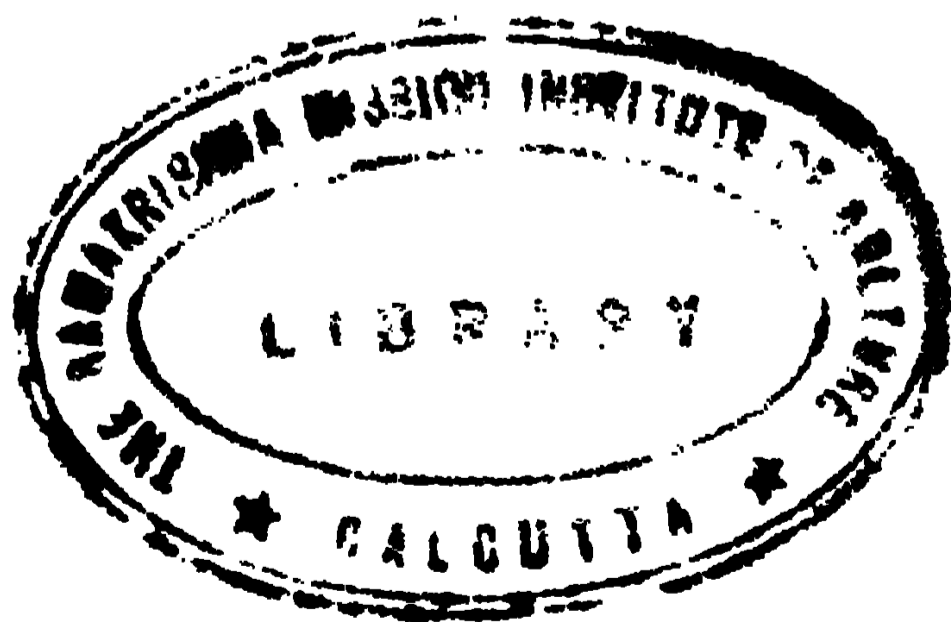


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Rāvaṇa and his Tribe

II

We have compared before (*I.H.Q.*, V, pp. 281ff.) the customs of Rāvaṇa's tribe with those of the Kuis and found that there is little or no difference between the two. Now we enter upon the study of the names of the tribe in Laṅkā. The Kuis are known to the world by a name quite different from what they call themselves by. Their Telugu neighbours call them the 'Khonds,' while the Oriyas give them the name of 'Kandh'. But they take pride in calling themselves 'Kuis'. The Gonds call themselves 'Koitor'.¹

Scholars like Caldwell and Grierson thought the meaning of the word *Kui* was obscure. Caldwell says "some consider Khond, a kindred word with Gond, and derive both names from the Tamil word *Kundru*, a hill, literally a small hill, the Telugu form of which is *Konda*. This would be a very natural derivation for the name of a hill people; but unfortunately, their nearest neighbours, the Telugus call them not Khonds but Gonds, also Kods; and as they call themselves Kūs, according to Mr. Latchmaji, the author of the grammar of their language, the existence of any connection between their name and *Kundru* or *Konda*, a hill, seems very doubtful. The term *Ku* is evidently allied to *Koi*, the name by which the Gonds call themselves, and which they are fond of lengthening into *Koitor*."

It is right that they should be called Khonds because they live in hills. The Rākṣasas also are given a similar appellation in

1 "The tribe is commonly known under the name of Khond. The Oriyas call them Kandhs and the Telugu people, Gonds or Kōds. The name which they use themselves is Kū and their language should accordingly be denominated Kui. The word Ku is probably related to Koi, one of the names which the Gonds use to denote themselves. The Koi dialect of Gondi is, however, quite different from Kui" (Grierson).

"It has been asserted, indeed, that all the Gonds, when speaking of themselves in their own language, prefer to call themselves Koitors. This word is plural appellative regularly formed from Koi" (Caldwell).

the Rāmāyaṇa. They are called the 'Laṅkā-nivāsinaḥ.' In my paper on the aboriginal names in the Rāmāyaṇa, it has been shown that Laṅkā means high, so a hill. 'Laṅkā-nivāsinaḥ' consequently signifies hill people. As for the name 'Kui' by which the people call themselves, it means in their language 'fighting men'. *Kui-giva* means to attack. The weapon which every Kui always carries is *Kurāri* or *Kuraḍi* which means a weapon (*ari*) to attack with; Koi and Koya are other forms of the word. The name by which they are proud to call themselves indicates their natural disposition to attack others with little or no provocation. Ethnology shows that the Kuis are descendants of the Rākṣasas of Laṅkā, and now the name Kui tells us of the cruel propensity of these men. We have now to study what the name Rākṣasa signifies. But before we take up the study of the meaning of the word Rākṣasa, it is but necessary to enquire, to which of the tribes this word is applied in the epic.

Three distinct tribes, each separated by at least 100 miles from the other, are implied by the name of Rākṣasa in the epic. The first is the Virādha clan near the northern end of the Daṇḍaka forest. As declared by Virādha, the representative of the clan, it was descended from Java and Śatahradā. It was known by the name of Rākṣasa. Virādha himself tells Rāma (III. 2-12): "Ahaṃ vanam idaṃ durgam virādho nāma rākṣasaḥ, carāmi sāyudho nityaṃ ṛṣimāṃsāni bhakṣayan." [He preyed upon the flesh of the inhabitants of the Daṇḍaka forest (ṛṣi)].

The second clan known to the Aryans as Rākṣasas was that of Kabandha. The name by which these clansmen called themselves was Dānava (III-71.7) because they were the children of Danu.

The most cruel and the strongest was the third and it is represented by the inhabitants of Laṅkā and its suburb Janasthāna. The name by which they called themselves and by which the Aryan settlers of the Daṇḍaka forest called them is Rākṣasa or Rakṣa.

In the Uttarakāṇḍa these men are said to have got that appellation because they had carefully guarded the waters that God created in the beginning of the world. But nowhere in the other books of the poem is this quality mentioned of these men; nor is there even an allusion to it anywhere in the other books. The expressions like Rākṣasāḥ pisitāsanāḥ (III. 36. 3) and Rākṣasān pisi-tāsanān (III. 54. 18) tell us something other than the watching of the waters. These statements intimate that the Rākṣasas were flesh-eaters. When Rāma with his wife and brother went to the settlement of

Śarabhaiga, all the colonists (tāpasāḥ) requested him to see the corpses of the colonists (munīnām) that had been killed by the Rākṣasas (III. 6. 16).

The settlers said that, as they did not wish to spoil the merit they had earned for ages, they did not curse the Rākṣasas even though the latter were eating them away (III. 20. 15.). When Rāma did not find Sītā in the Parnaśālā, he thought that she had been devoured by the Rākṣasas (III. 60. 30). He was led into the belief that she was devoured by the Rākṣasas, because he knew that they were cannibals. We have seen that Virādha, though of a different tribe, lived on human flesh. The other tribes living in and about the Daṇḍaka forest recognised the people of Laṅkā and their kindred as men living on human flesh. Kabandha speaking of the talents of Sugriva says (III. 73. 32) :

nara-māṃsāśīnām loke naipuṇyād adhigacchati.

Commentaries say that 'naramāṃsāśīnām' means 'Rākṣasānām'. It is now clear that the people other than the inhabitants of Laṅkā called them by the name of Rākṣasa. Let us now see how they exhibited their own nature of preying upon human flesh.

Rāvaṇa himself was a cannibal. Finding that Sītā was seduced neither by his wealth nor by his personal appearance and prowess, he threatened her that his cooks would cut her body to pieces for his morning meal (III. 56. 26).

tatas tvāṃ prātarāśārtham sūdaśchetsyanti leśasaḥ.

Mārīca and his associates disguised themselves as beasts of prey and feasted on the bodies of the Aryan colonists of the forest region. Sūrpaṅakhā threatened to eat Sītā that Rāma might have no objection to marry her (III. 17. 28 ; III. 18. 16 ; V. 24. 39. 48 ; VI. 8. 22). This blood-thirstiness of the Rākṣasas is personified in the form of Kumbhakarna who is represented as devouring the Vānaras pell mell.

The above illustrations from the Epic assert that the word Rākṣasa is used by Vālmīki to signify the cannibalistic nature of the people of Laṅkā. Consequently the word must have originated from a word that means blood.

In Telugu there are 'Rakkasi' and 'Rākāsi', both of which mean the drinker of blood. When the final syllable 'asi' or 'āsi' is taken away, only Rakka or Rākk remains, which means blood. It appears as Rakta in ordinary use, one 'k' being changed to 't'. In Kui also Rakka is used in this sense. This word exists in all the Dravidian

languages. This is one of the words that has gone into Sanskrit from Dravidian.

Rākāsi and Rakkasi have both been adopted into the Aryan tongue with a slight change. K generally changes to Ch in Dravidian languages; so Rāchasi and Rachchasi are formed. In Sanskrit Ch is changed to Kṣ, and Rākṣasa and Rakṣas are found in that language.

In the Mahābhārata (III. 274. 2. 9) Khara and Śūrpaṅakhā are said to have been born to Rākā, one of the three wives of Pulastya. Since Khara and Śūrpaṅakhā are called Rākṣasas, it appears that this derivation represents metaphorically that the word *Rākṣasa* is derived (born) from Rākā (Rakka).

Closely allied to the Rākṣasas are the Piśācas. Immediately after Sītā had been carried to the mansion of Rāvaṇa, he is said to have ordered the Piśācas to keep guard over her (III. 54. 14).

The Rākṣasas seem to be identical with the Piśācas, though they are treated as two distinct tribes in Amarakoṣa and other books.

In the Svarga-khaṇḍa of the Padma-purāṇa, it is said that bhūta, preta, and piśācas live in mid-air.

And above these but below the solar sphere are the Rākṣasas said to be wandering about.

It is this kind of interpretation unsupported either by reason or by the natural state of things that made these tribes live in ultra-mundane worlds. Obsessed by such notions we are unable to identify these tribes though we daily come in contact with them. We see them but we cannot identify them with the Rākṣasas and Piśācas whom we believe to be living beyond human ken. The same is the case with the others that are enumerated along with the Rākṣasas and the Piśācas. But with the help of ethnology and philology we have identified the ancient Rākṣasa tribes with the modern Kuis. Similarly the *Guhyakas*, the *Gandharvas*, the *Kinnaras*, the *Vidyātharas*, the *Apsaras*, the *Yakṣas* and the *Siddhas* who are all classed as the *Devayoni* tribes can also be identified with the peoples that are found in India, if only we study their respective languages and customs in the right way.

Now coming to the etymology of the word *Piśāca* we can see that because the people indicated by the word are identical with the *Rākṣasas*, the word signified the same thing as the name given to the people of Laṅkā. Therefore its etymology also must be akin to that of *Rākṣasa*. In Sanskrit it is treated as a compound made up of *Piśitam* (*māṃsam*) *asṇāti*, but a very laborious explanation is given

for the formation of the word :—*aś*+“*karmany aṇ*” *iti aṇ*; *tataḥ piṣod- aradāni yathopadiṣṭam iti śitū bhūgasya lopah*; *aś bhūgasya śac- ādeśah.*” The disappearance of a part of a word and the substitution of a different termination is all done just to give it an Aryan appearance. *Piṣita* becomes first ‘*Pi*’ by the disappearance of ‘*śita*’; then ‘*aś+an*’ become *śūca* instead of ‘*āśa*’; so the word *Pi+śūca*=*Piśāca* is formed. This explanation, on the very face of it, shows that the word is foreign to Sanskrit. The word appears to be formed of *Piśa* and *aca*; in Dravidian languages there is no difference between *s* and *c*; so *Piśa+asa* is found; ‘*asa*’ or *asi* is a personal termination in Kui, and *Piśa* or *Piśā* means flesh. Thus *Piśāsi*, as pronounced by the lower class of men in the Telugu country, is obtained. When pronounced by the refined men it becomes *Piśāci*.

Now we understand that the Rākṣasas and the Piśācas show by their very names that they were bloodthirsty and were preying upon human flesh. This character of these men is again exhibited by the Kui tribes whom we have seen to be still maintaining those customs which the Rākṣasas of Lañkā are said to have followed in days of yore. The Kui tribes are spoken of as the people that had sacrificed human beings till the middle of the eighties of the last century. This human sacrifice was so very common amongst the Kuis that in the year 1841, as many as 240 Mariah (human victims) had been sacrificed at the new moon feast in February of that year. “Between 1837 and 1854 Col. Campbell was the means of rescuing 1506 mariah victims, of which 717 were males and 789 females.” These figures confirm their love for man-slaughter. This human sacrifice appears to me to be a relic of the ancient cannibalism. The love of blood was so ingrained in them that the man-slaughter of ancient feast was adopted for purposes of worship in subsequent times when preying upon men was given up either by outward compulsion or by the reform in their own society. This sacrifice has been given up now on account of the vigorous watch kept over the tribes by the British government. Yet the faith in the efficacy of blood has been so strong that they have substituted a buffalo for the man and they treat it with as much cruelty as they used to do with the human victim. The intensity of the cruelty of a human sacrifice can better be understood from the description of a Mariah sacrifice from the Ganjam District Manual.

In the Rāmāyaṇa, tribesmen allied to the Rākṣasas are also men-

tioned. Mandodarī, the wife of Rāvaṇa, mourning over the body of her lord says that he was the son of the daughter of Yātudhāna (Yātudhānasya dauhitra). Yātudhāna is one of the names of Nairṛta, the lord of the South-west corner of the world. That Rāvaṇa is given the appellations of Nairṛtaḥ, Nairṛta-patiḥ, shows that he became the ruler of the dominions which had belonged to his maternal grandfather who had no sons. The Rāmāyaṇa informs us that Mālyavat was the father of Rāvaṇa's mother (VI. 35. 6).

Tatas tu sumahāprajñō Mālyavān nāma Rākṣasaḥ
Rāvaṇasya vacaḥ śrutvā iti mātāmaho'bravīt.

This correlated with 'Yātudhānasya dauhitra' tells us that Mālyavat was of the Yātudhāna tribe. Though there are not sufficient data given to confirm it, the tribe may be identified with one of the modern tribes, if the etymology of the word Mālyavān is found out.

The word and the relationship of the holder of the name with the Rākṣasas now identified with the Kuis, suggest that it is formed from Malai, a Dravidian word for a hill. It is also pronounced Mālaya as in "Ganjam Mālayās." When 'an' the Dravidian masculine singular termination is added to it, Malaya-an, is formed. Since V is used to prevent hiatus, the word becomes Mala-ya-v-an or Maleiyavan, a man of the mountains or a mountaineer. Caldwell gives Malayinan as an example of a word in which the masculine singular termination is annexed to the oblique case or inflexional base. He further says, 'sometimes, the inflexional 'in' is merely added euphonicly e.g. "there is no difference in meaning between Villan, a bowman and Villinan, which is considered a more elegant form." So there is no difference between Malei-y-in-an and Malei-v-an. This derivation shows that in the time of Rāvaṇa also there was a tribe kindred to the Rākṣasas, and they were known as the Malayavāns just as the Khonds in modern days are said to have got their name from a word which means a hill.

(*To be continued*)

G. RAMADAS