

THE  
**Bengali Ramayanas**

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in 1916, as Ramtanu Lahiri Research Fellow  
in the History of Bengali Language  
and Literature.*

By  
**Rai Saheb Dineshchandra Sen, B.A.**

Fellow Calcutta University and Author of *History of Bengali Language and  
Literature* *Typical Selections from Old Bengali Literature*  
*Chaitanya and his Companions* *History of Medieval  
Vaishnava Literature* *Folk Literature of  
Bengal* *Banga Bhasa o Sahitya*  
and other works



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## PREFACE

There is a controversy still going on, and it is doubtful whether a solution will be unanimously accepted in future, as to whether the Epic of Vālmīki or the Jātaka-literature belongs to an earlier period of composition. It is now unanimously held by the orientalist that the metrical portions of the Jataka-stories are older than their prose-matter. We find that many passages of the birth-stories, written in verse, show a close and unmistakable affinity with those of the Epic, and on an examination and analysis of both these monuments of Indian Literature, the Jatakas and the Epic, I have arrived at the conclusion that the Epic belongs to a later age. But I cannot expect that my conclusion on this point will be accepted by all.

One of the evidences in support of my theory, upon which I have laid much stress, is that the Epic of Vālmīki is replete with stories that are materially similar to a large number of birth-tales even in detail. Such for example are the Sama Jātaka which closely resembles the story of the Andhamuni in the Rāmāyana and the Sambula

Jātaka where the goblin appears exactly in the same light as does Rāvanā in the Açoka-garden before the heroic and chaste wife of Rāma. In the Vessantara Jātaka the speeches of Vessantara and Maddi on the eve of the former's banishment are so akin to the speeches of Rāma and Sita on a similar occasion that here the difference of names seems to be the only point of divergence. Again, in the same Jātaka the prince's mother Phusati mourns over the banishment of her son in a strain that at once reminds the reader of the lamentations of Kausalya and Bharata after the exile of Rama. The story of Riṣya Çringa again offers a close parallel to that of the Nalinikā Jātaka, and one of the passages in which the monkey-king Vāli admonished Rāma is exactly like the one in the Mahā Sutasoma Jātaka in which the ogre is censured by the Great Being. Such instances may be easily multiplied, so that the Daçaratha Jātaka is but one of the numerous birth-stories where we find fables and legends akin to and sometimes almost the same as we find in the Rāmāyaṇa. Regarding the marriage of Sitā with her elder brother Rāma as narrated in the Daçaratha Jātaka, we find that the custom of marrying one's sister was current among many tribes and especially so with the Çakyas, amongst whom it was so extensively prevalent that at one time when their enemies the Koliyas

ridiculed them for it, instead of feeling ashamed, they boasted of such connection (*vide* Kunāla-Jātaka, translated by H. T. Francis, the Jātaka No. 536, p. 219). All these have led me to believe that these and similar other stories had been extensively current in this country before the advent of Vālmiki who treated these scattered episodes as materials for his immortal Epic changing them in such a manner as to suit the new ideal of domestic purity set up by him. A comparative literary estimate of the crude and archaic birth-tales and the grand and artistic Epic has also strengthened my conviction that the former belongs to an earlier period than the latter. To say that Vālmiki was indebted to these birth-stories for his materials is not in the least to detract from the great merit and worth of the Epic-master. Shakespeare is not a whit less admired because of the fact that he freely used Holinshed's Chronicles and many previous literary works extant on the continent for dramatic treatment.

Another theory that I have put forward in these lectures is that originally the legends of Rāma and Rāvaṇa were prevalent in this country as distinctly different tales, independent of each other. These were subsequently mixed up somehow or other, and Vālmiki for the first time gave the united story the consistency and