

## **RAMAYANA IN TRANSLATION-An Analysis**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Ramayana is one of the two great epics of the Hindus. It is a poetic rendering of the story of Rama, the righteous prince of Ayodhya and the trials and tribulations of his life, the rescue of his wife Sita after her abduction by the demon king Ravana. This epic poem of sublime style is unanimously ascribed to the Hindu sage Valmiki and considered to be an integral part of the Hindu literature. In Hindu mythology, Rama is considered an avatar of the Hindu supreme God *Vishnu*. The poetry of Ramayana illuminates some of the central paradoxes of the human situation and explores the human values and the concept of *Dharma*. Analysis of the Ramayana as a purely literary work without any religious connotations attached to it is not possible. However my area of concern will be to illuminate on the various translated versions of Ramayana.

Multiple versions of Ramayana survives. Famous retellings include *Ramayanam* of Kamban in Tamil (11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century), *Saptakanda Ramayana* of Madhav Kandali in Assamese (14<sup>th</sup> century), *Shri Rama Panchali* or *Krittivasha Ramayana* by Krittibas Ojha in Bengali (15<sup>th</sup> century), *Bhavarth Ramayana* by saint Eknath in Marathi (16<sup>th</sup> century), *Ramcharitamanas* by Tulsidas in Awadhi (16<sup>th</sup> century) to name a few. There are Buddhist and Jain adaptations too.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Ramayana, in Sanskrit, Ramayanam doesn't need any introduction in the literary sphere of any genre. It is one of the two great epics the sub-continent has ever produced, the other being The Mahabharata immortalised by sage Ved Vyas. This epic poem of sublime style is unanimously ascribed to the Hindu sage Valmiki and considered to be an integral part of the Hindu literature. In Hindu mythology, Rama is considered an avatar of the Hindu supreme God *Vishnu*. The Ramayana belongs to a class of literature known in Sanskrit as *Kavya* (poetry). The Indian epic, Ramayana, dates back to 1500 b.c according to certain early scholars. Recent studies have brought it down to about 4<sup>th</sup> century b.c. (1) Ramayana narrates the journey of Virtue to annihilate Vice. Sri Rama, the hero of Ramayana, is believed to have lived in *tetra yug*. Srimad Valmiki Ramayana is composed of verses called *Slokas*, in Sanskrit, the ancient language of India, in a complex metre called *anustubh*. The Ramayana contains 50,000 verses (*slokas*) arranged into several cantos (*sargas*) and is taken to be much longer than Iliad or Oddesey. The Text survives in several thousand partial and complete manuscripts, the oldest of which is a palm-leaf manuscript found in Nepal (2).

## **OBJECTIVES**

It is important to note that there is not one Ramayana in India. The original composition by Valmiki is seldom read these days. The most common Ramayanans are in the 'vernacular' Indian languages. There are Ramayanans virtually in all the major Indian languages and a few dozen translations, mainly abridged, and "transcreations" in English. My paper today will illuminate the august audience about the various versions of The Ramayana available today. Depending on the methods of counting as many as 300 versions of the Indian Epic poem, The Ramayana are known to exist today (3).

## **REGIONAL VERSIONS OF THE RAMAYANA**

Due to constraints in time, it will not be possible to take up all the versions of the epic. Meanwhile, some noteworthy regional renderings of the Ramayana are listed below.

1. The Assamese Katha Ramayana or *Kotha Ramayana* in 14<sup>th</sup> century by Madhav Kandali
2. The Bengali *Krittivasi Ramayana* written by Krittivas Ojha in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.
3. The Awadhi *Ramcharitmanas* by Goswami Tulsidas in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.
4. The Kashmiri *Ramavatara charita* written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
5. The Tamil *Kambaramayan* by poet Kamban in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.
6. The Kannada *Kumudendu Ramayana* written in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and another *Kumara Valmiki torave* written in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. There is another version *Ramachandra charita purana* written by Nagachandra in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.
7. Urdu version called the *Pothi Ramayan* written in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.
8. The Oriya *Dandi Ramayana* or *Jagamohan Ramayana* adapted by Balaram Das in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.
9. The *Tulsi krita Ramayana* is a Gujrati adaptation of Tulsidas' *Ramcharitmanas* in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by poet Premanand Swami.
10. *Sri Ranganatha Ramayanamu* was adapted by Buddha Reddy and is the telegu vesion of the Ramayana.
11. In Punjab, it is the *Ramavatara* written in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by Guru Govind Singh.
12. In Maharastra, it is the Marathi *Bhavartha Ramayana* written by Eknath in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.
13. In Kerela, it is the Malayalam *Adhyatma Ramayanam Kilipattu* written by Thunchaththu Ezhuthachan in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.
14. In Mythili, Chanda Jha and Lal Das wrote Mithilabhasa Ramayana and Rameshwarcharit Ramayana respectively.
15. In Goa, it is the *Ramayanu* written by Krishnadasa in Konkani in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (4).
16. Jain version of the epic can be found in the various jain agamas like 'Padmapurana' which is the story of padmaja being Sita and Rama.

It is not an easy task to list all the versions of the epic in different regional languages. Some authors are yet to be recognised. Listed above are only a few of the regional renderings of the Adi Ramayana. More such adaptations are available. Some languages have undergone severe changes and some dialects are no longer uttered by the human

tongue. In such cases, unfortunately, Ramayana written in these languages have become extinct.

### **VERSIONS OUTSIDE INDIA :**

It is a matter of pride for all the Indians that The Ramayana is widely read all over the world. But the people outside India hardly read it in its original form. The Ramayana has spread to many Asian Countries outside India, including Burma, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Phillipines and China. Some of the important adaptations of this classic tale include the (Cambodia) khmer Reamker, the old javanese kakawin Ramayana, the Thai Ramakein, The Laos Phra Lak Phra Lam. Others include Malyasia- Hikayat Seri Rama, Phillipines-Maharadia Lawana, Burma (Mynmar)-Yama Zatdaw. The Nepal Bhasa version called Siddhi Ramayana was written by Mahakavi Siddhidas Mahaju Amatya. In Tibet it is found in several manuscripts from Dunhuang (5).

### **SANSKRIT VERSIONS OF THE RAMAYANA :**

Sanskrit pandits have translated Adi Ramayana into sanskrit as well. Various sanskrit versions of the epic poem is also available. Mention may be made here of Vasistha Ramayana, Adhyatma Ramayana, Ananda Ramayana, atri Ramayanam, bharat Ramayanam and Agustya Ramayanam among others. Vasistha Ramayana, which is principally a dialogue between Rama and Vasistha and Ananda Ramayana are attributed to Valmiki while Adhyatma Ramayana or spiritual Ramayana is extracted from the Brahmananda Purana is attributed to Ved Vyasa. This is unaimously argued to have inspired Tulsidas's Ramcharitmans in Awadhi. The Vasistha Ramayana does not tell the story of Rama in the typical Valmiki way. Adbhuta Ramayan also relates the story of Rama in fragments. The main focus of this book is on the story of Rama. Only a few of these recount the original narrative while others mainly deal with philosophical expositions and peripheral stories. The core themes of the original epic has a much wider perspective than these several ones trying to recreate the magic created by the older one.

### **ENGLISH ADAPTATIONS OF THE RAMAYANA :**

There are numerous translations of the Ramayana available in English language. One popular but extremely condensed version based on the Tamil of Kamban in India is by R.K Narayan (Penguin Books). C. Rajagopalachari is accredited with a longer version, in prose published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan. Another easily available abridged version in verse is by William Buck. The most complete English translation of the Ramayana is the multi volume version by Robert Goldman, Sheldon Pollock and others published by Princeton University Press.

### **CONTEMPORARY VERSIONS OF THE RAMAYANA**

Contemporary prose versions of the Ramayana include *Sri Ramayanam Darshanam* by Dr. K.V Puttapa in Kannada and *Ramayana Kalpavrikshamu* by Vishwanatha Satyanarayana in Telegu, both of which have been awarded the prestigious Jnanpith Award. The popular Indian author R.K Narayan wrote a shortened prose interpretation of the epic. Ramesh Menon also wrote Ramayana in short in prose earning him lots of rich accolades. C. Rajagopalachari also wrote Ramayana published by Bhavanas in 1957. In September 2006, the first issue of Ramayana was published by Virgin Comics. More recent retellings of the epic include popular Indian author Ashok Banker's eight volume Ramayana and Ramayana of Ravi Venugopal, an U.S based N.R.I . The Ramayana has been adapted on the screen as well. A Japanese animated film called 'Ramayana-The Legend of Rama' was released in the early part of 1990s. The Indian television series by Ramanand Sagar was also immensely popular recounting the story of Rama and his righteous battle against all odds. Sanjay Khan also made a series on the life of Hanuman which he rightly named as 'Jai Hanuman'. The Ramayana has also been staged several times with much enthusiasm and precision.

### **FINDINGS**

All the translations that are available today are not mere the slavish imitations of the Original one. They have their own distinguishing features. Moreover, the retellings have been marked, more or less, by plot twists and thematic adaptations. The Ramayana related in North India differs in important aspects from that preserved in South India and the rest of South East Asia. In the Buddhist variant of Ramayana, Dasaratha was the king of Benaras not of Ayodhya and Ram and Lakshman, the two sons of his first wife (6). In the Jain epic of Ramayana, it is Lakshmana

who kills Ravana and not Rama as narrated in the hindu version (7). The Jain versions have some other variations from Valmiki's Ramayana. According to them Rama in the end attains moksha and becomes a jain monk and Lakshmana and Ravana go to hell. In Guru Granth Sahib, there is description of two types of Ramayana. One is the spiritual Ramayana, which is the actual subject of Guru Granth Sahib in which Ravan is ego, Sita is 'buddhi', Ram is inner soul and Lakshman is 'mann'. In Thai Ramakein, Sita is the daughter of Ravana and Mandodari. Ravana threw her to water who was later picked up by Janaka. While the main story seems to be identical to Ramayana, many other aspects were transposed to a thai context.

### **CONCLUSION**

Although there may be a thousand Ramayana today with all its ramifications, the fact remains that none can dim the glitter of the Adi Ramayana. One of the most important literary works of Ancient India, it will continue to have a profound impact, as it does, on the art and culture of the Indian sub-continent. Though the telling of the narrative may vary from time to time, the crux of the story and the moral dilemmas that Rama in particular and Man in general faces remain the same. Through the ages, Ramayana, the magnum opus of Sage Valmiki has remained the saga of man's existence which is why; it has been able to garner a wide range of readers all over the world. Though a very few readers today believe in re-incarnation, yet the essential thought of the epic is eternal. Ramayana deals with the Universal themes—the tragedy of a man for being too good, his conflict with the evil, his relentless effort to be in harmony with the existing situation, his aspirations and his failures—all these are of abiding interest to the modern man.

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