

# RĀMĀYANA AND LANKA

PARTS I & II

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## CHAPTER IV

### Why I Located Lanka on Indrana Hill Sugrīva's Instructions to the South-bound Vānaras

IF there is true geography in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Lanka must be looked for in the poet's account of the *successful* search for Sītā by the Vānaras led by Aṅgada and Hanumān. These were to search the region south of Kishkindha and Prasravaṇa. Prasravaṇa was close to Kishkindha. From Prasravaṇa, Rāma could hear the riotous noise of Vānaras singing and drumming in Kishkindha (*Kishkindha*, Sarga 27, verses 26 and 27). From Kishkindha, Sugrīva and Lakshmaṇa hastened to Prasravaṇa in a palanquin (*Kishkindha*, Sarga 28, verse 16) and the Vānara hosts were marshalled in the valley between. When Sugrīva solicits Rāma's orders for the assembled army, Rāma naturally says: 'First find out whether Sītā is alive, and *where* Rāvaṇa lives.' Sugrīva and Rāma evidently believed that Rāvaṇa lived to the south of Kishkindha, and Rāma gave his signet-ring to Hanumān for delivery to Sītā (*Kishkindha*, Sarga 44, verse 12). Sugrīva's first, and probably only, instruction to the south-bound Vānaras was: 'Search the

thousand-headed Vindhya and the Narbada river difficult of approach' (Sarga 41, verse 8). A month's time was fixed for search, return and report, and the penalty for delay was death. Myriads of Vānaras were sent in all four directions, and the leaders Vinata, Śatavali and Sushena returned to Prasravaṇa before the month expired (Sarga 47, verses 6-9). That being so, Sugrīva's fanciful geography of the region to the south of the Narbada right down to the Sunless South Pole ruled by Yama, may be ignored as an interpolation. It is clear however that the Vindhyan ridge ran *close to Kishkindha to the south of it* and that the Narbada flowed south of the Vindhya. Both range and river were world-famous landmarks but Hanumān did not cross the Narbada on his way to Lanka, nor did Rāma in his march to Lanka at the head of his Vānara host. The Narbada is so great and important a river that the poet would not have overlooked it if it came in the way of Rāma or Hanumān, and it may be assumed therefore that *Trikūta with Lanka at its top rose between the Vindhyan and the Narbada river.*

#### THE SEARCH FOR RAVANA'S ABODE

Verse 8 of Sarga 41 proved the key to the discovery of Lanka. There is no mistaking

the identity of thousand-headed Vindhya or of the Narbada river, especially when the two are placed in juxtaposition, the river to the south of the range. As ordered by Sugrīva, the search began with the Vindhya. The Vānaras went over the range systematically from end to end, as detailed in Sargas 48 and 49. What is more, *the search was confined to the Vindhya*, there is no mention of villages, towns, or inhabited country, and it covered only the crags, caves and gorges, the torrents, water-falls, tangled thickets, and inaccessible river-heads of the great ridge. As they entered a thicket, a huge Asura attacked them and Aṅgada, thinking he was Rāvaṇa, killed him. *Evidently* therefore, the Vānaras expected to find Rāvaṇa in or near about the Vindhya.

#### SOUTH-WEST END OF THE VINDHYAS

Tired and thirsty, they sat down at the *pointed south-west end* of the range (*Kotim dakṣiṇa-paścimām, Kishkindha, Sarga 30, verse 3*). There is only one such abrupt end in the entire range of eight hundred miles and that is where the Kaimur section of the range terminates a mile east of Katangi in the twenty-fourth mile of the Jubbulpore-Damoh road. There was no mistaking the pointed end even in the Degree sheet 55·M, but looking

at the coloured sheet 55.M/15 it was plain as a pike (Long. 79° 48' and Lat. 23° 27'). There is thus conclusive proof that the search was confined to a section of the Vindhya's beginning at the south-west end near Katangi, and ending at the Mahendra-dvār, the extraordinary cleft in the Kaimur ridge through which the Kair river enters the Sihora Haveli to the south of the ridge. This section is eight miles in length running south-west to north-east and the ridge is a knife-edge.

#### FROM THE VINDHYAN KOTI TO THE MAHENDRAGIRI CLEFT

Near the south-west end, the hungry and thirsty Vānaras looked for water and entered a great cavern known as the 'Rksha-bila' (Bear's hole), whence aquatic birds emerged with wetted wings. The ridge is precipitous on both sides, and is infested by bears even now. The cave must be looked for near the 'Koti' in the swampy ground between the ridge and the rivulet that drains the Kaimur Pass. The Vānaras got lost in the dark windings of the cave till an ascetic Svayamprabhā took them in hand, made them close their eyes, and led them up the steep slope to the top of the ridge. There she told them: 'This is the *Vindhyān* mountain, here is the

great Sāgara, and this again is the Prasravaṇa hill'. It was from below the Prasravaṇa the Vānaras were despatched *south* by Sugrīva, and they were to search the *Vindhyan* to begin with. From the Kaimur ridge, therefore, Svayamprabhā must have pointed *north* to the Prasravaṇa peak. The ridge ran north-east to south-west and the great Sāgara therefore lay along the south-east foot of the Range, and it is noteworthy that a mile *east* of the south-west Koti, the Kair joins the great Hiran and swells its waters. A look at coloured sheets 55.M/15 and 55.M/14 shows that Prasravaṇa or Mālyavan must be the high peak rising 2,140 feet out of the Deori Reserved Forest immediately *south* of the Singrāmpur valley. The Deori peak is nearly five miles north-north-west of the Kaimur 'Koti' as the crow flies, and the Bhanrer ridge between the Koti and the peak is too low to obstruct the view.

When Svayamprabhā left them, the Vānaras saw the dread sea and sitting on a foot-hill of the *Vindhya*, anxiously considered the position (Sarga 53, verse 16). Aṅgada said : 'Sugrīva himself fixed the day of our return. That day expired in the Bear's cave. . . Our search has been fruitless. Sugrīva is cruel by nature and always hated me. He is sure to

have me killed by painful torture. Here, therefore, on the holy shore of the sea, I will sit down to die of starvation.' The Vānara chiefs shed hot tears of sympathy. They reviled Sugrīva, praised Vāli, and sat round Aṅgada determined to die with him. Seated on the *north* shore of the sea, they discussed, sadly and fearfully, the disasters that followed the exile of Rāma, including the destruction of Jatāyu. Sampāti, a brother of Jatāyu, lived closeby in a cavern of the *Vindhya* at the head of a precipice. Hearing Jatāyu mentioned, he came out of the cavern, saw the Vānaras, and burst out: 'Who is this that announces the death of my younger brother who was dearer to me than life. I wish to descend this precipice and learn all about Jatāyu's death.' Aṅgada boldly went up, led Sampāti down and told him of Sītā's abduction by Rāvaṇa, and Jatāyu's death in his unequal fight with Rāvaṇa. Aṅgada then said: 'If you are Jatāyu's brother, tell us where that Rākshas Rāvaṇa lives' (Sarga 58, verse 9). Sampāti replied: 'I am now weak and wingless. The only help I can give is by way of information. As to the seat of that Rākshas, listen to my words. In an island of the sea, *a hundred yojans hence, Rāvaṇa sits supreme in the city of Lanka.*' Sampāti then

desired to be taken down to the sea to offer a libation to his brother in Heaven. He was led down and led up again.

It is thus clear that Sampāti lived in a cave in the *southern* slope of the Vindhya not far from the south-west Koti near Katangi. It is clear too that the Sāgara was immediately below at the hill-foot. The south-west Koti is 1,200 feet high and the first swell a mile and a half up the Koti is a low peak 1,507 feet, almost on the solstitial point. Half a mile further up, the Kair is nearest to the mountain-foot which it almost touches before it recedes and joins the Hiran a mile below. It was here probably that Sampāti offered a libation to Jatāyu's manes, and if the Sāgara was a shallow fresh-water lake of Kair and Hiran combined, it was here too that Sampāti and Supārṣva found their supply of drinking water.

RAVANA AND SITA SEEN AT  
MAHENDRA-DVAR BY SUPARŚVA

Gladdened by news of Rāvaṇa, the Vānaras rejoiced exceedingly. Jāmbavan however jumped up, and questioned Sampāti: 'Where is Sītā? By whom was she seen? Who took her? Tell us all about it.' Sampāti replied: 'Listen Vānaras, as to how I *heard* of the



taking of Vaidehī, by whom I was *told* of it, and where Sītā is' (Sarga 59, verse 6). "Old and weak, I had lighted on this steep hill many *yojans* long, and my son Supārṣva supports me by fetching food for me at eating time. One evening at sunset he came to me without flesh. When I complained, he pacified me and explained: 'Seeking flesh, I stood over the cleft across the Mahendra hill and bent down to block the gorge and keep back the sea-animals that passed through it. There I saw a shiny-black man with a Sun-bright woman. In soft words, he begged me to let him pass, and it was not for one like me to resist his respectful appeal. I was then told by the *Siddhas* thereabouts, that it was Rāvaṇa, King of the Rākshasas, taking Rāma's wife.' *This information Supārṣva gave me*" (Sarga 59, verses 10-14 and 19).

#### IS MAHENDRAGIRI A SECTION OF THE KAIMUR RANGE ?

A mile and a half above Sampāti's peak, the Vindhyan ridge rises almost to 2,000 feet. This peak is higher than the Trikūta (1,932 feet) in the Sīhora Haveli below. It is also the highest peak in the final thirty-mile stretch of the Kaimur between the Bhainsakund (2,086 feet) and the 'Koti' near Katangi.

From this dominating peak, the ridge descends in five miles to what the *Damoh Gazetteer* calls 'the extraordinary cleft known as the Katas' through which, the river that drains the Singrampur valley forces its way to the south. This stretch of five miles between high peak and low pass is also marked by two more peaks 1,860 and 1,758 feet high, while the cleft itself like the Katangi Koti, is only 1,200 feet. This 'wonderful cut' as the cleft is called by the *Jubbulpore Gazetteer*, strikingly corresponds to the Mahendragiri gorge (*dvāra*) where Supāṣva was preparing to fish when he met Rāvaṇa and Sītā on their way to Lanka. It seems almost certain, therefore, that this five-mile section of the 'thousand-headed Vindhya' is the Mahendragiri of Supāṣva, and the cut across the mountain wall named Katas, the '*dvāra*' (hole, passage, gateway) of the Mahendragiri he was attempting to block.

#### FURTHER PROOFS OF THE IDENTITY OF THE MAHENDRAGIRI AND VINDHYA

Having ascertained Rāvaṇa's abode from Sampāti, the Vānaras gathered on the sea-shore, and discussed the feasibility of crossing the *hundred-yojan* sea (Sarga 64, verses 2, 4 and 15-18). Hanumān undertakes the

task. He then brags in approved athlete fashion : ' This ground cannot stand the force of my spring. *Here* are these (*etāni iha*) high firm peaks of the Mahendra and from these I will take off. These will stand the pressure of my feet as I jump across the *hundred-yojan* sea ' (Sarga 67, verses 35-38).

When Aṅgada asked : ' Who will cross the *hundred-yojan Sāgara*, and save our lives ' the Vānaras were camped on the north shore of the Sāgara below the Vindhyan ridge. From his perch on the *Vindhyan*, Sampāti said : ' Rāvaṇa lives in Lanka City in an island of the sea full hundred *yojans* hence ' (Sarga 58, verses 19 and 20). The *Jubbulpore Gazetteer* says : ' The Jubbulpore (Tahsil) Haveli is an entirely flat and open plain, while the Sihora Haveli watered by the Hiran, is interspersed with hills and jungles.' *The island referred to by Sampāti was no doubt, the Trikūta cum Suvēla hill.*

In this connexion the references to the Vindhya and the Mahendragiri contained in the *Sundara Kāṇḍa* are worthy of special note. When Hanumān meets Sītā in Lanka, he naturally gives her a short account of the search the Vānaras made for her and says ' We were lost in the great Vindhyan mountain. The period fixed for our return expired,

and we sat down to die on the top of that hill. Gladdened however by news of Rāvaṇa's whereabouts from Sampāti, we rose from the *Vindhya* and descended to the seashore. I then swam (*plutaḥ*) a hundred *yojana*, and entered Lanka in the night' (Sarga 35, verses 57-71). Again in the same *Kāṇḍa*, Sarga 57, when Hanumān re-crossed the sea, he raised a thunderous shout of triumph as he approached the lofty *Mahendra hill* and the Vānaras awaiting him on the *northern* shore rejoiced to hear it and jumped down the rocks to welcome him (verses 14-16, 18, 19 and 25).