

# Valmiki Ramayana

## Critical Essays

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# Uttara-kanda, the pretender kanda

## 1. Introduction

§1 The *Uttara-kanda* (abbr.: U-K), which claims to be Valmiki's narration of the story of Rama after his consecration as King of Ayodhya, is generally presented in complete editions of the Ramayana as though it is the seventh *kanda* of the Ramayana. However, for over a century scholars are generally agreed that most if not all of the U-K is a later addition tacked on to Valmiki's Ramayana (Valmiki-ramayana). This essay takes a fresh look at the U-K and its status.

## 2. Some preliminary remarks

§2.1 *Sarga* 1 of the *Balakanda* of the Ramayana gives a very rough outline of the story to be developed later. It makes no reference to the U-K or to anything in it. *Sarga* 3 gives an outline of the story of Rama as visualized by Valmiki. The U-K, or a part of it, is referred to in verses 1.3.28 and 1.4.2; the phrase *uttare kavye* in 1.3.29 seems to refer to a distinct *kavya* or perhaps merely means "in the excellent poem;" but these verses are probably much later additions.

There are *phalasaruti slokas* at the end of the *Yuddha-kanda* of the Ramayana itself. Since *phalasaruti slokas* will occur only at the end of a work, this means that the Ramayana ended with the *Yuddha-kanda*. People who want to consider the U-K as a part of the Ramayana claim, without real evidence to support such claim, that the above *phalasaruti slokas* of the Ramayana are interpolations. The Critical Edition relegates the *phalasaruti* verses of both the Ramayana and the U-K to the appendix. But it will be shown further below that even in ancient days many felt that the U-K was not really a part of Valmiki-ramayana.

§2.3 The author of the U-K repeatedly refers to Valmiki as a great and eminent sage. Since it is most unlikely that Valmiki would have praised himself in these terms, this also suggests that he was not the author of the *Uttarakanda*. The U-K further refers to the '*ramayana kavya*' as an already completed work; this too suggests that the U-K itself did not consider itself to be part of the Ramayana.

### **3. A preliminary comparison of the Ramayana and the Uttarakanda**

§3.1 Valmiki's Ramayana is superbly planned and is executed with great poetic skill. The U-K lacks the poetic quality, dignity, unity and high moral standpoint that one finds in the Ramayana proper. The concepts, plan and execution of the U-K are all poor, and the text is a hodge-podge of purana-like stories.

§3.2 Valmiki's Ramayana says that Brahma asked Valmiki to compose "the story of Rama" (*Rama-katha*) as a poem; it also describes itself as "the great story of Sita, and of the killing of Ravana." Indeed the Ramayana is really the story of Rama and Sita and there is practically nothing in it that does not contribute to their story. On the other hand, sixty-nine out of the hundred *Sargas* of the U-K have nothing to do with Rama or Sita.

§3.3 It seems to be that today only a few scholars — and some politicians, feminists, social reformers and people who wish to indulge in Rama-bashing — that seem to consider the U-K to be a part of Valmiki's Ramayana. Scholarly opinion holds that not only is the U-K a later addition to the Ramayana, but also that by the time it was added, the Ramayana was already recognized as an exemplary work, and Rama, Laksmana and Sita as ideal models for human behaviour.

§3.4 However, although right from the beginning the U-K seems to have been considered to be distinct from Valmiki's Ramayana, it got to be viewed by many that the two texts are inseparable, and the U-K is included in many of the printed texts of the Ramayana. But, traditionally, the U-K has generally been ignored.

### **4. The societal values of the Uttarakanda**

§4.1 The U-K adopts (and indirectly advocates) certain societal values in regard to the position of women and Sudras in society. But its stance is in direct opposition to that of Valmiki's Ramayana and is further evidence that the U-K is not a part of the genuine Ramayana; indeed, it shows that the U-K is not by Valmiki, the author of the Ramayana. Since Rama was revered as a *dharmatma*, his ideas seen in the Ramayana proper cannot be replaced by new ideas as to what *dharma* is, except by claiming that he himself adopted those new ideas. That is what the U-K does. It

embodies the new ideas in two stories that are usually referred to as *Sita-parityaga*, the abandonment of Sita (after Rama and Sita return to Ayodhya and Rama was consecrated as king) and Sambuka-vadha, the killing of the ascetic Sambuka. The U-K attributes both actions to Rama, whom people acknowledged to be righteous and as a model to follow. By masquerading as an additional *kanda* of the Ramayana composed by Valmiki himself, the U-K succeeded, to a considerable extent, in sabotaging the values presented in Valmiki's Ramayana. This will be discussed in detail further below.

§4.2 The heart of the U-K consists of the two episodes mentioned above, and it is these episodes that have captured the interest of various poets, playwrights, scholars, politicians, feminists and social reformers alike. We shall first give the two episodes in brief.

### **I. The U-K story of Sita's exile**

§5.1 The U-K says that soon after Rama's return from Lanka and his coronation, he heard that there was widespread dissatisfaction among the people of Ayodhya that he had taken back Sita who, according to the norms of the society, should be rejected since she had spent almost a year in Ravana's custody. Rama was perturbed by the report and was plunged into sadness. Afraid of earning a bad reputation among his people, he decided that Sita, who was pregnant (with twins) at that time should be exiled. Warning his brothers against raising any protest, he ordered Laksmana to take Sita across the Ganga and leave her there, beyond the borders of his kingdom, near Valmiki's hermitage. Sita was not aware of any of this till Laksmana took her across the Ganga and told her of Rama's decision. (A point that is missed by many is that Rama ordered Laksmana to leave Sita near the hermitage of Valmiki, where Sita would certainly be spotted very soon by Valmiki or by his disciples; and when Laksmana left her there, he informed her that Valmiki was a very dear friend of Dasaratha, and that she could live in comfort under his care. The U-K says that near Valmiki's hermitage itself there were also several other hermitages, with Rishis, their wives, disciples and children; the area was not a forest with wild tigers or Rakshasas. Valmiki told Sita to feel quite at home staying in the care of the ascetic women who lived close to his asram and who will look after her as their own child. The U-K says also that Laksmana remained in his chariot, on the Ayodhya-side of the river, and left for Ayodhya only after he saw Valmiki lead her

into his hermitage. This also shows that Valmiki's asram was not in a forest or heavily wooded area, and that the abandonment of Sita, cruel as it was, was arranged with a lot of concern for her safety and physical comfort.)

## II. The Sambuka story in the Uttara-Kanda

§5.2 The major portion of the U-K has nothing to do with Rama or Sita. The only significant chapters of the U-K are devoted to the story of *Sita-parityaga* (discussed above) and to the Sambuka story. The Sambuka story says that an aged Brahmin brought the dead body of his very young son to Rama's presence and complained that the death of a young boy had happened in Rama's kingdom only because of some grievous misconduct on Rama's part (U-K 64.9: *ramasya duskritam kimcin mahad asti na samsayah*). Rama consulted his ministers Vasista, Markandeya, Maudgalya, Vamadeva, Kasyapa, Katyayana, Jabali, Gautama and Narada who advised him that the Brahmin boy's death happened because some Sudra was performing tapas somewhere, and that Rama should take action against him. According to the *Uttara-kanda*, Rama went in his aerial car searching all over his kingdom for the Sudra; in the course of his search he came upon a person performing tapas; Rama asked him what his varna was, and he identified himself as born of a Sudra mother and that his name was Sambuka. The U-K says that Rama then cut off the Sudra's head and that as already predicted by Rama's advisors, the Brahmin boy in far-away Ayodhya immediately came back to life!

But Rama's killing of Sambuka is inconsistent with the portrayal of Rama in the Ramayana. (See §9.1 below.)

§6.0 As we look more closely at the U-K episode of Sita's exile, we shall see that there are a number of reasons for deciding that this U-K story is also not a creation of Valmiki and that it is not a part of Valmiki's Ramayana.

§6.1.1 The U-K story says that soon after Rama's coronation there was widespread dissatisfaction in Ayodhya that Rama had accepted Sita who had been in Ravana's custody for many months. But this contradicts what is said in the Ramayana about how happy and contented the people were under Rama's rule, with no famine or premature death, for thousands of years following his coronation. This strongly suggests

that the story in the *Uttarakanda*, and perhaps the U-K itself, is not by Valmiki and is not really a part of the Ramayana.

§6.1.2 Consider the *agni-pravesa* episode occurring in the Yuddha kanda. If it was to prove to the Rakshasas, the monkeys and the bears assembled in Lanka that Sita was chaste, the *agni-pravesa* was totally unnecessary. Hanuman's testimony was already known to Rama, Laksmana and the monkeys and bears in Rama's army. There were other witnesses too who could attest to her purity: Vibhisana and his wife Sarama, their daughters Kala and Anala, Ravana's own wife Mandodari, as well as Trijata and any number of other raksasis who were guarding Sita in the asoka grove; even Sita's appearance as she was — if she had been brought to Rama's presence straight from the Asoka-vana where she had been held captive — in her pitiable appearance, unbathed, unkempt, wearing a dusty soiled raiment and no ornaments, would have been evidence that she had not been living in luxury in Ravana's palace. Therefore, the question as to why Rama spoke those harsh words that led to Sita's *agni-pravesa* requires proper consideration.

One explanation for Rama's words is that he must have wanted the "world at large", including the 'ordinary,' uncultured men (*prakritah*) also to be convinced of Sita's purity. A second explanation is that Rama's harsh words form the *purva-paksa* and Sita's reply the *siddhanta* of the debate on whether a woman who had, due to whatever circumstances, spent a period in another man's house should be taken back or not. These matters will be discussed elsewhere. But anyway, Sita's *agni-pravesa*, witnessed by Laksmana, Vibhisana, Sugriva, Hanuman, Angada, Jambavan and large numbers of monkeys and bears, as well as by the Devas, would certainly achieve the purpose of convincing the people of Ayodhya of Sita's purity when, as one may suppose, these witnesses tell the people of Ayodhya and elsewhere of the happenings in Lanka. Rama certainly had looked upon Sita's *agni-pravesa* as squelching the possibility of any doubt anybody anywhere may have about Sita's chastity. We may therefore expect that Laksmana and Hanuman and others, if not Rama himself, would have made the *agni-pravesa* of Sita public knowledge.

Indeed, the U-K itself suggests that the people of Ayodhya would have been told of what happened to Rama and Sita during their exile. For instance, the people knew that Sita had been forcibly abducted by

Ravana, and even the detail that she had been held in the Asoka woods. It is beyond belief that they had been told that detail but not about the spectacular event of Sita's *agni-pravesa* and how her purity had been attested to by the gods themselves. Note also that according to the *Uttarakanda*, Hanuman and others who had been with Rama in Lanka stayed on in Ayodhya for more than two months after Rama's coronation. It is unbelievable that they would not have told the people of Sita's *agni-pravesa* - especially in view of Rama's declaration that the *agni-pravesa* in Lanka shall be a means to convince the people of the world of Sita's purity. They would have also told the people of Ayodhya that after her *agni-pravesa*, Sita not only emerged unscathed by the fire, but was showered high praise by the Devas and that the Devas told Rama that Sita was absolutely pure and blameless, and asked him to take her back. It is therefore beyond belief that Valmiki would say (as the U-K does) that there was widespread disapproval of Rama's acceptance of Sita. The U-K story is therefore highly suspect.

§6.1.3 We note that the U-K does not, in fact, speak about any suspicion about Sita's chastity in the mind of any person in Ayodhya. The U-K describes the people's feeling of dissatisfaction at Rama's action as follows, "Setting aside his anger, Rama brought her back to his household. What kind of happiness does he feel by sexual union with her whom Ravana had forcibly carried her away, seating her in his lap? Why does he not reject her who was in the custody of the Rakshasa? [Because of Rama's behaviour we will also have to be forgiving towards our wives who stay in another man's house for some days], [for] people follow the king's behaviour." It is to be noted that the dissatisfaction expressed here is not in regard to Sita's character, but in regard to Rama's action.

The evidence contradicts the scholars who have said that according to the U-K there was widespread or "continuing" suspicion of Sita's chastity; none of those scholars cite any evidence from the *Uttarakanda*; some of them seem to have been confusing the later, fictional, play *Uttararamacarita* of Bhavabhuti with the *Uttarakanda*.

§6.1.4 Sending Sita into exile may have been perhaps justified by Ksatriyadharma, but the Rama of Valmiki-ramayana had categorically renounced the Ksatriyadharma; he had described it as great adharna (unrighteousness) tinged with a little *dharma* (the Ksatriyadharma of obeying the people's wishes). So why did the author of the U-K include

the *Sita-parityaga* story (and the Sambuka story) in his narration?

§7.1 The U-K story of the exile of Sita seems to have been motivated to promote the ideas (1) that a woman who had been abducted and then rescued should not be welcomed back into the family, (2) that a husband may treat his wife in any manner he likes and that she should accept it meekly and without protest, and be totally subservient to her husband whom she should worship as her deity even if he treats her badly, and (3) that nobody has the right to criticize such action by the husband. This stand of the U-K is unfortunately shared by many in India even today. The intent of the Sambuka story seems to have been to establish that sudras are not eligible to practice tapas (or other activities associated with especially Brahmans). It was probably thought that the best way to present these right-wing reactionary ideas that are really contrary to the spirit of Valmiki-ramayana, is to make them part of a text, name the text as a “later kanda” (of the Valmiki-ramayana) composed by Valmiki himself, and then claim that it is ‘a part of Valmiki Ramayana;’ for the Valmiki-ramayana had by that time been universally recognized as an exemplary text on *dharma*, and Rama as the ideal exemplar of *dharma*. By such means, the messages implicit in Valmiki-ramayana were subverted, and ideas contrary to those of the genuine Ramayana were presented as though they were endorsed by Righteous Rama himself; note that the U-K contains no episodes of real interest except for the exile of Sita by Rama and the killing of Sambuka by Rama.

§7.2 For the “ordinary”, common man the point at issue in the U-K episode was not Sita’s chastity but whether a man should take back his wife who had lived for some time — whether voluntarily or involuntarily — in another man's house. Such a woman's chastity is open to suspicion; in Lanka, Sita’s *agni-pravesa* proved her chastity. But she was not a mere human but goddess Lakshmi herself, as the Devas declared. Therefore, simply because Sita did an *agni-pravesa*, can it be prescribed that every married woman who had stayed for some time in another man's house should undergo an *agni-pravesa* test? No ordinary human being will survive the *agni-pravesa* test. Therefore, the ordinary men felt that a wife who had been abducted and who had lived in another man's house for some time should simply not be welcomed back into the family by her husband; and that this is the only way to ensure that no woman will go astray. This must have been the custom or law or norm even before Rama’s time. (And it is regrettable that many in India have followed this

norm, through many centuries down to the present.) For it is this law that Rama seemingly relied on when he uttered words rejecting Sita just prior to her *agni-pravesa*, even though he knew that Sita was pure. Sita protested against the Validity of that law and proved it to be a defective law by her entry into and subsequent emergence from the fire.

§7.3 In the commoners' view, a king must obey and uphold the law, defined by the customs of the people; that is part of *Rajadharma*. But Rama's concept of *dharma* transcended not only *Ksatriyadharma* but also *Rajadharma*. So when Sita's *agni-pravesa* proved her chastity of which he had had no doubt at any time, he took her back, thinking that the world would only approve of his action.

§7.4 But, especially from the point of view of the commoners of Ayodhya, the issue was not Sita's purity, but that Rama had violated a time-honoured custom or law and in so doing had caused them difficulty in regulating their family affairs. That is really the substance of their grievance against Rama and it put Rama in a very difficult situation. The custom or law or social norm in question could be changed only with the consensus of the society; but Rama had not consulted his subjects on whether he should take back Sita. When Rama suggested that Sita should do another *agni-pravesa*, it was not because he had any doubts about Sita's purity but in order to impress the thousands of his subjects of all varnas, and many distinguished rishis and kings and monkeys and bears and Rakshasas as well, who had gathered there to witness Sita's *sapatha* and *agni-pravesa* — in order to vindicate his taking back Sita. Indeed Valmiki told Rama, and the gathering, right at the beginning: "Sita is pure ... She was abandoned by you, O great upholder of the law, out of fear for your reputation." Rama then acknowledged to Valmiki (and to the gathering) that he had always known that Sita was pure, that he had made a bad mistake in sending Sita away and he begged to be forgiven. Apparently, he wanted the assembly to declare that it was a mistake to have sent Sita away and that he should welcome her back.

§7.5 Sita probably wanted to teach the common people that it was wrong to demand that anyone should undergo an *agni-pravesa* in order to prove one's purity; she probably wanted to teach the people that a woman, rescued from her abduction, should be welcomed back into the family. She swore, and proved her purity in an astonishing way. She did not do an *agni-pravesa*, but, on the strength of her purity, invoked

Mother Earth and disappeared into the earth with her.

## **Characterization of Rama**

§8.0 The character of the Rama of the U-K is strikingly inconsistent with that of the Rama of Valmiki-ramayana. The behaviour of the Rama of the U-K is like that of Ravana, or even worse.

§8.1 It is true that people would not like to have a king whose wife's character was not above suspicion, for people would feel that such a king will be corrupted by having a corrupt wife; and they would also like their king to follow time-honoured customs and laws. The U-K says that Rama decided to send Sita into exile because he heard reports that there were widespread rumours among the people of Ayodhya strongly disapproving of his taking back Sita as his wife, although she had spent nearly a year in Ravana's custody. Rama knew that Sita was most chaste and pure and blemishless; he knew also that the people expressed no suspicion or complaint about Sita or her character, but only about his action in taking her back. After sending Sita into exile, Rama continued to rule as king for several years.

But we know that the Rama of the Valmiki-ramayana did not always feel obliged to act according to the people's wishes. To fulfill his father's promise to Kaikeyi, he was determined to go into exile. As he set out for the forest, the people pleaded with him, most pitifully, to return to Ayodhya. But Rama did not heed to their pleadings.

§8.2 Some people argue that it is a king's Ksatriyadharma requires not only that his queen should be above all suspicion, but also that the king should also uphold established customs and laws, and that it was for that reason that the Rama of the U-K arranged for Sita to be abandoned in the forest although he knew that she was absolutely pure and innocent — and pregnant at the same time. But such action by Rama would be a typical instance of Ksatriyadharma where righteousness and unrighteousness go hand in hand — and it is precisely this kind of *dharma* that the Rama of Valmiki's Ramayana had rejected. He had said, more than once, that his concept of *dharma* transcended the Ksatriya code - a code that he rejected, describing it as a code “where unrighteousness and a little bit of righteousness go together, a code that is followed only by vile, greedy

and wicked men of sinful deeds.”

§8.3 In acting according to the defective Ksatriyadharma that had been resolutely rejected by the Rama of the Valmiki-ramayana, the Rama of the U-K behaves very unlike the Rama of the Valmiki-ramayana who had declared that it was not for earthly wealth that he cared to live in this world, and that, like a rsi (Rishi), he cared only for *dharma*, righteousness. The action of the Rama of the U-K shows him to have been keen on enjoying the good opinion of his subjects and also on retaining the kingship; it shows him also as totally lacking any sense of justice or compassion: he did not even tell his pregnant wife that he was abandoning her, and why. Ravana too was proud of his kingship, wealth and glory and enjoyed the good opinion of his Rakshasa subjects but had no sense of justice, nor any respect for women. That is, the *Uttarakanda*'s portrayal of Rama is rather like that of Ravana and is very unlike the portrayal of Rama in Valmiki's Ramayana.

§8.4 The Rama of Valmiki's Ramayana never demanded that any one should accept his decisions meekly and unquestioningly. He was willing — indeed, he welcomed — dissent and debate. This can be seen from his discussions with Kausalya and Laksmana when they wanted him not to go exile, and also from his discussions with Sita and with Laksmana when they each wanted to accompany him to the forest. The behaviour of the Rama of the U-K is in strong contrast: he sternly ordered his brothers from offering any discussion whatsoever on his decision to abandon Sita in the *tapovana* beyond the borders of the kingdom. We note that the Rama of the Valmiki-ramayana had accepted with gratitude the advice that Laksmana gave him from time to time, and praised it as excellent. He had welcomed and praised the advice from Sugriva also. On the other hand, faced with a serious situation the Rama of the U-K not only did not seek the advice of Laksmana or any others, but sternly warned them against offering any comment. His behaviour is similar to that of Ravana who, driven by lust upon hearing Surpanakha's description of Sita, did not want to consult his ministers and advisors, but dismissed them and decided to abduct Sita. The warning Rama issued to his brothers is similar to Ravana's scolding his uncle Marica for advising him against abducting Sita, and similar to his admonition to Marica that he should speak only when asked and that even then he should not criticize his king. Indeed, the behaviour of the Rama of the U-K forbidding any comment from his brothers is much worse than that

of Ravana who several times did allow Vibhisana to advise him to return Sita to Rama, even though the advice was not to Ravana's liking. This was even before Hanuman returned from Lanka to Kishkinda. Even on the eve of the arrival of Rama and Sugriva and others in Lanka, Ravana allowed Vibhisana to repeat his advice again and again, although at the end of it he, Ravana, was overcome by anger and cursed and execrated his brother. We see then that the behaviour of Rama of the U-K who ordered his brothers to voice no comment is most unlike that of the Rama of the Valmiki-ramayana and is in fact much worse than that of Ravana.

§8.5 In the Valmiki-ramayana, whenever Rama fell into sorrow or anger or despair, Laksmana or Sugriva would remonstrate with him and ask him to stop behaving like an 'ordinary' uncultured (*prakrita*) man; Rama would then recover his normal composure and express his appreciation of them. On the other hand, the Rama of the U-K acknowledged that he had "fallen into the ocean of sorrow," and yet strictly forbade his brothers from making any comment on his decision to exile Sita.

§8.6 The Rama of the Valmiki-ramayana is portrayed not only as most truthful but also as loving his wife Sita so much that he could never leave her behind or abandon her; he himself says that she was dear to him as his own life, indeed even dearer than his own life and that he could not live without her even for a short while. Even the Rakshasas Marica and Ravana said the same of Rama. Valmiki also declared that for Rama, Sita was dearer than life itself. Whereas the Rama of the Valmiki-ramayana had declared before the assembled Devas themselves that he can never abandon Sita, the Rama of the U-K arranged for the abandonment of Sita, did not even have any discussion whatsoever with her about it, and continued to rule as king for many years as though nothing had happened. We see that the behaviour of the Rama of the U-K is in sharp contrast with that of the Rama of the Valmiki-ramayana.

§8.7 Also, for quite some years the Rama of the U-K seems to have had no curiosity about the fate of his wife Sita who had been banished from his kingdom, nor about the fate of the baby/babies, he had fathered through her. His behaviour is in strong contrast to that of the Rama of the Valmiki-ramayana who was madly in love with his wife, was most compassionate and was also devoted to righteousness — a righteousness that transcended mere *Kshatriyadharma*.

§9.1 The Sambuka story blames a Sudra's tapas for a Brahmin boy's death hundreds of miles away. It takes the stand that the Sudra deserved to be killed for his 'offense' and it gloats that the Brahmin boy came back to life when Rama beheaded the Sudra. But the story is contradictory to the spirit of the Ramayana and is apparently the creation, not of Valmiki but, at a later date, of some extreme conservative person. For, the story not only contradicts what the Ramayana says more than once, that during Rama's reign there were no child deaths, but it also contradicts what the Valmiki-ramayana says about sudras performing tapas. The Valmiki-ramayana refers to a young Sudra (the son of a Sudra woman), as well as a Sudra woman (Sabari) as ascetics engaged in tapas (2.57.18, 20, 37; 3.70.7). In the Valmiki-ramayana, both Rama and Valmiki refer to Guha, of the lowly hunter tribe, as Rama's friend dear to him as his own self (*atmasamah sakha*). The feeling was not one-sided condescension; for instance, when Rama met with Guha, the latter took the initiative and embraced Rama. This shows that in the days described by Valmiki there was no distinction based on sex, jati, varna, or race etc. Rama's first words to Sabari, a Sudra woman, of the "lowly" hunter tribe, were to enquire whether her tapas was proceeding well without hindrance from anybody. Rama looked upon everybody equally, making no distinction based on sex, varna, jati (caste) or even race. Among those he revered were his dearest friends were Sabari and Guha, both of them of the hunter tribe, the vulture Jatayu, the monkeys Sugriva and Hanuman, and the Rakshasa Vibhisana. Finally, in regard to the U-K story of Rama killing the sudra ascetic Sambuka, we first note that Valmiki's Ramayana says that Dasaratha realized that he had committed a great sin (*mahatpapam*) when he had unwittingly killed a sudra practitioner of tapas and, as the Sudra ascetic's father reminded Dasaratha, it would have been a far greater sin if the killing had been intentional. Certainly, Dasaratha's son Rama, described as righteous and learned, and who showed such high regard for the Sudra tapasvini Sabari and looked upon the nisada Guha as his *atmasamah sakha*, would not have intentionally killed the Sudra ascetic Sambuka for performing tapas. We see then that the Rama of Sambuka story cannot be the Rama of the Ramayana and the story is certainly not by Valmiki.

§ 9.2 Thus we find that the U-K repeatedly paints a picture of Rama that is very different from the picture of Rama in Valmiki's Ramayana and one can only conclude that Valmiki could not have been the author of

the *Uttara-Kanda*, and that the U-K cannot be a part of the Valmiki-ramayana.

### **Characterization of Sita**

§10.1 The Sita of the U-K is portrayed as a weak and submissive person, meekly accepting her exile ordered by her husband even though she has done no wrong, was faithful and devoted to him and was free of all blame. She neither questioned, nor argued or protested her husband's action. The U-K thus portrays Sita as accepting that a husband may treat his wife however harshly and unjustly as he pleases, and that his wife should meekly accept such treatment.

But that is not how the Sita of the Valmiki-ramayana is portrayed by Valmiki. As soon as Rama told her that he was going to the forest and that she should remain in Ayodhya (2.23.34), she protested angrily (2.24.1: *samkruddha*). Rama persisted and told her, “You must stay here and do your duty . . . You must do as I say” (2.25.2-3: *iha acara svadharmam tvam ma yatha manasah sukham || site yatha tvarn vaksyami tatha karyam tvaya abate*). He went on to cite the dangers of life in the forest. Then Sita angrily asked him, “Did my father give me in marriage to a woman with the body of a man?” (2.27.3). So we see that the Sita of the Valmiki-ramayana did not meekly accept whatever her husband said.

Later too in the Valmiki-ramayana, Sita is portrayed as brave and strong. After she was abducted by Ravana, she was offered enticements and threats, by Ravana himself and by the Rakshasis guarding her, but she spurned them all. Later still when Ravana had been killed and Rama uttered words rejecting her, she forcefully argued against his reasoning (that an abducted woman should not be welcomed back into the family); she publicly rebuked him for speaking like an uncultured person, and she proved that Rama was wrong, by herself doing an *agni-pravesa* and emerging gloriously out of the fire.

That is how the Valmiki-ramayana portrays the fortitude of Sita. But we saw that the Sita of the U-K is portrayed as weak and submissive, meekly accepting her unjust banishment by Rama.

§10.2 The fact that the Sita of the U-K was pregnant when she learnt of her exile should have really added to her strength; but the U-K portrays

her as a weakling without any spirit, and as practically thanking Rama for abandoning her. Thus, we see that the Sita of the U-K is totally unlike the Sita of the Valmiki-ramayana.

### **Characterization of Laksmana**

§11.1 Let us compare the portrayal of Laksmana in the Valmiki-ramayana and in the *Uttarakanda*. The Laksmana of Valmiki-ramayana is a devoted son and a devoted brother. But he had strong feelings that he expressed freely, and would not blindly accept what a person of authority says, whether it be a king, a father or an elder brother. He was furious that his father, the king Dasaratha, had given boons to Kaikeyi as a result of which Rama was to go into exile; he was ready to depose Dasaratha by force of arms; and he expressed his anger against his elder brother Rama for meekly accepting exile as his “fate.”

§11.2 In the Valmiki-ramayana, whenever Rama fell into despair, Laksmana, though he was the younger brother, used to chide him, comfort him and give him advice; and Rama appreciated receiving such advice. Verses 3.60.52 and 3.61.1 describe Rama as overcome by great sorrow and rage at the loss of Sita, and was prepared to destroy all the worlds; Laksmana’s words of advice calmed him; Rama acknowledged the value of the advice and indeed asked for further advice as to what they should do next (3.63.1, 3). In the *Yuddha-Kanda* of the Valmiki-ramayana, Laksmana could not bear to hear Rama’s harsh words rejecting Sita and looked angrily at Rama; and he lit the fire for Sita’s *agni-pravesa* only after reading a reassuring message in Rama’s face [namely, that Rama knew that Sita was pure and that Sita will not be hurt by the fire but emerge from it with great glory].

§11.3 The behaviour of the Rama and Laksmana of the U-K is in striking contrast with that of the Rama and Laksmana of the Valmiki-ramayana. The Rama of the U-K announced his decision to banish Sita whom he knew to be blameless, afraid that otherwise, his subjects would speak ill of him; he admitted that he was sunk in sorrow (U-K 44.10-14). But instead of seeking the advice of Laksmana and his other brothers as the Rama of the Valmiki-ramayana would have done, the Rama of the U-K ordered them not to make any comments on his decision (U-K 44.18), and ordered Laksmana to ferry Sita out of the country — and the Laksmana of the U-K uttered not a word in protest, but meekly carried

out Rama's order.

The behaviour of the Laksmana of the U-K is in sharp contrast with that of the Laksmana of Valmiki-ramayana proper. The Laksmana of Valmiki-ramayana proper had expressed his virulent condemnation of his father King Dasaratha's action leading to Rama's banishment; in particular he said that he knew of no crime committed by Rama, nor of any fault of Rama's that would justify the banishment (2.52.18: *kenayam aparadhena rajaputro vivaSitah*). Even Rama could not fully pacify him, for not long afterwards Laksmana sent a stinging message to Dasaratha through Sumantra, saying that Rama's banishment was a rash and perverse act and that he, Laksmana disowned the king as his father (2.52.21: *aham tavan maharaje pitrtvam nopalaksaye*).

But in the *Uttarakanda*, when Rama announced his decision to banish Sita even though (by his own admission) he knew her to totally blameless, Laksmana raised no protest whatever and meekly carried out the banishment of Sita. The U-K does not say that Laksmana cast not the slightest angry or disapproving look at his brother. He meekly took Sita to the forest, told her she was being abandoned, and left her there. This is not what one would expect of the Laksmana of the Ramayana proper,

§11.4 In acting as described above, the Laksmana of the U-K thus failed in his duty as advisor to his brother. Valmiki's Ramayana stresses again and again that it is the duty of a king's counsellor to advise the king against following a wrong course of action, whatever may be the cost of offering the advice; it does so through the words of Marica to Ravana, through the repeated advice of Vibhisana to Ravana and through the words of Hanuman who tells King Sugriva, "a counsellor must put aside fear and tell the king what is good for him" and gives him sharp advice. Marica, and later on Vibhisana use identical words and tell King Ravana that there are plenty of people who will say things that are pleasing to the ear, and rare is the person who would give proper advice even if it be not pleasant to hear; and that likewise, rare is the person who would listen to such advice; but that it is the duty of a good counsellor to advise what is good, even if it be unpleasant to hear; since both Marica and Vibhisana use identical words, it would appear that they were quoting a well known maxim. Both Marica and Vibhisana gave proper advice to Ravana, even though they knew that it would invite his wrath: Marica advised him against abducting Sita, and Vibhisana advised him, repeatedly, that Sita

should be returned to Rama. Of course, in both cases, Ravana reacted with great anger. However, the Laksmana of the U-K did not offer even one word of advice or protest to Rama on the latter's decision to exile Sita — so unlike the Laksmana of the Ramayana who did not hesitate to question or to advise against what Rama intended to do.

§11.5 In the Valmiki-ramayana, when Rama said that it was only due to fate that he has to go into exile and that no one is capable of contesting fate, Laksmana angrily retorted that only the weak and cowardly submit to fate; but the Laksmana of the U-K says that Sita's having had to go into exile was due to fate, that fate cannot be conquered and that Rama, a "tiger among men," should simply accept Sita's exile as his fate, for the brave do not sorrow over their fate. Thus, the behaviour of the Laksmana of the U-K is again seen to be very unlike that of the Laksmana of Valmiki's Ramayana.

§11.6 We see then that the author of the U-K portrays not only Rama and Sita, but also Laksmana in a manner inconsistent with Valmiki's Ramayana.

§12 Valmiki's Ramayana portrays some women as strong and evil, like Tataka and Surpanakha; and it portrays many more women as strong and noble, or as great ascetics, or as extremely wise, like Kusanabha's daughters, and Anasuya, Svayamprabha, Sabari, Tara, Mandodari, Vibhisana's wife Sarama, and, of course, Sita herself. No woman is portrayed as weak; no woman is portrayed as forcibly violated by any one (except by Ravana). The U-K on the other hand portrays women as weak; Vedavati was a noble ascetic, but, unable to stand up against Ravana, immolated herself; many were the women who were forcibly violated by Ravana. Sita is also portrayed as weak and submissive. This again suggests that the U-K is not by Valmiki.

§13 There are also other inconsistencies and defects in the U-K story of *Sita-parityaga*. The story ignores the question of justice for Sita.

The Rama of the Valmiki-ramayana is described as righteous and most compassionate towards all. But the Rama of the U-K showed no concern for the rights and the welfare of Sita and her then yet-to-be-born babies. And it was not righteous of him to condemn Sita to exile on the basis of rumours that he knew to be false and were critical of his action

of taking her back; and he exiled Sita without giving her an opportunity to say anything — indeed without even telling her that she was to be exiled, and what for — and refusing to allow anyone to speak against his decision to exile her. In a matter that touched him personally, justice requires that the Rama of the U-K should have consulted his advisors — his brothers and other ministers and Vasista and Bharadvaja and others — but he did not. This contrasts with his behaviour when an aged Brahmin appeared before him in his court and complained that during Rama’s reign his young son had died prematurely — that is, that the boy’s death was due to some fault of Rama’s (7.64.9); Rama then consulted with his advisors and ministers.

§14 The U-K story of Sita’s banishment to the forest give rise to a number of questions for which it contains no answer. For instance, where is the justice for Sita in that story? Is not the life and welfare and the rights of Sita and her then yet-to-be-born babies entitled to the same concern that Rama, who is described in the Ramayana proper as most compassionate, showed towards others? It was Rama himself who had taught Sita that compassion is one’s greatest *dharma*, as Sita asked Hanuman to remind him (5.36.34: *anrsamsyam paro dharmas tvatta eva maya srutah*). In a matter that touched him personally, how can Rama the “righteous” assume the role of prosecutor and judge and condemn Sita to banishment without giving her an opportunity to say anything — indeed without even letting her know of her “punishment” (exile), or even what she is exiled for, till her banishment had been carried out? There are other points to be noted too. Sita cannot be banished without people noticing her absence and raising questions. Indeed, if Rama wanted to transform the widespread disapproval of the people that triggered his order to exile Sita into approval, he would have had to give wide publicity to his exiling her. Did the people approve of his action?

The U-K does not say. What did the wives of Laksmana, Bharata and Satrughna say? Did King Janaka keep quiet? And did Vasista and Agastya and Bharadvaja also keep quiet? And of course Rama’s ministers and other courtiers and the general public -- did they condemn, condone or congratulate Rama on his action? Why did not Rama go to the sages Vasista, Agastya, Visvamitra or Bharadvaja for advice? Why did not Dasaratha consult his council of ministers, as he did in the Sambuka story? The U-K has no answer to these and many other questions too. The plot of the U-K is very weak and full of holes, unlike that of the

Ramayana proper. It is therefore no wonder that so many poets like Bhavabhuti and Kalidasa and others felt at liberty to modify the story of Sita's banishment in many different ways.

### III. Is the U-K a source of critical information?

§15.1 The *Uttara-kanda*, which reads like a purana, really adds little or no information that is relevant for the story of Rama. Almost all the details it gives about Ramayana personages are already found in the Ramayana.

§15.2 Sometimes the U-K gives “information” in a ridiculous fashion. For instance, it describes Anaranya as cursing Ravana that one of his descendants will kill him; this is somewhat similar to Kamsa being cursed that Devaki's eighth child would kill him. Kamsa then set about killing Devaki's children. But Ravana seems to have shown no interest in even learning about Anaranya's descendants, and not even of Rama, who, while yet a boy, had killed Tataka (mother of Marica, Ravana's uncle); indeed, Surpanakha repeatedly berates Ravana for not having employed spies, who would have told him about Rama, his prowess and his actions; Marica berated him likewise and had to tell him about Rama.

§15.3 Another critical matter that the U-K does not explain is the following. It says that Indra prayed to Visnu to wage war against Ravana and kill him, although they knew of Ravana's invincibility by the Devas and any other beings, other than men and monkeys (7.27.12,19). *Sargas* 31-33 are on Ravana's defeat by Kartavirya Arjuna of Mahishmati, a man; *Sarga* 34 describes Ravana's humiliation by the monkey Vali. This means that there were at least one mighty human and one mighty monkey — and perhaps there were more of them, and other beings too — who were neither Devas nor Asuras and who were capable of defeating Ravana. Why did not the Devas seek out such a man or monkey? After all, it would appear that they had at some time sought the help of Vali himself; that is how Vali was awarded the golden necklace by Indra. (4.23.28: Tara said to Vali: *ya datta devorajena tava tustena samyuge*).

§15.4 Sometimes, the “information” given by the U-K is inconsistent. For instance, early in the *Uttarakanda*, Pulastya is praised most highly as a “brahmarsi, possessing a great intellect and righteousness, a *dharmatma*

whose good qualities cannot be praised adequately.” Yet when his grandson Ravana was constantly harassing the Devas, Rishis, Yaksas and Gandharvas, Pulastya seems to have offered his grandson no advice or reprimand not to do so; nor does the U-K say that Pulastya reproached Ravana for his attempt to violate Vedavati Ravana forcibly carried off numerous other women too; his younger brother Vibhisana condemned the abductions, but the U-K does not indicate that Pulastya ever came and admonished Ravana. Similarly, when Ravana forcibly violated Rambha, the wife of his brother Kubera's son Najakubara, and who therefore deserved to be treated as his daughter-in-law, the U-K does not say that Pulastya condemned his grandson's action in any way. On the other hand, the U-K describes how Ravana went to pick up a fight with Arjuna (of Mahismati), but suffered a humiliating defeat and was captured by Arjuna; that as soon as Pulastya heard of it, he rushed to request Arjuna to release Ravana and that Arjuna granted the request. But the U-K does not say that Pulastya gave his grandson Ravana any admonition or sobering advice whatsoever. We see that Pulastya, who tolerated without a murmur or disapproving word the heinous crimes of his evil grandson, is described by the U-K in glorious terms as a Brahmarsi, possessing a great intellect, as a *dharmatma* etc. This shows that the U-K is inconsistent and ineptly constructed and suggests that the U-K is not by Valmiki.

§16.1 There are also instances where the U-K contradicts Valmiki's Ramayana. We have seen some instances in our discussion of the two stories that form the heart of the U-K. (Few more are given below.)

§16.2 (i) The U-K says that Sugriva and other monkeys and bears stayed on in Ayodhya for more than two months after Rama's coronation; this is inconsistent with Valmiki's Ramayana which says that after witnessing Rama's coronation and receiving various presents from Rama at the end of it, Sugriva and Vibhisana and their companions returned to their abodes, that is, to Kishkinda and Lanka respectively); that is, it says that Sugriva and others stayed in Ayodhya only for a very short time after the coronation. Thus, the U-K again contradicts the Ramayana.

(ii) The Rama of the U-K refers to Sita's *agni-pravesa* in Lanka and says that Sita was restored to him by Mahendra; but the Ramayana says that it was Agni deva who restored her.

(iii) Another instance is the telling of the story of Ahalya. The story is told in the *Balakanda* itself, and there is no need for the U-K to give its version of the story. And the U-K version contradicts the version given by Valmiki. Valmiki says that Gautama cursed Indra to lose his testicles; but the U-K says that Gautama cursed Indra that he would be captured by his enemies.

(iv) The U-K (*Sargas* 33-34) says that after his release by Arjuna, Ravana again in his foolish arrogance, went to Kishkinda to challenge Vali to a fight; but he was humiliated (even before a fight) by Vali who caught him, kept him a prisoner in his armpit and went about his ablutions. The U-K says that Ravana then sought and made a friendship pact with Vali and that he lived in Vali's palace for a month, like the crown-prince Sugriva.

Now, during that month Sugriva must have come to know a lot about Ravana. Yet, when Rama met him in Rsyamuka, Sugriva said he knew nothing whatever about Ravana - his power, valour or his family. Recall that Sugriva is described as a *dharmatma*, mahatma, of good character, *satyasamdha* etc. This would mean that Sugriva was not truthful in his denial. It suggests that the U-K statement quoted above contradicts Valmiki's Ramayana.

§17 The numerous instances where the U-K is inconsistent with the Valmiki-ramayana and the spurious nature of the story of Sita's exile to the forest and of the Sambuka story — almost the only important part of the U-K — shows that the U-K cannot be a part of Valmiki's Ramayana, and that its author is not Valmiki.

#### **IV. On claims that the U-K should be considered to be a part of the Ramayana**

§18.1 Some scholars claim that the U-K is a “part of the Ramayana tradition;” but they do not state clearly the sense in which they use the term ‘Ramayana tradition’. They seem to claim, in effect, that every ancient or modern piece of writing, or song or film, whether it is a sundry poem or a piece of creative fiction, or part of a politician's diatribe, that speaks of a Rama, Sita or Ravana is part of the ‘Ramayana tradition’ — even if only a microscopic minority of the people from which the writer comes have read or even heard of those writings. We examine the critics'

claim by considering how the *Sita-parityaga* and Sambuka stories that form the heart of the U-K have been treated in works of the past 2000 years and more.

§18.2 We start with six early works, in chronological order, that mention neither of the two stories: (1) The Ramopakhyana (100 BCE?), a part of the Mahabharata, gives the story of Rama in 20 *Sargas*. Its authors knew the U-K [as it was in their time]. (2) The Visnupurana, the oldest extant purana, contains a summary mentioning all the high-points of the story of Rama. (3-4) Bhasa (300-400 CE) is probably the earliest playwright to write any play devoted exclusively to the story of Rama. His plays Pratimanataka and Abhisekanataka are both generally faithful to the Valmiki-ramayana, but neither of them contains anything from the *Uttara-Kanda*. (5) Kumaradasa (500-700 CE) ends Janakiharana, his story of Rama, with the consecration of Rama as king, and completely ignores the *Uttara-kanda*. (6) Bhatti (600-700 CE) in his Ravanavadha (also known as Bhattikavyai) gives a summary of the Valmiki-ramayana, but completely ignores the *Uttara-Kanda*. (7) So does Bhavabhuti's (700-800 CE) Mahaviracarita on the story of Rama. His Uttararamacarita has little in common with either Valmiki-ramayana or the *Uttara-Kanda*. It makes skeletal references to the killing of Sambuka and the exile of Sita, but it is mainly concerned with making changes to the latter story so that Rama and Sita are finally joyfully united. The point for us is that Bhavabhuti wrote two distinct works, one dealing with themes from the Valmiki-ramayana and the other dealing with themes from the *Uttara-Kanda*, thus suggesting that in his opinion the Valmiki-ramayana and the U-K were distinct works. (8) Dinnaga (Dhiranaga) (300-600 CE? 850-950 CE?): His Kundanmala is said to be modelled on the *Uttararamacarita* or was the model for it, and so need not be discussed separately. (9) The Ascaryacudamani of Saktibhadra (800-900 CE) generally closely follows Valmiki's Ramayana, but with some minor deviations. It too omits the *Uttara-kanda*. (10) So does the play Anargharaghava of Murari (800-1000 CE).

§18.3 Kalidasa's (400-500 CE) Raghuvamsa presents several tales of Raghu's (fictional) dynasty, as well as about Rama and his descendants. Its primary focus is not Rama, and it gives creative versions of the *Sita-parityaga* and Sambuka stories of the *Uttara-Kanda*. But this only shows that Kalidasa was aware of those stories, and it does not mean that he considered them to be part of Valmiki-ramayana. In any event, we see

that for 2000 years or more after Valmiki, the Sanskrit works dealing primarily with the story of Rama either ignore the U-K or treat it as a work distinct from the Valmiki-ramayana.

§18.4 Let us now look at three examples of how the Rama story was, and is, handled in the regional languages of India. The most significant as well as the most ancient of the Ramayana texts is the epic poem Iramavataram (popularly known as Kamba-Ramayanam ) of Kamban (800-1000 CE) in over ten thousand verses in Tamil. For centuries it has been, and continues to be, THE Ramayana for the people of Tamil Nadu, where less than about three per cent of the population knows Sanskrit (or Hindi). It follows Valmiki's Ramayana fairly closely and gives a fine poetic treatment of the narrative. It is divided into six parts, corresponding exactly to the six kandas of the Valmiki-ramayana. It ends with Rama's return to Ayodhya and his consecration as the king and completely ignores the U-K

§18.5 The oldest Rama-katha in Telugu is the Sri Ranganatha Ramayana by Gona Buddhareddy, said to have been composed around 1240 C.E. It too ends with the coronation of Rama and has no material from the *Uttara-kanda*.

Viswanatha Satyanarayana, a 20th century Telugu poet is the author of Ramayana kalpavrkshamu, immensely popular among the Telugu-speaking people; the author even received the prestigious Jnanagni-pravesaitha award. It too follows Valmiki, and has no material from the *Uttara-Kanda*.

Thus, the most popular Rama-katha texts in a large part of South India reject the *Uttara-kanda*.

§18.6 The situation in regard to North India is not different. The Ramacaritamanasa of Tulsi Das in Avadhi (popular rural Hindi) is THE Ramayana for hundreds of millions of people in North India and for the Hindu diaspora in the Caribbean and elsewhere; it too ignores the *Uttara-Kanda*.

§18.7 The story of the earliest Ramayana in Assamese has a history that is shrouded in some mystery. One version is that Madhava Kandali in the 14 th century wrote (in Assamese) only the five kandas Ayodhya

to *Yuddha kanda* and that Sankaradeva and his disciple Madhavadeva appended to it the U-K and the *Bala-kanda* respectively. Significantly, the augmented text is called the Saptakanda Ramayana (“Ramayana with seven kandas”). Sankaradeva’s *Uttara-kanda* is an extreme distortion of the Sanskrit *Uttara-kanda*.

There are two points worthy of note here. One, If Madhava Kandali did not include the Bala- and *Uttara-Kandas* in his narration of the Ramakatha, was it perhaps because he considered that the two kandas were not really part of Valmiki’s Ramayana? Two, the authors who added an *Uttara-Kanda* to Kandali’s narrative called it a “Seven-Kanda Ramayana;” it suggests that in their opinion the Ramayana of Valmiki had only six kandas and that the U-K was not really a part of the Valmiki-ramayana.

Thus we find that several Sanskrit poets, including Bhavabhuti and Dinnaga, in their works on Rama either have nothing in common with the Sanskrit U-K or treat the U-K as distinct from Valmiki’s Ramayana (and therefore felt free to change the stories of Sita’s exile and Sambuka in any manner they pleased), and that the same is true of several ancient as well as the most popular poets in the regional languages of India.

§19 The relief structures of the Gupta period at Nacna Kuthara and Deogarh in Madhya Pradesh and the slightly later ones at Pattadakala in Karnataka which depict Ramayana scenes do not include anything from the *Uttara-Kanda*. It suggests, even if it does not prove that the U-K was regarded as a work distinct from the Ramayana.

§ 20 Finally we look at how Hindus of today look upon the Uttara-Kanda. They may or may not enter into a debate on the theoretical question as to whether it is part of Valmiki’s Ramayana, but, in practice they do not consider it to be a part of the Ramayana. For instance, people who do daily parayana of the Ramayana — that is, reading of the entire Ramayana continuously, a portion of it each day — do not include the U-K in such reading. Public discourses on the Valmiki-ramayana, extending over several days, also end with the *paththabhiseka* (the consecration of Rama as king) and the *phalasaruti* verses of the *Yuddhakanda*. That is, the U-K is effectively considered as not belonging to the Ramayana. The Ramacaritamanasa of Tulsi Das has been discussed above, as also Kamban’s Iramavataram (Kamba-Ramayana) in exquisite Tamil poetry, exceedingly popular in Tamilnadu among Hindus and non-

Hindus alike, and Viswanatha Satyanarayana's Ramayana kalpavrkamu, very popular among Telugu speaking people in the province of Andhra Pradesh and elsewhere. All of them follow Valmiki's Ramayana and ignore the Sanskrit U-K (as seen above). In a lighter vein, we may add that many children (and parents) of today know the Ramayana story [only] in the Amar Citra Katha version (meant for children), a version which also ignores the U-K stories.

§21 From the evidence presented above, it is clear that a very large number of people in the past as well as a very large number in the present have rejected the claim that the U-K is a part of Valmiki's Ramayana. Thus, according to tradition too, the U-K is not part of Valmiki's Ramayana. It is not surprising that most scholars are agreed that the U-K is a later composition and is not a part of the Ramayana. The irony is that some scholars who hold this opinion yet make statements on personages in Valmiki's Ramayana by using the U-K as though it were a part — a seventh kanda — of Valmiki's Ramayana.