fulfil that promise in so atrocious and unheroic a way, and finally to expect Vāli to admire him for his...

(Continued from the previous page)

The Tilaka remarks:— सुप्रीवस्यापि ज्वेत्रभ्रातुत्तोलिनः पितुसमस्य भार्तश्वर्तं दुस्मयमिति दिन्तू।

Thus it is evident from Vālmīki that Sugrīva had outraged the wife of his elder brother who, as Rāma himself admits, is a father to the younger brother. Later on Vālmīki will tell us how Sugrīva carried on his illicit connections with Tārā in her widowhood, though his own wife Rūmā had been recovered for him by Rāma:— तारा सहितः क्रमी सक्तः कपिलपरस्तदा॥ Rāma knew this, but while he gave a long lecture to the dying Vāli, he said not a word to the sinning Sugrīva. Moreover, Tārā had a grown-up son, Aṅgada; hence Sugrīva’s incest with her was as reprehensible as that of Claudius with Gertrude in Hamlet.

* Vālmīki: IV. 18. सुप्रीवश्च मे सर्योऽस्मिनि यथा तथा।

दार्शनिनिमित्वं च निश्चेषस्यकारः स मे।

प्रतिश्च न मया दच्चा तदा वानस्यशिचिं।

प्रतिश्च न कथे शक्यं सहिष्णुनावेणिश्चिं।
faithful adherence to his word is the height of brazenfacedness. It is nothing short of robbing the rightful Peter to pay the lawless Paul and then looking around to see that the world applauds you as a redressor of wrongs and restorer of rights! So did Hitler promise half of Poland to Stalin, and then smashed the other half down to implement his promise. So did Lord Auckland promise Shah Soojah, the exiled prince, the throne of Kabul against the better man, Dost Mahomed, and thereafter fought three bloody wars on Afgan soil to secure a bulwark for the Empire of India against the bogey of Russian menace. So did the Emperor of Japan promise full independence to Burma and Siam, and thereafter bled the two countries white in order to equip his troops for the further annexation of Asia to the land of the Rising Sun. And so did Rāma espouse the cause of the pretender against the rightful owner, and thereafter through the puppet on the throne of Kishkindhā commandeered the forces and resources of the country to plant the flag of the Solar Dynasty in the heart of Laṅkā! Such is politics, and politics is not ethics. It is a ruthless struggle for power. Whosoever has brains in his head, and strength in his arms, and sternness in his heart, has also a feeling in his mind that he has a divine right to seize, by any means fair or foul, whatever he takes a fancy to. If he succeeds, everything foul will become fair; if he fails, everything fair will turn foul. As one poet observes:—

"Treason doth not succeed, what is the reason? If treason succeed, none dare call it treason,"
Since success and failure are the criterion of right and wrong in politics, it is ridiculous to apply the ethical standards of ordinary life to the ways of the extraordinary conquerors of the world. They prevailed by virtue of their superior strength and skilful adaptation of means to an end, pushing the weaker and less clever to the wall. Let us pay homage to them for what they ultimately achieved and study silently the grim situation which compelled them against their will to stoop down to methods which they themselves knew to be questionable. It is only when propagandists begin to spread sublime colours over their unscrupulous ways that they foolishly show them up as painted scoundrels. If they, for reasons of policy, cannot own up the truth, let them at least refrain from flimsy falsehood. Rāma argues further:

'By inflicting capital punishment upon you I have paved your way to salvation and saved my Bharata from perdition. For the scriptures say that when an offender is spared chastisement, he sends the king to hell, whereas if he receives condign punishment, he goes straight to heaven. I have thus done you a favour for which instead of thanking me, you have the ingratitude to remonstrate with me.'

* Valmiki: IV. 18.

शर्वश्र धर्मं इत्येव इश्वर्यस्त्रव निग्रहः।
श्रुवते मद्वन गीती श्लोकोऽचारित्वमात्सर्कोऽऽ।
राजभिः इतनदन्दादृश्व स्वामीर्यात्तिपातिनः।
राजा त्वशासनु वापस्य तद्वापानोति किद्विविद्धः॥
Dogmatism could go no further. By rubbing in the salt of scriptures, Rāma is really adding insult to injury. Moreover, Vāli was not a subject of Bharata at all; secondly, offences against sexual morality are not usually punished with death. Chandra, the god of moon, was not sent to the gallows for incest with Jupiter's wife; nor Indra, the king of heaven, for rape upon the wife of Gautama; nor Vishnu, the Lord of the Universe, for violating the chastity of Vṛnda.* They were only made to suffer in such a way that by constant mortification they were purified of all taint. That is the right way to reclaim a man from the mire of licentiousness and save his soul from perdition. But Rāma killed Vāli unawares, while his mind was still sunk in lust! He further says:—

"I am a Kshatriya given to hunting and you are a monkey living in the forest. If I have shot you stealthily while you were engaged with your rival, you cannot reproach me for it. Remember that it is the special privilege of hunters to kill their game unawares from a place of concealment.†"

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* Tulasī: I.

परम सति अनुराधिपनारी । तेहि बल ताहि न जितहि पुरारी ॥
चळ करि टोरेड लाखु ब्रह प्रमु चुरकारा जोन्ह ।
जव तेहि जानेउ मरम तब साप कोप करि दीन्ह ॥

† Vālmīki: IV. 18.

वानि राज्यक्षत्राः मुगावाः धर्महरिविदाः ।
प्रत्यक्षान्त्र विध्यति न च दोषोः सत्र विच्छुक्ते ।
वस्माचार्य निहतो हुवदु युद्धमन्येन वानर ।
मथा वाणेन निहतंकं वस्माच्छालामुगो ह्यसि ॥
Inconsistency has reached its climax here. If Vāli was no more than a monkey, it was absurd on the part of Rāma to discuss ethics with him. Hunters pursue animals for the sake of lively sport and not to punish them for promiscuous sexual relations. Nor in honour of the hunted creatures are funeral rites ever arranged according to Vedic formula, as was done by Rāma in the case of Vāli.* It is indeed strange that while Rāma makes away with Vāli lightly as a monkey, he coronates his brother Sugrīva splendidly as a man. Waters fetched from sacred rivers in golden jars and consecrated with Vedic mantras were sprinkled on the head of Sugrīva with the form and ceremony prescribed by ancient sages in Śrauta works.† Are monkeys ever installed in this fashion? When Rāma met Hanūmān for the first time, he was so impressed by his elegant speech that he could not help saying that Hanūmān must have studied the three Vedas and thoroughly mastered

* Vālmiki: IV. 25.

आरोप्य बिषिक्षा वैव वाहिन इतवजीवितम् ।
अलंकारस्तु विविल्पाथेन्द्रवेशस्वभूपितम् ।
वितमारोपयानामश्च सोऽज्ज्जद: पितरं सदूः ।
to 5 पिनि विषिवद्दु स्वच्छा सोपसर्वं चक्कार ह ॥


नदीनेद्यं तंहुत्व तीर्थेन्यत्र समन्तं ।
अपं कनकनेशेभु निधानं विमलं जलम् ।
प्राइमवं विधिवन्यन्मतः स्थापित्वा वरावनेः ।
अन्यष्ठित्वं सुध्रींतं हर्षपदी रात्रेदत् ॥
the science of grammar.* Are monkeys ever capable of attaining such scholarship? It is indeed unbecoming on the part of Rāma to play upon the word Vanara in defence of homicide and treat murder as mere sport by sheer verbal jugglery!

"We Kshatriyas are enlightened beings, the very gods born on earth to interpret to mankind by our acts the intricate principles of religion. Therefore what we say is law and what we do is right. You are but a benighted creature of the forest. You should not bandy words with me, but submit to your lot quietly in full faith that you have been sacrificed on the altar of justice.†"

Here ends the speech of Rāma. The peroration is in keeping with the rest of the argument. It reminds one of Shakespeare's lines:—

"I am Sir Oracle,
When I ope my lips, let no dog bark."

* Vālmīki: IV. 3.

† Vālmīki: IV. 18.
Indeed, in trying to save the face of Rāma, his bards have fully laid him bare as a man swollen with insolence and conceit, arrogating to himself all wisdom and excellence, and admitting not a shred of intelligence and worth in his helplessly fallen foe. Well might his spirit in heaven lament,

"O God, save me from such friends!"

The plain fact is that while working with a singleness of aim towards the one goal of his life, namely, the liberation of Āryāvarta, Rāma was often confronted with a situation where political necessity ran counter to moral sentiment. When he failed to reconcile the two, he preferred the former in the interest of his ideal, though he suffered excruciating pangs at heart on account of the other. Witness his ruthless abandonment of Sītā in public interest and his subsequent mental tortures to the end of his life; though he wielded the golden sceptre with a placid face, yet he carried a rankling dart within himself. Similarly, when he had to leave his father on deathbed, with none of his four sons by his side to soothe the agonies of his parting soul, and also his mother, with the shadow of widowhood gradually creeping over her tear-stained face, how much his heart must have ached! But once his mind was made up, he did not then vacillate like Hamlet, saying:—

'Now to go or not to go, that is the question.'

He promptly suppressed his filial sentiments and fixing his eye only upon the much larger issue of his race, he turned his back upon whatever might happen to his parents and entered upon his career
as the saviour of his people. Similar was the state of his mind when he saw that unless Vāli was removed secretly in this manner, the attainment of his goal was altogether impossible. He heaved a sigh, but steeled his heart and dispatched Vāli outright, and thereafter managed the sequel wonderfully well, though his heart must have bled within. To say, as the above defence purports to show, that he felt morally exultant over this act, which he would fain have avoided but could not help doing, is to misjudge his character, to imply that he was dead to all finer feelings, and to deny him the grace of humanity which he actually had and which alone made his personality so lovable to all in spite of his occasional hardness of heart.

Bhāsa is the only poet who has boldly exposed the folly of justifying the murder of Vāli on moral grounds. In his Abhiśeka-nāṭaka he has inserted a dialogue between Rāma and Vāli on the combat-field, in which the former is completely floored by the latter. As the aforesaid contest of words is highly interesting, it deserves to be elaborately stated here. Mortally wounded in the chest and gasping for breath, Vāli looked tearfully at Rāma and said:

“You call your self a hero and a saint, but as far as I am concerned, you have killed me like a coward and a knave. If you had any grudge against me, why did you not meet me face to face instead of stabbing me from behind?”

Rāma replied rather haughtily:

“There is nothing objectionable in the manner in which I have killed you. You are, I
say, only a beast living in the forest, whereas I am a Kshatriya given to the sport of hunting. It is customary for all hunters to beguile the game first into a trap and then shoot it from behind the branches of a tree or a thicket of creepers. I have acted similarly, and I do not think there is anything dishonourable in following the time-honoured custom.'
Vāli smiled sadly and said:

"So you choose to call me a beast and kill me. One may give a dog a bad name gratuitously, then hang him callously, and call it fair and square. Such indeed are the ways of enlightened Kshatriyas who style themselves champions of justice! Be it so. It is an eye-opener to me at the time of closing my eyes. However, let us now proceed on the assumption that I am only a beast of the forest, and see how far your act of killing me is justifiable. Now tell me, is it not a fact that hunters never kill any animal unless it is either eatable or harmful. Now it is as plain as daylight that in killing me your object was not to feast upon my flesh. I am not edible enough for your civilised stomach. Therefore I should like to know what harm I ever did you to deserve such death at your hands?"

Now Rāma felt that the ground on which he had taken his stand was slipping from under his feet. Recovering his balance somehow, he said a little indifferently:

"Well, as a matter of fact, you may not have done me any harm, but you have certainly wronged Sugriva by seizing his wife. Now
remember that incest with a younger brother's wife is a sin, altogether revolting to moral sense and entirely condemned by Aryan religion. Death is the only penalty prescribed for it and I have meted it out to you."

On hearing these words Vāli flared up and retorted:—

"Be consistent, Rāma! You are blowing hot and cold in the same breath. You first call me a beast and then apply to me the moral and religious code which governs man's conduct in society. The two things are incompatible. If I am no more than a beast of the forest, then certainly my conduct was in accordance with the law that reigns supreme in the jungle, namely, that might is right. But since you judge my conduct by the ethical standards of human society, you must first admit that I am a man. And if I am a man, as I really am, then by your own confession you stand self-condemned before me as a coward and a murderer."

Now Rāma felt that the ground under his feet was completely cut away. But like a drowning man catching at a straw he said:—

"I again repeat that you are a beast. But you are also at the same time the king of beasts. Indeed, as the lord of Kishkindhā, you ought to have maintained a correct conduct. But since you swerved from the royal path, it was my duty as a Kshatriya to inflict capital punishment upon you."

Vāli made a gesture of disgust at Rāma and said contemptuously:—
“O fie upon the rationality of a Kshatriya who has the insolence to call his fellow-being a beast, and has the brutality to butcher him in cold blood, and when questioned, has only a subterfuge to offer in self-defence! Instead of answering me straight, you have been constantly shifting your ground. Be it so. The sands of my life are running fast and I have only a few moments to live. But before I close my eyes, I shall still run you down in the new position you have taken and die in moral triumph over you. Now tell me if a certain conduct is condemnable in a king, does the same conduct, or why, even worse than that, become commendable in his brother?”

Rāma could not guess what Vāli was driving at. He held his tongue and also his breath in apprehensive eagerness to hear more. Vāli proceeded calmly:

“Some time ago, Rāma, I had to leave my kingdom to quit scores with an old enemy of mine. Before I went, I entrusted my subjects, my wife, and my son to the protection of my brother Sugrīva, whom I trusted as my own second self. But he betrayed my trust.* He

* Vālmīki: IV. 55.

कथं स धर्मं जानैति इते भानं दुरात्मना।
युध्यायः भिन्न-भिन्नं गुहायाः: पिलितं सुभस्॥

Here Aṅgada says, “Does my uncle Sugrīva know even the meaning of virtue? He is so wicked at heart that with fratricidal intentions he closed up the mouth of the cave, which my father had entered to pursue his enemy and which he had been asked to guard.”
plotted against me and spread a rumour that I was dead. Then setting aside my son who was the legitimate heir, he usurped the throne and dragged my wife, Tārā, into his harem. He thus committed an act of treason against me who was not only his king but also his elder brother and therefore as venerable to him as a father. He also committed an act of outrage upon Tārā who was his elder sister-in-law and therefore as sacred to him as a mother. But though he stinks of treachery and incest, you kiss him as a paragon of virtue, and kick me as a monster of vice. Is that your idea of equity and justice?"

What reply could Rāma make? He quietly knelt down by the side of Vāli, stroked his quivering body gently with his hand, and dropped a tear on his face.* He assured him that though policy would compel him to place his brother on the throne, yet he would carefully safeguard the life and interests of his son. Simultaneously with the coronation of Sugrīva, he would install Angada in the office of Crown Prince, so that during the life-time of his uncle he would have equal share in the administration, and after his death succeed to the throne with-

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इत्येवमातृस्य वचो निषायम्
संजातवायः परवीरहन्ता
शामो सुहृत्व विश्रान वस्मृत

i.e. "On hearing the pathetic words of Vāli, the best of heroes, the eyes of Rāma, his slayer, were filled with tears and his mind was suffused with gloom."
out any hitch. On hearing these words a look of calm came over the face of Vāli, his body ceased to writhe with pain and his soul happily flew to heaven.*

† But for Rāma’s strict vigilance, Sugrīva would have secretly made away with Aṅgada, as is evident from the following apprehensions of Aṅgada himself:—

Valmīki : IV. 55.

कथं शानुकुलीनं मां सुग्रीरो जीवसम्भवति।
उपांशुदेवं हि मां बन्धनेनोपवासते।
शाठं कृतं नूर्वासश्च सुग्रीरो राज्यकालानाद्।

i. e. ‘How can Sugrīva ever let me live even, as I am the son of Vāli, his rival? He is so unscrupulous, cruel, and inhuman that on some pretext or other he will cast me into a dungeon and finish me off there quietly for the sake of ensuring the permanency of the kingdom for himself and his offspring.’

This was exactly Vāli’s anxiety also at the time of his death. Hence Rāma’s assurance was as it were a nectar to his passing soul. Compare in this connection the relations of Claudius and Hamlet in Shakespeare’s The Prince of Denmark.
CHAPTER VII

The Climax is reached

Having compassed the death of Vāli by an act contrary to all the laws of fair fighting and having disposed of his body honourably according to the rules of Vedic funeral, Rāma sent Lakshmana into the city to arrange for the installation of Sugrīva as king, and of Angada as Crown Prince, with form and ceremony, in pomp and splendour, appropriate to the occasion. It is highly significant that Rāma did not personally attend the ceremony of Coronation. Perhaps the tragic fate of Vāli and his dying words so much rankled in his heart that he had no wish to see with his own eyes the glorification of an ignoble wretch on the throne of a noble hero. Circumstances had compelled him to espouse the cause of Sugrīva and use him as a tool, but he could have no real liking or respect for him. He excused himself on the plea that as he was serving his term of exile in the forest, he could not enter any town or village for fourteen years.* He stayed away from the jubilations


चतुर्दश समा: सौभग श्रामं वा यदि वा पुरम्।
न प्रवेश्यामि हनुमन् पितुनिर्देशपार्यः॥

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in Kishkindhā, and that gives us a glimpse of his inner character as distinct from his political doings.

When Sugrīva had realised his ambition, gained the kingdom and regained his wife, he dropped Rāma completely from his mind and abandoned himself solely to sensual indulgences. Treacherous and licentious before, he proved ungrateful and voluptuous afterwards.* His love for his own wife was only skin–deep; what he passionately longed for was the lovely skin of Tārā. With her he sported day and night, leaving the kingdom to the care of his ministers.† Rāma waited in vain to hear from him that he had started mobilising the resources of his country and putting his men in fighting trim for the sake of a gigantic struggle with Rāvana. But no word came from him. The days passed without any activity. Precious time was being lost for nothing.


र् ह्यं म्रामेषु भोगेषु सक्तो मित्रायमतिश्रवः ।
अनावेषेन्द्रु क्षतरंश्च मित्रायचारिः च वानर ।
पूर्वं कृत्यां रामेण न तत्त्रत्रतिक्रोष्णि यत् ॥

Here Hanumān rebukes Sugrīva: “Since you do not repay the debt of gratitude you owe to Rāma and remain absorbed in carnal pleasures, you are evidently mean, ungrateful, false-hearted, and untruthful.” Even Angada says the same thing.

Vālmīki : IV. 55.

सत्यात्माणशूद्धितत्वं कत्रिकां महायशः ।
विस्मृतो राष्ट्रो देन स कस्य सकारस्मेव स्मरेत् ॥

† Ibid : IV. 29. मल्लिकृष्ण न्यस्तकार्यं च कामुपचारिण स्थितम् ।
विहस्तमहोपार्ज तारया सहितं कपिद्र ।
इभीवं समुपात्मस्म हनुमाणु वाक्यमब्रवीत् ॥
The interminable delay on the part of Sugrīva convinced him that his lacheryous ally meant to leave him in the lurch, thinking that he had now nothing more to gain from him. He grew uneasy and lost his patience.* He sent Lakshmana to warn him in categorical terms that if he did not fulfill his part of the contract at once, he would soon find himself in hell. Hanūman, the most capable man in Kishkindhā and ever true to his oath of loyalty to Rāma, also gave Sugrīva a bit of his mind. He told him what the consequences would be if he procrastinated any further.† The threat told, and Sugrīva was roused from his sloth to brisk activity.

When Sugrīva saw the fury of Lakshmana and heard his message, when he saw Hanūman and other supporters of his altogether out of sympathy with him, he realised the insecurity of his position. He knew full well that Rāma still held the people so completely under his hypnotic power that if he so willed it, he could raise the devil against him in no time and bring about a revolution in Kishkindhā in favour of Angada. He felt that he was standing on the brink of a volcano which might burst any moment and engulf him. Fear took possession of him and drove out all lust from his mind. His conscience

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* *Ibid*: IV. 28. सुग्रीवस्य कृतार्थस्य मलादमभिक्षुः।
शोकस्य सम विस्तीर्ण:। अपरो भावः। रावण:।

† *Ibid*: IV. 29. क्रृष्टे चेतातिज्ञानीपि राजस्वम महादत्त:।
सघनर्वं निषिद्धार्येहों दृष्ट्यं वाचिनम्।
न तं वंदनविधिः पंथा वेन शाली हृतो गत:।
was now fully awake. Trembling from head to foot he went down on his knees before Lakshmana and cried for mercy. Thereafter he put himself entirely at the service of Rāma and worked vigorously to help forward his undertaking, rather through dread of punishment from him than from a sense of gratitude to him.* Preparations were set on foot in right earnest. Recruitment, training, and equipment of armies started all around. The storing of war material began. Arrangements for regular supplies were made. Reconnaissance parties were sent in various directions under competent leaders.

To Hanūmān were entrusted two vital tasks. If he succeeded, it would be plain sailing to victory; if he failed, victory would be despaired of. The first task was to discover a passage across the channel for conveying large bodies of troops easily, quickly, and safely to the shore of Laṅkā. Unless such a passage was discovered, further movement would come to a standstill. The second task was to win over Vibhīshana and spread out through him a net-work of informers, saboteurs, and underground workers within the stronghold of Rāvaṇa. Unless the enemy was weakened from within, his defeat from

* Vālmīki : IV. 55.

Here Angada says, "Sugrīva has sent us out to search for Sītā only through fear of the wrath of Lakshmana and not through abhorrence of his own sin of ingratitude. How can there be any trace of virtue in him?"
without would be a sheer impossibility. In addition, Hanūmān had to report on the coastal fortifications of Laṅkā, their vulnerable points, the intricate lines of forts, ramparts, and moats that surrounded the city, the gates and their protection, the strength and condition of the army, the size and position of military buildings.* In all these tasks, though extremely difficult, Hanūmān succeeded marvellously well by dash and courage, tact and foresight, and by presence of mind and readiness of resource. In fact he smoothed the path of Rāma and placed victory almost within the hollow of his hand. Rāma had only to close his fingers upon it. Hence the name of Hanūmān is permanently associated with that of Rāma as the ideal servant of the ideal master. He symbolises the spirit of loyal, intelligent, and disinterested service, which carries out orders at all costs, always discovering ways to get over difficulties and never inventing excuses to fight shy of them. He is our god of strength, purity, and devotion. There is not a village in India but has a temple of Hanūmān in it. Vālmīki says:—

"He is the best of men who, when appointed by his lord to a work of peculiar difficulty, does it as willingly and whole-heartedly as though it were his own. On a singular mission was Hanūmān

* Vālmīki : VI. 3.

प्रतिज्ञापाह काकुलस्यो हनुमन्तमथातः 
करति दुर्गाणि लंकाया दुर्गायास्तदृशवीष्य में।
बलस्य परिमाणं च द्वारस्तुरग्रीष्टमयमपि।
गृहितकं च लंकाया रक्षां सदनानि च॥
sent and with a signal success he returned. Indeed, he never stooped to meanness in life and always served Rāma with loyalty."

Now with regard to the first task of finding a passage, although the distance from India to Lankā is said to be eight hundred miles in Vālmiki,† yet the position as it actually stands to-day is as follows. About two miles from the Indian coast, is the Island of Rameshwaram, which is eleven miles long and was, in the opinion of geologists, joined to the mainland some centuries ago by a rocky causeway. About thirty miles from the Island of Rameshwaram is the other island of Manar, which is nearly eighteen miles in length and is just off the opposite coast of Ceylon. Between these two islands stretches a straggling chain of sandy rocks, submerged but not much below the surface of water, impassable to ships of burden and known in the present day as Adam’s Bridge. Thus though the distance of Lāṅkā from the mainland is sixty miles from shore to shore, yet the real problem before Hanūmān was how to negotiate the thirty miles of salt water between the two islets of Rameshwaram.

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* Vālmīki : VI. 1.

यो हि गृह्यो नियुक्तः सन् मृतोम कर्मणि हुज्जते ।
कुर्मचतुर्भुजम् तमाः पुत्रोत्तमम् ।
तत्र व्रताम नियुक्तेन हृतं त्र्येष हनुमता ।
न च चतुर्म व्युत्कां नीलं श्रीरामचापिं तोपितं ॥

† Vālmīki : IV. 58.

इतौ द्राघः समुद्रस्य संपूर्णं जलमोणे ।
तवस्माल्लंका पुरी रम्य निर्मिता विशकर्मणा ॥
and Manar. Strong and agile as he was by nature, he discovered by dint of perseverance and defiance of danger this submerged chain of rocks, and by jumping from rock to rock with a pole he landed safe and sound on the shore of Lankā. That he traversed the distance in a single leap through the air is only a poetic appreciation of none the less romantic feat of Hanūmān in an unexplored sea. His struggle with the guardian demon of the sea during flight and with the watchful deity of Lankā on landing obviously refers to his fight with the sentries and watchmen, whom Rāvana must have posted on the island of Manar and on the shore to guard the hidden approach to his insular place. Hanūmān is said to have crushed both the demon and the deity with one stroke of his foot. It seems that the undisturbed peace which the Rākshasa sentries had enjoyed so far had lulled them into a false sense of security and made them careless. Naturally when Hanūmān came upon them all of a sudden, they were too unprepared to resist and hence could be easily overthrown. He caught them napping and sent them to eternal peace. So did Tānāji surprise the dosing sentries at Sinhagarh and, having dispatched them all without a noise, obtain a foothold on the wall of the fort.

Having arrived at the city of Lankā, Hanūmān remained hidden outside until dusk.* When the sun

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* Vālmīki : V. 2. इहां यदि तिष्ठामि स्वेच्छ स्वेच्छं संज्वुलं।
विनाशशुपास्स्यस्यम् महृद्धर्वर्द्धच्छ हास्यति।

(Continued on next page)
went down, he assumed the disguise of an old hunchback, bent double under the weight of years and therefore looking much smaller than his usual size. In this disguise he entered the city unnoticed and unsuspected. As he hobbled along the streets, watching and listening attentively, he gathered from the talk of the people that Sītā was kept in Asokavana under a female guard. At about midnight he bent his steps towards that place, and there gliding softly from tree to tree under cover of darkness, he arrived at a spot where at the foot of a Śinśapā tree sat a woman, listless and limp, with her head leaning back languidly against its trunk, wrapped up in her own thoughts. A few Rākshasa-women, who were supposed to keep watch on her, sprawled carelessly around, thinking that she was too frail to need any watching, too timid to play them any tricks. The night had far advanced and sleep had naturally stolen upon them all.* Hanūmān waited for a while and listened.

(Continued from the previous page)

The Tilaka: — पररेवना ममत्वाविनद्व निपास्यांमि भद्वर्ष्णिनिदिव्य तस्मादार्थं क्षचिद्विकाळिनांं निःशंकं स्थित्वा रजन्यं स्वेतेन्त्र रूपेण परंदु हस्तां गतो एण्ड्रमिष्ठतिपत्यालत्ययः ||

* The Aḍhyaṭma: V. 2.

ददरं शिशपावृष्टिमस्यौत्रनसतितिविनिपिद्दमु ||
तन्मूले च स्थितां दीनां शोक्धा नसरणमात्याम् ||
ददरं हनुमथसीतां, समताण्डशसित्रियः ||
दूषीमासंस्त्रकं तत्र निद्रावशाल्पागतः फः ||
No one stirred. All nature seemed hushed in silence. The moon rose softly above the horizon at this time and threw its mild splendour upon the face of the guarded woman. He peered at her closely. Could she be Sītā, the world-famous embodiment of feminine grace and charm? The contrast between the report and the reality struck him speechless. He was plunged in doubt for some time.* But who else could she be? The surroundings pointed to her being no other than Sītā. Obviously it was shame and sorrow gnawing at her heart that had altered her looks. Having thus set his doubts at rest and assuming that she was Sītā, he woke her up gently from her reverie. To convince her that he was a messenger from Rāma he showed her his ring. He then narrated to her briefly all the events that had happened since her disappearance from Pañchavatī. He assured her that preparations were almost complete to take full vengeance on Rāvaṇa and release her honourably from her dishonourable captivity. From her he learnt, among other things, that Trijātā was a jewel of a woman and that Saramā often told her, by way of consolation, how her husband sympathised with Rāma and detested Rāvaṇa. Who was Saramā? The wife of Vibhīṣaṇa! Indeed, this augured well for his negotiations with

* Vālmīki: V. 15 to 17.

प्रजागम नमस्तम्बो निर्मेंि निमर्मेडः।
स ददशे ततः सीतां विमुखऽप्रव परिप्रेमनीम्।
तत्त्वं शंदिकिते वुद्वव्यस्तास सीतां निरोक्ष्ये च।
तर्क्यामास सीताति कारणाश्यपदिद्भवः॥

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him. Bidding farewell to Śītā, he made his way to Vibhishana's house.

He found Vibhīṣaṇa too willing to join in the conspiracy against his brother to need much persuasion from him. He was, as it were, waiting to receive overtures from the enemy. Directly the bait of royalty was dangled before his eyes, his mouth watered profusely and his heart overflowed with affection for Rāma. Rāma’s cause appeared to him right and just; that of Rāvana, unjust and wrong. Why should it not? By the grace of Rāma he could, without losing a single drop of his blood, rise from the position of a nonentity to the dignity of a king, if only he betrayed his brother and helped secretly in the wholesale slaughter of his blood relations. It was a fine bargain, and who that has a speck of wisdom in his head would ever refuse it? Moreover, by working against his own kith and kin there was no fear of his ever losing face in the world; on the contrary, his face would be brightened for ever by coming over to Rāma; for even filth became fragrant by contact with flowers. Then why should he be infamous by associating himself with Rāma? The bards of Rāma would never show him up a traitor, but proclaim him a lover of truth, a supporter of right, and a pillar of virtue! The bargain was therefore struck in the very first meeting. It was decided that Vibhishana should continue to stay in Lankā as long as he did not fall under the suspicion of Rāvana. Till then he was to collect and supply up-to-date information of military value to Rāma. He must also through his agents spread discontent among the
people, telling them that Rāvana was unnecessarily exposing them to the horrors of war for the sake of a mere wench. He must carefully hide from their minds the real racial issue involved in the forthcoming struggle, the issue for which Rāvana had worked and toiled, fought and triumphed over the Aryans throughout his life,—the Aryans who had aggressively descended into the land of his forefathers, dispossessed them of their rich soil in the north, pushed them into the wilderness of the south and called them demons into the bargain, themselves posing as descendants of the gods! Vibhīshana was warned never to touch upon this vital question of racial survival in his propaganda. And so he agreed in his own selfish interest. Both shook hands with each other, fully satisfied in their own way, and parted.

Having thus metaphorically set fire to the enemy’s stronghold, Hanūmān returned as quietly as he had gone, but with one big difference. When he went, his heart had sunk in despair at the sight of the terrible fortifications of Laṅkā, bewildering in construction and bristling with engines of destruction. He says:—

‘Of what avail will the valour of our warriors be here? This Laṅkā can never be carried by assault. Even if Rāma lands here, what possibly can he do, though mighty-armed he may be? To try to breach these defensive lines is to dash one’s head against a rocky wall. The Rākshasas here are so fierce and determined that words of conciliation can never soften them; so loyal and united, that seeds of dissension can never take
root among them; and so tenacious and brave that they will rather sell their lives dear than yield an inch of ground cheap. If my first impressions prove correct in the end, there is not the ghost of a chance for us."*

Thus had Hanūmān felt depressed on arriving in Laṅkā. But when he came away from there, his heart was buoyed up with a hope of victory, which almost amounted to a certainty. He says:—

"By me has this Laṅkā been wounded in its vital part, from where it will now bleed to death. I have already consigned it to blazes, and before long it will be a heap of ashes. The fortifications may look impregnable from without, but the canker-worm I have planted inside will eat them hollow from within. Let the weapons of Indrajit dazzle the eye, but they will be as harmless as a firefly. I now feel confident that I can alone wipe out this island with all its inhabitants and finish Rāvana with all his relations. If I had the permission, I would have laid him low myself. But Rāvana is a noble soul after all and deserves to be dealt with like a hero on the open field. As a faithful servant of Rāma, my duty ends with sowing the seeds of victory. Let my lord

* Valmiki: V. 2.
now come here personally and reap a rich harvest of glory.”

This is, in my opinion, the true meaning of Hanūmān’s visit to Laṅkā. The fantastic description, full of cloying detail, given by several poets and dramatists as to how he laid the garden waste, where Sīta was by Rāvaṇa kept; how he slaughtered singlehanded the Rākshasa warriors by hundreds; how he slipped them one and all, but in the end let himself be caught to make further ghastly havoc; how he drew his tail to abnormal length, until it reached the cloudland; how they stripped the city naked to wrap it up from end to end; how they failed to set it aflame, when Rāvaṇa blew it into flames and had his whiskers all aflame; how with his fiery tail he jumped from place to place and setting the houses all ablaze, ‘burn’ the city to dust and ashes,—all such description, which is obviously meant for the amusement of the illiterate, the childish, and the credulous, must be rejected as

*Vaṁkī : V. 60.*

मध्ये निहता लंका, दर्शा भस्मीक्षुता पुरी।
तां लंकां तरसा हुन्दु रावणः च सबान्तवम्।
अहंभक्षो च पर्याप्त: सरास्वराणं पुरीम्।
यदि शक्तितत्त्वाणि दुनिर्त्ताणि संयुगे।
तात्यते निहतिन्ध्यामि विषमन्त्रामि राष्ट्रसङ्गः।
भव् हृदिम् दशस्वीवं्, स महात्मा दशाननः।
सहंस्या तिमिक्षो च सौ रावणे राष्ट्रसङ्गः।
आहे कोस्मयारुजद दास: पवनसंभवः।
मिति त्तमां रामस्व वशे तस्य भविष्यति।
altogether absurd and misleading. The Marathi poets are most guilty in this respect. They had to popularise the Rāmāyaṇa among the hill tribes of the Western Ghats, and therefore to catch the imagination of these backward people they painted each scene in glaring colours and with superhyperbolic touches. Thus the poet Rāmadāsa describes the adventures of Hanūmān in this way:—

‘When they applied fire to his tail, it smouldered and smoked, but would not burn with flame. Warriors came in successive waves to blow it into a blaze, but they all blew themselves out of wind. Then came Rāvana fulminating with rage, and as he emitted a strong current of breath, the smoking fire burst into flames, spluttering and crackling aloud. His moustaches and whiskers, which for years had grown to coarse luxuriance, burnt merrily and disappeared in specks of ashes. As the tail blazed forth emitting terrific noise, Hanūmān flew up to a tremendous height and burnt the Trikūta mountain on which the city of Lankā stood. Thrusting his tail into houses through gates, he set everything burning—towers and turrets, markets and stalls, buildings and palaces. The citizens ran about stark naked, helter-skelter, screaming and shouting.’*

* The Samariha Rāmāyaṇa: Sundarakanda (In Marathi).

ततर ब्रविता बित्त्र तेयं न लागे।
कठे पुरौधं तो विरंबीर मागे।

(Continued on next page)
What these poets forget is that Hanumān had been sent on an extremely delicate mission, and it would have been altogether impolitic on his part to indulge in monkey tricks and, by revealing himself thus glaringly, to put Rāvaṇa wise to the storm that was secretly brewing over his head. In Vālmīki he himself says:—

“The Rākṣasas here are so spirited and brave, so watchful and alert that to elude their vigilance and do our job is not easy. I must therefore move with great caution and commit no act of indiscretion. I must bear in mind that I am alone, with none to help me; hence I can

(Continued from the previous page)

These lines display a riot of fun, fancy, and mere sound, which can please only those who have not yet outgrown their child-hood or have just slid back into it.
be easily overpowered, arrested, and shot dead as a spy. Indeed, if my presence is detected here, the entire plan of my master will miscarry and I shall thus be guilty of an unpardonable breach of faith. Those ambassadors and agents who do not keep strictly to the orders they have received, and in their love of the spectacular, act in utter disregard of time and place are not the supporters but betrayers of their master’s cause.”

How inconsistent with these sensible words are the senseless descriptions of later Sanskrit and Prakrit poets! If Hanumān really possessed such miraculous prowess that he could run amok with impunity in the very stronghold of Rāvana and whip his troops to death with a single stroke of his tail, why did Rāma, after securing his inestimable services, plan the destruction of Vāli to gain his army and treasury, or threaten Sugrīva with dire results if he delayed in supplying him the necessary

* Vālmīki: V. 2.

महाजलो महाजीयं बलकर्त्तस्य रक्षसः
वंचनीया मया रघुवं स्वामिकार्यं प्रकुर्वता
मयि दण्डे तु रघौमयी रामस्य विदितात्
भवेदू व्यर्थमिदं कार्यं राक्षणानथमिन्चत
ह्राहं यदि तिष्ठण्मि रघून रूपेण संवृत
विनाशामधुमन्यम् महुर्तर्थश्च हास्यति
भृतां शृध्वं विनाशयन्ति देशकालिनिरोधिता
विक्रबं दृतमासाच तसं सुरूर्द्ध्वे यथा
शालकन्तीह कार्यौ दृतां पण्डितमालिनः
sinews of war, or even when fully equipped with men and material, still say anxiously*:

"Rāvaṇa is a formidable enemy, still so far beyond me that I do not know how I shall be able to get the better of him?"

Or even after the triumphant return of Hanūmān from Laṅkā, still pass nights and days restlessly over the problem as to how he should transport his troops across the channel, and say†:

"Hanūmān has done well in tracing the whereabouts of Sitā; but at the sight of this ocean, so vast and profound, my heart sinks within me. The monkey warriors are all assembled to fight for me, but how will they reach the battleground which is on the other side?"

Rāma certainly would never have lost his peace of mind, if Hanūmān could really swell to the size of a mountain and stretch his tail to interminable length. For he could as well then form an excellent bridge with his tail for the troops to cross over to Laṅkā. Or why, there was even no necessity of taking this trouble; for, by simply extending his tail, Hanūmān could drag the whole Island down to the feet of Rāma, just as Gulliver had pulled the entire fleet of ships at Lilliput with only one of his arms!

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* Vālmīki : IV. 29.

† Ibid : VI. 1.

Further discussion in the text.
Alas! How these puerile bards have degraded the glorious history of Rāma to the level of a cock-and-bull story. Alas! How they have smothered the genuine poetry of Vālmīki with their additions of tawdry art and taken such a stranglehold on the minds of our people that in times of crisis this land of Rāma has always looked to miracles from heaven, and sunk lower and lower in slavish mentality. The foreigners have taken full advantage of this monkey-tail-ridden faith of ours and put the yoke squarely upon our neck. We have borne the yoke loyally and in childish belief that some day Hanūmān would extend the backward appendage of his body to lift us up from the mire of drudgery and place us on top of the world. Thus though the Rāmāyaṇa is fervently read by us, the fruit thereof has gone to our conquerors from the North and the West.

When Hanūmān made his report to Rāma, he felt exceedingly happy. With tears in his eyes he embraced Hanūmān and said:—

“I have no words to express my gratitude to you, nor any reward to offer you in return for your services. I simply call you my all-in-all. Henceforth you will have permanent place by my side.”

1 The Adhyātma: V. 5.

हनुमस्ते क्रमं कार्यं दशेकरि छहुत्करम्।
उपकारं न परशामितः तव प्रत्युपकारिणः।
इदानं ते प्रवचणमं सवस्यं मम मास्ते।
इत्यालिंग्य हनुमस्ते साठ्नेनो रघुचरम्।
Hence it is that no temple or picture of Rāma is said to be complete without the figure of Hanūmān close by. However, thereafter began the movement of the troops from Kishkindhā towards the southern coast. The march of the army is graphically described in the Adhyātma as follows:—

“Sugrīva was the Commander-in-chief of all forces; the other Chiefs took their stations at the head of their respective divisions. The troops, well armed and appointed, formed a square with Rāma and Lakshmana in the centre. Their numbers were large and their spirits high. Day and night they marched on in the most regular order, swift as the wind, passing lightly over mountains, wilds, and sands in utter scorn of the difficulties of the route, subsisting on the fruits and roots of the forest, maintaining inter-communication among themselves with sounds of shells, encouraging each other to hasten on to exterminate Rāvana, the pest of the world, until they reached the southern shore, where they looked with astonishment at the waves of the sea, rolling one after another with a tremendous noise.”

When the shore was reached, the first concern of Rāma was to see that the troops were comfortably encamped in huts made of leaves. Then as he lay cogitating about his further moves, there came a report that Vibhīshana had arrived with four of his principal conspirators. It was a happy news, which promised a solution of his immediate difficulties.

After the departure of Hanūmān, Vibhīshana could not stay long in Laṅkā, but had to fly for his
dear life. Rāvana somehow came to know of his secret dealings with the enemy and subversive activities in the kingdom. One day he called him into his presence and gave it him hot:

"You are a disgrace to the Rākṣasa race. I cry shame upon you. If you were not my brother, your head would not have remained on your shoulders by now. You are a dirty dog and I don't wish to see your wretched face again. Get out of my sight, if you love your life. I would rather dwell with my deadly enemy or even with a furious poisonous serpent, but never with a person like you who wish well to the enemy and speak ill of me, who harbour blackest intentions towards me under a show of friendly instructions and carry a rotten soul within under a saintly face. You say that it is dishonourable to carry off another's wife, but is it honourable to mutilate another's sister? I have at any rate given the honours of a lady to the wife of Rāma, but he treated my sister worse than a dog. The dog loses only his tail, but she has lost her face for ever. If you had any sense of honour, you would never plead for him, but cry for revenge like me. Shameless as you are, you advise me to kiss the feet of Rāma who has kicked us all on the head. Well, if it pleases you, do it yourself."

(Continued on next page)

* Vālmīki: III. 37, VI. 16.

वसेष्यां सप्तनाम हयेनासीविषेण च
न हु मित्रउपादेन संवरस्थासेविना
Vibhishana did not beg of Rama his bhakti, as is popularly believed, but kingdom, life, and happiness for himself at the cost of his own brother, in destroying whom, root and branch, he promised his fullest help to Rama to the best of his ability. Rama knew him to be as despicable as Sugriva and would not promise him anything in return, until he had disclosed to him first all the secrets of Ravana, his weaknesses and strength. It is only after Vibhishana had laid the required information at his feet that he ordered a pot of water to be brought from the sea, and having emptied it on his head, declared him solemnly the future Lord of Lanka.* After this

(Continued from previous page)

* Valmiki: VI. 19.

भवद्वस्तं हि मे राज्यं जीवितं च सुखानि च।
राज्यानां यथे साह्यं करिष्यामि यथाचर्मू।
तत्र तद्वनं शुचि रामो भवनमनवैतुः।
आश्वयं समं तलेन रावणस्य क्षारश्चर्मू।
तथोक्तकं रामस्तु परिष्वयं विभीषणमू।
अन्वतीक्ष्मणं श्रीतं समुद्रजलम्भय।
तेन चैम महाप्राणमभिक्षु विभीषणमू॥
Rāma called together a Council of War to consider how they should cross the ocean. Some suggested swimming, others jumping. Vibhīśaṇa laughed down their suggestions and said that Laṅkā could never be taken by going there in driblets, but must be assaulted in force all at once. He, therefore, insisted that a bridge should be built on the foundation of the rocks that lay hidden from shore to shore. His proposal was fully approved by Rāma and unanimously accepted by all.* Thereupon Nala, the engineer, offered to undertake this task, if the required material was supplied him in sufficient quantity. Forthwith labour gangs were dispatched in all directions; and they brought trunks of trees, slabs of stone, ropes of grass, and tendrils of creepers, and gave them all to Nala. The bridge was put through in five days,† a remarkable achievement like that of the Japanese in the last Great War, when they constructed a causeway from Malaya to Singapore in a couple of days and took the British general completely by surprise and altogether unprepared to meet the sudden attack. When the bridge was completed, Rāma ordered Vibhīśaṇa to go


† Vālmīki: V. 22.
ahead and establish a bridgehead on the other side. This step taken by Rāma shows his foresight. Treachery was till then unknown among the Rākshasas, and therefore it could not be said with certainty whether Vibhīśaṇa was really a traitor or only luring Rāma to his destruction. If it transpired that he was playing a double game, he could at once be shot dead; if he was correct in his information about the safety of a particular landing place, he could be further trusted. Moreover his presence on the enemy’s shore with his Rākshasa followers would not excite suspicion for some time, at least until the whole army had safely crossed over and dug itself in.*

Before the army had crossed the sea, Rāvana was informed by Sārdūla, an officer of the Intelligence Department, about its arrival on the southern coast in large numbers, its preparations and its future intentions. Rāvana sought to break up its strength by means of dissension. He asked his trusted spy, Śuka, to enter the enemy’s camp in the disguise of a vānara and deliver the following message to Sugrīva:

“I wonder at your alliance with Rāma. How does it affect you at all, if I brought away his wife? Why should you waste your precious

*Ibid : V. 22. ततः पारे समुद्रस्य गदापाणिधिमिश्रणः। परेषामभिभावार्थमिन्दिमिश्रणः। सहृ।
तलस्य रामः कैण्यस्य अभृतः सहवल्लभः।
अन्ये मेघेन गच्छति पार्वतीः स्वे पछ्वेगमः।।
blood on his account? You have now nothing to gain from him, but everything to lose by fighting for him. You will please remember my pact of friendship with your brother. I wish to continue the same relations with you and I hope you will reciprocate my sentiment.”

But the camp was so well-guarded under the directions of Hanūmān that before Śuka could get in touch with Sugrīva, he was caught and produced before Rāma. Rāma ordered that he should be kept under arrest until the army had safely landed on the other shore. Thereafter he was set free and asked to tell Rāvaṇa that he was now held in a vice and could not escape.

There is an adage in Sanskrit that whom the gods wish to destroy, them they deprive of clear thinking. Rāvaṇa held the enemy so cheap and counted so much on the diplomatic ability of Śuka that having sent him away to talk over Sugrīva, he gave no more thought to the matter and went to sleep. Sārāṇa, another spy of his, tried to wake him up, but he did not choose to stir either during the construction of the bridge, or when the army was crossing over. It is difficult to account for his inactivity. He was a great warrior, famous for his

1 Vālmīki : VI. 20.

शान्तस्य वचः शुष्का हुर्को प्रोकाच रावणः ।
सुप्रीववे वृष्टि गत्वाचार राजान्यो चवनान्यमः ।
अहं वधायर भायाम् राजयुक्तस्य धीमतः ।
किं स्त्व तव सुप्रीवेः कित्विन्या प्रति गम्यताम् ।
न कर्चनाथायैव नास्त्यनाम: तथापि मे श्रावस्मो हरीश।
lightning tactics, but on this occasion he showed peculiar indifference and sluggishness. Was he too chivalrous to attack the enemy at a disadvantage and smash him on the narrow passage at sea? Or was it a part of his strategy to have him on his own ground, then cut off his retreat and annihilate him to the last man? Whichever way the truth may lie, he was mistaken either way. He had only one chance, the first and last, of averting his doom, and he let it slip like the Scottish King, James IV, at Flodden, 'where shiver'd was Scotland's spear and broken was her shield.' The feelings of the Scottish bard at this overwhelming disaster break out as follows:—

From Flodden ridge
The Scots beheld the English host
And heedful watch'd them as they cross'd
The Till by Twisel Bridge.

And why stands Scotland idly now,
Dark Flodden, on thy airy brow,
Since England gains the pass the while,
And struggles through the deep defile?
What checks the fiery soul of James?
Why sits that champion of the dames
Inactive on his steed,
And sees, between him and his land,
Between him and Tweed's southern strand,
His host Lord Surrey lead?
What 'vails the vain knight-errant's brand?
O Douglas, for thy leading wand!
Fierce Randolph, for thy speed!
O for one hour of Wallace Wight,
Or well-skill'd Bruce, to rule the fight,
And cry—'Saint Andrew and our right!'
Another sight had seen that morn,
From Fate's dark book a leaf been torn,
And Flodden had been Bannockbourne!
The precious hour has pass’d in vain,
And England’s host has gain’d the plain;
Wheeling their march, and circling still,
Around the base of Flodden hill.

How similar would have been the pathetic cry
of a Rākṣasā bard, if he had survived the massacre
at Lanka!

The movements of Rāma were so quick that by
the time Rāvana awoke to the full gravity of the
situation, he was hemmed in on all sides and cut off
not only from the rest of the world but also from
the rest of the island, as Napoleon III was at Metz
in the Franco-German War of 1870. The blockade
of Lanka was complete. Vibhīśaṇa proved an
acquisition of inestimable value. He had first-hand
knowledge of the topography of the place, of the
fortifications and weapons of Rāvana, of his generals
and their specialities in offence and defence, of the
numbers and disposition of his troops, of the location
of his granaries and armouries and manufactories, of
the secret passages leading to and out of the city.
This knowledge he laid at the feet of Rāma. Vālmiki
tells us that Rāma posted his generals and marshalled
his troops according to the directions of Vibhīśaṇa,
so that each of his generals might be more than a
match to the opposing general on the other side,
My secret agents, he said, have just returned from the city with valuable information, which you will carefully listen to before making your dispositions."
The details need not be given here. The point that stands out clearly before us is that Rāvana was crushed not so much by the prowess of Rāma as by the treachery of his own brother.

According to the Tilaka commentary on Vālmīki, the siege of Lāṅkā lasted for eighty-eight days, starting on the second day of the bright fortnight of Māgha and ending on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of Chaitra.† During this period the tide of battle swung to and fro, causing elation and dejection in turn among the combatants. Both the sides are said to have suffered heavily; rivers are said to have flowed from their blood, and hills to

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* Vālmīki : VI. 31.

† The Āgniśeya :—

i. e. The war at Lāṅkā lasted for eighty-eight days. But there were fifteen days of truce, on which both the sides abstained from hostilities by mutual agreement. Thus the actual days of fighting came to seventy-three.
have been formed of their corpses. But whereas the
ranks of the Rākshasas thinned out considerably,
those of the Vānarás continued at their original
strength. The poetic explanation, as given in Vālmīki
and others, is that Hanūmān frequently brought
miraculous herbs from the northern mountain
Gandhamādana, whereby the dead on his side were
soon restored to life and were ready again to resume
the fight. But the Rākshasas, once slain upon the
field, never rose to their feet again and had to be
thrown into the sea.* The rational explanation
seems to be that since Rāma had taken care to see
that his communications with the mainland were
held intact, he received regularly from the north
reinforcements in men and material; thus his losses
were quickly made good, whereas those on the side
of Rāvana could never be replaced, as he was in a
beleaguered fortress.

The insidious propaganda conducted by the
agents of Vibhishana inside the city and the irre-
parable losses inflicted by the soldiers of Rāma from
outside told in the long run. Serious discontent
broke out among the citizens. Cries and curses
filled the air. Rāvana who had been the idol of his
people now fell in their estimation to the level of an

* Vālmīki : VI. 74.

गत्वा हनूमन गवालमुन्योपरि सागरम् ।
मूलसंहीतनं गृह्य हरीम्याणिस्त्व योजय ।
आषाशिमित्व कपयो मुतास्ते पुनःरतिथिताः ।
वे हन्यन्ते र्गो तत्र राजसाः कपिलेनैः ॥
हत वृक्षेष्टु क्षिपर्यन्ते करौ एव दु सागरे ॥
idiot. There was not a woman in Lankā but had lost her husband or her son or her brother. They all wailed:—

"Damnation to Śūrpaṇakhā who incited Rāvana to bring Sītā for our destruction! For her sake he incurred the deadly hostility of Rāma. If he had only listened to the salutary advice of Vibhishana, this city of gold, where birds of paradise warbled day and night, would not have been the city of corpses, with vultures swarming over the putrid flesh."

In spite of these lamentations continuously splitting his ears, in spite of his losses mounting higher each day, in spite of the growing shortage of everything and increasing difficulties on all sides, Rāvana conducted the defence admirably and retained his hold on the army so well that in spite of its diminishing strength it fought on with undiminished vigour. The exploits of Indrajit gave Rāma moments of blackest despair. He says:—

"How are we to overcome this young hero who rules the fight everywhere and is yet nowhere to be seen. He dazzles us with his missiles and baffles our efforts to locate him. Our army

* Vālmīki: VI. 94.


disturbance of the brahmanas. 
the great disturbance. 
this is not the time to honour the 
there is no need for rescue. 
the enemy's domain. 
the army.
has lost so many of its bravest officers that it now looks desolate. We two have been disabled and put out of action. What hope is there now for us?”

From this despondent mood he had to be roused and stirred to action by his friends:

“Don’t forget yourself, Rāma! Where has gone your buoyant spirit? This is not the time to feel sore over our wounds, but to quit scores with our enemy. Indrajit may have worked havoc, but we can still rise superior to him, if we keep our wits about us. If you despair, our army will soon dissolve into a rabble rout. Be on your mettle, Rāma, and look the present situation squarely in the face.”

Indeed, Indrajit proved true to his name. But what could mere valour do against heavy odds? He knew that he was fighting with his back to the wall and that the end was within sight. In the last resort

* Valmiki: VI. 73.

† Valmiki: VI. 84.
he turned to one mysterious weapon of his, which he had designed but not yet materialised. He had so far shrunk from using it, as he could not gauge its effect. Perhaps it might plunge all, friends and foes alike, into one common ruin. But he now decided to give it a tangible shape and use it, whatever the outcome might be. Let the world turn over a new leaf and start afresh, if it came to that. As the weapon was being forged to perfection in a hidden factory under his direct supervision, as Hitler’s was in Germany, the spies of Vibhishana hurried to convey him the news of it. He warned Rāma that if Indrajit’s weapon saw the light of day, it would darken his future for ever. Even a moment’s delay was fatal. Let Indrajit and his weapon be both buried together, while they were still underground. Thereafter Rāvana would be as good as dead.* Lakshmana therefore went at once with select troops by the secret passage shown by Vibhishana and took Indrajit unawares. Though caught in a corner, he did not cry quarter, but fought to the death like a true hero.

Rāma was at this time supplied with an armoured car from the north by the king of kings and with a new miracle of destruction by Agastya from

* Vālmīki: VI. 84.
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० वैश्य निदुरुमिल्लामध्य प्रायम् होमें करिष्यति ।
हुराष्ट्रेण भवस्तवेव संग्रामे राज्यनात्मकः ।
हस्तमण्ड्रे क्रेष्यार्थभाविः, राज्यणि निविष्टिः चासः ।
त्याजयिष्यति तस्य ततो वात्यो भविष्यति ।
हते तस्मानहतं विद्य राज्यण समुद्रद्रणम् ॥
Danḍakāranya.* Thus equipped, he felt doubly confident. Rāvaṇa, on the other hand, saw nothing but darkness around him. With the death of his son, the bravest of the brave, and with the destruction of his arsenal, the chief source of his strength, his last hope vanished. Now to wish for victory was mere self-deception, but to ask for quarter was a humiliation worse than death. Therefore he was determined to fight to the last ounce of his blood. He took the field in person and, with a few remnants of his forces, performed such feats of valour that Rāma–Rāvaṇa–battle came to be called by the poets a unique fight, unprecedented before and unsurpassed afterwards. Even Rāma admired him thus:—

“How brilliant is his martial spirit! He dazzles the eye with his splendours, as though he were the sun itself. As he stalks on the battlefield, it seems as if he is the King of Terrors in human form.”†

He fought on unmindful of his wounds and many a time had to be brought back in a senseless condition from the battlefield. But when he recovered his

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* The Adhyātma : VI. 11.

रघुर वं देवराजेन प्रेमपितो विजयाय ते।
अमेधं कब्रं लघुंं विद्युतारुणियं ध्वनि॥

Also Vālmīki : VI. 105.

उपागमस्याविद्रोहमु अगस्त्यो भववास्वतः॥
गुहाणेदं महावाहे गुहां राजुविनाश्यत॥

† Vālmīki : VI. 59.

आदित्य इव दुर्वेश्यर्थोभिमानिति राजवा॥
सूते: परिवृत्तस्तीत्येदिशवपदलिङ्गगतः॥
consciousness, he refused to lie in bed and returned to the fight breathing freely, though bleeding profusely. His rebuke to the charioteer is worth quoting:—

"With whose permission did you bring me away? Do you take me effeminate, weak, or afraid of death? I would rather perish facing my enemy than seek safety by turning my back. Take me straight to the battlefield again and remember that Rāvana never returns home except as a victor crowned with laurels, or as a corpse bestrewn with flowers."

Thus fighting manfully for eighteen days, unconquerable as ever in spirit, he died at last a hero's death.† He was great. While he lived, he rose to the zenith of power and prosperity. His race had been lying in obscurity since the battle of Tripurī; he raised it to conspicuous heights by tremendous effort. Such was the magnificence of his rule that the island of Laṅkā under him came to be spoken of as paved with slabs of gold. He possessed irresistible prowess, but lacked liberal policy; hence though he allowed the Aryan kings to retain their thrones

* Vālmīki: VI. 104.

† The Agniveśyā:—

�ध्यादेशादिनै रामो दैर्यथे रावणं कर्षित ।
ढार्द्यः च चुक्कुपश्चय नावचकस्य चुर्दशैषीम् ॥
after surrender, he failed to establish his empire in the hearts of Aryan people. He was satisfied that they feared him and never cared if they loved him not. But when the edge of his sword was skilfully turned by Rāma and he had nothing to fall back upon, he ruefully remembered the words of Anaranya:—

“Though I die a victim to your brute force, yet the spirit of freedom is immortal. It will assert itself in due course and, through my scion, destroy you root and branch.”*

Nevertheless he was great. According to his lights he did his best to retrieve the fortunes of his race and to recover from the Aryans what he honestly felt was unjustly wrested by them from his forefathers. In the words of Stevenson, he meant well, did his best, and if he failed, was a faithful failure. If we judge him from this point of view, he ranks much higher than Alexander whom history calls Great in spite of overrunning countries which had done him no harm, much higher than Napoleon who is styled Great in spite of deposing hereditary kings and putting his underlings in their place. The following elegy sung by Vibhishana over his grave sums up his qualities:—

* Vālmīki: Vi. 60.

उत्पत्त्वपते हि महंते तेन तवं निहनन्यपि ।
इश्वर्यक्षतर्येन इश्वरकुक्तित्वेन यत् ॥
पर्योक्ते तत्मवया प्राय्यं, मौर्यं येन परमयं तथः ।
पर्स्मान्वो महेन्द्रेण मानुष्येण विनितितः:

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* Vālmīki: Vi. 60.
"He enjoyed the pleasures of life to the full, relieved the needy of their wants, rewarded the servants with liberal gifts, was kind to his friends and bitter to his foes. He pursued knowledge with a zest, worshipped the sublime with reverence, was bold in his undertakings and firm in his austerities."

Even Rāma pays him the following tribute of praise:

"With his valour blazing hot as ever, his courage unflinching, and his energy inexhaustible, he fought up to the last moment with supreme self-confidence and in utter disregard of death. He was far and away the greatest hero of his time. He perished no doubt, but not through weakness of nerve, but entirely by adverse turn of fate. War is after all a game of chance and no one can claim victory as his birthright; for the slightest thing may turn the scale in favour of one or the other. I may as well have been slain by him as he has been by me. However, with


अनेक द्वानि बनीप्रेषिः
भृकुट्यार्च भोगः निस्मुतार्च भृत्यः ।
भानानि भिन्नेषु समर्पितानि
वैराण्यस्मिनेषु निशापितानि ।
एयो हितार्चिनेषु महात्पाध्य
बेदान्तः कपचु चाच्याख्यात: ॥

बनीप्रेष = suppliant.
his death terminates all my enmity with him. I shed a tear for him as though he were my own brother. Let due honours be paid to his remains.”

But in spite of this the name Rāvana connotes to the Indian masses nothing but what is evil, what is sinful, what is despicable. Why? A fair-minded critic in ancient India solved the puzzle with remarkable insight, and in solving it also warned us against the wonderful power of propaganda. He says:—

“While the glory of Rāvana has shrunk to insignificance, that of Rāma has swelled out of all proportion. Both were extraordinary in their own way and worked honestly for the exaltation of their respective races. But in spite of the sameness of their merits there has been a vast difference in respect of their fame. This is all due to the magic pen of Vālmiki. Therefore, O ye rulers of earth, beware of poets! It does not matter what you actually are, but how you have


नायं विन्दो निन्दकेष्ठं समरे चण्डविक्रमं ।
अतुबलभावऽहस्तनाहं पतिवं शमशंकितं ।
नैकान्विकाजयो युध्ये भूतपूर्वः कथविचन ।
पैव्य इन्द्रेते वीरं पराना हस्ति संयुगे ।
मरणान्तनि वैराणि निवृंचं न योजनम ।
किष्तामस्य संस्कारे ममाप्येष यथा तत् ।
been painted by them. What you achieve in your lifetime may perish hereafter, but what these poets write in their books will live for ever. And what you have been shown in their immortal works will go down to eternity as gospel truth.“*
CHAPTER VIII

The Catastrophe

After the death of Rāvaṇa, Vibhīśaṇa was installed according to previous agreement on the throne of Laṅkā. Both he and Sugrīva accompanied Rāma to Ayodhyā, where they attended his coronation and made obeisance to him as their suzerain lord. Always courteous and never supercilious, Rāma treated them as his equals, introduced them to all as his truest friends,* and entertained them most cordially while they stayed. At the time of departure they had the rare honour of being presented with tokens of regard at the hands of Sītā herself † Naturally they returned to their respective kingdoms fully pleased with themselves, without any sense of humiliation which alone is the cause of all bitterness between the conquerors and the conquered. The result was that in course of time the Rākshasas and the Vānaras imbibed the culture and civilisation

* Kālidāsa: XIII.

† Ibid: XIV.
of the Aryans and ceased to exist as separate peoples. The astounding achievements of Rāma, coupled with his liberal policy, led to willing acceptance of his paramountcy all over India. A few partisans of Rāvana, such as Lavaṇāsura, went underground and from there carried on their subversive activities for some time.* But they were soon exterminated by Śatrughna, who thereafter came to be classed as a hero along with his twin-brother, the famous conqueror of Indrajit. Having established peace and order within the empire, Rāma then turned his attention to its North-Western Frontier, from where hordes of rapacious invaders have, time after time, poured into the smiling plains of Hindustan owing to sheer negligence of our native rulers in the past. The country of the upper Indus was at this time occupied by a turbulent people, the Gandharvas, whom Yudhājit, the king of Kekaya, had been unable to subdue.† At his request, therefore, Bharata was sent there, and he not only vanquished them

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* Kālidāsa : XV.

† Vālmīki : VII, 100.
but also disarmed them for good, putting the lute in place of the sword in their hand.* In this way the truculent tribe of the Gandharvas took to minstrelsy and dispersed into bands of musicians all over the world.

The last days of Rāma were exceedingly unhappy. And so were those of many heroes of history, who bent the destinies of nations in their lifetime and rose to heights of power and prosperity by ways which only the ends they sought could justify, but which justice itself must call unscrupulous and bloodstained: Witness the fate of Alexander and Napoleon, Ghazni and Ghory, Dupleix and Clive, Bismarck and Kaiser, Hitler and Mussolini! Indeed,

* Kālidāsa : XV.
भरतस्वतं गंधर्ववन शुष्क निद्रित्य ब्रह्मवन् ।
आलोच्यं भ्राह्मणमास समर्थाय धरणादुवथम् ॥

* Vālmīki : VII. 101.
निन्दृत्यामास तदा समुद्रे द्रे पुरोधम् ।
तवं निन्दृत्यायं हु पुरस्त गुण्डवललते ।
गोमत्यादिये रुचिरे गान्धारविषये च सः ॥

N. B. Taksha and Pushkala were the two sons of Bharata, who were posted respectively in Takshašīla, near-about Rawalpindi or Peshawar, and in Pushkālāvata, nearabouts Attock on the Western bank of the Indus. Gandhāra is the modern Kandahar. The adjectives used in connection with the country of the Gandharvas, namely, splendid, fruitful, blessed by Nature, exceedingly charming, and not easily accessible, point distinctly to Kashmir. Thus Gandharvadesa seems to have comprised Kandahar, the N. W. province, and Kashmir.
there is a good deal of truth in the Greek conception of Nemesis who keeps watch in the Universe and sees that no transgression of Heaven's law goes unchastised. Rāma had deliberately in the beginning made Sītā his pretext for destroying Rāvaṇa root and branch,* and the same Sītā in the end became involuntarily his goddess of retribution to destroy his peace and happiness for ever! Indeed, no sooner had he held the sceptre of universal sovereignty in his hand than the dart of divine vengeance entered his soul and remained there rankling till his death.† His own subjects, who had received him back with open arms, grumbled about his having received Sītā back into his arms. They strongly suspected her character and somehow felt that she

* The Adhyātma : II. 1.

Also the Kārma : सुपूर्व्या मायामयी सीताः स राजकव्येऽह्या

† Bhavabhūti : बुद्धशास्त्र मे राजः संप्रति विपर्यस्तो जीवलोकः। अया-बलिं जीवितप्रयोजनं राजस्य। अश्वमधुना भीरारण्यं जगत्। असारः संसारः। काट्ढियं शरीरम्। अश्वर्णोऽसि। कि करोमि, का गतिः। हुःशंसत्वेदनाचैन समे चैतन्यमर्यं। समूपवातिविभं प्राणविपर्णकीवस- यिं द्वि॥

i. e. Alas! No sooner do I ascend the throne than have I to abandon my dear Sītā! The world has suddenly turned topsy-turvy for me. The very purpose of my existence is now over. The earth now looks to me an unweeded garden that runs to seed: things rank and gross in nature possess it completely. Life has no charms for me. My body is doomed to tortures. To whom shall I look? Alas! Consciousness was implanted in me to suffer pain only: life is as it were a dart of adamant driven into my heart to lacerate its vitals.
had yielded to the seductions of Rāvana. Therefore they wished her expulsion from the royal family, lest their own wives should claim immunity from chastisement for similar license by reference to her. That Rāma should continue to bestow his caresses upon one who was obviously faithless to him filled them with dismay. Whispers of discontent buzzed throughout the city.* When these were reported to him by his spies, he could hardly believe his own ears. Therefore to ascertain the truth of the matter he consulted the members of his inner circle, and when they also testified to the correctness of the report, his heart sank within him.† For, to escape from public censure there was no other way left open to him but to cast her away callously.

Here two questions arise before us. Firstly, were the subjects of Rāma really so uncharitable that instead of feeling compassionate towards their own queen, who was still smarting under the recollections of her abduction, they should desire her banishment

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* Valmiki: VII. 43.

† Ibid: VII. 43.
from society to solitude, where she would again be an easy prey to the beasts of prey and to brutes in human form! Some of the later poets have seen this point and therefore, in order to save the people of Ayodhyā from the charge of inhumanity, they have, in place of Vālmīki's account, substituted another story of their own invention. They say that a certain washerman, whose wife had stayed one night at her father's place without his knowledge, turned her out of doors with these words that he would never allow her to cross the threshold of his house again, though Rāma might shamelessly take his Sītā back in spite of her six months' stay with a stranger. When these words, they say, were reported to Rāma by his spies, he was cut to the quick and forthwith decided upon the abandonment of his innocent spouse. This story does no doubt absolve the public of Ayodhyā from all responsibility in the tragedy that followed, but it does great injustice to Rāma as a constitutional monarch; for in taking such a vital step in life he is said to have acted upon the ravings of a single domestic tyrant and in utter disregard of the feelings of his honourable citizens. We have therefore to reject this story as spurious and puerile, and stick to Vyāsa, Vālmīki and Kālidāsa. Even Bhavabhūti, who has tampered with Vālmīki's narrative in several places, says that it is the citizens as a whole who compelled Rāma to act against his conscience: Witness the soliloquy he puts into the mouth of Rāma:—

"O ye inhabitants of towns and villages! Since you did not approve of my queen's stay
with me in the same house, I cast her away like a piece of straw in a tenantless forest and did not even mourn for her openly; I simply nursed my grief in private”*

Also,

“Alas! It is a great pity that the people have to be humoured even in their prejudices by those who want to maintain the good name of their family in public.”†

Thus my first question stands: Were the subjects of Rāma only thoughtless fanatics in demanding the expulsion of their ideal king’s wife?

Secondly, if Rāma knew his wife to be absolutely pure and his subjects altogether in error, should he allow their strictures to upset his sense of justice and humanity to such an extent that having rescued her honourably from the clutches of a brutal tyrant, he should throw her away dishonourably to

* Bhavabhūti: III:

हे भवन्तः पौरजनायः ।
न किञ्च भवतः देश्यः स्थायिने गुणे समाहितं तत्सू।
तृणगिरिनी च चछते र्यक्ता न चाच्युतशोचिता।

† Ibid: I.

कद्यं जनः कुलचन्दनुसरव्यञ्जनीयः।

‡ Ibid: III.

ज्योत्स्नामववेच मुदुवान्त्रक्षणकल्प्य।
कल्याणशिरसूरणावलित्का निषयतं विलुप्ता।

i.e. ‘Her delicate body, made up, as it were, of moonbeams or lotus fibres, must have been finished off by now by the eaters of raw flesh.’ This is said by Rāma who had turned her out of the palace on the pretext of sending her out on a pleasure excursion! Could such a procedure be even called honourable?
the monsters of the forest; he who had mercifully reclaimed Ahalyā from her sinful state, and reconciled her to her husband who had dropped her petrified with horror at the sudden exposure of her guilty amours? The later writers have failed to appreciate this Christian virtue of Rāma's and therefore have represented Ahalyā as an innocent woman, grossly deceived by Indra, unjustly turned to stone by Gautama, and accidently restored to her former self by the touch of Rāma's foot. But Vālmiki's account is different, free from miracle and consistent with human nature. He says that Ahalyā recognised Indra at once, though he had put on the garb of an ascetic; but instead of spurning his advances, she fell directly into his arms—thrilling with pride that her beauty should have set aflame the heart of so great a personage as the king of Heaven! Passionate by nature and wedded to a homely hermit against her will, she enjoyed to her heart's content the caresses of her heavenly paramour. Unfortunately Gautama returned home from his ablutions a little


**The Tilaka on the above :**

† Vālmiki : I. 48.
too soon. Their confusion gave rise to suspicion and
drew his attention perforce to the marks of dalliance
on their bodies. In wrath he actually mutilated
Indra and abandoned Ahalyā in a desolate place to
suffer the torments of hunger and thirst, of shame and
remorse.* In this helpless state she was discovered
by Rāma, who took pity upon her and, seeing that
her nature was purified by the fire of repentance,
reunited her with her husband.† Thus my second
question stands: if Rāma could be so compassionate
towards a fallen woman, should he be so cruel to
his own innocent wife?

When Rāma was informed of the scandalous
talk going on everywhere about Sītā, why did he not
convene a public meeting of his subjects, as his
father had done before, and give them a straight
talk as follows:—

‘Ye Citizens of Ayodhya, my dear but benighted
children! Do you pretend to know Sītā better than
I do,—she who had discarded all royal comforts for
my sake and forgotten the ills of forest life in the

* Idid: 1. 48. प्रेतामुक्तिः मूसौ सहस्राक्षस्य तत्क्षणान्।
तथा शस्त्रवा च वै शार्क मायोमयि च शच्चवान्।
यात्रा वीरहार्य तत्सनसी महाविश्वायिनी।
अहिस्त्वा सर्वशूद्वानाजापन्मे सिंधुसिविधिषिः।
i. e. the testicles of Indra fell to the ground, and Ahalyā was
subjected to starvation.

† Ibid: I. 48. गौतमो 5वि महायेजः अहित्यायहितः ुत्ती।
रामं संसूल्यं विभिन्नचतपर्तें महायेजः।
delights of my company,* who according to the
testimony of Trījaṭā was left alone by Rāvana to
nurse her own grief,† who on the evidence of
Hanūmān was reduced to skin and bone, and
changed out of all recognition by pining for me ?‡
That Sītā is inseparable from me. She and I have
but one heart, one mind, and one soul.§ Hence if
you tear her away from me, you will leave us both
bleeding for the rest of our lives.¶ Therefore if you

* Bhavabhūti : II.

त्वया सह निवस्तायमि बनेनु मृत्युगतिः।
दितीहारकोशासी स्नेहस्तुस्मि: स ताहयः॥

† Valmiki : V. 22.

उपागम्य तत्स्खयं चिन्तोऽ, ‘सीता किं तवानय।
विचरणया क्रयणवा मानुषया राष्ट्रेश्वर।
अक्षायं कामायनस्य शरीरसुपत्येष्व।
एवमुकतस्तु राष्ट्रस्य सुप्रक्ष्यस्ततो कपी॥

i. e. Then she drew near Rāvana and said, ‘Why do you bother
about this Sītā? See how dark in complexion and gloomy at
heart she is. To expect enjoyment from one who does not love
you at all is to consume our own body with vain desires.’ Thus
addressed, Rāvana turned back at once and let Sītā alone.

¶ Valmiki : V. 15.

तस्य संदिग्धे दुष्कर्म्भात्र्थतः निरीक्षे च।
पीडितां दूःकर्मस्ततपत्तां परश्रोणां वहनिनीम्॥

§ Bhavabhūti : III.

तवं जीवितं श्वसति मे हृदयं द्वितीयम्।
तवं कृष्णदीर्घत्व कमस्यैव त्वमष्टे॥

¶ Ibid : III. हा यजेन जानकि कृपाचिते। कटुं मो कष्टम।
द्वितुतं हृदयं गरधोरे, द्रिष्य न हु भिच्चते।
प्रहरति विषयमेवचेदी न क्रतन्ति जीवितम॥

(Continued on next page)
do not want her to be with me, you cannot expect me to be with you. I again repeat that you will either have me with her or not have me at all. I am not particularly attached to this kingdom of Kosala. You already know that I renounced it like chaff at the wishes of Kaikeyi. You also know that I conquered the much bigger empire of Ravana by the prowess of my arms and gave it away as a gift to Vibhishana. Still the earth is vast enough, where I can carve out a kingdom of my own choice, and with Sita live in a paradise of peace, honour, and joy. Pray do not for a moment think that I intend to leave you to your fate. I have seen to that part of my duty as your king. I am fully confident that you will be safe in the hands of Bharata who has already won your affections by his selfless administration for the last fourteen years. He will be assisted by his two brothers, Lakshmana and Satrughna, who have already immortalised their name as heroes. The empire is now so well consolidated from Gandhara in the north-west to Lanka in the south that I scent no danger from any quarter in the near or distant future. Thus I assure you that by my abdication, your interests will not in the least suffer. But, I am afraid, by my stay here on your conditions, my conscience will suffer most. Indeed, in the eyes of Heaven I shall be guilty of glaring injustice

(Continued from the previous page)

i.e. Where art thou, my darling! In tense agony does this heart of mine crack, but breaks not in twain. Fate cuts me to the quick, but cuts not the thread of my life.
to the most innocent soul on Earth.\(^*\)

'I admit that the king is a servant of the people and must therefore respect their wishes.\(^†\) But he is also their master and must therefore see that their wishes do not run counter to reason and sense.\(^‡\) If the king does not exercise his judgement and allows himself to be led blindly by the hydra-headed multitude, his kingdom will soon be a pandemonium and his majesty a mere jest. Your present wishes involve wanton cruelty to a blameless person. The being carried off forcibly is certainly a stigma upon one's honour, and that stigma has been wiped off, as you already know, with the blood of the abductor's whole family. But if you say that it is also the defilement of one's heart, character, and chastity, I do not agree with you. Even in the Kṛta age when Urvāsi was carried off by the demon Keśi, Purūravas having chivalrously rescued her took her to wife. However, I cannot force you to pay homage to Sitā against your will, nor can you force me to part with her against my conscience. When I took her hand in

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* Manu : VIII.

अद्वैतान्त्यग्रामश्रवणार्का दंडवासीश्रीपदार्धणुः
अयशो महापात्मोति नरकं चैव गच्छति॥

i. e. By punishing the innocent and sparing the guilty the king incurs infamy and goes to hell.

† Kalidāsa : IV. राजा प्रकृतिरत्ननात्

i. e. A king is called Rājā because of his primary duty to keep the subjects contented.

‡ Ibid : I. प्रजानां विनवायाधानानाग्नायाध्यायानात् पिता

i. e. A King is also a father to his people, because he has to liberalise their outlook and guard them from error.
marriage before the sacred fire, I swore that I would ever be a true, dutiful, and loving husband to her. That solemn oath you should not expect me to break for the sake of this throne of Ayodhyā. Indeed, I have no desire to rule over the people who have no faith in my convictions, nor conviction in my wife’s faith. Therefore adieu, Ye citizens! Now I ask my darling to entwine her arm around my neck,* and thus do we both depart from here to seek our fortune and our happiness elsewhere. Farewell!”

If Rāma had addressed the people thus, it would have surely taken the foul breath from their mouth and brought them a rolling to his feet. But such was the irony of fate that he could not look his own subjects full in the face and defend his chaste wife from their slanderous charge. Herein lies the tragedy of Rāma’s life. He had made use of a false Sītā to destroy Rāvaṇa, and though that false Sītā had nobly sacrificed herself in the fire at Laṅkā in order that with a bright face the real Sītā might live with Rāma for ever, yet ultimately it so turned out that

* Bhavabhūti : I.

तेन हि निर्मतयमवः ब्रह्म नामदुगमनाय।
जीवविनिव रसावस्त्रयश्य —
स्वेदकिर्कीर्कितमसग्न्यताम्॥
बाहुरीत्वमयुल्लुभित —
स्यत्वद्वित्वमिति ग्रामिः: ||

i. e. Clinging to me closely, my dear, and come along with me. Let your arm, bedewed with perspiration on account of excitement and fatigue, and therefore having the grace of a jewelled necklace dripping under the rays of the moon, be thrown about my neck to put new life as it were into my soul.
neither she could be saved from the disgrace of abandonment, nor he from the mortification of injustice. Herein applies my reference to Nemesis who spares none, howsoever great, if he swerves even a little from Truth. But how did this curious situation arise? Why did the public discontent strike him dumb, and leave him no other alternative but to act against his own conscience? The answer to this question requires a careful consideration of the circumstances under which Rāvana had carried off the so-called Sitā with ease.

Just prior to her abduction the behaviour of this false Sitā was so witless as to be unworthy of the intelligent daughter of Janaka and so atrocious as to be unbecoming to the kindly sister-in-law of Lakshmana. It is this which aroused a strong suspicion in the outside world that Sitā must have fallen under the glamour of Rāvana’s magnificence* and therefore, in order to elope with him quietly, had purposely got rid of her husband first and then her husband’s brother. Indeed, at the sight of the artificial deer, fashioned and mechanised skilfully by the Rākshasa artisans for Rāvana, Sitā had simply

* Vālmiki : VII. 43.

कीदशं हःदये तस्य सीतांमोगाः मुखम्।
लक्षामपि पुरा नीतामेकायोप्य रश्या ।
रश्यां वशमापञ्जनं कथं रागो न कृत्स्यति॥

Here the citizens of Lankā say, ‘What pleasure does his heart really feel in embracing such a wife as Sitā? We are amazed to find that he does not detest her whom Rāvana had carried to Lankā in his own arms, and who had lived completely under his influence!’
gone mad with a desire to have it. She pressed Rāma to pursue it and bring it alive, or at least kill it and bring its skin. The skin would do well for a blouse;* how lovely she would look in it! Or the skin might serve as a fine carpet to cover her bed of straw;† how delightful it would be to lie upon it and talk delicious nonsense with Rāma!

Rāma was so charmed by her enthusiasm that without further thought he made ready to go out, bow in hand. Lakshmana, who had hitherto held his tongue, could no longer keep quiet. What surprised him most was not that Sītā should be fascinated by the deer, but that Rāma should fall under the spell of both, and mistake an obviously dangerous artifice for a lucky sport of nature. He therefore assumed sternness and warned Rāma in the presence of Sītā in these terms‡:

* Anonymous: A Marathi song:—
कंतुकनिचा बाह लघा छेंद लागण।
राम निनुने गेले म्हणून मारण्या मूगा॥

† Vālmīki: III. 43.
निहतस्यस्य सत्त्वस्य जाबुनादमयतवच।
शाप्युपस्य विनीतायामिनिष्यामच्छयुपासितुम॥

शाप्युपस्य = a coarse fabric of plaited grass used by ascetics for sitting and sleeping; a mat.

‡ Vālmīki: III. 42 and 43.
हेमराजस्त्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट्राष्ट�
"Open your eyes, my brother, and see for yourself how unnatural this animal is! Can such deer ever exist in God's creation—with the body of gold bespangled with silver, with hoofs of emerald, horns of sapphire, eyes of ruby, and a tail displaying the gorgeous colours of a rainbow? Since it is artificial, it is unquestionably a contrivance of the enemy to lure us and lead us into a trap. Let us therefore be on our guard and watch its further moves. Leave it alone for the present."

But Sītā refused to listen to the voice of reason; on the contrary she became all the more insistent.* Like a giddy-headed girl she frisked about Rāma, clapped her hands, implored him, ogled at him, feigned anger, and did all that a Delilah would do to have her wish. Rāma, whom neither the appeals of his dying father nor the pathetic cry of his Bharata could soften, was now moved by her juvenile hilarity. He said to Lakshmana†:

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* Vālmīki : III. 43.

एवं तुवार्ण शौमिनि यतिवार्य श्रद्धिसितम् ।
उवाच सीता संद्याः मृगो हरति मे मनः ॥

† Ibid : III. 43.

पश्य लक्ष्मण वैवेद्य: स्पृहामुल्लभिताः विद्याम् ।
कस्य रत्नमयो नाम न मनो लोमकेन्मुः ।
अर्थी वेनायन्त्रवेन संब्रज्जलविचारतरू।
तमथ्यवैद्यास्त्रय: प्रासुरवय: लक्ष्मण ।
एतस्य मूर्तरत्नय: पर्यथे काश्चनलत्वचि ।
उपवेय्यति वैवेद्य नया सह सुमध्यम ।
हह तथं भव सत्त्वो वजितो रक्ष मैथुलिम् ।
हृत्तथात्भवर्मी आदय शीर्षमेष्यथि लक्ष्मण ॥
“Well, what you say may be true. But somehow I am inclined to agree with Sītā that the deer in front is a precious animal and worth having at all costs. Fortune favours the brave and the brave despise all risks. After all my darling has sacrificed so much on my account that in return I must at least grant her this wish. However I shall take your hint and stalk the deer warily. Have no fear on my account. You stay behind and guard Sītā vigilantly. Stand rooted to this spot and do not stir from this place on any account until I return.”

Some time after the departure of Rāma a piercing shriek was heard, ‘Alas! O Sītā: Help! O Lakshmana.’ These words were in mortal agony uttered by Mārīcha who was sitting inside the deer to control its movements and hold Rāma in play, as Ulysses lay hidden inside the wooden horse to effect entry into the citadel of Troy, or as the agents of Pradyota lay concealed within the iron elephant to take Udayana captive by surprise.* Lakshmana was so familiar with the voice of Rāma that its clever imitation by Mārīcha could not escape his detection. He twitched his face a little and remained still. But Sītā seemed smitten with anxiety for her lord’s life. She importuned Lakshmana to leave her alone and run to the rescue of his brother. But he refused to budge an inch. He said:—

“I am rather surprised to see you so easily taken in by mere imitation. You have yourself

* Bhāsa’s Pratījnāyaugandharāyaṇa.
witnessed the powers which Rāma, single-handed against many, has displayed on several occasions before. This at least, I expect, you have not forgotten. How do you, then, think it possible that today the matchless Rāma has been outmatched by the enemy? Compose yourself, Madam, and be at ease."

At these sensible words Sītā lost her sense and her temper completely. In fact, she went off her head and ceased to be her usual self. Without the slightest justification for it, she spoke daggers to Lakshmana, which cut up his very vitals. She charged him openly with malignant intentions towards his brother and with incestuous motives towards herself. She said† :

* Vālmiki: III. 45.

**व्यक्तं न कष्ठदयि दैवतः।
राक्षसा विविधा वाचो व्याहरन्ति महावने।
न्यासभूताशि बैदेहि न त्वा त्यक्तुमिहीतस्य।
अशाक्षरस्व बैदेहि भस्ति जेवें न संशयः।
अनिवार्यं बलं तस्य बैदेहिश्वतायसि।
अवध्यः समरे रामो न विन्तियिदुहांहसि॥

† Vālmika: III. 45.

**व्यक्तं ते प्रिंशं मन्ये स्मेहो भ्रातरि नासिति ते।
इच्छिषि त्वं विनश्यति रामे व्यक्त्रण मरक्ते।
मम हेतोऽप्रतिष्ठाणं नूर्षं कुल्यपाण।
अनायं क्रणांर्म प्रवक्तो मतलेन वा।
वरुणस्य वो राममेकमेको सुगन्ध्यसि॥

(Continued on next page)
"I have long known you to be despicable at heart. You followed us in exile not to serve your brother but to slay him, not to guard his wife but to grab her. Working secretly for Bharata, you want to rid him of his possible rival to the throne; and coveting the charms of my body, you wish to have me at your mercy as a helpless widow. But remember, you villain, I shall rather embrace fire than let you hold me in your arms. Away with you! I hate the very sight of your face."

As she raved thus, she tore her hair, beat her breasts, and cried her loudest.

Lakshmana was stunned at this outburst. How often during the last thirteen years of forest life he had remained alone with her at the behest of Rāma! But at no time did Sītā betray even a hint of suspicion about his character. What had now come upon her who was always so kind and considerate, guileless and sweet, noble and generous! He could disregard the first charge of treachery, because it concerned his relations with Rāma and Bharata, and they both would strongly testify to the contrary. But the second charge of lechery entered his soul like a red-hot iron, because it concerned his relations

(Continued from previous page)

विचारिः वा विष्णु तीव्रं प्रकेष्यां मुनाणम् ।
न तथैव राप्पत्रादन्तं कदापि पुरस्य स्नृते ।
एवं लक्ष्मणामात्र तथा चोकसम्बन्धिता ।
पाणिध्रवं शुद्धी श्रोकासुरें प्रजस्य हि ॥
with Sītā, and her testimony went decidedly against him. He said*:

"I know that women by nature are narrow in their outlook, malicious at heart, and disposed to rouse discord between brothers. But I have always held you far above them and worshipped you as my mother. Your words today clearly show that you are no exception to the general rule. Standing on the brink of destruction yourself, you are throwing mud upon me. My brother's commands are inviolable to me, but your words are insufferable. What a situation for me! However, let my brother say to me what he will, but I cannot stay here against your will. May the gods watch over you while I am away, and may we both see you safe and sound on our return! Adieu."

From these antecedents of Sītā's abduction it will be clear that the grounds on which the suspicions of the people of Ayodhya rested were irrefutable. Let us look at the whole affair from their point of view. Sītā's age at this time was at least forty-three. The Adhyātma says that her full breasts were distinctly

* Valmiki: III. 45.
noticeable from under her wedding garment when she put the auspicious garland on Rāma.* Thus she must have been at least eighteen at the time of her marriage.† Vālmīki says that she had stayed twelve years in Ayodhyā with Rāma before he went into exile.‡ If we add thirteen years and a half of forest life to this, her age at the time of her abduction comes to forty-three years and six months. Thus she was sufficiently grown up to be sober and not flighty, to be able to appreciate the warning of Lakṣmanā and judge for herself that the deer in front of her eyes was not a natural creation but a mechanical fabrication. Yet she cried for it like a fractious child, she pouted her lips at Lakṣmanā, and she wheedled Rāma to go in pursuit of it. Naturally the people of Ayodhyā felt that considering her age and her intellectual attainments, her conduct was most unbecoming and purposely designed to send away her husband on a fool’s errand. But there still remained one more obstacle in her way—Lakṣmanā. And him she attacked


śrītā śvāmēryā māthāṇa vatsrāntvaṁjīvitaṁśanā ||
raṣmāṇeśvarī nīkṣiṣṭya śvāmēraya śvādē yathā ||

† Vālmīki : III. 47.

abdādha hi varṇaṇa mām jñānani ghanvate |

‡ Ibid : III. 47.

vaditvamā dvādeśa samā iśtvākūṇāṁ vinicchānaṁ |
taṁ abhijñāde vāṁ rājāmāntrapitārājaḥ |
abhijñāenānāṁ rāmē sametō tyāgapat打败 ||
atrociously in his sensitive spot: she called him a secret spy and a hidden libertine. She had known him for twelve years in Ayodhya, and during the thirteen years of exile Rama had often stationed him behind to guard her whenever he went out alone to deal with troublesome night-rovers.* Had she ever detected anything suspicious in his looks and manners before? Then how was it that on this particular occasion, when his presence was most necessary, it suddenly dawned upon her mind that he was lusting for her! Did she not know that Rama was a strict disciplinarian and had ordered Lakshmana to stand rooted to the spot until his return? Then why did she create such a hysterical scene against him when he refused to disobey those orders? Was this not therefore her feminine trick to get rid of him somehow?

Let us ask ourselves a question, namely, whether she who behaved thus could be the real Sita. If she were, it would be strange that within a year or so after this incident she agreed to go alone

* The Adhyatma: III. 5.

Here Rama says to Lakshmana, “Take Sita to the cave for safety’s sake and stay with her until I destroy all these soldiers of Khara. Don’t argue, but obey me unhesitatingly in this matter.” Thereupon Lakshmana entered the lonely cave with Sita.
with Lakshmana readily, when Rama decided to send both on an excursion to the Ganges.* Indeed, no woman who has some modesty left in her would ever go on a pleasure trip with a man whose character she has once cut up hideously and whose feelings she has wounded brutally! My conviction thus remains unshaken that the Sitā of Ayodhya, who went innocently alone with Lakshmana for a sojourn on the river bank, was different from the Sitā of Janasthāna, who was suspected to have so contrived as to elope with Rāvana secretly. Who could this be, if the view of miracles is to be rejected? Obviously Śabari who at the instructions of Rama had dedicated her life, her body and soul, to his cause. It was she who, under his tutelage, played the part of an ill-tempered, giddy-headed, and light-minded woman, who first prevailed upon Rama to run after a trap-deer and then compelled Lakshmana to leave her alone.

Rama could never confess to his people—and no diplomat who has his wits about him ever would—that what happened in Janasthāna was skil-

* Valmiki: VII. 46.

i.e. When Lakshmana said to Sitā that he had been ordered to take her alone to the bank of the Ganges, she was mightily pleased and rejoiced at the idea of going with him. Lakshmana then helped her into the chariot and drove at full speed.
fully engineered by him to put Rāvaṇa apparently in the wrong and then to destroy him utterly with a show of righteous indignation. Such a confession would bring his own machiavellian policy into the limelight and scrape off the veneer of inevitable necessity from his war of planned aggression. Thus since he could not disprove the grounds on which the suspicions of his own people rested and since he could not repeat the trial by fire to prove the innocence of his dear Sītā, there was no other course but to abandon her. Merely to turn a deaf ear to the buzzing slander would not stop the mouth of the people. To abdicate the throne for her sake would not wipe the stain off her name. On the contrary, it would expose him to public sneer that he was so much under the spell of his wife that, forgetting his own dishonour in her ravishing beauty, he went wagging his tail behind her who had once run away from him, rather than stay with his people who had long been waiting for him.

Herein lay the tragedy of Rāma's later life. He had not let Lakshmana into his secret about the substitution of a false Sītā.* For Lakshmana was a


कः लक्ष्मणानां ज्ञातः मायासीतं मया क्षताम्।
ज्ञात्वापेनं वंचवित्वा शोभामि प्राहः यथा।

i.e. 'Lakshmana does not know that a false Sītā has been created in place of the real one. He has been kept in the dark, but I know the truth; still I must put up a fine show of grief.' Compare also Tulasī's lines:

लक्ष्मणहु यह मयं स जानाम्।
जो कछ रचा चरित भगवानं।
man of strong likes and dislikes, and from his contemptuous rejection of the food offered by Śabari,* Rāma had rightly concluded that he would never treat her with the same regard as he showed to Sītā. He would thus unwittingly give away the show, which was not desirable. If left in the dark, there was little possibility of his ever discovering the truth himself; for he carried the idea of moral purity to so fastidious an excess that he never ventured to look at Sītā’s face. Having guarded the secret from him then, Rāma did not like to disclose it to him now; for its disclosure would not serve any useful purpose. It might shock Lakshmanā to know that he had not been considered worthy of confidence before. Even if he did not take it ill, what way could he suggest to Rāma to wriggle out of the present difficulty. Not gifted with a resourceful mind and being a veritable Hotspur, he would have proposed the wholesale slaughter of the people of Ayodhyā for desiring the abandonment of Sītā, as he had actually done before at the time of Rāma’s banish-

† According to one popular legend, Lakshmanā flung disdainfully the leafy cup in which Sabarī had offered him fruit. A hill is said to have emerged out of it when it fell to the ground. It is the herb from this hill, called Dronāchala, which saved the life of Lakshmanā later on in Lāṅka. The story is interesting in so far as it reveals the unsophisticated simplicity of Sabarī and the incapacity of Lakshmanā to appreciate it.
ment to the forest.* How could such a drastic step be acceptable to Rāma as the solution of his delicate problem?

Now it is easy for us to understand why Rāma, having decided upon the abandonment of Sītā, refused to discuss the matter with his brothers. He called them together and spoke to them with a peremptory curtness which was quite unusual with him. He said:—

"By all that is sacred to you, by my very life which you hold so dear, I charge you to listen quietly and do my bidding without question. If you remonstrate with me, I shall take it as an affront to my royal authority. If you seek to conciliate me, you will only succeed in alienating me. Have the goodness to remember that I am never hasty in my action and that my decisions are made after due deliberation, never from impulse. Now to come to the point, you are already aware how my acceptance of Sītā


निम्नलिखितमा सर्वमयोच्या मनुष्यसम्म
करिप्यामिति श्रेष्ठीमणीनि स्थापत्ति विधिप्रयोऽ।
भरतस्मृत पत्यो वा यो वास्त्व हितमिच्छति।
सर्वस्तोत्तर्वः वर्णव्याप्ति नुमुन्हि परिमृष्टे॥

i. e. "If only one dares to oppose my wishes to see you on the throne, I shall teach him a lesson by laying waste the entire city of Ayodhya. Whosoever sides with Bharata or wishes him to rise at your cost shall be slain by me outright. Harshness pays in life; whereas meekness leads to humiliation."
back has caused a public ferment. That she and I must part has become inevitable. She has expressed a desire to pass a few days in the vicinity of the Ganges. And this very day Lakshmana will take her out in a chariot on the pretext of fulfilling her wishes and leave her to her fate on the river's bank. It is, I know, a cruel resolve, but there is no help for it. Raise no objections and ask no questions. Do as I say. Go.”

Having considered Rāma's reticence towards his brothers, the next question that compels our attention is, why did he withhold the truth from his wife also and deceive her noble self into eternal gloom in so Mephistophelean a manner? Why did he not tell her frankly what necessitated their separation for ever? It could not be said that he was afraid lest she should fall into hysterics and create an ugly scene for him. He had already had a spontaneous assurance from her that for his sake she would undergo any sacrifice in a just cause. Soon after his ascension to the throne he had set forth before

* Valmiki : VIII. 45.

श्रापिता हि मथा यूर्वः पादाम्यों जीवितेष्व च।
ये मां वाक्यान्तरं हृयुर्दुर्वेतुः कथं च।
अहितार नाम ते निष्केष मद्धीत्विप्रचलनात्।
मानवयन्तू मवनोत मा यदि मन्त्रासने स्थिताः।
इत्यदि नीयताः सीतास दुःखनु वचनं मम।
तस्मात सच्च सोमिन्ने सत्व कर्म विचारण।
अप्रीतिविलित धरण मायं लक्षमात्कत्विचारति।
पूर्वमुक्तो हमनन्दा गंगावलारे हमास्थमानोऽह।
पर्येष्यमिति तस्यास्त्र कामयं संततिरतामयम्।
her his ideal of kingship, namely, that he would, without a qualm of conscience, give up affection, compassion, and happiness, nay, even the daughter of Janaka, in order to propitiate his subjects.* At this she had not betrayed resentment, but expressed full admiration in these words: — 'Hence, my lord, you are styled the Most Illustrious Scion of the Solar Race.'† In spite of this assurance he was not straight with her. He callously turned her out of doors without her being in the least aware of it. Holding the prospect of a sojourn in a vernal wood before her, he lured her away to a terrible doom. Bhavabhūti has rightly emphasised that what Sītā felt most keenly was not her abandonment, but the inhuman way in which it was effected. But he does not make it clear why Rāma adopted this heartless procedure; in fact he is peculiarly silent on this point. Nor have Vālmīki, Vyāsa, and Kālidās even attempted a solution of this riddle. Tulasidāsa has ended his epic with the coronation of Rāma. Obviously he did not like to deal with the gloomy sequel of his glorious career. Western scholars like Talboys Wheeler have jumped to the conclusion that Rāma, as he advanced in years, became jealous and peevish like Henry the Eighth.‡ This inference we can never accept, knowing Rāma as we do. Moreover it is quite inconsistent

* Bhavabhūti : I.

स्नेहं दशं च सौरखवं च यदि वा जानकीमयि ।
आराध्यनय लोकस्त शुचितो नास्ति मे व्यथा ||

† Ibid : I. अत एव रायवटबुल्लर्य: आयौष्ट: ।

‡ History of India Vol. II. Page 405.
with the fact that even after her abandonment, Sītā remained tenderly enshrined in his heart till the last flicker of his breath. How, then, shall we reconcile this undeniable fact with his seemingly heartless indifference to her! Why did he not tell her straightaway what compelled him to yield to public pressure against the dictates of his conscience? If he had taken her into his confidence, they both would have parted, though gloomy in looks, yet cheerful in spirits, and they would have been spared the terrific agonies which each suffered for ever—the one from consciousness of inhuman cruelty; the other from utter ignorance of its motive.

As has been pointed out before, the root of the whole trouble lay in the frivolous conduct of the illusory Sītā. The ruse had been planned by Rāma with the assent of Śabarī to force Lakṣmana out of the way, to entice Rāvana into a false step, and to provide himself with a plausible excuse to destroy him root and branch. It had answered his purpose well, but while it possessed the wisdom of political expediency, it lacked the virtue of moral uprightness. He could not defend it before his subjects; nor could he speak of it to his wife. Indeed, how could he tell her that she, a woman on the wrong side of forty, had been represented to the world, through a substitute, as a silly wench, crying obstinately for the skin of a spotted deer and maligning hideously the character of spotless Lakṣmana! How could he disclose to her all that had been planned in her name and behind her back in Janaṣṭhāna! He knew that if she was apprised of the way in which she had
been shown to act to facilitate her abduction,* she
would be mortified with shame and resentment. He
had not forgotten how in the Danḍakā forest she
had vehemently deprecated his duplicity in planning
the destruction of the Rākshasas under the garb of
asceticism. She had said:—

"Be true, my dear, to the vow of renunciat-
tion you have taken. View all with an impartial
eye and intend no evil to those who mean you
no harm. To turn an anchorite and meditate
bloodshed is, my dear, a stark hypocrisy which
may satisfy ambition but surely paves the way
to perdition."

Thus Rāma had perceived long ago that though
Sitā was born of Earth, she was not earthly. Brought
up in a serene and philosophical atmosphere at her
father Janaka's place, she lived in a much higher
region, far above the world of strife and intrigue;

* The old Marathi poets have invented mythical reasons
for the equivocal behaviour of Sitā on this occasion. They say
that the gods from heaven implored her to drive out Lakṣmaṇa
and to walk beyond the barrier which had been put up for her
safety, so that Rāvaṇa might easily carry her off and thus
provide Rāma with a ground to start his premeditated war of
Liberation.

† Vālmīki : III. 9.

नित्यं शब्दचिन्तितं शौर्यं चर्बमण तपोवने।
अख्सा में मनोदवितियंदि तव मिनसे चुनिन्।
बुद्धिवर विना हनुन्तु न सा कार्यं कर्त्चन।
कर च ख्यांकर च वर्नं व्याविदुभयंतिविदम्।
कदस्यकल्पा बुद्धिसारस्तेष कारणाम्॥
hence she could never accommodate herself to the ways of worldly rise. Her conviction, as she put it in her admonition to Rama, was—*“Remember, my dear, the pursuit of material prosperity leads not to lasting bliss.”* Indeed, what will it avail us, she meant to say, if we gain the world but lose our soul. Large and sincere was her heart; pure and catholic were her sympathies. Wishing violence to none, inspiring confidence in all, and diffusing love everywhere, her musical soul, says Bhavabhūti, drew the animals of the forest around her like Orpheus’ harp. Naturally she would have been horrified to learn that under her name Lakshmana, the spirit of service incarnate, had been wounded in his honour and that for her honour’s sake Śabarī, the image of platonic love, had died in flames.†

The truth is that Sītā was cast in a different mould from Rāma’s. If he lived for the liberation of his race and the uplift of his country, she stood by the glory of truth and love of humanity. He had long realised that he was wedded to a wife whose soul did not confine itself to the narrow limits of the earth, but embraced the whole universe. She belonged to a much higher plane, and he felt awed down by her moral grandeur. He had not the brazen-faced

*Ibid*: III. 9  दुख प्रभावदेत बर्मित, ने मुखास्बंधाते दुखम्।
† The Kūrma: सा प्रत्ययाय भूतानां सीता मायामयी तत:।
विशेष पाषक्ष दीपति द्राह ज्ञेसो पि ताम्।

Also Tulasidāsa: प्रतिविषय और लौकिक कविता।
प्रचण्ड पाषण में जरे।
courage to tell her how the equivocal methods employed by him to secure his end had recoiled upon her and brought her irreproachable character into irrefutable reproach. He was stung by shame and remorse. His resourceful mind failed him on this occasion. He did not see any way by which he could honourably avoid separation from her, or even make the inevitable separation honourable to her. For, to abandon her meant confirming the verdict of the people and making the blot on her name indelible! This was the real tragedy, the cruel mockery of his fate, and it is this which rent his heart in two.

In this distracted state of mind he entered her boudoir and found her asleep. Unaware of the impending crack of doom, a happy smile glimmered on her lips. A clear conscience, undisturbed by outside slanders, lent a halo of light to her sweet face. Aa Rama gazed upon her, big drops rolled down his cheeks. He said:—

"O artless one! Why was thy lot cast with mine! Taking me to be a sandal tree, thou hast clung to a poisonous plant. Leave me, an inhuman wretch as I am."

Then suppressing his tears, he drew near her with noiseless steps. But he did not, like Othello, kiss her; for he felt that his foul breath might sully her spotless face. Instead he gently lifted

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*Bhavabhūti: I.

अभूवत्कर्मचाण्डालं अवि सुधेष्व लिङ्गुच्च माम्।
श्रीतासि चन्द्रनारायणं दुर्लिखाकं विष्ठुरम्॥

*
her feet, pressed them to his bosom, and placed them on his head.* This is the most unusual thing in Hindu society. No husband will ever bow to his wife, much less touch her feet with his head. Rāma did. That shows how guilty he felt in his heart of hearts, and how angelic he regarded her in purity of soul!

At this moment the door-keeper from outside announced that an urgent matter awaited His Majesty's pleasure. Instantly he was himself again. With a stern face he came out and attended to the report that a serious trouble, engineered by certain malcontents, had broken out in Mathurā. Forthwith he issued orders that Śatrughna should proceed there with troops. Then he sent word to Lakshmana that he should have the chariot ready to take Sītā out into the jungle as soon as she was awake. If she inquired for him, he was to convey his regrets that State business made it impossible for him to bear her company this time in her excursion to Nature's paradise.

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* Bhavabhūti: I. देवि देवि! अर्यवर्षियस्ते रामशिरसा पादप्रकृतिः। (इति सीताया पाद्री धिरिष्रि कत्वा रेद्दिति)

This is how Bhavabhūti's Uttarācharita begins and Shakespeare's Othello ends. The situation is strikingly similar, with one important difference: Rāma did not doubt the chastity of Sītā, but the outside world did, and he abandoned her; the outside world did not doubt the chastity of Desdemona, but Othello did, and he murdered her. Both suffered intense tortures of the soul at the grave injustice they had done. But while Othello could seek relief in suicide, Rāma had to put on a smiling face in spite of an aching heart within.
The task assigned to Lakshmana was most repugnant to him, but the orders of Rama were inviolable and he had to execute them. With a set face, though upset in mind, he drove her in a chariot as far as the Ganges, then led her across the river in a boat, and having helped her alight on the southern bank, left her there, helpless and stunned at the doom so unaccountably meted out to her. Doleful and dazed, she wandered aimlessly in the forest, bewailing her stars. A few disciples of Valmiki, happening to come that way, were moved to compassion at her forlorn state, and gently they escorted her to their Teacher's hermitage, where she lived under the paternal care of the sage, and in due course was safely delivered of twin-sons. When they were weaned, she left them in charge of the sage and herself took the veil. The twins were named Kusa and Lava, and were brought up as Brahmin boys only. At this time Valmiki was writing his metrical history of Rama, and as these boys had excellent memory, he made them learn by heart the verses which he composed each day. In this way, by the time they were twelve years of age, they had Valmiki's unadulterated Epic on the tip of their tongue. Since it is Kusa and Lava who first gave publicity to the Ramayana by singing portions of it wherever they went, the professional bards who took it over from them afterwards called themselves Kusilavas, which now is a regular Sanskrit word for a reciter of poems or an eulogist. It is necessary to mention here that though the later Sanskrit and
Prakrit poets represent these two boys as masters of all mystic lores, of all arts and sciences, civil and military, yet there is not the remotest suggestion of it in Vālmīki and Vyāsa. These authors only refer to the two boys’ ability to repeat from memory the whole of Vālmīki’s Rāmāyaṇa at the age of twelve, as Macaulay did the whole of Milton’s Paradise Lost at the same age.

However, when they were about this age, Rāma undertook the performance of a Horse-sacrifice according to usual custom.* To this sacrifice he invited many sages from far and near. Vālmīki was

* The narrative that follows is strictly in accordance with Vālmīki, Vyāsa, and Kālidāsa. Unfortunately Bhavabhūti and his slavish imitators have entirely altered Vālmīki’s simple, natural, and truthful account to please their own childish fancy and pamper their love of the marvellous. They say that when the sacrificial horse of Rāma entered Vālmīki’s hermitage, these two boys tied it up and refused to give it back. In the terrific battle that ensued all the veteran guardians of the horse, including Lakśmana, Hanumāna, Aṅgada, were utterly defeated and mortally wounded by these two boys who, according to Vālmīki, had not yet learnt to handle a bow, much less to shoot, and far less to fight big armies. On hearing of this debacle, Rāma is said to have rushed to the battle-ground. But he also was forthwith worsted, and might have even lost his life but for the timely intervention of Vālmīki and Sītā. In this way these puerile bards have invested the two boys with supernatural powers and divested the renowned heroes of their genuine prowess. It is such fabulous stories which pass for Rāmāyaṇa among the millions of India and make the great Vālmīki turn in his grave. These poets also make Rāvaṇa come to the Svayamvara of Sītā and behave like

(Continued on next page)
one of them, and he came with a number of his disciples including these two boys. The citizens of Ayodhyā were struck by their close resemblance to Rāma, not only in complexion and features, but also in voice, gait, and bearing. Vālmīkī had taught them the verses of his newly composed poem, and as they, at his instance, went round the city, chanting the beautiful lines they had learnt in their sweet accents, crowds of people would gather about them and stand listening with rapt attention. In this way within a few days they became the talk of the whole town.

It was not long before the news of these two lovely boys reached the ears of Rāma. His curiosity being roused, he expressed a wish to see them, and when they were admitted into his presence, he felt unaccountably drawn towards them. A lump rose in his throat, as he heard them recite feelingly the tragic story of his later life. They seemed to voice forth, as it were, the pent up agonies of his heart. He asked them who they were, but they could not tell him anything beyond that they were under the guardianship of Father Vālmīkī. He offered them a reward in money, but they said that they

(Continued from the previous page)
a clownish braggart who cannot even lift the bow, and therefore sobbs and weeps, whines and vomits, and runs away in disgrace! This is Ramayana to many, but they forget that Rāma does not deserve to be glorified for destroying such an imbecile braggadocio! According to Vālmīkī, only Rāma, Lakshmana, and Vīśyāmitra were present at Sītā's swayamvara,
had no use for it in a place where Nature supplied all their wants. Having dismissed them, he sought an interview with the sage in private and begged of him to enlighten him on the mystery that surrounded their birth. Thereupon the sage told him the whole truth and pressed him to espouse Sītā back. But he repeated his old argument that unless the people were convinced that her honour was bright, he could neither accept her as his wife, nor own the twins as his sons.* On hearing these words the sage sent for Sītā from the hermitage and called upon Rāma to summon the citizens together. When they were assembled, he asked her to face them. Unconcerned and serene, as she stepped firmly before them, her very looks dispersed the clouds of suspicion from their minds; for though pale and emaciated, her face reflected the purity of her heart, and in her eyes sparkled the inner consciousness of innocence.† None of them had the courage to meet her gaze, and with their heads hanging down in shame, they all stood up and acclaimed with one voice that she was their mother, their queen,—spotless, chaste, and glorious.‡

* Kālidāsa : XV.

† Kālidāsa : XV.

‡ Ibid : XV.
Rāma was now perfectly willing to take her back, but she had no wish to go back to him—to him who had cast her away as though she was a dirty broom, without telling her what her fault was, or rather what his own difficulties were. He had denied her his confidence and deceived her into the bargain. Her heart was broken beyond repair. If she held on to life thereafter, it was because she did not wish to die in bad odour that she was but a runaway slut and that her sons were only guttersnipes. But now that her face was brightened and her little ones assured of a legitimate place under their father’s roof,* a great load was taken off her mind. She heaved a sigh of relief and with that sigh flew away her life: she dropped dead on the ground before all. Vālmiki, however, says that a miracle happened at this time.† The ground in front of her opened out all of a sudden. Therefrom rose a golden throne with Mother Earth sitting upon it. She received Sītā into her loving arms and vanished into the chasm. Thereafter the ground closed up as before.

Whether Sītā disappeared bodily into the earth or departed spiritually to heaven is a matter of

* Kālidāsa: XV.

† Vālmiki: VII. 97.
little importance. The point worth remembering is that she did not go back to him who had made use of her illusory form to effect his purpose and thus brought her character under a shadow of suspicion, who had first confirmed the suspicion of his people by turning her out of doors and then called upon her to clear herself of all imputations.* She did clear herself by sheer force of virtue, without betraying her husband’s closely guarded secret. But after that she had no wish to continue in this world where she had tasted nothing but the bitters of life. Out of the privations of fourteen years’ exile she had fallen into the tortures of endless abandonment. She was fed up with this world where people could be so thoughtless as to suspect that the daughter of Janaka could turn a flirt at the age of forty-four and elope with Rāvaṇa at a time when the bloom of her youth was already past. Such a world could never give her that peace and happiness which her soul needed. Hence she cut off at one stroke all the ties that bound her to this life; she shot a glance at Rāma and soared heavenward out of sight, never to meet him again on this side of the grave.†

* Kalidāsa: XV.
† Bhavabhūti has entirely spoiled the effect by making Sitā rush into the arms of Rāma when he called her back to him at the jubilant shouts of the people. Classical poets generally represent Aryan women as dolls, which may be thrown away and picked up by men at their sweet will, as if they have no sense of self-respect, no personal dignity of their (Continued on next page)
Rāma did not and could not get over this terrible shock. He suddenly felt limp in the body and could not stand erect without the support of a staff; his neck hung loosely; he let flow the tears in torrents which he had so far restrained in public: that saved him from the throttling grip of his grief.* He lived a few years more and discharged his kingly duties as efficiently as before. Slackness was not in his nature, and perfunctoriness he abhorred as sin. He carried on the administration of his vast empire with remarkable vigilance, but denied himself all the pleasures which sovereignty placed within his reach. Whenever trouble arose anywhere, he forthwith sent his brothers to deal with it: Witness how Lavanāsura was put down by Śatrughna, and the Gandharvas by Bharata. But he himself never drew his bow again. He did not commit Napoleon's mistake of reserving for himself the right to take the lead in every thing; hence his brothers were not own. Witness Kālidāsa's Śākuntala, where the heroine, in spite of being repudiated in public by her husband as a fornicating wench, goes back to him meekly, without even a show of remonstrance, when he, having no heir to the throne, wants her back for the sake of his own son. Witness also his Mālavikā-guṇimitra, where the two elderly queens gladly consent to the marriage of their fifty-year-old husband with a sixteen-year-old-girl, upon whom he dotes in sheer senility.

* Vālmīki : VII. 98.

बृहदकाव्यमवदयङ्ग बाण्यवाकुल्लेखणम् ।
अनवकिच्चाय दीनमन्य नमो भावसीर्वुद्वितिः ।
स सर्वेद चिरं कालं वहुश्रो बाण्यसुतु्रभु ॥
left incompetent, like Napoleon's, to manage any
situation independently.

Duty was his watchword throughout. When he
saw the Aryan people sunk in slavery and satisfied
with their lot—a dangerous mood indeed, he felt
that his first duty was to liberate and lift them.
And he devoted himself to that task so whole-
heartedly that he did not even hesitate to leave his
father alone on deathbed and his helpless mother
under the shadow of widowhood. When he saw that
Sītā had no other refuge but himself, no place of
honour in the kingdom, after he was turned out of
it a homeless wanderer, he took her along with him
to the forest, though he knew full well that she
would be an additional source of anxiety to him.*
But the same Sītā he turned out of doors at a
time when she was a great solace to him in his days
of well-earned rest,† because the womenfolk of


† Bhavabhūti: I.

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Here Rāma says after his return from Laṅkā, ‘Sītā is the
apple of my eye, the light of my house. Everything about her
is delightful except separation, which is intolerable to me
even in thought.’
Ayodhyā misconstrued her example and justified their own intrigues with their paramours by reference to her.* When she left him for good, and all of a sudden, in the hour of his supreme joy at the changed attitude of his people, he felt so crushed in mind and body that he would have gladly followed her to heaven. But realising his duty towards his sons who had been left by her in his charge, he somehow held together his shattered heart and saw to their up-bringing. When they and the sons of his brothers were of age, trained and efficient, he appointed them rulers of the various parts of his empire, so that they might all grow familiar with the difficult art of government under the supervision of their parents and be enabled to fulfill afterwards all the duties of sovereignty with satisfaction. The countries assigned to their charge were as follows:—

'The country of the Upper Indus, including Kashmir, Kabul, Kandahar, Baluchistan, and N. W. Provinces, was placed under the two sons of Bharata,† The country from the river Vidiśā or Dasan to the north of Mathurā, including

* Vālmīki : VII. 43.

अस्माकममपि दारेषु सहनीयं भविष्यति ।
यथा हि कुस्मे राजा प्रजास्तमतमुनिवते ॥

i.e. We must now connive at the misconduct of our wives; for as subjects we have to follow in the footsteps of our king and queen.

† Kālidāsa : XV.

स तस्माकः पुत्रो राजधान्योपवस्तदार्थयोः ।
अभित्वकथा भसलो रामानन्देषु पारागमनु ॥
Mālavā, Sindh, Central India, and Rajputānā; was placed under the two sons of Śatrughna.*
The country of the Southern and Northern Kośala was placed under his two sons.†
The remaining portion was placed under the two sons of Lakṣhmaṇa.‡
The country to the south of the Godāvari was placed under Hanūmān, excluding Kishkindhā which was placed under Sūgrīva, and Laṅkā which was under Vibhīṣaṇa.§

When he saw that the empire was safe in the hands of his sons and nephews, when he saw that Lakṣhmaṇa had sought release from the strain of work and worry on the banks of the Sarayū, when he saw that Bharata and Śatrughna also looked forward to repose in heaven, then only did he think that he was free to shake off this mortal coil. With a clear conscience he took leave of the world and stood before his Maker with a bright face, saying without a quiver in his voice,

‘My Lord, here I am. Judge me as you please.’

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* Kālidāsa : XV.

शशुश्रातिनि शब्दन्: सुमाहौ च बहुदुङ्गे।
मथुरानिदीवे सूत्रोमिन्दे पूर्वजोत्तुकः॥

† Kālidāsa : XV.

ञङ्की निवेशस्य कुशाबल्यं रिपुनागांकुरस्य कुशाम।
शारवक्ष्यां ततां कुल्लौलंतंत्रवन्न प्रवस॥

‡ Kālidāsa : XV.

अंगदेचन्द्रु पुष्करं प्रस्थापयं प्रभावसंभवः।
शारानाध्यनाथस्य चक्रे कारापथेष्वरी॥

§ Kālidāsa : XV.

लेखानाथेष्व प्रवन्तनयं दक्षिणे चोतरे च॥
APPENDIX

The name Rāvana is rather intriguing. Although the Indian poets take it to be the name of a single individual, yet it is difficult to believe how the Rāvana who had killed Anaranya, a remote ancestor of Rāma, could be the same Rāvana whom Rāma himself, coming several generations after him, killed. To my mind, therefore, it seems that like Caesar for the emperors of Rome, like Kaiser for the emperors of Germany, and like Mikado for the emperors of Japan, the word Rāvana was a title of distinction for the mighty rulers of Laṅkā after the Non-Aryans had recovered from their debacle at Tripuri and established a firm footing in the island. This view gains support from the way Pāṇini derives the patronymic Rāvana from the word Viśravas. He says that when the affix an, in the sense of a descendant thereof, is applied to Viśravas, the substitute Ravana somehow glides into its place to receive the said affix, so that the resultant patronymic from Viśravas is not Vaiśravasa, as one might expect, but curiously enough the word-form Rāvana!*

* Pāṇini : IV. 1. 112.

विष्णुबंशन्वदोपययोऽप्रत्ययं नाना
‘विष्णवसो विष्णवणयाण्यं’ इति रघुदेशा।

Quoted by Mallinatha in his commentary on verse 91 of Canto XII, Rāghuvaṃśa.

(267)
Mālavā, Sindh, Central India, and Rajputānā, was placed under the two sons of Śatrughna.* The country of the Southern and Northern Kośala was placed under his two sons.† The remaining portion was placed under the two sons of Lakṣhmaṇa.‡ The country to the south of the Godāvari was placed under Hanūmān, excluding Kishkindhā which was placed under Sugrīva, and Laṅkā which was under Viśhishṭa.§

When he saw that the empire was safe in the hands of his sons and nephews, when he saw that Lakṣhmaṇa had sought release from the strain of work and worry on the banks of the Sarayū, when he saw that Bharata and Śatrughna also looked forward to repose in heaven, then only did he think that he was free to shake off this mortal coil. With a clear conscience he took leave of the world and stood before his Maker with a bright face, saying without a quiver in his voice,

'My Lord, here I am. Judge me as you please.'

* Kālidāsa : XV.

† Kālidāsa : XV.

‡ Kālidāsa : XV.

§ Kālidāsa : XV.
APPENDIX

The name Rāvana is rather intriguing. Although the Indian poets take it to be the name of a single individual, yet it is difficult to believe how the Rāvana who had killed Anarāṇya, a remote ancestor of Rāma, could be the same Rāvana whom Rāma himself, coming several generations after him, killed. To my mind, therefore, it seems that like Caesar for the emperors of Rome, like Kaiser for the emperors of Germany, and like Mikādo for the emperors of Japan, the word Rāvana was a title of distinction for the mighty rulers of Laṅkā after the Non-Aryans had recovered from their debacle at Tripuri and established a firm footing in the island. This view gains support from the way Pāṇini derives the patronymic Rāvana from the word Viśravas. He says that when the affix an, in the sense of a descendant thereof, is applied to Viśravas, the substitute Rāvana somehow glides into its place to receive the said affix, so that the resultant patronymic from Viśravas is not Vaiśravasa, as one might expect, but curiously enough the word-form Rāvana!*

* Pāṇini: IV. 1. 112.

"विश्रवः शासादपत्यायं वणस्यायं शति
'विश्रवस्त्रो विश्रवणस्वग्नो' इति स्वनेवेत्।

Quoted by Mallinātha in his commentary on verse 91 of Canto XII, Raghuvamśa.

(267)
This etymological jugglery clearly indicates that when a descendant of Viśravas retrieved the lost glory of his race and founded a dynasty in Laṅkā, he styled himself Rāvana,* obviously from pride at the noise he made in the world by his portentous rise to power. His successors assumed the title of Rāvana along with the crown of Laṅkā, and fully justified their claim to both by carrying forward his policy of world domination by ruthless suppression and extermination of the Aryan invaders from the north. Thus as the policy of Laṅkā and the spirit of its rulers remained the same from beginning to end, to the Aryans it mattered little as to which particular king was on the throne of Laṅkā. Whosoever he may be, he was only a replica of Rāvana, a source of dire anxiety and dreadful trouble to them as before. Individual kings might die in due course, but the name and spirit of Rāvana lived for ever, only changing the outer vesture of body from time to time. Hence the Aryans looked upon the rulers of Laṅkā as one Rāvana and attributed to him all their feats of prowess and their terms of life. Thus Rāvana became an abnormal being in mythology, interminable in existence, ubiquitous in presence, irresistible in might, and monstrous in shape. It is this Rāvana, or in other words the spirit of Rāvanism, ‘in which sat the dread and fear’ of Aryans, whom Rāma destroyed root and branch, and therein lay his greatness and his claim to eternal fame!

* The word literally means a noise-maker, from the Sanskrit root ru to roar.
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