A TALE OF THREE COUPLES AND THEIR POET: *RĀMAKATHĀ*, LOVE AND VĀLMĪKI IN SOUTH ASIAN TRADITION

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Rāmakathā or the story of Rāma is one of the most notable South Asian traditions. As R.P. Goldman and Sally J. Sutherland Goldman have described, it stands for the collectivity of oral, literary, folk, performative and artistic representations of the ancient tale of Rāma and Sītā(Goldman, 2004: 75). However, the same authors also accept the central position of the Sanskrit epic, the *Rāmāyaṇa,* attributed to the poet Vālmīki, within that tradition (ibid.: 75). The relationship between Vālmīki's epic and the entire *Rāmakathā* tradition is therefore quite intriguing. The prevalent belief usually holds Vālmīki's epic as the supreme, original, authentic and, at times, 'historical' account of the life of Rāma. On the other hand, scholars like A.K. Ramanujan, Paula Richman and Romila Thapar have shown that there are numerous accounts of Rāma's life, across different forms, languages, religious affiliations and regions throughout South and Southeast Asia.[1] All these accounts do not necessarily conform to any single text and each of them has its independent following. Therefore, these scholars tend to accept each account as equally valid. Richman writes:

> "The 'Many Ramayanas' model assumes that each telling of Rama's story is equally valid in its own right: Tulsidas, the (original) Southall Black Sisters in Greater London, the domestic servants singing in Bhojpuri dialect, Valmiki, the artisan priests of northern Kerala, and the anonymous author of *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa* all recount Rama's story, but they do so in their own ways." (2000: 5)

However, Richman accepts that equal validity does not necessarily mean equal influence. So, she marks out four retellings of the *Rāmakathā* as 'authoritative'. These are Vālmīki's epic, Kamban's *Irāmāvatāram*, Tulsīdās's *Rāmacaritamānas*, and Ramanand Sagar's Hindi teleserial (ibid.: 9).

This approach, though largely convincing, seems to be a bit unfair

on Vālmīki. Vālmīki's epic is not only the oldest full literary telling of the *Rāmakathā*, but also held as the first literary creation – *ādikāvya* – in the Indian tradition. As a result, most (though not all) of the other *Rāmakathās* somehow either derive their material from Vālmīki or interact with his text. Vālmīki's epic is neither the only nor the most influential *Rāmakathā* (its actual following cannot match that of Tulsīdās or Ramanand Sagar). But it is no doubt the central text of the tradition.

However, by claiming the centrality of Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, we are not making any claim for its greater authenticity or historicity. The Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* has been interpreted by various scholars in various manners. Weber saw in it a nature-myth influenced by the Homeric epics; Victor Henry viewed in it the allegorical representations of a solar myth; James Talboys-Wheeler perceived a struggle of the Buddhists of Ceylon against the *brāhmaṇas*; Jacobi tried to reveal the transposition of the Vedic Indra-Vṛtra myth; Lassen explained it as an Aryan advance on South India; and Arthur Lillee marked it out as the source of the Homeric epics![2] B.B. Lal has tried hard to substantiate the epic's historicity with archaeological findings, but without much success (Lal, 1981). Thapar views in it the conflict between the monarchical state society and the clan society (Thapar, 2013: 27-34). Though we cannot totally negate the possibility of the existence of some historical kernel behind the traditions about Rāma – a personality acknowledged in Brahmanical, Buddhist, Jaina and many other traditions so unanimously – there is hardly any reliable breakthrough yet to discover that historicity. Therefore, it is pointless to claim one text as historically more authentic than the others.

We must remember that the *Rāmāyaṇa* is usually considered in the Indian tradition a *kāvya* (literary work), unlike the other great Sanskrit epic, the *Mahābhārata*, which is known to be a traditional history — *itihāsa*. Thus, the *Rāmāyaṇa* is, above all, a piece of poetry. Vālmīki, as its poet, also occupies a very special position — the position of the first great poet. Goldman has noted that Vālmīki himself does not claim to be the originator of the *Rāmakathā* tradition. Rather, his contribution is noted as principally of form rather than substance, his creation being an oral performative and musical piece poetically rendering a historical event (Goldman, 1997: 224).

This paper tries to explore the relationship between Vālmīki's poem and the *Rāmakathā* traditions from this perspective. At first, we will try to understand the meaning of Vālmīki's poetry, which

seems to be a tale of love and separation of three couples. Then we will try to see how the 'Uttarakāṇḍa', decidedly a later addition to Vālmīki's text, altered the message of the epic, accounting for much misunderstanding of Vālmīki's poetry. Finally, we will show how the various ancient, medieval and modern poets of the *Rāmakathā* perceived this problem, how they engaged with both Vālmīki and the poet of the 'Uttarakāṇḍa', and how they mostly sided with the poetic standpoint of Vālmīki and his story of the three couples.

Vālmīki and his three couples

Speaking of Vālmīki, the first question we have to encounter is who he was. Goldman rightly says that there is no reason to contradict that the central portion of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is the work of a single author and to accept the unanimous tradition that the name of that author is Vālmīki.[3] However, there are few personal details known about this author. The 'Bālakāṇḍa' and the 'Uttarakāṇḍa', the first and last books of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, provide some information about the author. But these two books are generally considered later additions to Vālmīki's text.[4]

The 'Uttarakāṇḍa' is no doubt a later addition. However, regarding the 'Bālakāṇḍa', we have reasons to disagree with the standard view. Certainly, there are sections in the 'Bālakāṇḍa' which were added later to the text. But the entire 'Bālakāṇḍa cannot be a later addition. It is in the 'Bālakāṇḍa' that the chief protagonists of the epic are introduced and the marriage of Rāma and Sītā takes place, without which the epic cannot move on. Moreover, the 'Bālakāṇḍa' contains vividly pre-Buddhist geography. The text neglects Pāṭaliputra in its description of Magadha, distinguishes Mithilā and Viśālā as separate towns not yet integrated in the city of Vaiśālī, and presents Ayodhyā – not Sāketa or Śrāvastī – as the principal city of Kosala. These being the reasons for Goldman's dating of the earliest strata of the *Rāmāyaṇa* to c. 750-500 BCE, a substantial section of the 'Bālakāṇḍa' must be part of that earliest core (Vālmīki 1984, vol. I: 14-23). More importantly, the deification of Rāma being one of the principal causes for considering the 'Bālakāṇḍa' and the 'Uttarakāṇḍa' as later additions, it is noteworthy that in the first three introductory *sargas* of the 'Bālakāṇḍa', Rāma is particularly noted as human. Therefore, we may agree with Bulcke that the introduction, description of Ayodhyā, the horse-sacrifice, Rāma's birth and youthful exploits, the breaking of the bow, the marriage, and the return to Ayodhyā are original contents in the

'Bālakāṇḍa', whereas the Putreṣṭi, the Puranic stories, and Rāma's encounter with Paraśurāma are definitely later additions (Bulcke, 1952-1953: 327-331).

Thus, we can start with the information on Vālmīki, provided by the introductory *sargas* of the 'Bālakāṇḍa'. Vālmīki is said to have asked the wandering sage Nārada about a man who is truly virtuous, mighty, righteous, truthful, steadfast in his vows, of exemplary conduct, benevolent to all creatures, learned, capable, good-looking, self-controlled, of proper temperament, judicious, envy-free, and fearsome in a battle (Vālmīki 1984: I.1-5). Nārada answers that so many qualities were hard to find in one person, but Rāma, born in the Ikṣvāku lineage, is known among the people as one such person (*ikṣvākuvaṃśa prabhavo rāmo nāma janaiḥ śrutaḥ*) (Vālmīki 1984: I.7-8). Then, Vālmīki heard the gist of the *Rāmakathā* from Nārada. Later on, he was aggrieved to see the death of a crane in copulation, killed by a hunter, and the lamentation of its partner. In grief, Vālmīki uttered a curse in a rhythmic meter. Thus, Vālmīki's grief (*śoka*) was turned into a poetic meter (*śloka*). Ordered by Brahmā, Vālmīki composed the *Rāmāyaṇa* in his new-invented *śloka* (ibid.: I.2). When his composition was over he taught it to two *kuśīlavas* (wandering balladists) who came to his hermitage, learnt his poetry by heart, and sang it in different places, including Rāma's horse-sacrifice (ibid.: I.4).

This entire narrative makes certain points clear. Firstly, it shows that Rāma was considered by Vālmīki a man having many qualities, not a deity. Secondly, it acknowledges that Vālmīki was not the originator of the *Rāmakathā,* which was preexistent as a popular oral tradition. Thirdly, it represents the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a tradition of the *kuśīlava* bards.

But, who was Vālmīki? The 'Uttarakāṇḍa' calls Vālmīki a Bhārgava *brāhmaṇa*.[5] A similar claim is made by the *Mahābhārata,* which speaks of a *Rāmacarita* being composed by a Bhārgava.[6] However, Goldman rightly prefers not to give much attention to these references, though many later Purāṇas accept this (Goldman, 1976: 97-101). Both the 'Uttarakāṇḍa' and the 'Śāntiparvan' of the *Mahābhārata* are known as Bhārgavized interpolations added to the respective epics. Moreover, the Mahābhāratan statement does not make it clear which Bhārgava and which *Rāmacarita* are being referred to. The *Mahābhārata* itself contains a 'Rāmopākhyāna' attributed to the Bhārgava sage Mārkaṇḍeya. Therefore, the Bhārgava identity of Vālmīki is not very well-established in early tradition.

Charlotte Vaudeville assumes that Vālmīki might have been the court-poet of the Ikṣvāus, who composed the *Rāmāyaṇa* after Rāma's coronation (Vaudeville 1963: 329). However, this seems unlikely. Had Vālmīki been the Ikṣvāku court-poet, he would not have needed to know the *Rāmakathā* as an oral tradition narrated to him by a wandering sage.

Thus we come to Bulcke's suggestion. Could not Vālmīki, who taught his composition to the *kuśīlavas*, himself be a wandering balladist? (Bulcke, 1958: 123) The possibility seems high. Interestingly, unlike the *sūta* bards (who were generally royal eulogists), the *kuśīlavas* had a very low status in the society. The *Arthaśāstra* describes them as professional actors, often the sons of courtesans, who should be paid a wage so that they do not take to robbery.[7] Both the *Arthaśāstra* and the 'Śāntiparvan' of the *Mahābhārata* describe them as very low-born *śūdras*. Possibly because of their inclinations towards robbery, it has been advised to banish them from the towns (Kauṭilya, III.7.32; Vyāsa (Vol.XIII), XII.69.49). It is highly significant that long after the Bhārgavization of Vālmīki's text and identity, the Purāṇas remembered some remnants of Vālmīki's lowly origin. Various accounts of the *Skanda Purāṇa*, the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* (c. fourteenth century), the *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa* (c. fifteenth century), the Bengali *Śrī Rāmapā(n)cālī* of Kṛttibāsa Ojha (c. fifteenth century) and the *Tattvasaṃgraha Rāmāyaṇa* of Rāmabrahmānanda (seventeenth century) present variants of the same story where Vālmīki, a *brāhmaṇa* by birth, was a robber in his early life before being turned into a sage-poet by rigorous asceticism during which an anthill was formed around his body.[8] Thus, even after being Brahmanized and Bhārgavized (in course of which he hijacked the anthill legend which the *Mahābhārata* narrated about Cyavana),[9] Vālmīki retained the flavour of the miserable *kuśīlava* who would sing his ballads in normal circumstances but would take to robbery if impoverished. It seems that Vālmīki was an unsuccessful *kuśīlava* who might have taken to part-time robbery as well, before he heard the story of Rāma from Nārada. This story brought out his poetic potential and turned the miserable balladist into a celebrity poet. The *kuśīlava* disciples of Vālmīki sang his composition and received royal patronage.

But what was the core of Vālmīki's poetry? Was it just the story of an ideal man, as indicated in the very first verses? Vālmīki himself indicates otherwise. Here the story of the cranes, narrated in *Sarga 2*, becomes crucial. It is not the story of Rāma's achievements narrated

by Nārada, but the wailings of a female crane, which brought the poetry out of Vālmīki.

Let us now focus on the story of the crane-couple in detail. The poet, while going for a bath, saw a pair of *krauñca* birds in copulation. Suddenly, a Niṣāda hunter struck down the male of the pair. Seeing this, the female uttered a piteous cry. Filled with pity and compassion, the poet uttered his first poetic verse to curse the Niṣāda for killing one of a pair absorbed in passion (*kāmamohitam*) (Vālmīki, I.2.9-14). His composition was fixed in metrical quarters each having a like number of syllables and fit for the accompaniment of stringed and percussion instruments. This meter he named *śloka* after his *śoka* (grief) (Ibid., I.2.17). He composed the *Rāmāyaṇa* in this meter and mood.

This anecdote has enormous significance in setting the tone for the *Rāmāyaṇa*. It clearly indicates that the essence of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was not to be the heroic one of Nārada's narration, but the pity of the *krauñca*-couple. As Vaudeville indicates, Vālmīki's *śloka* is the song of that lamenting bird (Vaudeville, 1963: 333).

The specific bird is highly significant here. Julia Leslie has masterly shown that Vālmīki's *krauñca* is nothing but the Indian Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone antigone*) (Leslie, 1998). Ornithologists Salim Ali and S. Dillon Ripley have noted that the bird is famous for the life-long faithfulness and devotion between the partners (Ali and Ripley, 1983: 130). A more notable point comes from the description given by Hugh Whistler:

> "The birds pair for life, and are very devoted and close companions... So obvious is their affection that the legend has arisen, that if one of the pair is killed the other dies of a broken heart."(Whistler, 1986: 445)

This parable therefore denotes the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a tale of devoted companionship and unfair separation between couples. But which couple is being indicated?

Barbara Stoler Miller thinks that the crane-parable allegorically represents the killing of Rāma's trust in Sītā by the unfair act of her abduction by Rāvaṇa (Miller, 1973: 166). But the suggestion is not very convincing. The crane-parable does not denote loss of trust, but actual separation. No doubt, the *Rāmāyaṇa* contains such separations between Rāma and Sītā thrice–after Sītā's abduction by Rāvaṇa, after her banishment to the forest by Rāma, and after Sītā's suicidal entrance into the earth. However, in all these cases, it was either both of them or Rāma alone who had been left to lament. But, in the crane-parable, it is the female crane which is

left to mourn her deceased partner. This aspect has troubled the medieval commentators and the modern scholars alike. Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta, the commentators who focus on Rāma's despair after Sītā's disappearance, tried to alter the crane-parable altogether by opining that actually the female crane died and the male mourned (Leslie, 1998: 476). On the other hand, scholars like Vaudeville and Leslie, on the basis of the crane-parable, argue that Sītā, not Rāma, was the central figure of the original *Rāmāyaṇa*.[10] Both the views, therefore, try to alter some fundamental tenets of the text to suit their respective interpretations. However, the apparent contradiction can easily be sorted out by recognizing the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a tale of three couples, with Daśaratha and Kaikeyī intervening as the second couple between the crane-couple and the Rāma-Sītā duo.

Daśaratha in Vālmīki's text is a highly polygamous man with three principal wives, Kauśalyā, Sumitrā and Kaikeyī. Kauśalyā, the mother of Rāma, is the chief queen. But, Kaikeyī, the youngest, appears to be the most beloved of the king. The central problem of the *Rāmāyaṇa* starts when Daśaratha decides to coronate his favourite and eldest son, Rāma, as the crown prince. Kaikeyī, initially happy about the decision, is maneuvered by her favourite maid Mantharā to ask Daśaratha to grant two wishes to her, citing an earlier pledge. Kaikeyī asks Daśaratha to make Bharata, her own son, the crown prince, and to banish Rāma to the forest for fourteen years. Daśaratha is grief-stricken by the unjust demand, but Rāma decides to go to the forest to fulfill his father's pledge. Sītā, his wife, and Lakśmaṇa, Sumitrā's son, follow Rāma. Daśaratha dies of the shock. When Bharata, who was staying in his maternal uncle's house, receives this news, he is terribly upset and reviles his mother for the entire calamity. He goes to the forest to bring Rāma back. Rāma remains steadfast to keep his father's truthfulness. So, Bharata returns with the sandals of Rāma to rule as Rāma's regent.

In this entire story of remarkable truthfulness, sacrifice and fraternal love, Kaikeyī stands as the typical villainess. However, despite her villainy, it is Daśaratha's passion for her which surfaces time and again. It is possible that Kaikeyī's villainy is innovated by Vālmīki to emphasise the couple's love and companionship. Sheldon Pollock has pointed out that the two boons pledged by Daśaratha seem to be Vālmīki's own innovation over the *Rāmakathā* he received.[11] Otherwise, Vālmīki's own text testifies that Daśaratha had already promised Kaikeyī's father to make Kaikeyī's son the next king, while asking for Kaikeyī's hand (Vālmīki, II.99.3).

Therefore, Kaikeyī did not need to ask for two boons to demand her justified marriage-pledge.

Then why did Vālmīki insert the two boons? Pollock thinks that it is to preserve the honesty and integrity of Daśaratha (ibid.: 28). However, that purpose is hardly served. Daśaratha, in any case, was going to break his marriage-pledge. But the story of the boon has another dimension to it. These boons were pledged for the excellent services given by Kaikeyī to Daśaratha when the latter was in danger in a battle (Ibid., II.9.12-13). It is not a usual thing for an early Indian queen to be present on a battlefield to save her husband in crisis. Therefore, the story also emphasizes Kaikeyī's relationship with Daśaratha, which seems beyond a traditional husband-wife relationship. It is a companionship and love-relationship for which Kaikeyī could break the norms and endanger her life to save her beloved. Daśaratha's pledges to Kaikeyī are the tokens of that love. Therefore, Mantharā, who had taken care of Kaikeyī since her birth (Vālmīki, II.7.1), views Rāma's coronation as a deception to Kaikeyī, a defrauding of her innocent love (Ibid., II.7.20-22).

So when Kaikeyī demands the boons, Daśaratha faces a test of his love. He proves his love for Kaikeyī, the woman who had once risked her life for his sake, with his life. Even Mantharā knows that Daśaratha will 'go through fire' for Kaikeyī's sake (Ibid., II.9.17). The king cannot bring himself to anger Kaikeyī nor even bear to look at her when she is angry. He is powerless to refuse her, and will give up his life to please her (Ibid., II.9.17-19). Daśaratha does exactly that.

Coming to share the joy of Rāma's coronation with his beloved, Daśaratha finds her lying on the ground. Caressing her, he emphatically declares that there is nobody but Rāma who is dearer than Kaikeyī to him (Ibid., II.10.1-17). The king's passion transcends his kingly ethics:

> "*kasya vā te priyaṃ kāryaṃ kena vā vipriyaṃ kṛtam/*
>
> *kaḥ priyaṃ labhatām adya ko vā sumahad apriyam//*
>
> *avadhyo vadhyatāṃ ko vā vadhyaḥ ko vā vimucyatām/*
>
> *daridraḥ ko bhavatyāḍhyo dravyavān vapy akiñcana//*
>
> (Is there someone to whom you would have favour shown, or has someone aroused your disfavour? The one shall find favour at once, the other incur my lasting disfavour.

> Is there some guilty man who should be freed, or some innocent man I should execute? What poor man should I enrich, what rich man impoverish?) (Ibid., II.10.9-10)

This uncontrolled passion of Daśaratha is noted and criticized by everybody around. The angry Lakṣmaṇa goes to the extent of calling the king 'perverse, old and debauched by pleasures' (*viparītaś ca vṛddhaṣ ca viṣayaiś ca viḍamvitaḥ*) (Ibid., II.18.3). Bharata thinks that the king committed this great evil under the constraints of a woman (Ibid., II.97.6). The ever-composed Rāma says that because of his desire, Daśaratha is completely in Kaikeyī's power (Ibid., II.47.8). Even Daśaratha himself admits that he has done a rash thing for a woman's sake (Ibid., II.53.16). But still he does not break his pledge to his lover. He cannot believe the sudden transformation in his lover. He reviles her (Ibid., II.10.33-35), begs to her and touches her feet (Vālmīki, II.10.40-41), appeals to her heart which he knows to be there (Ibid., II.11.3), even repudiates her (Ibid., II.12.11). But he still maintains his pledge as the token of their love. With his life, Daśaratha proves his words:

> "*bhadre hṛdayam apy etat anumṛśyoddharasva me/*
>
> *etat samīkṣya kaikeyi brūhi yat sādhu manyase."*
>
> (Take hold of my heart, rip it out, and examine it closely, my lovely Kaikeyī; then tell me if you do not find it true.") (Ibid., II.10.18)

What happens to Kaikeyī then? How does she react to the death of the lover for whom she had once risked entering the battlefield? How does she react after being held responsible for his death unanimously? What happens to her after being repudiated by even the son for whose sake she did all these? After Bharata's rejection, she must have realized her mistake. But by then Daśaratha was dead. There was no way back. The *Rāmāyaṇa* does not say anything directly. But is it very difficult to identify in Daśaratha the *krauñca* absorbed in passion, not noticing even the approaching death? If Vālmīki's *krauñcī* represents the 'uncontrolled sexual female', as Sutherland Goldman thinks, is Kaikeyī not her exact successor? (Goldman, 2004: 51) Kaikeyī's lamentations are not recorded by Vālmīki. They seem to have been absorbed in the wailings of the *krauñcī* mourning her mate, through the first poet's voice.

The story of Rāma and Sītā has to be understood with this background in mind. In the halo of Rāma the ideal man, ideal king, ideal son, and ideal brother, Rāma the lover has been overshadowed.

So has been the case of Sītā epitomized as the ideal, devoted, submissive, chaste wife. However, the first six books of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the compositions of Vālmīki, reveal a different picture. Keeping the tradition of the two couples discussed above, the story of Rāma and Sītā develops as a pure and simple love story. Vālmīki introduces the couple as one of profound mutual love, pointing out that their relationship is beyond the traditional husband-wife relationship:

> *"priyā tu sītā rāmasya dārā pitṛkṛtā iti/*
>
> *guṇāt rūpaguṇāc cāpi prītir bhūyo vyavardhata//*
>
> *tasyāś ca bhartā dviguṇaṃ hṛdaye parivartate/*
>
> *antarjātam api vyaktam ākhyāti hṛdayaṃ hṛdā//"*
>
> (Sītā was naturally dear to Rāma, for she was the wife his father gave him. Yet because of her virtue and beauty, his love grew greater still.)
>
> And yet in her heart she cherished her husband twice as much. Even their innermost hearts spoke clearly one to the other.) (Vālmīki, I.76.15-16).

Sītā does not make many appearances in the main narrative of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. But, whenever she does, she appears as a vocal, confident woman. We hardly see Vālmīki's Sītā speak in the voice of a normative submissive woman. Therefore, when Rāma decides to go to the forest, he manages to dissuade his mother Kausalyā from accompanying him, by giving her discourses on the normative duties of a woman. But, this ploy fails in front of Sītā. Sīta's passionate pleadings for accompanying Rāma to the forest are not only remarkable for poetic grace, but also for their significant contents. Sītā, the passionate lover, strongly argues that the conjugal relationship between a man and a woman transcends all other human relationships, including those with the parents, siblings, children, friends and in-laws. Therefore, a wife has a right to share all the joys and sorrows of her husband (Vālmīki, II.24.2-4). Sītā does not want to follow in her husband's footsteps like a traditional submissive wife. She wants to walk in front of Rāma to soften the thorns and sharp grasses for him (Ibid., II.24.5).The exile to the forest will be a sweet honeymoon for her, since she will be able to enjoy the streams and mountains, ponds and forests, geese and ducks, in her lover's company (Ibid., II.24.13-14).Sītā perceives her relationship with Rāma only in terms of love, which means sharing

each other's joys and sorrows (Ibid., II.26.18). In her anxiety to accompany Rāma, she does not refrain from reviling him (Ibid., II.27.3-8). However, she also makes it clear how all the hardships, in Rāma's company, will turn into pleasure, because her heaven is in his company and her hell in his absence (Ibid., II.27.10-17). As a result, Rāma agrees to take her along, declaring that he will refuse even heaven if it comes at the cost of Sītā's sorrows (Ibid., II.27.25). Subsequently, it turns out that their promises to each other are not empty. The time Rāma and Sītā spend together turns out to be a romantic outing rather than an exile in Vālmīki's description.

Similarly, she also vehemently expresses her disapproval when Rāma, requested by some sages, starts killing some Rākṣasas without provocation. She chastises Rāma for getting diverted from his path, and reminds him that bows are only for protecting those in distress.[12] Rāma's passion for Sītā hardly falls short of his father's passion for Kaikeyī when he chases the illusion of a golden deer, partly knowing it as unreal, to gratify Sīta's whim. We witness Sītā at her reviling worst just after that episode, when she – alarmed by the imitation of Rāma's voice by the Rākṣasa wizard Mārīca – forces Lakṣmaṇa to go in search of Rāma, accusing Lakṣmaṇa of plotting with Bharata to get her (Vālmīki, III.43.22).

It is the absence of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa that Rāvaṇa uses to abduct Sītā. However, in the face of certain abduction, Sītā displays her confidence in both Rāma and herself. Unafraid, she abuses Rāvaṇa continuously in words steeped in her love for Rāma:

"mahāgirim ivākampyaṃ mahendrasadṛśaṃ patim/

mahodadhim ivākṣobhyaṃ ahaṃ rāmam anuvratā//

mahābāhuṃ mahoraskaṃ siṃhavikrāntagāminam/

nṛsiṃhaṃ siṃhasaṃkāśam ahaṃ rāmam anuvratā//

pūrṇacandrānanaṃ vīraṃ rājavatsaṃ jitendriyam/

pṛthukīrtiṃ mahābāhum ahaṃ rāmam anuvratā//"

tvaṃ punar jambukaḥ siṃhīṃ mām ihecchasi durlabhām/

nāhaṃ śakyā tvayā spraṣṭum ādityasya prabhā yathā."

(I am faithful to Rāma, my husband, the equal of great Indra, unshakable as a great mountain, imperturbable as the great sea. I am faithful to Rāma,

> the great-armed, great-chested prince, who moves with the boldness of a lion, a lionlike man, a lion among men. I am faithful to Rāma, the king's most cherished son, a great-armed mighty prince of wide-renown and strict self-control, whose face is like the full moon. As for you, you are a jackal in the presence of a lioness, to come here seeking me, whom you can never have. You could no more touch me than touch the radiance of the sun.) (Ibid., III.45.29-32 (diacritics added))

If this defiance exemplifies Sītā's love for Rāma, the heart-wrenching lamentation of Rāma after Sītā's abduction shows the other side of the story. This paper cannot afford the space needed for quoting the entire passage, one of the best displays of Vālmīki's poetic capacity, where Rāma asks every tree, plant and animal about Sītā's whereabouts, like a madman (Ibid., III.58.12-22). In course of his lamentation at Sītā's loss, Vālmīki's Rāma reiterates those points which constructed the core of their companionship:

> *"prasthitaṃ daṇḍakāraṇyaṃ yā mām anujagāma ha/*
>
> *kva sā lakṣmaṇa vaidehī yāṃ hitvā tvam ihāgataḥ//*
>
> *rājyabhraṣṭasya dīnasya daṇḍakān paridhāvataḥ/*
>
> *kva sā duḥkhasahāyā me vaidehī tanumadhyamā//*
>
> *yāṃ vinā notsahe vīra mūhurtam api jīvitum/*
>
> *kva sā prāṇasahāyā me sītā surasutopamā//"*
>
> (Where is Vaidehī, Lakṣmaṇa? Could you have left her behind to come here, the woman who accompanied me when I set forth to Daṇḍaka wilderness? Where is fair-waisted Vaidehī, the woman who shares my sorrow as I run wretchedly through Daṇḍaka, driven from my kingdom? Where is Sītā, a woman like a daughter of the gods, the woman who shares my life?) (Vālmīki, III.56.2-4 (diacritics added))

Thus, with the abduction of Sītā, the third passionate couple in Vālmīki's epic faces separation. However, Vālmīki, who had cursed the Niṣāda for causing the first separation, and showed the same tragedy in the second couple's life, now begins to rectify the unfairness in the third case. Rāma's quest for Sītā starts. After a series of events, at last Hanumān reaches Laṅkā with Rāma's message. There he meets Sītā in a miserable condition, being wooed by Rāvaṇa and terrorized by her guards, yet steadfast in her love for Rāma. Even after the long separation, Sītā not only resists Rāvaṇa's advances with dignity, but retains her confidence that she had while

arguing for accompanying Rāma to the forest: no one is dearer to Rāma than her, not even his mother, father or anyone else.[13]

Sukumari Bhattacharji, showing Rāma as an unworthy and bad lover, argues that while Sītā's condition was miserable because of the separation, it did not affect Rāma at all (Bhattacharji 2002: 37). However, what Vālmīki says through Hanumān's voice is utterly different:

> "*naiva daṃśān na maśakān na kīṭān na sarīsṛpān/*
>
> *rāghavo'panayed gātrāt tadgatenāntarātmanā//*
>
> *nityaṃ dhyānaparo rāmo nityaṃ śokaparāyaṇaḥ/*
>
> *nānyac cintayate kiñcit sa tu kāmavaśaṃ gataḥ//*
>
> *anidraḥ satataṃ rāmaḥ supto'pi ca narottamaḥ/*
>
> *sīteti madhurāṃ vāṇīṃ vyāharan pratibudhyate//*
>
> *dṛṣṭvā phalaṃ vā puṣpaṃ vā yac cānyat strīmanoharaṃ/*
>
> *bahuśo hā priyetyevaṃ śvasaṃstvām abhibhāṣate//*
>
> *sa devi nityaṃ paritapyamānasa tvām eva sītetyabhibhāṣyamāṇaḥ/*
>
> *dhṛtavrato rājasuto mahātmā tavaiva lābhāya kṛtaprayatnaḥ.//"*
>
> (His mind is so completely fixed on you that he does not even brush the flies, mosquitoes, insects, and snakes away from his body. Rāma is constantly obsessed with brooding, constantly absorbed in grief, completely under the power of love. He cannot think of anyone else. Rāma almost never sleeps, but even when that best of men does fall asleep, he wakes up murmuring 'Sītā' in a sweet voice. Whenever he sees some fruit or flower or anything else that women like, he sighs and calls out for you over and over again, crying 'alas!my darling!'. In constant agony, my lady, the great prince, firm in ascetic vows, calls out to you, crying 'Sītā!' He is making every effort to get you back.) (Vālmīki, V.34.40-44) (diacritics added)

However, this fine love-story stumbles at its climax, after Rāma kills Rāvaṇa. Suddenly suspicious, Rāma refuses to take Sītā back, saying:

> "Bless you, but let it be understood that it was not on your account that I undertook the effort of this war... Instead, I did all this in order to protect my reputation and in every way to wipe clean the insult and disgrace to my illustrious lineage.

> Since, however, your virtue is now in doubt, your presence has become as profoundly disagreeable to me as is a bright lamp to a man afflicted with a disease of the eye.
>
> Go, therefore, as you please, daughter of Janaka. You have my permission...I have no further use for you, my good woman.
>
> For what powerful man born in a respectable family – his heart tinged with affection – would take back a woman who had lived in the house of another man?
>
> How could I who boast of my noble lineage possibly take you back — just risen from Rāvaṇa's lap and gazed upon by his lustful eyes?
>
> I have recovered my reputation, and that is the purpose for which I won you back. I do not love you anymore. Go hence wherever you like...Turn your thoughts toward Lakṣmaṇa or Bharata as you please.
>
> Or Sītā, set your mind on Sugrīva, lord of the monkeys or on whoever you please.
>
> For surely, Sītā, once Rāvaṇa had seen you, so enchanting with your heavenly beauty, he would not long have you left unmolested while you were dwelling in his house"[14]

How to account for this sudden change in Rāma? Bhattacharji opines that this incident makes all his earlier lamentations after Sītā's abduction seem like mere rhetorical flourishes. However, the matter can also be viewed from the reverse angle. The journey of Rāma and Sītā throughout the epic, the lamentations of Rāma after Sītā's abduction, Hanumān's report of Rāma's condition — everything makes the event most unnatural. Still, the episode is there, and it has a role to play.

Here we see Rāma the king to be. Nrisinhaprasad Bhaduri has pointed out that probably Rāma is now being overconscious of his image as a king. He had seen the image of his father being tarnished because of his excessive passion for a woman. He himself had joined the critics then. What if Rāma himself is labelled as the same, like Daśaratha, like the *krauñca, kāmamohita*? (Bhaduri, 2004)

The episode also falls within the scope of the love-story. If we follow Rāma's statement, we can see that it is more the aberration of a lover's ultra-possessiveness than a king's concern for his subject's opinion. Even Sītā, at least once, shows a similar insecurity and

anxiety, though in a more civil form, when she – captivated by Rāvaṇa – assumes that Rāma is to forget her and make love with other women (Vālmīki, V.26.14).

Rāma's possessiveness and anxiety are expressed in a much more vulgar manner. As a result, Sītā decides to kill herself by entering fire. With Sītā's death, the third love-story would also end in eternal separation and lamentation. However, that could not be the purpose of the poet who had cursed the Niṣāda and vilified Mantharā, who had made Rāma come up to Laṅkā and kill Rāvaṇa for Sītā. Already with the imagery of a lamp hurting the person with diseased eyes, Vālmīki made it clear who is the lamp and in whom the disease is. Now, as Sītā jumps into the fire, the Fire-god himself comes out with her, proclaiming her chastity. With divine intervention, the third couple is saved from eternal separation. Vālmīki's *śloka* could ultimately remedy the wrong which caused his *śoka*. The Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* ended in the union of Rāma and Sītā.

The 'Uttarakāṇḍa' and the epic turned upside down

The 'Uttarakāṇḍa', the seventh book of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, is a very late addition to the text. Its composition might have occurred as late as the third century C.E., since its contents do not seem to be known to the early *Rāmakathās* like the Buddhist *Dasaratha Jātaka* (c. mid first millennium BCE), the Jaina *Paumacariyam* (c. first century CE), the 'Rāmopākhyāna' in the *Mahābhārata* (possibly inserted between second century BCE and second century CE), and the *Pratimānāṭakam* and the *Abhiṣekanāṭakam* of Bhāsa (c. second century CE). The identity of the poet of the 'Uttarakāṇḍa' is not known. But, there is a possibility that he belonged to the Bhārgava family, who are largely responsible for Brahmanizing the *Mahābhārata* and composing the normative Brahmanical law-book *Manu Smṛti*.[14] Their zealously Brahmanizing tendency reshaped the *Rāmāyaṇa* as well.

Therefore, in the 'Uttarakāṇḍa', Rāma is no more the protagonist of a heroic romance, but the ideal king protecting the *varṇāśramadharma*. The text no more remains poetry of love and separation, but – like the other Bhārgava texts – a manifesto for an ideal Brahmanical society where the women and the lower castes are at the receiving end. Rāma therefore banishes the pregnant and helpless Sītā to the forest for no fault of hers, only to please his subjects who are suspicious of her chastity. We also see Rāma slaying

a*śūdra* ascetic Śambūka who dares to transgress the *varṇa*-order by performing austerities, a transgression leading to the untimely death of a *brāhmaṇa*'s son.

These incidents have influenced the reception of the *Rāmāyaṇa* so much that the message of the six earlier books is almost entirely overpowered. The orthodoxy professes Rāma as the ideal king. '*Rāmarājya*' has become the utopian epitome of a normatively perfect kingdom. Sītā has been idealized as the ideal, submissive, chaste wife who remains silent and devoted to her husband despite being unfairly treated by him.

On the other hand, the critiques of the *Rāmāyaṇa* have also directed their attacks mainly against the Rāma of the 'Uttarakāṇḍa'. Bhattacharji, for instance, attacks *Rāmarājya* as a kingdom based on oppression of the women and the lower castes.[15] As early as in the sixteenth century, Candrāvatī, a woman deceived by her lover Jayānanda, composed a *Rāmakathā* in Bengali, in which the story is viewed from Sītā's perspective, showing Rāma as a cruel and deceiving husband.[16] In his Assamese *Rāmakathā* composed in the seventeenth century, Śaṅkaradeva speaks through the mouth of Sītā:

> "He (Rāma) wanted to kill the two boys in my womb. When they speak of my husband's virtue, my body burns. He sought to take the lives of my boys and me. Tell me where else is there such a cruel husband?"[17]

The Telugu folk-songs sung by the women question Rāma's integrity and foreground the theme of the suffering that husbandly neglect causes a wife.[18] The Kahar and Barber women make Sītā one of them in their songs — a woman found in a field, of unknown parentage, suffering injustice at the hand of Rāma, silenced even when she tries to uphold her virtue.[19] Madhu Kishwar (2000) has shown how Sītā has become a more powerful symbol than Rāma in Indian popular culture, as a woman wronged yet not doing any wrong. Sītā has resurfaced time and again in various modern Indian compositions as the symbol of the deprived and maltreated woman, Rāma being the evil of patriarchy personified. Kumaran Asan's *The Brooding Sītā*, M.Geetha's poem *Agni Pariksha* and Bina Agarwal's poem *Sita Speak* are classic examples. In her one-act play 'Sita', Snehalata Reddy makes Sītā reject Rāma as a cruel, heartless tyrant, and condemn *Rāmarājya* as a male-dominated fraud.[20]

However, as we have seen, Vālmīki had little role to play in this gross alteration of his message. Rāma, the eye-candy of normative

orthodoxy and the political right wing, and the villain in the eyes of the gender-sensitive writers, is largely a product of the 'Uttarakāṇḍa'. So is Sītā, the ideal submissive woman or the symbol of the gender-oppressed yet strong-willed women.

The poet of the 'Uttarakāṇḍa' seems to be well aware of the injustice he has done to Vālmīki's text. Performing his social obligation, the poet asks for forgiveness of the first poet, through the voice of Rāma:

> "*seyaṃ lokabhayāt brahman napayety abhijānataḥ/*
>
> *parityaktā mayā sītā tadbhavān kṣantum arhasi//*"
>
> (Please forgive me, Brahmin, for having renounced Sītā out of fear of the people even though I knew that she was innocent.) (*The Uttarakāṇḍa*, VII.88.3)

However, a more interesting strategy adopted by him to interact with his predecessor is introducing Vālmīki as a character. In the 'Bālakāṇḍa', Vālmīki had no personal affinity with Rāma, but heard the oral tradition about him from Nārada. However, when Sīta, banished unfairly by Rāma, was wailing alone, the poet of the 'Uttarakāṇḍa' could not find any other way to tackle her than to bring back the poet who was once moved by the wailings of a female crane unfairly separated from her husband. In the case of the crane, Vālmīki failed to mitigate the injustice. However, in the 'Uttarakāṇḍa', Vālmīki becomes the refuge of Sītā. The *kuśīlava* disciples of Vālmīki are now turned into Kuśa and Lava, the sons of Rāma, born in Vālmīki's hermitage. However, despite Vālmīki's assurance, Rāma refuses to take back Sītā without convincing the public of her chastity. Registering her passive protest, Sītā enters the earth forever, proving her chastity but leaving Rāma alone.

Vālmīki's message also got transformed forever. Rāma and Sītā were separated for eternity. The 'uncontrolled sexual female' now gave way to – if we use Sutherland's words – the 'masochistic counter-aggression of the powerless woman' (Goldman, 1989). Yet, the homage to the first poet is paid. Even in the altered narrative of the 'Uttarakāṇḍa', Vālmīki remains the ultimate refuge of the wailing heroine. Vālmīki is the voice assuring her chastity and protesting the separation. It is in Vālmīki's hermitage, through his *kuśīlava* disciples, that the lineage of Rāma is shown to have continued.

Yes to Vālmīki, No to the 'Uttarakāṇḍa': Critiques of the Altered Narrative from Bhavabhūti to Rabindranath

We have seen how Vālmīki's story has been grossly transformed by the poet of the 'Uttarakāṇḍa' and how that affected the popular receptions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. However, it will be interesting to check how this alteration has been perceived within the *Rāmakathā* tradition itself. As already mentioned, some texts within the tradition had been composed possibly before the insertion of the 'Uttarakāṇḍa'. However, even these texts interact with Vālmīki and often go along his story of the three couples (the *Dasaratha Jātaka* is a notable exception). Vimala Sūri, the poet of the *Paumacariyam*, a Jaina *Rāmakathā* composed in c. first century CE, does not mention Vālmīki by name. However, it claims to present the 'true history of Rāma' that has been tampered and fantasized in the hands of a 'stupid, bad poet' (*mūrkhakukavi*) (Sūrī, 1962: III.14-15). The poet indicated is not difficult to identify. When the *Paumacariyam* points out that the Rākṣasas were not actually demons, the Vānaras were not monkeys, or Rāvaṇa did not really have ten heads, and presents more realistic explanations for each of these notions, his engagement with Vālmīki's account becomes apparent. However, interestingly, Vimala Sūri retains the story of Daśaratha promising a boon to Kaikeyī, which we have seen to be actually an innovation of Vālmīki into the tradition he had heard. Rather, making Kaikeyī even less villainous, Vimala Sūri writes that Kaikeyī demanded only the throne for her son, not Rāma's exile. She even tried to dissuade Rāma from going into exile (Ibid., XXIX-XXXI).Thus, the Daśaratha-Kaikeyī love-story, foundational to Vālmīki's story of the three couples, found a place even in the poetry of the poet most antagonistic to Vālmīki.

Similarly, even the highly Brahmanized 'Rāmopākhyāna' of the *Mahābhārata* retains the boon story and repeats the passion of Daśaratha who – echoing Vālmīki's text – is ready to kill an innocent man or free a guilty, give or take away wealth from anybody, just to please Kaikeyī. (Vyāsa, III.261: 15-25) It also retains Vālmīki's original ending, the happy union of Rāma and Sītā after the temporary anxiety of the fire ordeal.

In Bhāsa's *Pratimānaṭakam* (c. second century CE), the handling is even more sensitive. Kaikeyī, here, emerges as the highly misunderstood heroine. Even Rāma accepts in the drama that the kingdom belonged to Bharata, being promised as a marriage gift to Kaikeyī (Bhāsa, 1998: 9-11). However, Kaikeyī does nothing for the sake of the kingdom. Rather, she wants Daśaratha to keep his truthful

promise (Ibid.: 30). She exposes herself to blame, only to keep intact the reputation of Daśaratha who needed to perform a penance of separation from his beloved son, as a punishment for killing the son of a blind sage (Ibid.: 55). The story of killing the blind sage's son is there in Vālmīki, as a secret revealed by Daśaratha to Kausalyā before his death. However, Bhāsa shows that Kaikeyī was in full knowledge of the situation, and sacrificed her own reputation to protect the righteousness of her lover. Thus, from Bhāsa, we hear the unheard words of Vālmīki's Kaikeyī, the woman who had entered a battlefield to save Daśaratha, the woman who was considered by Daśaratha – until the final bitterness – as not just a wife, but a friend (*bāndhavī*) (Vālmīki, II.37.6).

What happens after the 'Uttarakāṇḍa' is composed is a question worth exploring. Do the later poets notice the mismatch between Vālmīki's books and the last book or is it only the modern Sanskritists and historians who enforce this distinction? If the distinction is recognized, how do the later authors react to it?

We may start off with Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṃśa* (c. fourth-fifth centuries CE). Kālidāsa begins with homage to Vālmīki that he dares to explore the difficult epic theme only because 'a gateway in the form of poetic speech to this royal lineage has already been opened by the first poet.'(Kālidāsa, 2005: I.4) The poet retells the entire *Rāmāyaṇa,*including the 'Uttarakāṇḍa', but retains the flavour of Vālmīki. In a single sentence, he represents Vālmīki's treatment of the Daśaratha-Kaikeyī relationship, saying that the king highly esteemed Kauśalyā, but loved Kaikeyī — "*arcitā tasya kausalyā priyā kekayavaṃśajā.*" (Ibid., X.55) However, Kālidāsa's treatment of the 'Uttarakāṇḍa' is highly interesting. He keeps the narrative intact, but in a couplet exposes the strategy of Vālmīki's sudden appearance as a character in the 'Uttarakāṇḍa':

> *"tām abhyagacchad ruditānusārī kaviḥ kuśedhmāharaṇāya yātaḥ/*
>
> *niṣādabiddhāṇḍajadarśanotthaḥ ślokatvam āpadyata yasya śokaḥ//"*
>
> (Following the wailing (of Sītā), there came to her the poet who had been out for collecting Kuśa grass and sacred faggot — the poet whose grief on beholding a bird shot by a huntsman burst into heroic verse.) (Ibid., XIV.70)

In this way, pointing out the essence of Vālmīki's poetry in the crane-parable, Kālidāsa resorts to restore the love-relationship of Rāma and Sītā. Therefore, his emphasis comes on the fact that

despite sending Sītā to the forest, Rāma took no second wife as his consort in the horse sacrifice, but used an effigy of Sītā for the purpose. This comforts Kālidāsa's Sītā amidst the unbearable grief of separation (Ibid., XIV.87). This also becomes an opportunity for Kālidāsa to assert how, despite the 'Uttarakāṇḍa', the *Rāmāyaṇa* remains a tale of the love between Rāma and Sītā, for Rāma, afraid of scandal, could thrust his Sītā out from his home only, but not from his heart (*kaulīnabhītena gṛhān nirastā na tena vaidehasūtā manastaḥ*) (Ibid., XIV.84).

If Kālidāsa's disfavour to the rejection of Sītā, and his support for Vālmīki's love-story, appears mild and subtle, Bhavabhūti represents the extreme case. This great dramatist, who flourished possibly in the seventh century CE, composed two dramas on the *Rāmāyaṇa* theme. The first, the *Mahāvīracarita*, deals with Rāma's entire career up to the killing of Rāvaṇa. The second, the *Uttararāmacarita,* deals with the 'Uttarakāṇḍa' episode only. Therefore, already in his selection of themes, Bhavabhūti indicates that he considers the *Rāmāyaṇa*, up to the 'Yuddhakāṇḍa', and the 'Uttarakāṇḍa' as two separate pieces of literature. Beginning his *Uttararāmacarita* with homage to the poets of old (Bhavabhuti, 2007: 64), he makes his stand on the subsequent theme clear in an early verse:

"*sarvathā vyāvahartavyaṃ kuto hy avacanīyatā/*

yathā strīṇāṃ tathā vācāṃ sādhutve durjano janaḥ//"

(It is our duty to act no matter what,

There is no escaping criticism,

However pure the words – or the woman –

There are always people who'll be malicious.") (Ibid.: 68-69)

Though it is apparent that the unjust criticism of Sītā is being addressed here, Bhavabhūti trickily connects the purity of the woman with that of words. Is it just a statement of the purity of Bhavabhūti's words and a dig at his critics? The implication seems to be more complex. The slandering about Sītā's character, leading to her exile, seems to be equated with the violation of words, possibly the tampering of the first poet's words! The *durjana* is thus not only the random Ayodhyan questioning Sītā's chastity, but also probably the poet of the 'Uttarakāṇḍa' tampering with Vālmīki's poetry.

Almost as a second Vālmīki, Bhavabhūti undertakes to restore the poetry.

Therefore, the drama is a complex one. Its metanarrative refers back and forth to several texts, Vālmīki's poetry, the 'Uttarakāṇḍa', Bhavabhūti's drama, and a drama performed within it. In an obvious attempt to remind the audience of Vālmīki's message, Bhavabhūti takes his protagonists to a gallery of paintings on Rāma's life, displaying the various significant moments and moods from the love-relationship of Rāma and Sītā in Vālmīki's text. Cherishing the moments of such lovely companionship, Sītā falls asleep on Rāma's lap and Rāma mutters his innermost feelings of love:

"viniścituṃ śakyo na sukham iti vā duḥkham iti vā/

pramoho nidrā vā kimuviśasarpaḥ kimu madaḥ/

tava sparśe sparśe mama hi parimūḍhendriyagaṇo/

vikāraś caitanyaṃ bhramayati ca sammīlayati ca."

(Every single time you touch me

A kind of transformation–

It can't be described as joy or sorrow,

Ecstasy or sleep,

A state of intoxication

Or all-suffusing poison–

Confuses my sense at once

Excites and dulls my awareness.) (Bhavabhuti, 2007: 104-105)

Creating this climax of love, Bhavabhūti brings the ultimate anti-climax. Suddenly, the envoy Durmukha reports the slandering about Sītā's character and Rāma decides to banish her. In this way, Rāma keeps his promise of letting go his affection, mercy, happiness, even Sītā, for the sake of serving his people (*snehaṃ dayāṃ ca saukhyaṃ ca yadi vā jānakīm api/ ārādhanāya lokasya muñcato nāsti me vyāthā*) (Ibid.: 80-81). But what does it leave of Vālmīki's Rāma? He considers himself an outcaste and untouchable, unworthy of Sītā's touch (Ibid.: 116-117). He feels that it was only to register pain that

Rāma was endowed consciousness: "*duḥkhasaṃvedanāyaiva rāme caitanyam āhitam.*" (Ibid.: 116-117) Touching Sītā's feet with his head, Rāma banishes her love to the forest (Ibid.: 118-119).

From here, the drama moves on as a commentary on how unfair the 'Uttarakāṇḍa' has been, with Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* as a constant reference point. Through Vālmīki's disciple Ātreyī, Bhavabhūti retells the crane-parable and Vālmīki's composition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Ibid.: 132-133). The killing of Śambūka is provided with a dramatic edge, as the incident is placed at Janasthāna, the very place where Rāma and Sītā dwelled together during their exile. The site of those very forests reminds Rāma, and the audience, how Sītā had accompanied Rāma in his exile and how she had enjoyed the hardships for the sake of his company. Rāma now realizes what a gift it was to have someone who truly loved him (Ibid.: 150-151). With both Rāma and Sītā (present on the spot in an invisible form) cherishing their memories, any reader of Vālmīki would unmistakably remember Rāma's mad quest after Sītā's abduction in Vālmīki's text, when Rāma was roaming the very forest, frantically asking each plant and animal about Sītā's whereabouts. At last, Rāma bitterly realizes that he has been separated from Sītā by a device beyond Vālmīki's text. Here, friendship with the Vānaras or Jāmbavān's advice would be no help, Nala would not be able to build any road, Hanumān's efforts or Lakṣmaṇa's arrows would not be enough to regain Sītā (Ibid.: 224-225).

In this situation, suddenly comes the news of Rāma's sacrificial horse being tied up in Vālmīki's hermitage. Rāma reaches the hermitage where he views his own sons, Lava and Kuśa, unknown to him, ravaging his army. The youngsters seem familiar with Vālmīki's new composition, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and appeal to the audience's (and Rāma's) memory yet again by quoting exact verses from Vālmīki about the mutual love of Rāma and Sītā (Bhavabhuti, 2007: 348-351; 352-353). The last part of the epic is reported to be unpublished, which Vālmīki has sent to the divine director Bharata for the composition of a play. Here again, there is a clear indication that the 'Uttarakāṇḍa' is not treated as a part of Vālmīki's original composition.

The play reaches its climax in the last Act when Vālmīki's latest composition, the concluding part of Rāma's story, is performed in front of Rāma. The drama within the drama ends with Sītā's suicidal entrance into the earth, watching which Rāma loses his consciousness. Then Lakṣmaṇa cries out to Vālmīki in shock:

"Help, Vālmīki, help! Is this the moral of your poem?"(Ibid.: 381)

The keyquestion is ultimately asked. Can the 'Uttarakāṇḍa' be the moral of Vālmīki's poem? Bhavabhūti replies in the negative, making Vālmīki modify the work and end it with the ultimate unity of Rāma and Sītā. The unfair treatment to both Sītā and poetry is mitigated. Bhavabhūti makes Vālmīki restore both to their deserved purity. The restored virtue of poetry is sanctified through Rāma's statement:

"*tām etāṃ paribhāvayantvabhinayair vinyastarūpāṃ budhāḥ/*

śabdabrahmavidaḥ kaveḥ pariṇata prajñānasya vāṇīm imāṃ//"

(May the learned come to relish it

Embodied in dramatic performance,

The verbal art of a seasoned poet, a master

Of the sacred mystery of language.) (Ibid.: 388-389)

Who is this seasoned poet celebrated here? Is it Vālmīki, the composer of the play within the play, or Bhavabhūti the composer of the real play? The right answer is probably both of them, unified in the Poet Universal restoring poetry to its proper purity and rectifying the aberrations. The playwright Girish Karnad rightly observes:

> "The tragedy inflicted upon Sītā by her villifiers objectifies what is being done to language itself in the same process. This is a crisis that only the Poet can resolve. 'Rama's Last Act' celebrates the Poet as one who bears the central responsibility of maintaining the purity of speech and who, when that turns turbid, can restore it to its unclouded state." (Ibid.: 24)

Therefore, we can see that the *Rāmāyaṇa* has been primarily understood as a love-story within Indian literary tradition, and the modification made in the 'Uttarakāṇḍa' was not very welcome to many poets. Bhavabhūti, though most powerful of them, was not the only one in this regard.

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, a *bhakti* text composed between c. seventh and ninth centuries CE, with love as its dominant theme, therefore remembers Rāma neither as an ideal king nor as the killer of Rāvaṇa, but as a great lover who, despite being so much free of greed that he could renounce his deserved royal wealth at once, chased an illusion of a golden deer to please his beloved's whim:

"*tyaktvā sudustyajya surairipsita rājyalakṣmī/*

dharmiṣṭha āryavacasā yad agād araṇyam/

māyāmṛgaṃ dayitayepsitam anvadhāvan/

vande mahāpuruṣa te caraṇāravindam."

(I worship the lotus foot of that great man who went to the forest for the sake of the words of his righteous noble father, leaving the royal wealth coveted by even the deities and difficult to forsake, yet chased the magic deer desired by his beloved one.) (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, XI.5.34)

The companionship of Rāma and Sītā became such a consistent theme within the *Rāmakathā* tradition that the poet of the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* (c. fourteenth century CE) could make Sītā plead with Rāma to take her to the forest on the basis of that authority:

"anyat kiñcit pravakṣyāmi śrutvā māṃ naya kānanam/

rāmāyaṇani bahuśaḥ śrutāni bahubhir dvijaiḥ/

sītāṃ vinā vanaṃ rāmo gataḥ kiṃ kutracid vada/

atas tvayā gamiṣyāmi sarvathā tvatsahāyinī."

(I am telling you something else listening to which you may take me to the forest. There are several *Rāmayaṇas* heard from different twice-borns. Tell me if anywhere Rāma has gone to the forest without Sītā. Therefore, I shall go with you, as your helper forever.) (*Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, II.4.33-34)

If Bhavabhūti united with Vālmīki in the person of the Poet Universal, the anonymous author of the *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa* (c. fifteenth century) goes one step further. He knows of the existence of hundreds of *Rāmāyaṇas*, but declares his own as the very best (*Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa*, Manohara Kāṇḍa 17.115). However, he prefers to remain anonymous and presents his work as Vālmīki's, for he believes that the only poet able to capture fully the beauty and the extent of the Rāma-story is Vālmīki (*Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa*, Janma Kāṇḍa 2. 13-15). However, the *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa* is the best of his creations, the cream on the top of Vālmīki's full cup (Ibid., Manohara Kāṇḍa, 8.69-71). How is this possible? How can a text acknowledging the knowledge of the hundreds of post-Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇas* still claim to be a composition of Vālmīki? Vidyut Aklujkar shows that the answer is provided in an interesting story (Akujkar, 2000).

The story shows Rāma, secretly traumatized by the memory of Rāvaṇa's laughter, banning laughing aloud. It creates an imbalance in the kingdom, leading Brahmā to assume the form of a laughing tree to restore equilibrium. When Rāma is troubled by the epidemic of laughter spread by the laughing tree, Vālmīki reveals to him the secret. Here, Vālmīki appears as the Poet Universal, the source of all poetry. He created a billion verses to describe Rāma's life, which Vyāsa had divided into various texts. So, the text still bearing Vālmīki's name is its sorrow-centric part, the poetry on war and strife is known as Vyāsa's *Mahābhārata*, and the poetry on the theme of love has become the *Bhāgavata*. All of them are important, but the best is the *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa,* which focuses on Rāma's real nature, the joyful and blissful one (*Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa*, Rājya Kāṇḍa, 13.1-137).

Therefore, no poetry exists out of Vālmīki. However, the essence of Vālmīki's poetry cannot be sorrow, but joy, and the joy in the *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa* represents the happy conjugal life of Rāma and Sītā, undoing the 'Uttarakāṇḍa' altogether. However, in doing this, the author hides himself behind Vālmīki, whose essence he only rediscovers:

> "Blessed is the Muni Vālmīki, the lord of all poets, who composed the billion-fold Rāmāyaṇa long ago, the extensive and auspicious Rāmāyaṇa, of which I told you only the essence." (Ibid, Pūrṇa Kāṇḍa, 9.63, Rājya Kāṇḍa 14.173-74)

Tony K. Stewart and Edward C. Dimock have pointed out that an even more serious critique of the 'Uttarakāṇḍa' comes from the Bengali *Śrīrāmapā(n)cālī* of Kṛttibāsa (c. fifteenth century CE) where the famous notion of *Rāmarājya* is questioned by the repeated statement that Daśaratha's reign was better than Rāma's (Stewart and Dimock, 2000). The untimely death taking place in Rāma's kingdom represents Rāma's misrule, and Rāma's arbitrary decision to kill Śambūka, the *śūdra* ascetic, is not a clear solution. Therefore, to atone for his sin, Rāma organizes a horse-sacrifice. However, what created the imbalance in Rāma's kingdom, if the transgression of the caste norms by Śambūka was not the real factor? It must have been a sin committed by the king. The possibility is high that Rāma's unfair judgment in banishing Sītā is indicated. The indication turns into a statement in the calamity brought by Rāma's horse-sacrifice. Lava and Kuśa, not knowing their parentage, and brought up in the innocence of Vālmīki's hermitage, not only capture Rāma's sacrificial horse, but kill Rāma along with his brothers in the

subsequent war. No composer of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, except Kṛttibāsa, has gone to the extent of killing Rāma in a battle. Rāma and his brothers are revived by the magic spell of Vālmīki. Still, despite Vālmīki's protest, Rāma asks for a second fire-ordeal of Sītā, leading to her suicidal entrance into the earth after which Rāma does not live long either.

Thus, Kṛttibāsa, devoted and respectful to Rāma in his first six books, voices his strong disapproval of the Rāma of the 'Uttarakāṇḍa'. Daśaratha, who sacrificed his life for his love, turns out to be a better king than the cold-hearted Rāma. Rāma's character has been desecrated to such an extent in the last book that the character's death in the hands of his more virtuous and innocent sons became necessary. It is only Vālmīki who has the power to revive his hero after that.

Therefore, the love of Rāma and Sītā, following the love of the crane-couple and the Daśaratha-Kaikeyī duo, remained the dominant theme of the *Rāmakathā* tradition. Even the most normative and Brahmanized*Rāmakathās* could not ignore it. Kampan, in his twelfth century Tamil text *Irāmāvatāram*, thus makes Sītā have a glance of Rāma from her window, to introduce a love at first sight.[21] Similarly, he makes the fire-ordeal of Sītā a nastier encounter, with Rāma slandering Sītā's birth and foodhabit in Laṅkā. However, Sītā does not merely emerge out of the fire, but scorches the fire, after which Agni reviles Rāma for abandoning *dharma* (Shulman, 2012). Thus, the love-story is developed, brought to extreme anticlimax, and restored to normalcy, just like in Vālmīki, for Kampan also knows Rāma and Sītā to be 'one breath of life in two different bodies' (ibid.: 99).

Similarly, Tulsīdās, the author of the Awadhi *Rāmacaritamānas* (sixteenth century), the most conservative, normative and Brahmanical of all the *Rāmāyaṇas*, retains Kampan's theme of love at first sight. He leaves out the fire-ordeal to save Rāma's embarrassment, but even his Rāma expresses his love for Sītā in the words not much different from Vālmīki, Kālidāsa, Bhavabhūti and Kampan:

"tattwa prema kara mama aru torā/

jānata priyā eka manu morā//

so manu sadā rahata tohi pāhī(n)/

jānu prīti rasu eta nehī māhī."

(Darling! It is only my mind that knows the secrets of my love and yours too. However, even that mind stays always with you.)[22]

In fact, despite the overwhelming hold of 'Uttarakāṇḍa' on both the orthodox appropriations of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and its iconoclastic criticisms, it is Vālmīki's theme that has often dominated even the modern *Rāmakathās*. I will conclude this essay with two such significant examples from modern Bengali literature: Michael Madhusudan Dutt, often considered the first modern poet of India, and Rabindranath Tagore, the most celebrated literary figure of modern India.

Dutt is largely known for his *Meghanādavadha Kāvya*, a radical reversal of the *Rāmāyaṇa* with Rāvaṇa and his heroic son Meghanāda as the chief protagonists. However, Dutt's use of the epic themes was not limited to this monumental work only. His *Bīrāṅgaṇā* is a collection of eleven imaginary letters written by different epic heroines to their respective lovers. In one of these, *Daśarather Prati Kekayī*, we hear for the first time after Bhāsa the open statement of Kaikeyī's love. Here, Kaikeyī demands the kingdom for Bharata not for the sake of the kingdom, but for the sake of the pledge made as a token of Daśaratha's love for her. It is the insult of her love, by Daśaratha's false promise, which offends Kaikeyī:

"No more I'm bent by weighty buttocks!

Thighs are not plump like plantains,

Rounded! The waist, which you would

Grip in love and demean lions,

No more is slender! Those high breasts

Are shaggy! Tasteless lips! Time has

Robbed crookedly all jewels which

Adorned youth's stock; Summer has robbed

Forest-flower's grace, drying it up!

But think of old days, My Gem,

When I saved you, in youth's bloom,

The vow you made, Lord, virtue itself

Being its witness; if in lust

You had given a false hope, tell —

Silently I'll then bear the pain.

I have heard how men in lust

Often steal the hearts of women,

Trickily, leaving virtue, free of fear,

Mixing with honey deceit's ashes!

Sun King, have you, too, stooped that low?

I have written this letter in blood

Of my breast! If sinless I'm,

Devoted still to the husband's feet,

Let Virtue decide, let Virtue speak." (Dutt, 1999: 141-142, Tr. by author)

If Dutt recovered the voice of Vālmīki's Kaikeyī, Tagore – engaged very closely with the *Rāmakathā* tradition – focused more on Rāma and Sītā and their poet. He opines that the glory of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is not in the battle of Rāma and Rāvaṇa. Rather, the battle is only a device to highlight the love of Rāma and Sītā (Tagore, 1961c: 662). Therefore, Vālmīki's crane-parable lies at the heart of Tagore's understanding of the *Rāmāyaṇa*:

> "The legend prevalent about Vālmīki will not be considered history by anybody. But we consider that as the real history of the poet. The biography created by Vālmīki's readers from Vālmīki's poetry is truer than Vālmīki's real life. Which impact made the source of poetry flow out of Vālmīki's heart? The impact of compassion. The *Rāmāyaṇa* is a stream of the tears of compassion. The grief-stricken wailing of the separated crane is sounded in the core of the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition... The parable of the crane-couple is a concise metaphor of the essence of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Flatly saying, the people have no doubt discovered the truth that the pure stream of the great poet's *anuṣṭubh* meter has flown, being melted by the very warmth of

> compassion. The untimely and permanent separation of conjugal love has churned out the poetry in the compassionate sage."(Tagore 1961b: 881-882, Tr. by author)

This belief was so deeply embedded in Tagore, that it became the theme of one of his earliest creations, *Vālmīki Pratibhā*.

Being so much sensitive to Vālmīki's poetry, Tagore did not fail to recognize and criticize the 'Uttarakāṇḍa', which tampered with the essence of the epic:

> "The poet of the *Rāmāyaṇa* has not constructed Rāma's character with the logic of any normative coherence. Thus the character is natural and literary, not advocatory. But the Uttarakāṇḍa came with the message of its particular time; it killed the character just as a glassworm kills a cockroach. The serious concern of the social necessity occurred, i.e. the problem of that time. In that period of codifying the behaviours, it was no more feasible to accept Sītā back into the house without protest, after her long stay in Rāvaṇa's house. That it would be wrong to do so, and that it was necessary to send her to the forest and (to ask for) a fire-ordeal at the end, giving priority to the public opinion–this ghost of a solution to the social problem possessed the character. The common audience of that time had appreciated the poet by considering the whole episode a high-quality production. By the power of that appreciation, this makeshift book is still attached to the living body of the original *Rāmāyaṇa*."(Tagore, 1961f: 514-515, Tr. by author)

Elsewhere, Tagore condemns the 'Uttarakāṇḍa', saying that this single book ruthlessly destroyed the story of joy and sorrow completely developed over the first six books. Up to the war, everybody considered Rāvaṇa as the greatest enemy of Sītā. But when Sītā had been rescued from Rāvaṇa after a long struggle, it is shown that the ultimate enemyof Sītā is not the unrighteous Rāvaṇa, but Rāma and his righteousness. Tagore thinks that anybody with the slightest sensitivity to the story cannot tolerate this sudden torture (Tagore, 1961e: 662 Tr. by author). Naturally, the sensitive authors like Bhavabhūti, Kālidāsa and Tagore could not tolerate it. In his longest poem, *Puraskār*, Tagore echoes Bhavabhūti's concern that Rāma's life has been turned into one that only registered pain:

> *"etek baliā kṣaṇa pare kabi/*
>
> *karuṇa kathāi prakāśila chabi/*
>
> *puṇyakāhinī raghukūlarabi/*
>
> *rāghaber itihās,/*

asaha duḥkha sahi nirabadhi/

kemane janam giyeche dagadhi/

jībaner śeṣ dibas abadhi/

asīm nirāśvās."

(The poet narrated in pitiful words that sacred lore – the tradition from the past about Rāghava, the best among the Raghus. (He stated) how his life was spent in unbearable agony and endless despair until the last day of his life.) (Tagore 1961d: 426, Tr. by author)

Thus, Tagore goes on to express his understanding of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in his poem *Bhāṣā o Chanda*. With this poem, we shall go back to the very first scene of the *Rāmāyaṇa* with which we started our survey of the *Rāmakathā* tradition. In the poem, Vālmīki asks Nārada:

"*bhagavan, tribhuvan tomāder pratyakṣe birāje*

kaho more kār nāme amar bīṇār chanda bāje.

kaho more bīrya kār kṣamāre kare nā atikram

kāhār caritra gheri sukaṭhin dharmer niyam

dhareche sundar śobhā māṇikyer aṅgader moto,

mahaiśvarye thāke namra mahādainye ke hay na nata,

sampade ke thake bhaye, bipade ke ekānta nirbhīk,

ke peyeche sab ceye, ke diyeche tahar adhik,

ke niyeche nija śire rājbhāle mukuṭer sama

sabinaye sagourabe dharā mājhe duḥkha mahattama —

kaha more sarbadarśī he debarṣi tār puṇya nām.

nārad kahilā dhīre, 'ayodhyār raghupati rām.'"

(My Lord, you have witnessed the three worlds. Tell me of a person whose name is echoed in the chords of eternal lute, whose might never transcends the limits of his mercy, whose character is graced by the uncompromising virtue of *dharma*. (Tell me) who stays modest in great affluence but is not

> overwhelmed by adversity, who remains restrained in wealth but is fearless in danger, who has received most and yet has given away more than what he has got, who has welcomed on his head in humility and glory — like the crown of a king — the greatest suffering in the world. Tell me, o all-witnessing divine sage, the holy name of a person such as this. Nārada said slowly, 'Rāma, the Raghu king of Ayodhyā.') (Tagore, 1961a: 916, Tr. by author)

However, asked to compose the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Vālmīki gets apprehensive to compose Rāma's history without knowing all the details. Nārada's reassurance follows:

> "*nārad kahilā hāsi, 'sei satya jā racibe tumi,*
>
> *ghaṭe jā tā sab satya nahe. kabi taba manobhūmi*
>
> *rāmer janamsthān ayodhyār ceye satya jeno."*
>
> (Nārada chuckled, "Truth is for you to create.
>
> Facts are not all True, but know, o poet,
>
> Your mind is truer than the birthplace
>
> Of Rāma–Ayodhyā.) (ibid.)

With this message, we can conclude our survey. The 'Uttarakāṇḍa' created an image of Rāma, the ideal king, and Sītā, the ideal submissive wife. This image turned Rāma into the hero of Brahmanical orthodoxy and the political right wing has gone to the extent of destroying a mosque in Ayodhya to retrace the 'history' of their idol! On the other hand, this notion of *Rāmarājya* and the character of Rāma have been variously condemned by the feminists, and the gender-sensitive, caste-sensitive thinkers, who also gave more importance to the 'Uttarakāṇḍa'. However, in both the cases, it is often unrecognized that the 'Uttarakāṇḍa' is a later interpolation in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, inconsistent with the essence of Vālmīki's poetry and disapproved by various authors within the *Rāmakathā* tradition. Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* is essentially a poem of love and separation involving three couples. It has been understood as such by the many poets following Vālmīki, who expressed their sympathies with the Vālmīkian, not the 'Uttarakāṇḍa', tradition. Rāma and Sītā are the protagonists of a classic heroic romance. No proof for a historical Rāma whose adventures were fashioned into poetry by Vālmīki, the *kuśīlava* bard, has been found yet. But what we have for sure is the

immortal poetry of Vālmīki about the three couples discussed. As Tagore writes, the real birthplace of Rāma is not Ayodhya, but the very mind of Vālmīki. The real story of Rāma is no historical adventure, but the resonances of that mind still echoing the mourning of a female crane for her deceased lover.

NOTES

1. See A.K. Ramanujan, 'Three Hundred Rāmāyaṇas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation' in Paula Richman (ed.), *Many Rāmāyaṇas* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2012), pp.22-49; Paula Richman, 'Introduction: The Diversity of the *Ramayana* Tradition' in Paula Richman (ed.), *Many Rāmāyaṇas* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2012), pp.3-21; Paula Richman, 'Questioning and Multiplicity within the *Ramayana* Tradition' in Paula Richman (ed.), *Questioning Ramayanas* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000), pp.1-21; Romila Thapar, 'Foreword' in Paula Richman (ed.), *Questioning Ramayanas* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000), pp. vii-xii.
2. See a historiographical discussion on all these positions in John Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics* (Brill, Leiden, 1998), pp.50-1.
3. Vālmīki, *The Rāmāyaṇa* (Vol.I), 'Balakanda' translated by Robert P. Goldman (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1984), pp.29-31. All the translations quoted from the 'Bālakāṇḍa' are from this volume, whereas all the verses quoted in original are from the same translation published with the original text from the New York University Press, New York, 2005.
4. See, for instance, M. Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature* (Vols. 1-3) (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1985-93); N.J. Shende, 'The Authorship of the Rāmāyaṇa', *Journal of the University of Bombay*, Vol.12, No.2, 1943a, pp.19-24; Brockington (1998); John Brockington, *Righteous Rāma* (OUP, Delhi, 1984).
5. *The Uttarakāṇḍa: The Seventh Book of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa.* Critically edited by Umakant Premchand Shah (Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1975), VII.94.26.
6. Vyāsa, *The Mahābhārata* (Vol.XIII), critically edited by Shripad Krishna Belvalkar (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona), XII.57.40.
7. Kauṭīlya, *Arthaśāstra*, critically edited and translated by R.P. Kangle (University of Bombay, Bombay, 1960-65), II.27.6-7; IV.1.58-65.
8. See Bulcke (1958) for details of all these narratives.
9. To Vyāsa, *The Mahābhārata* (Vol.II), translated by J.A.B. van Buitenen (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981) III.122. All the references to Vyāsa's *Mahābhārata* II and III are from this volume.
10. Leslie, p.477; Charlotte Vaudeville, 'A Further Note on *Krauñcavadha* in *Dhvanyāloka* and *Kāvyamīmāṃsa*' in *Journal of the Oriental Institute, Baroda*, Vol. 11, pp.122-128.
11. Vālmīki, *The Rāmāyaṇa*, 'Ayodhyākāṇḍa' translated by Sheldon Pollock (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1986), pp.25-28. All the translated

references to the 'Ayodhyākāṇḍa' are from this volume. All the references in original Sanskrit are from the same translation published with the original text from the New York University Press, New York, 2005.

12. Vālmīki, *The Rāmāyaṇa*, 'Araṇyakāṇḍa' (The Forest) translated by Sheldon Pollock (New York University Press, New York, 2006), III.8.6-22. All further references to the 'Araṇyakāṇḍa', in both original and translation, are from this volume.
13. Vālmīki, *The Rāmāyaṇa* (Vol.V), 'Sundarakāṇḍa' (Sundara) translated by Robert P. Goldman and Sally J. Sutherland Goldman (New York University Press, New York, 2005), V.34.29. All further references to the 'Sundarakāṇḍa', both in original and translation, are from this volume.
14. See Shende (1943a); N.J. Shende, 'The Authorship of the *Mahābhārata'* in *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol.24, 1943b, pp.67-82; V.S. Sukthankar, *Critical Studies in the Mahābhārata*, (V.S.Sukthankar Memorial Edition Committee, Poona, 1944); R.P. Goldman, *Gods, Priests and Warriors* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1977); R.P. Goldman, 'Akṛtavarṇa vs Śrīkṛṣṇa as Narrator of the Legend of the Bhārgava Rāma: Apropos Some Observations of Dr.V.S.Sukthankar' in *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol.53, 1972, pp.161-173.
15. See Bhattacharji.
16. See Nabanita Deb Sen, 'Nārīr Mahākāvya, Rāmakathār Punaḥkathan: Candrāvati Rāmāyaṇa' in Tapas Bhowmik (ed.), *Rāmāyaṇa Carcā: Bhārate o Bahirbhārate*' (Korak, Kolkata, 2010), pp. 256-266.
17. Cited in Linda Hess, 'Rejecting Sītā: Indian Responses to the Ideal Man's Cruel Treatment of His Ideal Wife' in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol.67, No.1, Mar 1999, p.21.
18. See Velcheru Narayana Rao, 'A *Rāmāyaṇa* of their Own: Women's Oral Tradition in Telugu' in Paula Richman (ed.), *Many Rāmāyaṇas* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2012), pp. 114-136.
19. See Usha Nilsson, 'Grinding Millet But Singing Of Sita: Power and Domination in Awadhi and Bhojpuri Women's Songs' in Paula Richman (ed.), *Questioning Ramayanas* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000), pp.137-151.
20. See Hess, p.18.
21. See Bhaduri, p.24.
22. Cited in Rambahal Tiwary, 'Tulsīdāser *Rāmacaritamānas*-er Ekdik' in Tapas Bhowmik (ed.),*Rāmāyaṇa Carcā: Bhārate o Bahirbhārate* (Korak, Kolkata, 2010).

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