

**The Valmiki Ramayana, an Archeological View**  
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Ramayana is a story of Rama Dasarathi of Ayodhya. The Rig Veda (2000 BCE) mentioned the name Rama only once as a king who distributed presents to people as was the custom in those days. The names Rama (10.93.14), Sita (4.57.6), and Lakshmana (5.33.10) were mentioned only once in different contexts with no connection between them or to Ayodhya. We know nothing more about them. They have no recorded history. Apparently, Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana were popular names in those days.

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

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

Rishi Valmiki (400 BCE) did not invent the Ramayana; he presented existing well known folk stories of Rama in a memorable metrical form that stood the test of time. Though the language was modern Sanskrit the story was ancient Indian composed a thousand years earlier and in wide circulation in folk culture. The Valmiki contains both the skeleton of an ancient story (2000 BCE) and the flesh of Rishi Valmiki's interpretation (400 BCE). Our interest is in the flesh, the social life of 400 BCE.

The Valmiki consists of only the first 6 books (Kanda). The seventh book, the Uttara Kanda, was added around 500 CE. Some publishers and translators ignore the Uttara. Religious zealots insist that the Uttara was composed by Rishi Valmiki. Here we treat the Valmiki and the Uttara as two separate and unrelated works. In the Valmiki, Rama was a mortal with human qualities. In the Uttara, he was a divine incarnation of Vishnu.

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

Why is it that stories of Rama of 2000 BCE, with no recorded history, are repeated for thousands of years by hundreds of diverse cultures?

Around 3000 BCE there was a great war in North India led by a King Sagara that resulted in massive death and destruction. People lost faith in the rule of kings and there was anarchy. At the same time, Rishi of the Agni Cult (who believed in non-violence, sacred books, and Law and Order) were migrating from Syria to India. They saw an opportunity to convert the disillusioned public to their way of coexistence. Reign based on the power of might proved itself to be worthless. The Agni offered Dharma (equity) as a change of paradigm. A new social order based on Dharma principles took root in the devastated land.

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

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

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

Suppose you are an engineer in charge of a system design in 2000 BCE tasked with composing a story of Rama to meet the stated objectives. What would you do?

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

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

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

They needed a reason for a conflict. Around 2000 BCE a king needed to be strong enough to protect his cows and women. A strong king challenged a weak king to show his strength by stealing the weak king's cows and/or women. A weak king had the option to surrender and become a vassal (Samanta) or fight. The hostages held to declare the intention of war were treated with dignity and protected by the honor of the host. The Rig Veda is full of stories of stealing cows. Even as late as in the Mahabharata War (1000 BCE) Kauravas stole cows of Virata to declare a war in order to flush Pandavas. The Ramayana needed something more dramatic, not any women, just the wife of the protagonist. Since she was held hostage to declare the intention of war, she needed to be protected by the antagonist as a guest of honor, as required by Dharma. The antagonist should also respect Dharma, the message.

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

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

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

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

By 2000 BCE, the Agni were on the north side of the Vindhya mountain range. Some missionaries ventured to the south and set up a few outposts above the Narmada river. At that time, land to the south of the Narmada was ruled by Dravidian kings, Ravanaas. The land above the Narmada, Janastan, was occupied by Rakshasa tribes who were friendly to the Dravidian rulers and enjoyed protectorate status. They were upset by the encroachment of the Agni. The Rakshasa disturbed the Agni rituals to let them know they were not welcome.

The Agni hired Rama to protect them. In those days, highly skilled warriors, like Rama, were called Indra, the highest military rank. Indra were mercenaries hired by Agni for protection in the hostile lands. In the Rig Veda, the Agni and Indra were inseparable.

Around 3000 BCE, long before the Agni, some of the river islands (Lanka) of the Narmada were occupied by Arjuna Kartavirya of Haihayas. Mahishmati Lanka of the Narmada (50 miles SW of Indore, 22.13 N 75.31 E) was his Capital. According to the Uttara, a Ravana was held as a prisoner (besieged) by Arjuna on a Lanka of the Narmada. Ravanas (Dravidian kings) took revenge and killed many Haihayas. By the time of Rama (2000 BCE), Haihayas were nowhere near the Narmada. Most likely, the history of Arjuna, Ravana, and Lanka of bygone days was common knowledge in folklore in Janastan. They were used to set the stage for the Valmiki.

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

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

In the days of Rishi Valmiki (400 BCE), people were identified by a Totem (Gotra, Clan). There was a clan with a monkey Gotra, called Vanara. Deliberate corruption introduced in the Valmiki treated them as forest monkeys.

Most likely, in the original, Vanara were Mundari-speaking Savara tribes who still lived in Janastan. Even today, Savara men wear only a turban and a loincloth (langoti) that hangs like a tail. Savara women do not wear a langoti. Vanara women, in the Valmiki, did not have a tail. Vanara wore clothes (4.10.26). Vanara men tightened their langoti before a combat (4.12.15, 4.16.15-16), just as Savara men do today.

Animal tails are of two types: (1) Cow tails with a tuft of hair at the end to chase flies, and (2) Monkey tails that taper and curl at the end to hang on to tree branches. A langoti with embroidery at the end looks like a cow tail.

In all existing paintings and sculptures, Hanuman had a cow tail, not a monkey tail.

Critical reading of the Valmiki suggests that, in the original it was the langoti (langulam) that was set on fire which burned Lanka. Most likely, Hanuman was painted with a cow tail (langulam) in the true spirit of the original Valmiki. Hanuman was painted before the Valmiki was deliberately corrupted.

The Agni cremated the dead, whereas Rakshasa buried the dead. A slain Rakshasa requested Rama to grant his last wish to be buried, not cremated (3.4.22-33). When Rama killed people, Rakshasa took the dead with them, with permission from Rama, for burial. It led to the deliberate misinterpretation that Rakshasa ate humans.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dravidian rulers, Ravana, were educated, rich in wealth, spoke Sanskrit, and aware of Agni culture. Ravana's wife, Mandodari, was compared to Rama's wife, Sita, in virtuousness. Hanuman described Ravana's place as heaven on earth. When Hanuman found Sita in Ravana's garden he refrained speaking to her in Sanskrit for the fear she would mistake him for Ravana in disguise.

After Ravana (2000 BCE) were gone, and long after the Mahabharata War (1000 BCE), Chola, Chera, and Pandya (400 BCE) ruled the Dravidian country.

Latter-day Dravidians were Shiva worshipers. Around 500 CE, after the collapse of the Gupta empire and Greek occupation of India, there was a religious war between the Vishnu and Shiva worshipers for religious dominance. Ravana was cast as a devotee of Shiva. Since Rama defeated Ravana, the Vishnu sect desperately wanted Rama on their side for a proxy war.

The Uttara was composed in haste, and was attributed to a Valmiki of 2000 BCE (not 400 BCE). Rama was promoted to the status of a temple god to be worshiped. There were no Rama temples before the Uttara.

In the Uttara, Rama was cast as an incarnation of Vishnu. The original Valmiki Ramayana was deliberately corrupted with Vishnu to conform to the story line of the Uttara.

What is currently known as the Valmiki Ramayana is the corrupted version. It was deliberately corrupted by the people who composed the Uttara. It was actively promoted as the original. The original is lost.

In the Uttara, Ravana worshiped Shiva. The Uttara transmitted the message that Vishnu was more important than Shiva. Vishnu Rama killed Shiva Ravana.

There was no Shiva or Vishnu in 2000 BCE or in 400 BCE when the original Valmiki was composed. They existed when the Uttara was composed in 500 CE.

Shiva and Vishnu in the Uttara were temple gods, not Vedic-Gods. Shiva and Vishnu in the Rig Veda were Vedic-Gods, not temple gods. Vedic-Gods were nature worship.

In India, there was no archeological evidence of temples or temple gods before the Greeks (200 CE).

The original Valmiki Ramayana had no Vishnu or Shiva.

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

In the Tulsidas' Ramayana (1500 CE) Rama and Sita worshiped Shiva and his consort Parvati. It transmitted the message that Shiva was more important than Vishnu.

There are hundreds of Ramayana serving various political and religious needs, each transmitting its own message.

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

In the Buddha Ramayana (Jataka 461), after the death of Dasaratha, Bharata visited Rama and begged him to return to Banaras to become the new king. Rama decided to spend the remaining years in the forest and sent his shoes (paduka), Lakshmana, and Sita back to Banaras. Rama expounded the Buddha doctrine to be free from sorrow.

The Buddha Rama lived in Banaras, not Ayodhya. The Buddha Ramayana had no Ravana.

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

Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita of the Valmiki (400 BCE), the Uttara (500 CE), and the Tulsidas (1500 CE) display different temperaments. They provide valuable insights to social values of the respective times and places of the composers.

Each Ramayana reflects prevailing social values of the time and place of its composer.

By analyzing characterizations we can reconstruct a history of social values in India by place and time.

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

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

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