

RAMAYANA

Myth or Reality ?

By

H. D. SANKALIA



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Lecture II

THE RAMAYANA—A REALITY

If we have to prove that the Ramayana—the main story—is a reality, had actually happened, then it has to be shown that the main actors—Rama, Dasharatha, Sita, Janaka, Vali, Hanuman and Ravana, and the various important places or sites associated with them—did exist, and that too at a particular time, and that the main story—the exile of Rama, abduction of Sita and her recovery from Ravana—could have normally taken place in a certain geographical setting.

THE HISTORICITY OF RAMA

Rama was an illustrious descendant of the Ikshvaku dynasty with its capital at Ayodhya. For this statement though there is no contemporary (historical) record, still this fact is vouchsafed by all the Puranas and early Jain and Buddhist traditions which are not later than the 3rd century B.C. It is true however that there is no clear, unambiguous reference to Rama in the early and late Vedic literature, though Janaka, a king of Videha, figures often in the Upanishadas.

Likewise besides Ayodhya, Mithila, Kausambi, Kanyakubja are all well known places and the history of these places, though not fully laid bare archaeologically, might be as old as 800 B.C. at least.

Here I would say that excavations at Ayodhya are urgently necessary. When I visited the site, I found not one, but numerous mounds, named after the various personalities in the Ramayana. There is also a mound overlooking the river, which is being rapidly eroded.

During this brief visit, very brief indeed, because we reached there from Banaras at 3 p.m. and left the site at 5 p.m., we were lucky to find potsherds of the Painted Grey Ware.¹ This is a pottery fabric which has been found at numerous places in North Rajasthan and at Kayatha near Ujjain in M.P. and in the Punjab in the north. It also occurs throughout the U.P. and reaches up to the Nepal Terai in the east. The date of its occurrence may be fixed between 800 B.C. and 400 B.C. and taking the uppermost limit, we can say that the antiquity of Ayodhya, and other places said to be contemporary to it, might go back to this period, that is 800 B.C. This date might be taken back still further, if the deepest layers of Ayodhya, Mithila, Kausambi yield the Ochre-coloured Ware (OCP), and dated to about 1700 B.C.²

FOUNDATION OF AYODHYA

Thus the foundation of Ayodhya and other sites in U.P. and Bihar might be placed provisionally to about 1500 B.C. I would say that this is not all archaeological speculation. Excavations at Chirand, on the confluence of the Ganga and the Ghoghra, have yielded evidence which places the beginning of a pastoral-cum-early-agricultural life, subsisting on rice, fishing and hunting, and going back to 2000 B.C. And Ayodhya is described in the Ramayana as having store-houses of rice, though this reference is very probably late, and might not belong to the earliest phase of the city.

Assuming that the foundation of Ayodhya could have taken place about 1500 B.C. or latest 1000 B.C., could it have developed into a city as described in the Ayodhya and Balakanda of the Ramayana? In the face of the Indus (and now also pre-Indus) cities in Sind, Punjab, Baluchistan and Kutch it would not be right to make a categorical statement and say

that no city, large or small, could have existed in the Ganga-Yamuna plains. Here again, our want of planned, problem-oriented excavations is responsible for our total ignorance. For a horizontal excavation at sites like Ayodhya, Vaisali, Kausambi, Ahichhatra would surely have given us a factual picture of the development of the city-life before and after Buddha. In fact we have no evidence at all of this kind, even for the Maurya, Sunga, Kushana and Gupta periods. I am therefore obliged to speculate on the slender evidence supplied by the Ramayana. It is my belief that the descriptions of Ayodhya, Kishkindha and Lanka, as available in the Critical Edition, are those of the cities which were built between the Kushana and Gupta periods, that is between A.D. 100 and A.D. 400. It is possible that some of the descriptions, particularly that of Ayodhya, might go back to the 3rd or 4th century B.C. as at that time we had fortified cities with houses, having a few floors and terraces. This inference may also be deduced from the extant sculptures at Sanchi and Bharhut.

EARLIEST HOUSES AT AYODHYA OF MUD

The single reference in the Ramayana to which I made a reference above is to my mind very significant. We are told that when Kaushalya learnt of Rama's exile, she fainted and fell down on the floor and her body was covered with dust.³ ^{3a} But if this floor was made of brick or made with stones, as the palaces are supposed to be, how or why there should be dust on the floor? I think this small, insignificant detail, overlooked by the poet, possibly gives us a clue to the real nature of the original houses at Ayodhya. These houses, though big, should be of mud or mud-brick, as have been exposed in our excavations outside the Indus civilization. These houses might have had a stone plinth, as at Ahar and Somnath, if stone was easily available. But the walls were invariably made of mud supported by a split bamboo frame and the roof was thatched. Where modern civilization has not penetrated the villages, such houses can be seen and are still in a majority all over India. Huts in villages near about Ayodhya are built in this way.

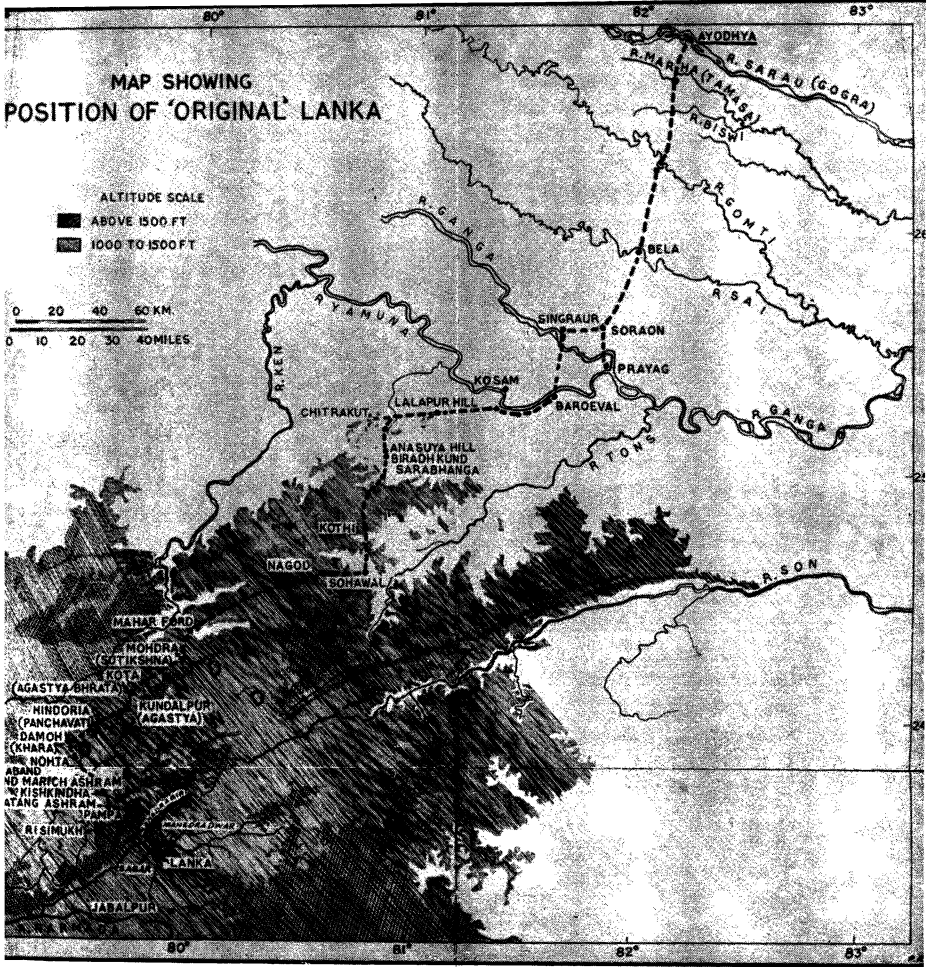


Fig. 1

This map shows the location of Lanka, according to the study of Iyer. The Godavari, a few miles south of Chitrakuta, as mentioned by Dr Hirral (1937), could not be traced in the maps.

RAMA'S JOURNEY OF DANDAKARANYA

Though there is no archaeological evidence, on the strength of the early historical literature (see here map), from the Hindu and Buddhist sources, we should accept the fact that Rama lived at Ayodhya and that he left this city with Sita and Lakshmana for the south and then to Dandakaranya. The route of Rama's journey from Ayodhya to Chitrakuta, south of Prayaga—Allahabad can be very accurately plotted.⁴ In fact it has never been in dispute.

SATKARA IN BHARADVAJA ASHRAMA

But what does not seem to have struck the editors of the Ramayana and all the earlier scholars is the extreme impropriety of the reception (*satkara*) given by sage Bharadvaja to Bharata, his three widowed mothers and to his army in his *ashrama* on the south bank of the river.^{5 5a}

1000 POTS OF WINE

With this we should also consider the passage, fortunately deleted in the Critical Edition, where Sita promises to offer 1000 pots of wine to the river Kalindi, if she is safely allowed to cross this extremely broad river.^{6 6a}

These two incidents and the way they appear in the editions of the Ramayana help us date these editions more precisely. I will return to this point later. Let us now follow Rama to Dandakaranya.

DANDAKARANYA —WRONG IDENTIFICATION

Wrong identification of Dandakaranya and the sites mentioned within it have led to all the subsequent inferences, the most important being that when Sita was kidnapped from Panchavati near Nasik, Rama and Lakshmana during their search contacted the Vanaras and then marching across the whole of South India and after building a bridge on the Indian Ocean at Rameshvaram invaded Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and killed Ravana and most of his family, and rescued Sita.

Those who have read Ramayana in the original carefully have come to the conclusion that all these inferences are unwarranted.

LANKA IN THE VINDHYA HILLS

But the mistake started with the wrong identification of the river Godavari, and Dandakaranya. The Ramayana clearly mentions that they were within easy reach of the hill Chitrakuta.⁷ Here were Panchavati, Rishyamuka, Pampa, Kishkindha and Lanka. And above all Ramayana repeatedly tells us that all these were within the Vindhya hills and forests, the most remarkable thing being the fact that the river Narmada which flows south of the Vindhya, almost across the heart of India, is not once mentioned, except in the much later interpolated sargas in the Kishkindhakanda, wherein Sugriva gives instructions to Vanara chiefs how and where to seek Sita. These facts are extremely important, nay crucial, for the correct identification of Lanka. Now a few scholars like Dr Hiralal,⁸ Dr Ramadas,⁹ Sardar Kibe and Paramasiva Iyer have by a very detailed study of the Ramayana, particularly the instructions given by Sugriva to Hanuman and other Vanaras as to how and where to search for Sita, in the nooks and corners of the Vindhya hills and forests, coupled with the movements of Ravana as described by Suparshva in the Aranyakanda, have shown that all these places including Lanka, were situated south of Chitrakuta and north of the Narbada. This is the region formed by the Chota Nagpur Plateau and now shared by the eastern M.P., western Orissa, West Bengal and South Bihar. Hiralal and others tell us that there was a small river Godavari about 11 miles south of Chitrakuta. It has now disappeared. With the Godavari so located and as also Dandakaranya other places can be easily identified.

RAVANA, A GOND KING

Ramadas's important contribution was to show that Ravana and his kith and kin were ordinary human beings

and Ravana had only one head, two arms and two feet.^{10 10a} He further tells us that most probably Ravana belonged to the Gond tribe,¹¹ amongst whom Ravana is still regarded in high esteem, as a king, and that the word 'Lanka' means, 'a high place', 'an island', 'the home of the king'.¹² This was further confirmed, very accidentally, by Sri V. S. Patwardhan.¹³ He has spent his whole life as a Forest Ranger in the forests of Chanda (Chandrapur) which was formerly in M.P. He told me that Gonds call all important places as 'Lakka' (not Lanka). Thus the view that Ravana and other Rakshasas were in truth an aboriginal tribe, most probably the Gonds, and the Vanaras belonged to other tribes such as the Savaras and Korkus seems to be justified.

Sardar Kibe¹⁴ then proposed to identify Lanka with the Amarkantak plateau, whereas Paramasiva Iyer¹⁵ by very intelligent study of the topographical maps prepared by the Survey of India proposed to identify Lanka on the Trikuta hill and the Suvela hill on which Rama had encamped with his Vanara army, with the hills facing each other, and situated about 15 or 16 miles north of Jabalpur. (See map, Fig 1.) The hill on which Lanka was situated is locally called Indrana. He also pointed out that the Sagara regarded as a sea or ocean in the Ramayana and 100 yojanas in extent was indeed a small lake or a river which could be forded with some difficulty by Ravana and Hanuman. The lake according to one calculation of a yojana would not be more than 11½ miles wide, because a yojana is just a dhanussata (a hundred bow length) or 200 yards.

All this work had been done some 30 or 40 years ago. When I took up the problem and read and reread the Critical Edition of the Ramayana, not only was I convinced of the proposed identification of Hiralal, Ramdas, Sardar Kibe and Paramasiva Iyer but independently of their views (because these views I came to consult later), I had found that the sala trees formed an important clue in the identification of the Dandakaranya and even Lanka. Just consider the following:

SIGNIFICANCE OF SALA TREES

Rama proves his prowess and capacity to kill Vali by shooting 7 sala trees with one arrow.^{16 16a} In any fight between the Vanaras and Rakshasas or amongst the Vanaras themselves the Vanaras invariably uproot a sala tree for a fight and use it as a stick. Secondly, when Hanuman's rampage in Lanka was ultimately checked by Indrajit, Ravana's eldest son, by tying him with the magical and invisible Brahmastra, then other Rakshasas in their ignorance tried to tie him more securely with *sana*, *chira* and other natural fibres.¹⁷ These two facts immediately suggested to me the locale of Lanka and Dandakaranya. For these occur so naturally, and the sala trees figure so frequently in the Chota Nagpur plateau that the composer—Valmiki or anybody else could not ignore their presence, even though he placed Lanka beyond the sea where no sala trees ever grew.

Hence, I tried to find the habitat of the sala forest. At this time (1968) I had just been to the Chota Nagpur area and had previously seen the sala forest at Amarkantak, thus I could think of no other area than this. Later, a study of the botanical literature showed that the sala—*shorea robusta*—grew in the Chota Nagpur plateau only and nowhere else. Thus Nasik in Maharashtra, Dang forest in south Gujarat, and the Bellary region in Andhra-Karnataka were automatically ruled out. Lanka has had to be somewhere in the Chota Nagpur plateau. For this we must find linguistic, ethnographic and archaeological evidence. As I have shown if the Ramayana is carefully studied, then it provides all the geographical data to locate Lanka in this region. And this identification is supported by ethnographic and linguistic evidence. Lanka or Lakka is a Mundari word, and so also Ravana.

As against this positive evidence the older view which has traditionally sought to identify Lanka with Ceylon (now officially called Sri Lanka) has very little to offer. Briefly, though the Malaya mountains have to be or might be identified with the hill ranges in Mysore or Kerala, Mahendra and Vindhya cannot be. There are no two Vindhya ranges and one cannot conceive of Vindhya hills in South India!

CEYLON AND RAMESHWARAM

Secondly, the area around Rameshwaram is flat with low sandy mounds. Not a single piece of stone can be found there with which Rama and his Vanara bands could have built a causeway. Even trees are rare. What is believed to be remnant of a stone causeway—Setu—built by Rama is nothing but the tops of ancient ridge or ridges which are now proved to have extended towards Australia. These facts were revealed by depth charges and other oceanographic studies during the geophysical year of 1964.¹⁸

The distance between Rameshwaram and Ceylon is so much that nobody can think of building a bridge, if one actually sees the place. However, once the poet thought of *sagara* as sea, he has used all the synonyms like *lavana-ambhasa*, thus making it certain that a real sea is meant and not a large sheet of water, or a fresh water lake. Hence a layman or a scholar could not think of anything else than an island in the sea!

Ancient name of Ceylon

The ancient or early historical name of the island of Ceylon in inscriptions and literature is 'Simhala-dwipa',¹⁹ and in foreign travellers' accounts as Taprobane (Tamraparni).²⁰ The name Lanka is not known earlier than inscriptions of the 10th century A.D.²¹

In Ceylon itself the Ramayana—Rama's story—is not so popular, though some places are associated with Asokavana. Though the name of Lanka for Ceylon is not very old, the name as pointed out above is a Gondi word. It also probably exists in other Austro-Asiatic languages and means 'an island', 'a high elevated place', and hence it has been accepted in preference to Simhala, which is also at least 2000 years old.

Lanka and early Buddhist monuments in India

Lastly, in Ceylon (or Sri Lanka) itself, there are no monuments which answer to the description of Lanka given in

Sundarakanda of the Ramayana. Pushpaka and other places with beautiful pillars and pillar capitals, architraves adorned with young women (*shalabhanjika*), with elephants and fanciful animals (*ihamriga*), as Dr Sivaramamurti pointed out with great perspicacity, more than thirty-four years ago may be found in the sculptures at Bharhut, Sanchi, Jaggayapeta, Amaravati and cave 3 at Nasik.²² (See Figs. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9)

Both the epics—the Ramayana and the Mahabharata—have them, and this shows these epics seem to have in view the monuments created all over India by the rapid spread of Buddhism. Therefore these portions of both the epics are not older than or might be dated between the 2nd century B.C. and 3rd century A.D. One may go further and say that the repeated descriptions of Ravana's palace in the Sundarakanda, particularly women lying in all sorts of positions after the night's revelry—had for its model the architraves of the stupas at Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda. Here excavations have laid bare the ruins of a Roman amphitheatre and other structures. There could well be the *kridagrihas* (amphitheatre) and *apanhgrihas* (drinking houses) of Lanka. To me the more appropriate and correct inference is to say that the epics have based their descriptions on the existing monuments.

There are other independent proofs to prove that all these portions of both the epics were composed at this period or even later.

Gopuram in Lanka

I think the reference to the tall gopuram in Lanka should be a comparatively late interpolation in the Ramayana. In fact, the whole of the Sundarakanda and many sargas in the Kishkindhakanda from a hypercritical point of view, that is the point of view which questions not the propriety of a reading, but the very occurrence of incidents, persons—seems to be a later composition. For, though the word 'gopura', meaning an entrance to a village or a city, is as old as the 1st and 2nd century B.C., still as a term standing for tall *sikharas* of gates to temples, as now used in South India—is certainly late, not earlier than the 6th-7th century A.D.^{22a}

Lanka, not Ceylon

Thus to my mind the location of Lanka in the island of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) or any other island in South-East Asia has been based on the uncritical reading of the Ramayana and without taking into consideration the geographical, linguistic, ethnographic and archaeological evidence.

RAMA IN PLACE AND PERSONAL NAMES FROM
INSCRIPTIONS OF SOUTH INDIA ✓

There is one more source of evidence. This is the study of place and personal names in inscriptions of South India, say the Pallava, Chola and early Pandya. Our aim here should be to ascertain how many place names have 'Rama' as the first part of the name. My feeling is that places like Rameshwaram are comparatively very late. At the Deccan College two of my pupils have studied the place and personal names from the Pallava and early Chola records.²³ This study shows that there are no personal names after Rama in the Pallava records, whereas in the early Chola records there are not more than four. The Pandya records yet remain to be similarly examined.

RAMA AS GOD ✓

And among the gods and goddesses Rama does not figure at all, Siva is most prominent, then comes Visnu and other indigenous gods and goddesses.

Rama temples and panels depicting Ramayana scenes

This question of the introduction and popularity of Rama worship may also be examined by mapping the distribution of (a) Rama temples, (b) temples having Ramayana panels in different parts of India. Though I have not studied this problem as thoroughly as it should be, from my general knowledge, I would say at present that though Visnu worship became popular under the Early Guptas (c. A.D. 350), as yet Rama was not worshipped as god or as Visnu. However his

exploits were now familiar and these are found portrayed in sculptures on the walls of early Gupta temples at Devghar, Nachuakuthar, Bhita and other places in eastern M.P. and western U.P. (See Fig.). And if the small terracotta plaques from Kosambi do portray Sita's kidnapping by Ravana as interpreted by some scholars,²⁴ then we have additional archaeological proof that the story was known by this time. Four or five centuries afterwards there are found sculptures in the Chalukya temples at Pattadakal in Karnataka. Rama appears to be unknown or not so popular to the Pallavas who were familiar with the Mahabharata, as some of the scenes such as Arjuna's penance are depicted at Mahabalipuram near Madras.

The early Cholas, the successors of the Pallavas, do not yet seem to have taken to Rama worship, but it was not far now. Soon after we have some of the finest Chola bronzes portraying Rama and Sita. This sketch of the development of the Rama worship, if confirmed by detailed mapping, will establish conclusively the point I am making here, viz that the Rama worship is of a considerable late date and in South India not earlier than the 10th century A.D.²⁵

✓ RAMAYANA IN TAMIL NADU

The view here put forward is also corroborated by the fact that by the 7th century A.D. the Ramayana, as known in the north, was sung by a Saivite Saint Jnanasambandar in his Devaram hymns. It is also at this time that the temple of Rameshwaram was probably first built, because according to the saint it was built by Rama to expiate the sin of killing Ravana. I am informed that the present temple is late, it stands on the ruins of a small 8th-9th century temple. However, this is a much later tradition, and does not figure in any form in the Valmiki Ramayana.

Two centuries later the Ramayana stories are found sculptured in the Nagesvara temple at Kumbakonam, Sadaiyar Koil, etc. These are small.²⁶ (See figs. 12, 13.)

Rama in Sangam literature

A glance through the Sangam literature which is in Tamil and dated to a period between the first century B.C. and sixth century A.D. also shows the total absence of reference to Rama, particularly as god,²⁷ though it refers to Lanka as *Ilankai*.

The gradual spread, first of the Mahabharata and then of the Ramayana into the Deccan, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, shows the slow absorption by the society, high and low, of certain ethical values which were then cherished and which some of us cherish even now. It has nothing to do with Arayanization because nobody deliberately tried to propagate a particular cult (as it is still being done by some people under various guises), but the stories when recited as *Hari-kirtanas* appealed to the people and the rulers. These were first depicted on the temple walls and later its hero and heroine worshipped. Simultaneously places all over India came to be associated with episodes in the Ramayana. This constant, oral repetition of the story helped its phenomenal growth, inflation, because every kirtankara has an opportunity to add spices to the story.

THE RING EPISODE IN RAMAYANA

In this connection the ring episode, I think, is the most important. As in Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* this is crucial to the present Ramayana. It appears first at the end of the Kish-kindha and then again in the Sundarakanda.^{28a} This itself shows that there is a genetic relationship between these two kandas and both must have been composed by one person.

The story is briefly this: When Hanuman is being given detailed instructions to search for Sita in the Vindhya and the south, he asks Rama to give him something on the production of which Sita will recognize that he (Hanuman) had come from Rama himself. Some very personal object was necessary and Rama gives him his finger-ring bearing the name 'Rama' and as Hanuman had anticipated Sita asks Hanuman

to prove his *bona fides* and he immediately produces the finger-ring. With this passport Hanuman's way becomes easy.

This ring episode is quite necessary from the point of view of the development of the plot as conceived by Valmiki. But an archaeologist would inquire how did Hanuman acquire a ring bearing the letters 'Rama'? For as far as we know, all the earlier rings in India, from about 2500 B.C. to the first century B.C., are all simple, round wires of copper, bronze or terracotta (those of gold seemed to have disappeared). (See Fig. 11.) No ring, except the one from Harappa, has a bezel, i.e. a flat broad space on which the name can be inscribed. So all these early rings are without any name. Signet rings, i.e. rings bearing the wearer's name, usually of a king, were first introduced by the Indo-Greeks who ruled in North-Western India, at times up to Kausambi in the latter part of the second century and early part of the first century B.C. This being the origin of the signet finger-ring in India, its use in the Ramayana and even *Shakuntala* by Valmiki and Kalidasa respectively should be normally a century or two later. This episode helps to fix the date of the present Ramayana much more precisely than the various decorative sculptures in the Pushpaka and other palaces in Lanka.

SITA'S VASTRA (OR SILK SARI)

The same precise conclusion we may draw from Sita's sari. Sita alone among all the persons who figure in the Ramayana wears a *Kausheya vastra*—silk cloth (*vastra*) (*sari*).^{29 29a} All others—men and women, kings and queens—wear clothes of *kshauma*, which is generally translated as cotton or linen. It is significant that this sari, the colour of which is not specified in the Ayodhyakanda, is said to be *pita* (yellow) in the Aranya and all later kandas. This specification, I think, is deliberate, because the poet wanted to heighten the effect when Sita was being whisked away through the air and this yellow sari glistened in the sunlight and the poet expressly says so.^{30 30a}

Now it is well known that Chinese silk was a craze among the Romans and was transported to them through India in the early centuries of the Christian era. In India itself Chinese silk was introduced at this time. However, Kautilya refers to silk (*Chinapatta*) and China (*Chinabhumi*) both and if the Arthasastra is dated earlier we might say that the Ramayana reference would go back to the 2nd-3rd century B.C.³¹

First the ring and then the silk help to fix the date of the composition of a certain portion of the Ramayana to a period not earlier than 1st century B.C.-A.D. These are also the dates suggested by Sita's offer of 100 pots of wine to the Kalindi river and the *satkara* by Sage Bharadvaja to Bharata, his three widowed mothers and his fourfold army. A goat is killed and wine offered in many aboriginal, non-Aryan societies. These customs are reflected in the Atharva Veda and later Tantric works. These are still current today. But the offer of 100 pots of wine is indeed intriguing. Though this particular verse is now omitted from the reconstituted text of the Critical Edition, its occurrence in several versions of the Ramayana only indicates the popularity of the custom. When may such a custom arise? When certain wines were becoming popular but difficult to obtain and so its offer would entail some extra labour or cost to the devotee and so its fulfilment would be believed to bestow merit (*punya*).

SATKARA (RECEPTION) IN BHARADVAJA'S ASHRAMA

The scene in the Bharadvaja Ashrama is very interesting and significant, for the light it throws on our society. When Bharata with the entire retinue crossed the Triveni at Prayaga, sage Bharadvaja who had his ashrama on the southern bank (a site is still there at Allahabad and might indicate how much the river has now receded) invited him to stay in his ashrama before he proceeded to Chitrakuta where Rama lived. Instead of offering Bharata a fare suitable to his status and the occasion which was far from pleasant, he

thought of offering a royal reception and with his *mantrabala* (magic powers) created as if out of nothing such feast of wine, women and meat dishes as well as other rich food that Bharata's soldiers—human as they were—said: "O, Bharata, you may return to Ayodhya or go to Sri Rama, we shall stay here because we are extremely happy. Let you, Rama and everybody be happy."³²

What is the propriety of such a reception, particularly when the entire retinue (we believe) was still in mourning? However, it is there and included in the Critical Edition because the editor found that it was in all the versions of the Ramayana. I think that this thing could never have belonged to the original story. Its inclusion or interpolation should have taken place at a time when owing to increasing trade with the Roman world, Roman wine and women were freely entering India and eagerly sought after by the kings and people, including sages like Bharadvaja. A clear reference to these features in our society was hitherto available in early Tamil literature,³³ but not documented archaeologically. But since 1946 when Sir Mortimer Wheeler identified sherds of Roman amphorae at Arikamedu, this definitely imported wine jar has been found all over India, even in the Buddhist monasteries at Deonimori³⁴ in the forest of Northern Gujarat and Nagarjunakonda in Andhra. And the Indian name for this wine was probably *varuni*, a definitely late word.

GOLD AND WINE IN INDIA

Wine drinking was not unknown in India before this period. But just as with the European contact it has become fashionable and a status symbol, so with the Roman influence many foreign objects—gods, goddesses and customs—were absorbed by the Indian society. Above all, the flourishing Roman trade brought in plenty of gold in the form of Roman coins. That this was severely deprecated by Seneca in the Roman senate,³⁵ is well known. In India, the gold was soon turned into ornaments, and occasionally for goldplating furniture, interiors of religious monuments and, perhaps, other

public monuments as well. An echo of this lavish use of gold is seen in the description of Lanka in the Ramayana and Dwarka in the Mahabharata.

Thus I have tried to show that the original Ramayana was quite different from the Ramayana we have at present. The origins or sources of the ur Ramayana might go back to a period between 1500 and 1000 B.C., whereas the present Ramayana could be as late as the 11th century A.D., for the earliest manuscript we have today is of A.D. 1020.

PRESENT RAMAYANA—C. 400 A.D.

But there is no doubt that the major elements of the present Ramayana were known in Northern India, in the 5th century A.D., as this is otherwise attested to by the *Raghuvamsa* and the panels depicting scenes from the Ramayana in Early Gupta temples, as well as small and large terracotta plaques.

It was this Ramayana which gradually spread to South India and in the process got more and more inflated. And this inflation has not ceased, for with every *Harikirtana* or *Harikatha* the reciters have a chance to and occasionally do concoct a story which is not to be found in any of the older versions. This I have myself heard on the Poona Radio during the months of June and July 1972.

Just as there is no proof for these stories, so also there is no proof for many of the stories in the Ramayana, current in the 5th century A.D. Thus Rama never crossed the Narmada, and went to Nasik and then across South India to Rameshwaram and then to Lanka. This Lanka is purely a myth and imaginary, and hence can never be located. So also the most wide-spread belief that Ravana had an aeroplane called Pushpaka which he had forcibly taken away from Kubera, and in which later Rama, Sita and Lakshmana flew back to Ayodhya is a myth. But a myth which was in existence in the 5th century A.D., as it was known to Kalidasa who exploited it so beautifully in the *Raghuvamsa*.