

EPIC IMPRINTS



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Impact of the characters
of the Epics and the
Puranas on the
Life of India

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The Cover page

Pictures showing Sri Rama embracing Guha the hunter, and Sri Krishna hugging Kuchela the poor Brahmin, reveal the fact that our epic heroes transcended differences of caste and status.



SYNOPSIS

VIVEKANANDA KENDRA PATRIKA
August 2003 – January 2004 **Vol.32 No.2**
Next issue 64th Issue

BALA BHARATAM

Child in India; its Past, Present and Prospects

A perfect *Jnani* is compared to a child in the Upanishads, because of its purity and innocence. Worshipping Sri Krishna, Ganesha, Kartikeya and Devi as a child is a Puranic tradition. Prahlada, Dhruva, Jnanasambandha, Adi Shankara, Lava and Kusha and a number of child prodigies find place in our history and mythology. India has a special way of looking at the factors that go to make a healthy child. Pre-Natal and Post-Natal samskaras (rituals) help children grow healthily in the physical, emotional, social and spiritual spheres.

In free India, education, nutrition and health programmes for children, special opportunities for their growth and for nurturing their talents have grown. Child prodigies, special children, girl children etc. receive focussed attention. Child labour problems, partly true, partly exaggerated, have caught the attention of the media.

What prospects does the future India hold for its children, in terms of environmental cleanliness, job, educational and employment opportunities and health facilities?

All these topics are sought to be dealt with, in the forthcoming issue of the Vivekananda Kendra Patrika



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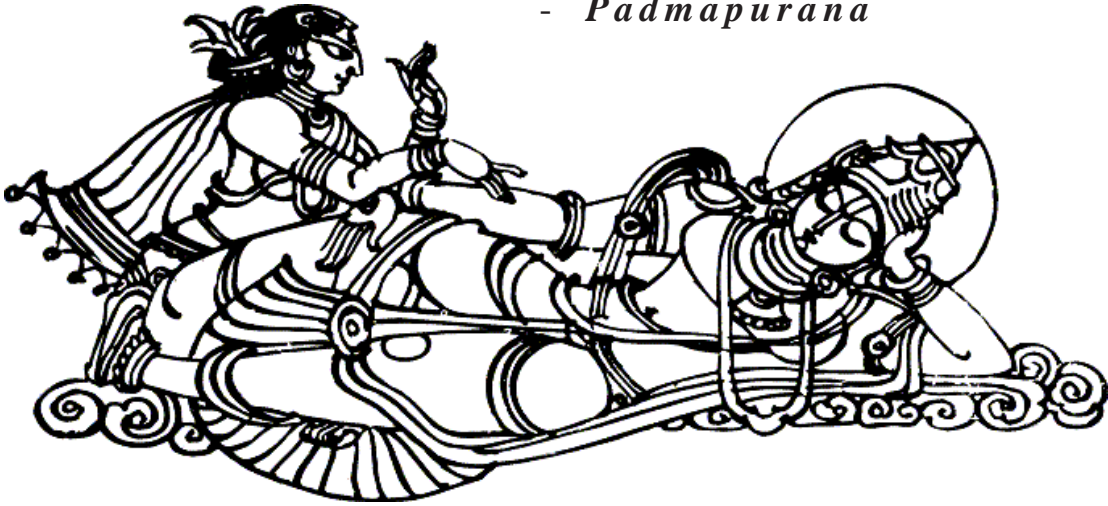
Invocation

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Ahimsaa prathamam pushpam Pushpam jnaanendriya nigraham
Sarvabhoota dayaa pushpam Kshamaapushpam visheshatah
Shaantipushpam tapah pushpam Dhyaanapushpam tathaiva cha
Satyam ashtavidham pushpam Vishnoh preetikaram bhavet.

The eight flowers pleasurable to Lord Vishnu are:
 Non-violence, Control over the organs of perception
 Love towards all beings, Forgiveness, Peace of mind
 Austerity, Meditation and speaking Truth.

- *Padmapurana*



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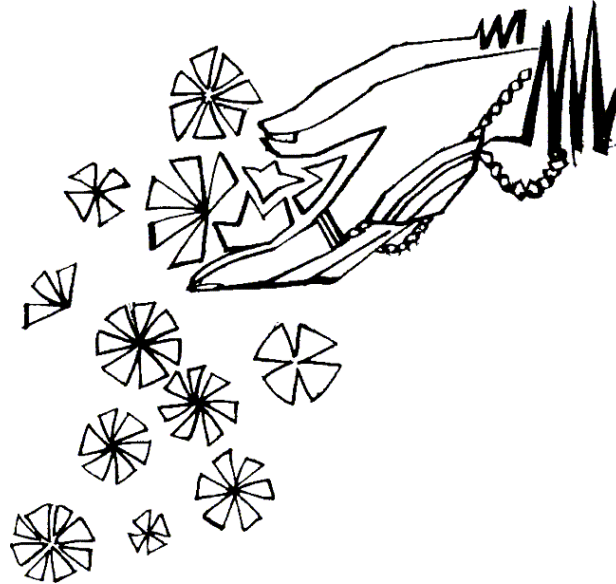
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Vivekananda Kendra Patrika

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Epic Imprints

Impact of the characters of the Epics and the
Puranas on the Life of India

Editorial

1) Introduction

Four different kinds of approaches mark our understanding of the Mythological literature of India, our Epics and Puranas.

The first is the enlightened, spiritualists' approach. Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Kanchi Paramacharya, Mahatma Gandhi and Rajaji saw our mythological literature, as the quintessence of Sanatana Dharma. The Epics and Puranas expatiate on the Upanishadic moral and spiritual truths and in turn pave the way for morally inspired spiritual action, the rituals. In fact, some of our Epic names and places are as old as the Vedas. The writings of Sri John Woodroff and a portion of the writings of Max Mueller also fall in this category.

The second approach is that of the Western scholars, who, though not spiritual, do not consider Indians as barbarians or our myths as cock-and-bull stories. They feel that the Epics and the Puranas are documents of a great past and help the student in understanding Bharat and its social life. Scholars like Ninian Smart take this view.

The third is the critic, the Catherine Mayo brand, who with a colonial mind-set says that India can contribute nothing except dust and communicable diseases to the world. Columbus, Vascodagama and people of their ilk imagined that Rome was the centre of the world, and as one proceeded away from Rome, one would meet people of increasing barbarity; they deserve to be tamed and corrected. They have nothing to contribute to the total heritage of humanity. These emissaries of the all-knowing West would treat the barbarians on merits.

The fourth type of people are the Western scholars and their Indian counterparts of analytical intelligence. They not only presented to the world our mythology as wrong lessons in history and geography. They read evidence of Aryan-non-Aryan conflicts in them. In all other respects the Epics and Puranas were worthless products of dreamy, barbarous, native, fearful minds. The only acceptable portion of the Epics and the Puranas

were those that present us as a divided and warring society, reeling under the impact of aggressive colonising alien rulers. Since India has always been ruled by colonising aliens, the present Western world views, Christianity and Marxism are not wrong in trying to take hold of our country. This is their interpretation.

The Marxian interpreters taking a cue from their European mentors, continued the tradition of Aryan aggression theory in interpreting Indian Mythology. When the invasion theory started losing its appeal even among leftist scholars, the word Brahmin was substituted for Aryan and the substance of the interpretation remained the same. Brahminical hegemony instead of Aryan hegemony - that was the core of Marxian interpretation of Indian Mythology.

2) Components of India's Religious lore: The essential components of India's religious life are 1) the Vedas 2) the Upanishads 3) the Dharma Shastras 4) the Epics and the Puranas and 5) the Rituals. The Vedas, the revealed scriptures of the Hindus, show man how to reach God, the transcendental. The Rishis, the Seers of truth, the pure souls, had the vision and the language to present total truths through the Vedas. The Upanishads are the case histories of individuals who experienced the divine within them. The divinity pervading the entire creation, the divinity of man, and the one truth being called by many names are the basic teachings of the Vedas, confirmed by the personal experiences of the Upanishadic teachers. Ramana Maharshi, in modern times, rediscovered these maxims through independent spiritual experiments, substantiating the validity of the Vedic scriptures. As all particulars of the creation are expressions of one underlying Divinity, the relationship among the particulars, the individuals, was one of unity at depth and harmony and bonding at the middle and apparent variation at the surface. The norms for the relationship and the code of behaviour a) for man towards God (the Ultimate Truth) b) between man and man and c) between man and the animate world, and d) finally between man and the 'inanimate' world, are presented by the Dharma Shastras. Love, truth, non-stealing, self-control, simplicity, purity, contentedness, effort, God-consciousness and 'self' study are the moral codes for this harmonious relationship. The Mythologies- a) the narratives forming a part of the Vedas and Upanishads, the Dharma Shastras and b) the Puranas themselves along with c) the Epics- concretize the scriptural teachings, through real-life episodes. The rituals are authenticated by the Puranas and Epics, so that the common people have something "to do" in the religious sphere.

3) The Epics and the Puranas cover the entire spectrum of Hindu teachings: Though Philosophy, Mythology and Rituals form the three components of all religions in general, in India, these water-tight compartments do not work. The Epics and the Puranas of India present our doctrines and philosophy, the basic intellectual frame work of our spirituality and religion as authoritatively as the Vedas themselves. The Bhagawad Gita, the Ashtavakra Gita, the Bhagawata, the Vishnupurana, etc. are part of our Mythology and their authoritative influence on the mind of the common people is as striking as the Vedas. The ritual dimension of the sacred, the vows, observances, pilgrimages and temple festivals are all derived from our Mythology.

The narrative dimension of our religion is provided by our Epics and Puranic stories as a living commentary on our Vedas.

Swami Vivekananda went to the extent of saying “Without studying the life of Sri Ramakrishna (a living example of Scriptural teachings) the common people cannot understand the Vedantic teachings.” The Narrative dimension, perpetuates the collective memories of a Nation, giving its people, an identity, a pride and a tradition. Actions and Narrations bind people together more meaningfully than an inert ideology.

Perhaps the greatest contribution the Epics and the Puranas have made for India is the emotional, experiential dimension of religion. Bhakti, love, experience of various forms of God, etc. are uniquely Puranic in nature, though the roots of love of God are found in the Vedas themselves. It can be safely said the entire domain of Bhakti rests on Puranic tales, the Epic and the Puranic heroes and goddesses. Prahlada, Narada, the Nayanmars, and the Alvars have opened the doors of religion and spirituality to the common man bringing about a sort of spiritual republicanism.

Love of God as an enlightened man would see Him, love of God as a lover, father or a mother, as a child, and as an employer are described by the Puranas. It has been possible for a large number of our common people to experience higher states of consciousness through the simple technique of love as described by the Epics and the Puranas.

The moral and ethical norms of a society are defined by its ultimate goals of life. Where does the individual want to reach? Where does he want the society to go? The values, the lifestyles, the actions, the do's and don'ts of that society are encoded in the moral, and legal norms of that society and that Nation. Bharat has stipulated that the goal of every life is God-realisation through the medium of a harmonious social life. That behaviour which promotes the core value of the society in an individual or a group is moral. That which deflects the person from the norm is immoral. The Epics and the Puranas of India not only help to inculcate the universal values of God-consciousness, love and truth among Indians, they also help the individual to practise his/her Swadharma, the values specific to a person. Region-specific, and time-specific, (Desha acara, and Kala acara) behavioural norms are taught by the Puranas. The role of Epics and the Puranas in preserving subcultures, within the broad framework of Universal and National values is immensely great. By an elaborate system of feasts and fasts, vows, do's and don'ts, pilgrimages, etc. the Epics and the Puranas have succeeded in building a society in which a smooth, natural and spontaneous practice of ethical and spiritual values is possible for every one.

At the societal level the Epics and the Puranas have helped the consolidation of the family, *kula*, tribe, caste, and community. Binding individuals together in marriage, in filial relations, planning and prescribing behavioural patterns for specific situations, the Epics and the Puranas of India have reduced inert, difficult ideals to vibrant, living practical relationships. Binding the society in traditions and, clamping down restrictions, the Epics and the Puranas have made it easy for the members of the society to learn these values as a

process of growing up in a climate of peace and love. While the caste system is being blamed for perpetuating inequalities across the caste-boundaries, we cannot forget that within caste, the system has great amount of social stability and identity that come out of a well settled web of relations and sociability. They are essential components of life for easy learning of skills. By using the key persons of priests, prophets, the contemplative, the healer, the guru, the incarnation, the sage, the preacher, the judge, the king, the monk, the nun, the hermit, the theologian, the philosopher, the saint, the martyr and the icon maker, a religion builds a society and a civilization within its bounds. These experts, functionaries, charismatic figures and holy persons “express” religion in comprehensive ways. From the smallest religio-social unit of ‘*Kutumb*’- family-, to the ultimate social unit of the family of the entire creation *Vasudha eva Kutumbakam*, the entire spectrum of social units are supported and promoted by the Epics and the Puranas.

Perhaps the great role of the Epics and the Puranas of India in enthroning love as the central theme of human existence can be rivalled only by their material dimension of promoting artefacts of exquisite beauty. India’s temples, icons, architecture, pictures, are all products of its mythology. Apart from oceans, mountains and trees, which are the naturally occurring physical expressions of God, man-made expressions of art have special significance as symbols of the Divine. Indian temple architecture, iconography, etc. and the beautiful rituals derive their relevance mostly from the Epics and the Puranas. Paintings, dresses, books, amulets, memorials of saints, etc. staple the memory of the Epic and the Puranic heroes to the minds of the people. Even professedly secular and non-religious departments of life copy these statues, paintings and icons. Some books themselves have come to be worshipped as in the Sikh tradition.

The political effects of religion have come to be studied with great interest in recent times. Man-made ideologies such as capitalism and communism, have not been tested or approved by the flow of time. They have failed in their efforts to organise people into meaningful societies. Whatever effect they had in their horizontal spread, is lost when one intensely ideologically conscious generation passes away. God-inspired, time-tested, multigenerational groupings like religious societies, provide ready-made units, civilizational conglomerates, co-operation groups, action groups, vote banks, etc. which the politicians use and exploit. Welding people into emotionally related groups which behave in an electorally and socially predictable pattern cannot be the work of dry intellect. Nor can a democratic society, taking all decisions on the basis of its short term interests, be able to serve the long term cultural and social needs of the people. That is why political parties seem to fall back on the option of tapping caste vote banks, religion-based vote banks, etc. It is a direct admission of failure of non-cultural organizations of the society. Perhaps what one has not inherited from his father cannot be passed on to his son. The concepts of economic expression of religious ideas have been studied by Weber. The effect of the ‘Social Capital’ on the economic growth of the society is being studied with interest by the World Bank. Francis Fukuyama has commented on the political expression of mutual personal trust of the citizens. This ‘trust’ could be a part of one’s religious faith. Ultimately the cultural and civilizational background of a Nation acting through its economic and political instruments

is vital to the destiny of a Nation. The Epics and the Mythologies of India chronicle the cultural history of the Nation and catalogue its abiding values. They serve the great purpose of perpetuating these values in lifestyles.

4) The History and the Mythology of India

The scriptures, especially the Mythologies of India were utilized fully by the National leaders during the freedom movement. Masterly commentaries on the Bhagawad Gita came to be written by Lokamanya Tilak, Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba. The coming of Gandhi and his aspiration of India achieving 'Ramarajya' were turning points in expanding the mass base of the freedom struggle. The Epic and the Puranic icons such as Harischandra, Draupadi, Hanuman and Appar were utilised to awaken the masses and educate them on the sacredness of the mission of our freedom struggle. The Vivekananda Kendra Patrika issue on the Role of Spiritual Literature in India's Freedom Movement also highlights the Epic and the Puranic inspiration. A crisis situation often helps a Nation to rediscover its original identity and endows it with the courage to shed all unwanted and irrelevant accretions of history. India utilised the critical period of its foreign rule to rediscover itself. The reaction was widespread. From the ascetic Vinoba to fiery Madanlal Dhingra a wide spectrum of Indian youth was inspired by its Mythology and spirituality.

Madanlal Dhingra's final testament read:

"As a Hindu I feel that the wrong done to my country is an insult to God. Her cause is the cause of Sri Rama. Her service is the service of Sri Krishna. Poor in wealth and intellect a son like myself has nothing else to offer to Mother but his own blood and so I have sacrificed the same on Her altar" From the extremists like Dhingra to a moderate leader like Gopalakrishna Gokhale, from a serious philosopher-Karmayogi like Lokamanya, to totally ascetic Vinoba, from a crowd-puller like Gandhiji to a recluse like Sri Aurobindo, every member of the freedom movement was inspired by the imagery of Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Durga and Savitri. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee found a new use for the Puranic imagery when he composed the immortal song 'Vandemataram.' He found that "every idol in every temple is the image of Mother Bharat." Subrahmanya Bharati likened Panchali's plight to that of Bharatamata in a most powerful song.

5) The Epic and the Puranic Images and Hinduism Today

Today Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Shiva, Hanuman, Vinayaka and Parvati are household names, inspiring people in their worldly as well as spiritual life. Sri Krishna the child is the universal archetypal trickster of Carl Jung. His love for Radha so divinely reciprocated, is the ultimate statement in selfless love. His philosophy of the Gita is a true commentary on the Vedas.

Hinduism is the only religion that accepts that the ultimate reality can have a feminine form. The worship of Parashakti, as the Goddess of Valour, Wealth and Learning has

tremendous social impacts. India has enthroned feminine values as divine values and has made 'Sneha, Prema, Daya and Bhakti' as the sine-qua-non of spiritual growth. A Western sociologist has called Hinduism a feminine religion. In a war-torn, violent world, feminine values have a vital place. Feminine values in Indian society are portrayed and promoted by our mythological literature. Sita, Shakuntala and Savitri are the symbols of grace, strength, chastity, courage. They are daring, yet loving and serving.

Hanuman and Ganesha are the most popular and common versions of Gods. Hanuman is the ideal of the folk as well as classical literature, a true Karmayogi, devotee and scholar all in one. Ganesha is the children's delight, and a jnani's jnani—simple, profound, happy prasanna vadanam—, most accessible and easy to please, therefore first to be remembered.

It is in Shiva the dancer-destroyer, that the Hindu Epics and the Puranas have hit a near peak. He is the father figure of Indian Art, a World ruler. The serene, meditative, yet most dynamic figure is praised by Ilya Prigogine, the Nobel Laureate as the symbol of ultramodern science. —

"Each great period of science has led to some model of nature. For classical science it was the clock; for nineteenth-century science, the period of the Industrial Revolution, it was an engine running down. What will be the symbol for us? What we have in mind may perhaps be expressed by a reference to sculpture, from Indian or pre-Columbian art to our time. In some of the most beautiful manifestations of sculpture, be it the dancing Shiva or in the miniature temples of Guerrero, there appears very clearly the search for a junction between stillness and motion, time arrested and time passing. We believe that this confrontation will give our period its uniqueness." (Quoted from Fritjof Capra's "The Web of Life"). Writing on Shiva as the Dancer, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy says "Purely intellectual formulae could not satisfy the children of this world who will not hurry along the path of release and the mystics who find a foretaste of freedom in the love of every cloud in the sky and flower at their feet. It may well be doubted if art and idolatry, idolatry and art are not inseparable. Precisely as love is reality experienced by the lover and truth is reality as experienced by the philosopher, the beauty is reality as experienced by the artist; and these are--the three phases of the absolute" Such an image of Shiva is a gift of Indian mythology to the world of art, to the realm of beauty.

6) The Puranas and the Indian Spirit of Unity

The Puranas are not mere rehashing of old values and old tales. They exhibit a tremendous integrating spirit that is uniquely Indian. Vyasa, after editing the Vedas, found the thread of unity of all existence running through the scriptures. He explicitly expressed it in the Brahma Sutras. Then there was a second pulsation of human spiritual experience being recorded in a rich variety of spiritual literature. Sri Krishna came and unified them again in the advaitic vision - the *Bhagavad Gita*. He prised expressions such as *Sankhya*, *Yoga*, *Yagna* and *Karma* from the earlier scriptures and endued them with new meanings,

relevant in the advaitic philosophy without destroying the relevance of these terms in the earlier scheme of things. Again a third phase of spiritual activity ensued. Came Shankara and unified Vedanta with Tantra (temple worship and an emotional approach to Reality - Bhakti.) It was he who tempered the steely *Vedanta* with loving devotion and wove intellectual strands of Vedanta into the soft tapestry of devotion. All these examples showed Sri Ramkrishna and Swami Vivekananda that all religious experiences both Indian and alien could be wound around the central spindle of Advaita. But all these great teachers did not destroy and consign as waste the earlier social systems, icons, scriptures, doctrines and dogmas, rituals and books, temples and forms shaped by so much of human effort. They simply took over the past achievements and breathed the *advaitic prana* into them. Swami Vivekananda talks of breathing *advaitic* life into European body, Islamic body etc. in this sense. "Have that faith, each one of you, in yourself that eternal power is lodged in every soul and you will revive the whole of India. Aye, we will then go to every country under the sun, and our ideas will before long be a component of the many forces that are working to make up every nation in the world. We must enter into the life of every race in India and abroad; we shall have to work to bring this about."

Every prophet or seer who stands on the turning points of human history, makes use of traditional and well worn words and phrases, examples and similes, morals and tales. This is for communicating with his fellow-men in an intelligible language. At the same time he infuses into those words and expressions a new life, which was never experienced before by humanity. His letters are old. His words are new. His words are old. His sentences and combination of words are fresh. His usages are old. His force, meaning, import and impact are astonishingly fresh and novel. Great men of the world, take their fellow beings to new heights of awareness, employing as their stepping stones, mere words, worn out with time.

The writers of the Puranas and Epics took the local folk tales, regional myths, village characters of charm and grace, proverbs, wisdom of the common people and wove them into immortal Epics and lively Puranas. Again in the reverse direction, the oral traditions, the preachers and singers scattered the Epic and the Puranic tales and episodes among the masses. The masses took up the stories and their characters, morals and events, simplified them, readopted them to suit their local needs and tastes. All over the world the inter relation between folk tales and classical forms are being studied with great interest. There appears to be a two-way traffic. The folk elements got sanskritised in course of time and added to the classical treasures of a society. On the other hand, the classical tales are demythified, broken up and the key elements are folk-ised for popular use.

7) Sanskritisation of Folk-Tradition - A Natural Process:

Folk saints, folk traditions and their followers are able to maintain their spontaneity for only a short period-say-for 4 or 5 generations. Their spiritualised anarchy often gets transformed into a system. They are deified, (e.g. Shirdi Sai Baba) organised into a cult, (Nath tradition) or into a separate sect (Kabir Panth). Sometimes their philosophy and

teachings are recognised as a part of Indian tradition, the temporarily lost links getting retraced. For example, Ramana Maharshi read no scriptures and followed no tradition until his spiritual sadhana was completed. But within a period of one generation of his passing away, he has been reabsorbed into the Advaitic tradition of India. Nandanar as a Nayanar (a Saivite saint) too marks this trend. When this happens the teachings of a new saint become part of the Hindu traditional scriptures. The birth place of the saint is venerated. His samadhi, if any, becomes a pilgrim centre. All this is not a part of studied and contrived acculturation but a natural process of assimilation for which India is well-known.

In fact, such processes of Sanskritization can be recognised in all facets of Indian folk life, folk arts, folk music, folk drama, folk ritual, folk painting, folk legend, etc. showing the same convergence. That is why Hinduism is said to be an ever-growing tradition. As Sri Aurobindo says, the last sentence about Hinduism has not been pronounced and its last spiritual discovery has not yet been made; and the last Hindu saint is not yet born.

We are witnesses to the folk tales of Ayyappa, Santoshimata, etc. being absorbed into the classical tradition of India. Sister Nivedita remarks that the process of absorption of these elements in the mainstream of Hinduism is always incomplete. We can see the outlines of partly digested inset stories in the host stories such as the Mahabharata.

8) Mythologies of India compared to those of the West:

Very often attempts are made to compare the Epics and the Puranas of India with the Greek mythologies. First of all the Greek mythologies are a dead literature and they do not have any relation with the life of the people of Europe today. India's Epics and the Puranas are a living literature, a part of the religious and spiritual tradition being put to day-to-day use even now. There is no Western equivalent of Ram Rajya of Gandhiji, Sri Rama of Saint Tyagaraja's vision or Sri Krishna of Sri Aurobindo's vision.

It is doubtful whether Zeus and Apollo have any contemporary validity or emotional impact on the life of Europeans. There is no question of Greek mythology contributing anything to the European spiritual consciousness. Attempts are also made to compare the impact of the Epics and the Puranas on Indian society with the influence of the Bible on the European society. Authorities such as Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi have expressed the opinion that the impact of the Bible on Europe is restricted, limited and somewhat superficial. Swamiji goes to the extent of saying that Europe has shaken off the teachings of Jesus Christ as represented by the Papal authority in order to survive as an aggressive, colonising, materialistic civilization. Aggressive Europe had no use for Jesus Christ with his "Avritta chakshu" eyes turned inward. To make matters worse, the West tried to interpret the story of Christ in historical terms shearing it of all its mythological halo.

Writes Swami Nityabodhananda: "Coming to the question, 'Why is history?' let history interrogate itself and it cannot get out an answer, though it has a need for an answer.

Let myth interrogate itself 'Why is myth?' and the answer is: 'God's need to love man.' This love lived by man is mythology.

There is a cry in the West that we have lost our myth. Jung says it definitely that the West has lost its myth and that the anguish of the unconscious can be remedied only when it is rediscovered. Before the West came to lose its myth, partly or fully, the West treated the question in a slovenly manner. Since the coming on the scene of science and the increase of the prestige of reason and precision, the West thought that prestige attaches itself to a religion which is historical. Linked to this is the attachment to a historical Christ. Since the West arranged things in the above way, it has been complaining of increasing secularization. Secularization does not come from outside, but from our inside, from our attitude to religion and what we want it to be. If we want it to be historical, then naturally we clip its wings by which it would have climbed to mythical heights. Before the search to make Christianity historical started, civilization was a part of religion. But now religion has become a part of civilization."

Within India the Epics and the Puranas have produced a vast treasure of folk arts, dances, tales and fables. That is why the rural people, mountain tribes, and the forest-dwellers have absorbed the classical tales, kept them stored in their heart until the classical angularities are rounded off and re-expressed the tales in spontaneous outbursts as if they have newly created these characters and events. The art forms are in direct contact with life in its most vital and raw essence. This is true of every classical tale of the Epics/Puranas. Maybe, one region prefers one story and another region is partial to some other story. But there is a full parallel folk literature comparable in intensity of emotion, volume and relationship to ritual to the classical traditions. But the Christian tradition, claimed variously as 500 to 2000 years old in India, has made little or no impact on the 'spontaneous' literature of India, on its folk tales, folk arts, rituals, songs, puzzles, and proverbs. This is a proof that India's common man considers Christian mythology and tradition as an artificial super-imposition unrelated to life in its essence. Of course, there are a few folk Christian tales and songs, "odams" 'dramas' and ballads, but their quantity and quality do no justice to the number of years Christianity has been current in India.

Leon Uris in his 'Armageddon' describes how during the second world war, Germany had to fall back to its pre-Christian local legends to rally her people around. A Nagaland elder wrote a letter to an Arunachali tribal Chief how Christians have taken away their culture without giving the Nagas new dances, folk songs or legends.

The point is that the onslaught of Westernisation and religious conversion alienates the people from their cultural capital of which mythologies, legends, beliefs, healing processes, pilgrim centres, heroes and heroines and art form are the most important components. In India, the Epics and the Puranas have a great role to play in preserving and conserving them. Guha and Sabari relate with Rama with ease. So does Sri Krishna with a shop-keeper woman.

9) The Role of Tradition in Innovation and Creativity:

How traditions, habits, usages and legends help the innovative and creative spirit of man is an absorbing field of study. One interpretation is that traditional and legendary names and episodes provide the raw material from which the creative artist draws a copious supply. Another interpretation is that Tradition acting hand in hand with language has made a large space for itself in the consciousness of the people. A word such as Sita, Hanuman, Karna or Kumbhakarna brings up a bundle of thought associations which the artist can use - ready made. A new name or icon would consume a thousand words or a thousand years to build up an equally effective image. An artist using a traditional figure simply inherits this space, and builds his creative edifice on this legendary foundation. Pudumaipittan writing on Ahalya, (Tamil) Nanabhai Bhat writing on Rama-Sita, (Gujarati) Narendra Kohli writing on the Ramayana and on Swami Vivekananda (Hindi) have adopted this technique.

Or it may be that a historically and socially well entrenched legend, with a rhythm and pattern of its own, keeps the conscious portion of the artist's or poet's, mind engaged and occupied, freeing the creative spirit to innovate. That is how a great poet like Kampan could create his version of the Ramayana, unawed by the reputation of his predecessor in the profession, Maharshi Valmiki.

Anyway, the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the Bhagawata, as a whole and their characters in individual cases, have spawned wonderful offsprings in every one of the Indian languages. Easily the Ramayana adaptations are the best in every language virtually. The stories of Rama, Krishna, Shiva, Devi, Shakuntala, Savitri, Nala Damayanti, Harischandra, Draupadi and Prahlada, have been very successfully retold with all creative adornments in every Indian language.

Further, every generation sees its own face in the Epics and the Puranas. The version written during an era, reflects the moods, aspirations and the culture of the people. The evolution of the people is mirrored in the Epics and the Puranas. Ramakatha from Valmiki to Kampan and Tulasidas pictures, how each generation of Indians had readapted its own religious philosophy or details of moral codes. Valmiki's Sita is carried away by Ravana, lifting her by her hair. Kampan's Sita would not submit herself to this treatment. He makes Ravana scoop the mass of earth with the hut in which Sita was residing in Panchavati and carry it to Lanka. Tulasidas's divine Sita creates a Maya Sita, a shadow of herself, to be carried away by Ravana. The original Sita hides herself in a facade of fire, to be released after the fire test in Lanka. Evolution of characters such as Shakuntala, Savitri and Draupadi has been studied by historians, literary critics and innovative poets. The studies show that these characters or the public images of them change as one marches down the lanes of history. The basics remain. The superstructure is transformed. Sri Ramakrishna says that the Indian tradition, like a lizard, can drop its tail whenever it wants, retain its body and grow a new tail. This innovation built upon the substratum of stability and constancy is uniquely Indian. This proves that India has its basic acts alright. But the details can always

be altered. Swami Vivekananda says that a similar relation exists between Smritis (amenable to change) and Sruti (eternal).

But the Western scholars, get stuck with the fixations of images. They take each image, icon, book as a final fixed entity and fail to see any continuity, when a new form or name emerges in a subsequent era. For example the names and forms of God change continuously from the Vedic period to the Upanshadic era. The Epics and the Puranas present a totally “different” image, role, name and story of a God. Max Mueller encountering this feature in Indian scriptures for the first time gave it the name, “Henotheism” (Treating a given god as the only one in a certain context; for example in a hymn to Indra, Indra is treated as supreme and unique). Others, finding long Epical mother stories such as the Mahabharata, interspersed with short local inset stories of interest classify them as “great traditions” and “little traditions.”

It is left to Swami Vivekananda the Master Surveyor of the Epic and the Puranic chronicles to solve the problem. He says “They (the various godheads) occupy the position of the personal god in turns. But the explanation is there in the book, and it is a grand explanation, one that has given the theme to all subsequent thought in India, and one that will be the theme of the whole world of religions: “*Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti*-That which exists is One; sages call It by various names.” In all these cases where there hymns were written about all these gods, the Being perceived was one and the same; it was the perceiver who made the difference. It was the hymnist, the sage, the poet, who sang in different languages and different words, the praise of one and the same Being. “That which exists is One; sages call It by various names.” “Tremendous results have followed from that one verse. Some of you, perhaps, are surprised to think that India is the only country where there never has been a religious persecution, where never was any man disturbed for his religious faith. Theists or atheists, monists, dualists, monotheists are there and always live unmolested-” meaning that the Hindu concept of One God with many names has taught the Nation the art, science of sociology of tolerance. This shows that the uniqueness of Indian spiritual history and that the history of evolution of our Mythology calls for new tools of analysis and understanding. The tools developed for studying Greek Epics, contemporary exploitative European society, etc. would not serve the purpose in the Indian context.

10) European and Marxian Interpretation of Indian Culture and Scriptures

When European interpreters started studying Indian scriptures, they had a baggage to weight their opinions. They invented the Aryan invasion theory to drive a permanent wedge between sections of the Indian society. For them every war, conflict, skirmish, battle between groups in India was an Aryan-Dravidian war. This theory had its basis neither in Indian history, nor in our literature nor in Indian Archaeology. In fact the later archaeological data were interpreted to suit the West’s earlier/divisive theories for interpreting Vedas, the Epics and the Puranas. That this Aryan-Dravidian theory was condemned roundly by linguists, spiritual giants such as Swami Vivekananda and Kanchi

Paramacharya, later-day archaeologists and a section even of later day communists, did not deter the West from persisting with the theory obviously for political reasons.

Perhaps the greatest reason for the West interpreting the Eastern mythological events as conflicts between man and Nature and as wars between the invader and the invaded people, is in the psychological groundings of the West. Write the authors of the book the "Blinded Eye 500 Years of Christopher Columbus."

"The foundations on which Western civilization are grounded, its attitudes to nature and to people living beyond its frontiers, were first set not in the time of the Greeks but much earlier, in the soils of the ancient Near East where an itinerant people, the Israelites, eked out a constant struggle for survival as a 'chosen people' in a hostile environment. The record of the evolution of that struggle is available in the Old Testament Bible which forms the first half of the scripture of Western civilization".

Even a casual reading of the Old Testament will indicate that the Israelites unambiguously saw the earth as hostile and that they had an almost murderous conception of it.

As Frederick Turner observes, Adam's punishment in the Genesis myth is to remain in exile from the Garden of Eden. Under the Creator's curse, man enters the wilderness of the world, estranged forever from nature. Nature, in fact, becomes a cursed adversary, eternally hostile to man's efforts for survival. Likewise, Adam is fated to be an enemy of the animal kingdom. Human existence in this world takes on the character of an unrelenting contest with nature in which man toils to fulfil God's command that he subdue the thorny, thistled earth and establish dominion over it. Thus the spiritual message of a tormented and suffering human existence (the central idea of Judaic and Christian thinking) affects the valuation of nature as peripheral and sundered, even where the actual experience of nature and the environment were otherwise.

Subsequent Old Testament events have a cumulative effect of confirming this destructive aspect of nature and of reinforcing the anthropomorphic, adversary attitude towards the natural world announced in the Garden of Eden myth."

Such a mindset can never understand Sri Rama relating with Guha, Sabari, the Squirrel, the monkeys, vultures, bears, and a Rakshasa (Vibhishana), in a friendly and brotherly manner.

With the Marxian outlook, the materialists of the West were not equipped to interpret things spiritual. Ninian Smart, a world level authority on comparative religion says: "In principle too there is a defined focus in Hindu theism, even if the question of what that focus might be is answered differently according to diverse sub-traditions. Suffice it to say that according to our analysis the interpretation of ritual is relatively straightforward. I would like to pause to dispose of one theory of sacrifice, largely because it illustrates how unwise it is to devise, or to take seriously, a theory which is based on a wider ignorance of the history

of religions (indeed this is a general trouble: some of the most influential figures such as Marx, Freud and Durkheim were by modern standards rather ignorant of the facts of religion).”

The West in general and the Marxists in particular have got stuck with the Cartesian analytical approach to life, science and religion. They are not able to see the meaning and purpose of religion the significance of higher levels of consciousness, the ultimate truth permeating all levels of living. Their kind of approach ends up in trivialising profound truths, or giving forth a highly lop-sided, one-sided glimpse of truths. Cartesian approach to science, Darwinian vision to Biology and Newtonian view of the physical world have been discarded by the scientific community as outmoded, incomplete and as missing the essential. But unfortunately Marxian sociology based on obsolete Cartesian science continues to thrive interpreting anthropology, mythology, religion etc. A holistic, most modern scientific study of Mythologies presents them as integrative, providing the psychological and cultural bedrock of the society. Such studies bring out the influence of the dearly held myths of each society on the morals, behavioural patterns, values, lifestyles and languages of its people.

11) Need for Educating Our Children in Our Epics:

Sister Nivedita urged that the National education is just and foremost an education in the National idealism. Instead of holding up the ideals of honesty courage and self-sacrifice from the lives of foreigners, it is necessary to present the example of these and similar other virtues from Indian history and literatures. According to her, true National education is learning the Nation’s epics. She translated, abridged and presented a number of stories from the Epics and the Puranas as a part of her scheme for educating Indian children especially girls. She persuaded great artists like Abanindra Nath Tagore to paint our National heroes and heroines, and bring alive the inspiring events from these stories.

The modern West believes in a linear movement of time, and ridicules India’s ideas of cyclicity of time and events. But the Epic and the Puranic ideals of chaturyuga, cyclicity of events, avatars and rebirth keep Indians optimistic of a glorious future, based on the eternal principles of Dharma. When Vyasa stands in the river and loudly proclaims the greatness of the women and the Sudras in the Kaliyuga, he dangles the great carrot of hope in front of a tired and colonised people somewhat wallowing in poverty, squalor and self-pity. The Epics and the Puranas keep alive this hope - a single sign of a living people.

12) Conclusion

In this manner the Epics and the Puranas of India have taken the messages of the Vedas and the Upanishads to the common people. They bring the entire message of the Vedantic ideal to the masses, and inspire them to a life of the spirit. The Epic and the Puranas of India have taken up the essentials of Dharma Shastras and have made these ideals live in flesh and blood. They cry aloud that the immortal life is not beyond in some unseen

heaven, but here and now in this world expressed through righteous life, a life of Dharma. The Epics and the Puranas have consecrated our pilgrim centers, breathed life into our rituals, and have concretised the spirit in the body of all our art forms. Again and again these Mythologies have reminded our people of our National Unity and of their spiritual destiny. They have served as Indian encyclopaedias of astronomy, medicine, linguistics, anthropology and a host of sciences. Our Mythologies and their by-products have inspired our greatest saints, nation builders, interpreters of our culture and seekers of the spirit. As their independent contribution to our civilization, the Epic and the Puranas have shown us LOVE AS THE PATHWAY TO GOD. It is not for nothing that Swami Vivekananda has said Hinduism today is Puranic in Nature.

True to its avowed theme, this issue of the Vivekananda Kendra Patrika, deals with the impact of our Epics (and Puranas) on the life of the people of India and related matters. The influence of the Epics and the Puranas on the Literature of India has been left almost untouched, as it will be a full topic for discussion on its own. Only the response of Indian literature related to them at the time of British rule has been discussed to show how old metaphors react to new forms.

This issue has been divided into five parts for the sake of convenience. A general introduction is followed by articles on the Ramayana, articles on the Mahabharata, and those on the Puranas. A few inspiring anecdotes round off the volume. Efforts have been made to maintain some balance between general theory on one side and particular characters and regional presentations on the other.



RAMAYANA IN KASHMIRI LITERATURE
AND FOLK-LORE
P.N.PUSHP

The Rama-theme entered the Kashmiri language much later than the Krishna-legend. This was so in spite of the fact that Sanskrit literature produced in Kashmir recorded not only awareness of the Rama-tradition but also its incorporation into critical as well as creative writing.

Therefore, the folk-tale, traditionally handed down in Kashmiri about the travails of Rama and Sita, and the affectionate devotion of Lakshmana are not confined to the Hindus but are widely shared among the non-Hindu population as well, most of whom (by the way) happen to be converts. In fact the Kashmiri language itself has crystallized this legacy into telling expressions, including place-names, allusions, idioms and proverbs. Thus we have not only Rama-*naga*, Rama-*kunda* and Sita-*Kunda*, but also *Ramabhadruny duni* (i.e., the bow of darling Rama) for the rainbow. The word Ramayana itself has come to signify in Kashmiri 'a lengthy tale of unmerited woe', indifference to which is caricatured in the proverb:

*"Ratas vonmay ramayan;
Subhan prutshhtham, Ram kya
vatihe Sitaye"*

Throughout the night I narrated the Ramayana; on the morn (yet) you asked me 'Who was Rama to Sita indeed'.

Even some modern poets like Rasal Mir and Mahjoor have used the names of Rama and Sita for telling effect in tragic situations, and the name of Ravana for spiritual loss caused by evil endeavour, as

ravun in Kashmiri means: 'Ravana' as well as 'to get lost'.

In the light of such a situation it is quite understandable that the Rama-legend should have been very much there in Kashmiri folklore too. True, it is not as prominent as the Krishna legend. Yet, it is there even in the earliest strata of the Kashmiri folk music as preserved in *Vanavun*, the traditional wedding-songs of the Kashmiris, in which allusion to the Rama-story may not be as frequent as that to the Krishna theme. Thus, for instance, in the symbolic improvisation with reference to the grooms and their parents, the names of Rama and Sita, Dasaratha and Kausalya, or even those of Janaka, Visvamisra and Vasistha occur quite often.

(Extracted from the Ramayana Tradition
in Asia: Sahitya Akademi
Ed.V.Raghavan, New Delhi 1989)

RAMAYANA IN MALAYALAM FOLK
LITERATURE
N.V.KRISHNA WARRIOR

“Many of the Kerala temples had within their precincts, buildings specifically designed for dramatic performances based mainly on the stories of the two great Epics. The texts for these performances were in Sanskrit, but each sentence and each word in these texts was lucidly explained in the local language with plenty of hilarious humour and all sorts of interesting anecdotes thrown in, so that the rustic people enjoyed immensely and congregated in large numbers at these performances which thus played a very effective role in the process of their acculturation. What concerns us here is the fact that the regional language, which was a dialect of Tamil, was completely transformed in the course of these discourses not only by extensive borrowings from the rich vocabulary, but also by unrestricted adoption of idioms, phrases and even morphological devices of Sanskrit”.

(Extracted from “The Ramayana Tradition in Asia” Sahitya Acadami Ed.V.Raghavan, New Delhi 1989.)

RAMAYANA IN NEPALI

KAMALA SANKRITYAYAN

The story of the Ramayana has played a great part in bringing about cultural unification. Among the Ramayanas in different Indian languages, we have in Nepali the Mero Rama (20th century) and Nepali *Adarsa Raghava Mahakavya* (20th century). There are also many other works based on the story of Ramayana,. Thus, we can understand how this sacred epic and the story of Ramachandra has affected the way of our thinking and life. We can also understand why our neighbouring Hindu Country, Nepal, has a great affection for the Ramayana-tradition. We can understand and observe the development of Ramayana-tradition in Nepali literature from the ancient period to the modern age.

(Extracted from “The Ramayana Tradition in Asia:” Sahitya Acadami Ed.V.Raghavan, New Delhi 1989.)

RAMAYANA IN MANIPURI LITERATURE
AND FOLKLORE

E.NILAKANTA SINGH

Shri Aurobindo wrote about the Ramayana thus:

“The Ramayana embodied for the Indian imagination its highest and tenderest human ideals of character, made strength and courage and gentleness and purity and fidelity and self-sacrifice familiar to it in the suavest and most harmonious forms colour so as to attract the emotion and the aesthetic sense, stripped morals of all repellent austerity on the one side or on the other of mere commonness and lent a certain high divineness to the ordinary things of life, conjugal and filial and maternal and fraternal feeling, the duty of the prince and leader and the loyalty of follower and subject, the greatness of the great and the truth and worth of the simple, toning things ethical to the beauty of a more psychical meaning, by the glow of its ideal hues”. (The Foundation of Indian Culture, Centenary Edition (Page 290).

This sums up the attitude of the Manipuri Hindus of Manipur and outside also to the *Ramayana* tradition since the 18th century A.D., when Ramanandi cult of North India became a State religion during the reign of the great Manipuri King, Garib Niwas (1709-1748). Bengal *Vaishnavism* which found supreme expression in the latter part of 18th century A.D. somehow integrated the Rama-worship into the liberal outlook of a Hindu mind and even though the cult has been assimilated into the *Vaishnavic* way of life, the Ramayana still retains its power and glory for the literate masses, the chief vehicles of

communication are: *Kathaks* whom the Manipuris call *Wari leebas* (storry-tellers), the minstrels on the *Pena* (Stringed Manipuri musical instrument), the singers on the *Dholok* (called *Khongjaom Parba sakpas*), the *Kirtana* musicians of the old *Pala* (*Bangdesh Pala* as they call it) and the *Jatras* based on the *Ramayana*. The characters of the *Ramayana* become intensely real, human and alive to the Manipuri mind. In a sense, an old illiterate Manipuri lady in the village knows much more about the Ramayana than the degree holders of the Universities and should I say, more cultured than most of the elites of Manipur. The old Manipuri scholars presented the Ramayana in all its seven books under the inspiration of Krttivasi *Ramayana* (of Bengal) as early as 10th century A.D. The entire Valmiki *Ramayana* has been translated recently and the tradition of presenting *Ramayana*-stories on the modern stage and also in the *Jatra* style still continues in full vigour.

It is evident that the *Ramayana* has really created an impact on the Manipuri minds through the ages. It is possible that the Manipuri *Ramayana* might have been popular in the 18th century A.D. during the reign of King Garib Niwas. But its importance has been eclipsed by the *Bhagavata* tradition of Bengal school of *Vaishnavism*. The considerable neglect of the Manipuri works written in Manipuri script during the later part of 18th century and 19th century is responsible to a degree for the comparative isolation of Manipuri *Ramayana* from the mass mind. Moreover, the work remained in manuscript and has been printed and published only recently. But the comparative neglect of the Manipuri *Ramayana* has been more than compensated by the various mass media

through which Ramyana has been brought nearer to the hearts of the people through the ages. The liberal outlook of Hindu mind which can integrate Rama-workship with the Radha-krsna cult with the expression of Hare Krishna, Hare Rama is also responsible for the great sensitivity on the part of the Manipuri *Vaishnavas* to the ideals and message of the *Ramayana*.

It is, of course, true that the Krittivasi *Ramayana*, the basic text of these artistic expressions and even of the Manipuri *Ramayana*, was nearer to the vigour of the soil and failed to attain the epic manner of Valmiki. It was the narrative poetry of the age in the *Puranic* tradition. Unlike

Kamban, the Tamil poet (9th century A.D) who made a great original epic of *Ramayana* and also unlike Tulsidas (16th century A.D.) whose famed *Ramayana* combines with a singular masterly lyric intensity, romantic richness and the sublimity of the epic imagination, Krttivasi *Ramayana* and its Manipuri version only served to respond to the cultural necessity of transferring into popular speech the whole central story of *Ramayana*.

(Extracted from "The Ramayana Tradition in Asia:" Sahitya Akadami Ed.V.Raghavan New Delhi 1989)

RAMAYANA IN ORIYA LITERATURE ORAL TRADITION

NILAMANI MISHRA

Rama in tradition

There is no place left in Orissa which has not received the magic touch of Rama. It has become a habit to associate places, forests, hills and rivers with the incidents of Ramayana. In the district of Phulbani in Orissa there is a hill named Ramagiri about which there are many legends prevalent among the local people. It is identified as the same place which has found mention in Meghaduta of Kalidasa. Koraput District abounds in such places which have some connection with the descriptions in the *Ramayana*. People draw similarity between the existing Chitrakunda Hill with Chitrakuta of *Ramayana* and Malkangiri with Malyavanta. People believe that Ramachandra had offered puja to Guptesvar during his forest-life; this is near Jeypore, in Koraput district. The rivers Taperu and Arkeil in Koraput district still bear many memorable episodes of Sita.

In Keonjhar district there is a place called Sitabinji famous for Ajanta style mural paintings. There, a small streamlet flows by, which is called Sitapari and there is also a hillock which is said to be the store-house of Sita.

At the foot of Ushakothi hills in the district of Sundargarh there is a small village called Lakshmanapa where Lakshmana used to live when Rama and Sita spent some days on the hill-top. There are oven-shaped marks and white lines on the hills which are believed to have been used by Sita as kitchen. In Southern Orissa there are two

fruits which are called Rama-phala, Rama-fruit and Sita-phala, Sita-fruit. People believe that these two were used mostly by Rama and Sita during their forest-exile. In the rural life, people draw a similarity between a house-wife neglected by her husband and Sita who had practically suffered in her separation. People also called a chaste woman Sita.

The sincerity and faithfulness of Lakshmana towards his elder brother Ramachandra is also reflected in the social life of Orissa. Brothers in a joint family living happily are termed as Rama and Lakshmana. A step-mother or a woman with quarrelsome bent of mind is named as Kaikeyi who created havoc in the life of Ramachandra. Twin brothers are named Lavakusa after the twin sons of Sita. A faithful follower is very often termed Bharata or Hanuman. A lady who gets married to her brother-in-law (the younger brother of her husband) is nicknamed Mandodari. The treacherous role of Vibhisana is also not left out. He who plays a dubious role in the family is named Vibhisana.

Ramayana in Art

Khandagiri and Udayagiri in the outskirts of the new capital have the earliest representation of *Ramayana*-episode in relief panels. Though no mention of Rama has been made by the historians who have dealt with it so far, we can safely attribute the panel depicting a man with bow in hand chasing a fleeing antelope to the *Ramayana*-episode of Rama pursuing Maricha.

(Extracted from The Ramayana Tradition in Asia: Sahitya Akademi Ed.V.Raghavan, New Delhi 1989.)

RAMAYANA IN SINHALA LITERATURE
and ITS FOLK VERSION

J.TILAKASIRI

It is indeed remarkable that ever since the Rama saga migrated to the countries of South and South-East Asia it has not merely enriched the cultural and literary heritage of every country which came under its spell but inculcated lasting ethical and religious values among the people. When the epic swept through the cultures of Asian countries its episodes, characters and even descriptive motifs had a varied influence on the different countries, each of which interpreted or adapted the story to suit its social milieu.

In many Asian countries the *Ramayana* theme has had a special appeal particularly because the characterization of the principal hero, Rama, his wife, Sita, and their companions and even their retinue, bears a humane and refined outlook on life. The principal events of the epic are located in Ayodhya, the capital of the Kosala Kingdom, in the North of India.

In Sri Lanka, the story of Rama and Sita has continued to be popular among the literati and the people in general from the time it became known. But it must be emphasized, however, that ambivalent attitudes towards the theme and the characterization of the heroes have prevailed and these are reflected in the literature of the Sinhalese and in the religious cults, legends and folk-lore of the island.

(Extracted from the "Ramayana Tradition in Asia:" Sahitya Akadami Ed.V.Raghavan, New Delhi 1989.)

RAMAYANA IN THE FOLK LITERATURE
OF BENGAL
BHABATOSH DUTTA

In Bengal, there are a number of versions of the *Ramayana* mainly with regard to its theme; some of these cannot be traced to the Sanskrit epic. These have been incorporated from the folk life. Quite a considerable portion of our folk literature is based on the Rama-Sita legend. Undoubtedly this deserves intensive analysis, which I am afraid has not been done adequately in spite of the good deal of work done on the folk literature of Bengal.

Rabindra Nath Tagore, about seventy years back, engaged, himself in collecting specimens of folk literature of Prabna-Rajshahi region of Bengal. In a paper published in the *Bharat* (1898) he observed that our folk literature was rich in the songs on Radhakrishna and Hara-Gauri but compared with them songs of Rama Sita were scanty. 'It must be admitted' he said: "In the west where Rama-legend is widely prevalent, ideal of manliness is more powerful than in Bengal. In our Hara-Gauri and Radhakrishna legends, the mutual relationship between man and wife and lover and the beloved has been emphasized but no attempt has been made to make them morally wholesome. The ideal of conjugal life of Rama-Sita is much higher than that of Hara-Gauri. It is unfortunate that Rama-Sita legend has never got the better of either Hara-Gauri or Radhakrishna legends". It is true, we do not possess on Rama and Sita anything like Krishna *Padavali* or the Sakta *Padavali*. The 'Rama *Padavali*' is quite unknown to us. Later researches, however, have shown that our folk art has been deeply influenced by the Rama-Sita

legend". Tagore was, however, right in maintaining that the ideal of manliness is generally missed in our folk poetry. We are moved more with the emotional appeal of the Rama-legend than the moral side of it.

(Extracted from the "Ramayana Tradition in Asia:" Sahitya Akadami Ed.V.Raghawan, New Delhi 1989)

RAMAYANA, THE EPIC OF ASIA
LOKESH CHANDRA

Born as a primeval poem, the *adikavya* in Valmiki's metrical measure welling forth in all spontaneity at the grievous sight of the death of a love-lorn avian couple shot by a hunter, the *Ramayana*, has become the lyric of the men of Asia from Siberia to Indonesia, filling their unbounded Self with ecstasy, with an ocean of bliss.

The Department of Culture of the Ministry of Education of the Government of Indonesia convened the first International *Ramayana* Festival and Seminar in 1971. they deserve praise the gratitude of men of culture for providing a forum where the modern man of Asia can evaluate the creative role of *Ramayana* through the ages, and its living unity of values in Asian societies. A literary oeuvre of sweeping majesty, it has gathered a momentum of its own, manifesting itself in the narrative arts of recitation by story-tellers, in declamations (like the *babahasaan* in Indonesia), the performing arts of classical ballet, theatre and shadow-play, or featured in plastic arts of stone-sculptures, wood-carvings and paintings; and lastly flourishing in creative writing in prose and poetry. It has been a force, a movement to translate social patterns and eternity of ideals and to explore realities of human existence, and to bring about better means of integrating *Homo ludens* and *Homo sapiens*, transcending all barriers to enlarge and intensify cultural understanding in our part of the world.

As early as A.D. 251 we find K'ang-seng-hui rendering the *Jataka* form of the *Ramayana* into Chinese, and in A.D. 472 appeared another Chinese translation of the *Nidana* of Dasaratha from a lost Sanskrit text, by Kekaya. A long tradition in narrative and dramatic form created the

great episodic cycle of the 16th century classic Chinese novel known as "Monkey" or the *His-yu-chi* which amalgamated among other elements the travels of Hanuman in quest of Sita. This motif enriched popular culture and folklore and also contributed to the development of Chinese secular literature.

In the sixth century the Sinhalese Poet-king Kumaradasa, identified with Kumaradhatuseña (who reigned during A.D.517-526) composed the *Janakiharana*, the earliest Sanskrit work of Ceylon. Its *verbatim* Sinhalese paraphrase was done in the 12th century by an anonymous writer. It has been eulogized in several Sinhalese works. In our times, the Sinhalese translation of the *Ramayana*, by C.Don Bastian has been a decisive influence on the Sinhalese novel. Modern dramatists like John de Silva, an outstanding playwright, have adapted the *Ramayana*. The popular appeal in Ceylon has been the ideal of the *Ramayana* in general, the particular the virtues of Sita have been extolled, as in Indonesia.

In seventh century Cambodia, Khmer citations attest that the *Ramayana* had become a major and favourite Epic. Its episodes symbolized great historic events in sculptured monuments. That the Khmers had been impregnated with the *Ramayana* is evident from the fact that a name or a scene was sufficient to characterize a historic episode or to endow a socio-ethical problem with moral authority and special emotion. The depiction of the victorious exploits of Jayavarman VII against the Chams, on the exterior gallery of the Bayon, often follow the plot of the *Ramayana*, and Khmer king was a new Rama to crush the king of Chams. Since Jayavarman VII the *Ramayana* became an integral part of

Khmer life, played at feasts, figured on frescos, and told by story-tellers. It is in fact the loveliest poetic expression of the soul of the Khmer people. A fact that merits particular attention is that the text followed at Angkor is closer to that of Java than to Valmiki. It is a historic destiny that Indonesia should again come forth to organize the first International *Ramayana* Festival, "to promote closer cooperation, harmony and peace..., to create a favourable atmosphere for mutual understanding and friendship" as expressed by His Excellency Mr. Mohammad Noer, the then Governor of East Java.

In the ninth century (according to the inscriptional evidence as interpreted by De Casparis), the *Ramayana* was sculpted on Prambanan's Chandi, Loro Jongrang, the Temple of the Slender Maiden. These differ from the Classical Indonesian epic *Ramayana Kakawin*, which means that the *Ramayana* was prevalent in Indonesia in several versions. The *Ramayana* reliefs at Panataran display the predominance of local style. The entire story is not shown but only those scenes in which Hanuman and his simian army play a role. It points to the crystallization of particular *Ramayana*-scenes as prominent among the repertoire of the performing arts.

In about the end of the ninth century we even find an East Iranian version of the *Ramayana* in Khotanese, an Iranian dialect prevalent in Khotan in Central Asia.

Since the 18th century, the *Ramayana* became a dominant element in the performing arts of countries of South-East Asia. In Laos, Phra Chao Anurut (King Aniruddha) constructed the Vat Mai 'New Pagoda' over the Vat Si Phum. On its pylon are carved episodes from the epic. Of about the same period is the Vat Pe Ke with the

most complete paintings of the *Ramayana* in Laos. Needles to mention, that the *Ramayana* plays a premier role in the Laos ballet. The *Natya Sala* or ballet School at Vientianne teaches it regularly with its appropriate music and dance. When princess Dala (Tara), daughter of King Savang Vatthana was married, the *Ramayana* was danced in full regalia and splendour at Luang Prabang. The King of Laos is composing a new *Ramayana* in the Laotian language with an elaborate choreography. A complete manuscript of the Laotian *Ramayana* is known in 40 bundles, of 20 leaves each at Vat Pra Keo, and another manuscript at Vat Sisaket. Mr. P.B. Lafont has published summaries of the P'a Lak P'a Lam (Dear Lakshmana and Dear Rama) and the other version entitled *P'ommachak* (Sanskrit *Brahmacakra*).

The *Ramakten* or *Ramakirti* is known to Thai choreography as masked play or Khon, as the Nang of shadow-play and as literary composition emanating from the Thai monarchs themselves. The only complete version is of King Rama I, and the most representable on the stage is that of Rama II. The Silpakon or Royal Fine Arts Department, Bangkok, adapts these versions to suit the occasion or the performers, but the sung portions follow the aforesaid two versions. The version of King Rama VI is the best known, and for it the King used the classical *Ramayana* of Valmiki as authority. Thai scholars, like Prince Dhaninivat, derive their Ramakien "from the Indonesian version no doubt prevailing in the epoch of the Srivijaya Empire". The Nang or shadow play with 'hide-figures' is mentioned in the Palatine Law of King Boromatrailokanath enacted in 1458. The Nang reached the valley of Menam Chaophya via the Malay Peninsula from Indonesia.

The Malaysian Hikayat Seri Rama (A.D. 1400-1500) has been a basis for the repertoire of Malay shadow plays, the Wayang Siam and Wayang Java. In spite of the marked toponymic nomenclature both, have assumed distinct Malay forms. The similarity of technique indicates its Indonesian origin, which is conclusively proved by the use of Indonesian technical terms like *kelir*, *pang-gung*, *wayang* and *dalang*. The popularity of the Rama saga in Malaysia is attested by a variety of local literary versions. The Malaysian *dalang* may perform two to three hundred shows a year, but they are not mere entertainment. The performances are preceded by a ritual, offerings are made and invocations directed to ensure harmony. It is an urge, an *angin* (*Prana*) to perform, a “susceptibility to be moved greatly by the rhythm of the orchestra and a capability of identifying oneself completely with the characters of the drama, causing one experience intense emotions. If an individual does not continue his *angin* he may lapse into a trance, a state of autohypnosis” (Prof. Amin Sweeney, London).

Burma too has known the *Ramayana* since early centuries of the modern era. King Kyanzittha (A.D. 1084-1112) styled himself a descendant of Rama. But, the performance of the Yama-pwe (Yama-Rama) was introduced into Burma in 1767 from Thailand after the Burmese conquest of Thailand. The performance of the Yama-pwe used to continue upto twenty-one nights, but these days it is a series of performances extending upto twelve nights.

The story of Rama spread into the northern-most lands of Asia, via Tibet where it is found in two versions in manuscripts of the 7-9th centuries from the grottoes of Tun-huang, in an early 15th

century poetical version of Zhang-zhung-pa Chowang-drak-paipal, in the now-lost translation of Taranatha, and in several versions scattered in commentaries on works on poetic and didactics, like the *Kavyadarsa* and *Subhasitaratna-nidhi*. From Tibet, the Ramayana reached Mongolia and thence spread far to the West, to the banks of the Volga. A folk version in Kalmuk language from the banks of the Volga, is known from the manuscript of prof. C.F. Golstunsky, now preserved at the Siberian Branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. Prof. Damdin-Suren of Ulanbator (Mongolia) is working on the Mongolian Ramayana in its literary and folk forms, in manuscripts preserved at Leningrad (USSR).

Nepal has the glory of preserving the oldest manuscript of the Ramayana of Valmiki dating to A.D. 1075. The legend of Rama has ever found echoes at all levels of existence and consciousness, and it is but natural that the highest expression of modern Nepalese poetry should be Bhanubhakta Acarya's *Ramayana* in Nepalese verse, written around A.D. 1840.

In the backyard of the collective unconscious of the Philippines are repeated resonances of the epic of Rama. In 1968 Prof. Junan R. Francisco discovered among the Muslim Maranaw a miniature version of the Ramayana as an *avatara* of the remote literature of pre-Islamic Philippines. Among other Muslim tribes of the Philippines like the Magindanao and the Sulu too, folk recitations of this great epic survive in diluted versions.

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THE RAMAYANA: ITS CHARACTER, GENESIS, HISTORY, EXPANSION AND EXODUS

SUNITI KUMAR CHATTERJI

After 660 B.C. *Satapatha Brahmana* takes its present form. Mention of Cyavana in *Satapatha Brahmana*, already a legendary sage, whose ascetic power enabled him to take up the form of a decrepit and shriveled man (later on in the *Mahabharata*, the story became that he was covered up by an ant-hill-*Valmika*). Saryata, a descendant of Manu and his *grama* or clan. His young men and daughter Sukanya pelted with clods the shriveled up Cyavana. Cyavana's wrath. Saryata comes and bestows Sukanya to Cyavana as an appeasement. Sukanya looks after Cyavana. The Asvins Sukanya. Obtains boon of healing and youth for Cyavana from the Asvins. Cyavana tells the Asvins how they were missing certain divine rights in a sacrifice and told them the remedy. Cyavana a descendant of Bhrgu.

Valmiki—a descendant of Cyavana. (Krittivasa, 1400 A.D., Valmiki son of Cyavana). Cyavana 500 B.C. Valmiki. Valmiki=? Formica: has the Cyavana in ant-hill legend' became transferred to Valmiki because of his name? Asvaghosha, 1st century, A.D., mentions Cyavana as a predecessor of poet Valmiki. Valmiki, called a Grammarian (*Taittirriya Aranyaka*—200 B.C), because he was an innovator in language-*sloka*, *Sru* an Eastern Sanskrit form. The popularising of *Sloka* verse. Valmiki-first conscious and sophisticated Poet-*Adi-Kavi*-deliberate creator of a series of ideal Characters-Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Dasaratha and the rest. The style and story of the *Ramayana* versus. that of the *Mahabharata*.

The *Ramayana*: Its Character and Exodus

Valmiki created the full story-3 main component parts:

- 1) Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Dasaratha, Kaikeyi, Bharata-Rama marrying Sita-Coronation-First nucleus. The Himalayas. (Character of Sita modeled on that of Savitri and Damayanti? Of Rama as a hero on that of Arjuna?)
- 2) Sojourn in Dandakaranya—Viradha-Surpanakha-Ravana-Marica-the Abduction of Sita-(Jatayus)-Sita in Lanka. Influence of Greek Legend (Helen, Paris, Menelaw on the Ram. Abduction Story? (of Homer and India—Dion Chrysostom).
 - a) The *Raksasas*-*Asuras*/*Dramidas*-civilised people, anti-Aryan.
 - b) The *Vanaras*-Negroid/Primitive Austric peoples of South India-Lithic stone implements, branches of trees. The *Raksasas*-Polycheirous and Polycaphalous Braiareos and other Giants from Greece. 10-headed, 20-handed Ravana and the Magic working and abnormal bodies of *Raksasas* of India?
- (3) The *Vanaras*-Hanuman, Sugriva-Valin-Pact with Sugriva-Hanuman in Lanka-Building of the Bridge. The Lanka War—(Indrajit, Kumbhakarna, Lakshmana. His wounding by Ravana, Hanuman

and Gandhamadana—slaying of Ravana-Sita's ordeal-Return of Rama, Sita Lakshmana and their friends by the Puspaka-coronation in Ayodhya.

The composite Rama story created by Valmiki completed in its essentials by 2nd century A.D.—Jain Pauma-cariu-Buddhist work by Kumaralata mentions Ramayana.

Story began to expand, addition of new episodes, new versions etc. from after its start as a Rama saga as composed by Valmiki.

Uttara-Kanda: Valmiki himself made one of the characters. More and more episodes.

**Rama became linked up with Visnu and Sita with Sri as their *avatars*—after 2nd century A.D.? Greater and greater popularity of the Rama *Avatara* Concept.

The social Ideals—Family Relationship—as introduced by Valmiki made for its popularity over other great stories—like (1) Pururavas-Urvashi, (2) Savitri-Satyavan, (3) Nala-Damayanti, (4) Tapati-Samvarana, and (5) Vasavadatta-Udayana.

Various new episodes and stories-newer and newer treatments of the Rama-Sita story.

Exodus of the Rama Saga (as Valmiki's poem also outside India, from after 2nd/3rd century A.D. with Brahmans and Buddhists, Sailors and Seamen, businessmen, settlers etc. Newer and newer versions and matters added—

- (i) in Indo-China-among the Mons and the Khmers and the Chams-among the Thais-Siamese and Laos-the Rama-

- Kir (-Kien)—the Burmese—then the Viet-nameese.
- (ii) In Malaya (Hikayat Rama) and Indonesia—Sumatrans, Sundas, Javanese, Madurese, Balinese—Lombokians—the *Ramayana*-the Wayangs—the Semar etc. The Philipinos.
- (iii) in Sri Lanka.
- (iv) In Central Asia-among the Khotanese, the Sogdians etc.
- (v) In Tibet, in Mongolia.
- (vi) In China, in Korea, in Japan.
- (vii) In Modern times—these Western Skt. Studies-Russia, countries of Western Europe.

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THE RAMAYANA TRADITION IN ASIA THE
OLD JAVANESE RAMAYANA

SOEWITO SANTOSA

In the Javanese badads (chronicles) we have legends of *nine walis*, saints, who spread the Islam in Indonesia. One of the best known was called Sunan Kalijaga. He was a son of the regent of Tuban, became a gambler at an early stage of his life and casually robbed people to get some cash for gambling. One day he wanted to rob a Moslem saint called Suman Boang, but Sunam Bonnang who saw in him a future saint, converted him to Islam. It is indeed very remarkable that there are similarities in the legend of the *Adikavi* in Sanskrit literature and that of the '*adiwali*' of Java. If we can believe that there is no coincidence in the similarities of both legends, than we can only think that this tradition might have existed in Java in the past, and that the Moslems have used it very cleverly. Surely we must see this in the light of the islamization of Hindu-Javanese literary products, because that very saint, called Sunan Kalijaga, according to Moslem tradition, was the inventor of the Javanese *gamelan* and the author of the stories of the shadow-play (*Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* a.e.) and the first puppeteer.

I had witnessed in the past, the reading of the *Ramayana* forms an important part in a series of sacral rites and ceremonies. Robson himself refers to several of them, e.g., tooth-filing ceremony and wedding ceremony. In a cremation ceremony the *Ramayana* dance-drama is always performed. What is the significance of all this?

At the end of stories, such as the Jaratkaru, Garudeya etc. we usually find a statement of benefits accruing by reading

them, e.g. longevity and wealth. At the end of the *Ramayana*, as understood so far, only the *Yogiswaras* and *sujanas* are said to benefit from it. The Sanskrit *Ramayana* of *Walmiki* however mentions many more. I quote:

“He who reads the story of Rama, which imports merit and purity, is freed from all sin. He who reads it with faith and devotion is ultimately worshipped together with his sons, grandsons and servants at his death. A *Brahmin* reading this becomes proficient in language, a *ksatriya* becomes a king, a *vaisya* grows prosperous in trade, a *sudra*, on reading this, will become great in his caste”.

Thus it is indeed appropriate if the recitation of the *Ramayana* at any stage of a ceremony will bring the kind of success desired.

One who recites the *Ramayana* will get guidance in his life, clearly he will get happiness in heaven, together with his children and grandchildren, living always in harmony with the gods. Furthermore, one of bad conduct, who will certainly be doomed, by reciting the *Ramayana* even though just a stanza of it, will surely be freed from sin.

The translation of the corresponding part in the Sanskrit version reads as follows:

“On hearing it (*Ramayana*), he who has no son will obtain a son, he who has no fortune will become wealthy; to read but a foot of this poem will absolve him from all sin. He who commits sins daily will be wholly purified by reciting a single *sloka*”

(Extracted from The *Ramayana* Tradition in Asia Sahitya Akademi Ed.V.Raghavan, New Delhi 1989.)

THE RELEVANCE OF TULASIDASA'S MESSAGE TO MODERN AGE

REV.C.BULCKE

- (a) Modern critics not infrequently accuse Tulasidasa of medieval ideas, especially his defence of monarchy and the caste-system, his glorification of the *Brahmins*, his low esteem of women. The answer to these criticisms is that Tulasidasa was not a social or political reformer and never intended to advocate changes in the political or social structure of his time. His one aim is to teach the royal (The *Rajamarga*) of *bhakti*. His derogatory remarks about women are all of them translations of Sanskrit *Nitivakya*'s, and reflect therefore tradition opinions.

As a matter of fact Tulasidasa seems to have foreseen these criticisms. In his introduction he compares his poem to a stream, filled with the water of Rama's stainless glory:

Rama bimala jasa jala bharita so
And adds that "Social and scriptural doctrine are its four banks".

Loka veda mata manjula Kula

It seems that he wanted to stress the fact that he exposes his vision of Rama-*bhakti*, according to the prevalent social opinions (*Lokamata*) and the teachings of scripture (*Vedanta*). The same may be said of the philosophical ideas that find expression in his Ramachanrit Manas. At times they reflect the monism of Sankara and at other times the *Visista Advaita* (qualified monism) of Ramanuja. They found a place in his poem, because both were commonly

held in his time. Tulasidasa remains independent. In his *Vinayapatrika* we read:

"Some say it (creation) is true, some say it is false, and some hold that both are equally true; Tulasidasa says, who ever abandons these three misconceptions, he alone knows himself".

Tulasidas pariharai tini Bhrama, So apana pahichani (No.111)

As regards his personal opinion about the caste-system, he has given a glimpse of them in the description of *Ramarajya*, where he says that "every man loved his neighbours".

Saba nara karahi paraspara priti

"Each husband was true to one wife, and each wife was loyal to her husband in thought and word and deed".

Ekanari braja rata saha jhari
To man abaca karma pati hitakari

And finally.

"Most beautiful of all was the royal ghat, where men of all castes could bathe".

Rajaghata saba bidhi sundarabara
Majjahi taha barna chariu nara

It is relatively easy to answer the above mentioned criticisms. But the problem of the relevance of the Rama-story to modern age goes much deeper. A new generation is growing up, which does not believe in any incarnation or even in the existence of a Supreme Being.

- (b) The chief aim of Tulasidasa is to give a message about *Bhagavad-bhakti*, but those who do not believe in the existence of a Supreme Being

can still admire the undoubted genuine poetic art of Tulasidasa, just as, without believing in the theology of Dante, one can admire his *Divina Commedia*. Even for them the Ramacharit Manas remains a great cultural document containing the traditional beliefs of centuries, innumerable mythological stories and poetic conventions and conceits that have charmed millions of his countrymen.

- (c) However, the number of such people is relatively small. The great majority of the modern generation believes in the existence of a Supreme Being and in the spiritual nature of man. For all these Ramachanrit Manas has a message, whether they believe in any particular incarnation or not. This message contains the essential elements of genuine devotion to God, as expounded by the mystical writers of all religions; namely, importance of moral conduct, a great awareness of God's majesty and man's sinfulness, the relative unimportance of ritual and finally a genuine desire to promote the welfare of others.

The popularity of the Valmiki Ramayana and the voluminous Rama-literature of many centuries, is a monument to the idealism of India, its high esteem of moral values and its belief in the ultimate triumph of good over evil. In the same way, the enthusiastic response of the millions of northern India to the message of Ramachanrit Manas testifies to the deep-seated religious belief and spontaneous pity of the soul of India.

Note : Tulasidasa was well aware of the fact that he made his own choice among the many incidents, of the Rama-story, as

narrated by innumerable authors before him. His *Ramacarita* is not to be taken as history, but as an illustration of the infinite mercy of the Supreme Being, who became manifest for the sake of his devotees.

He even admits the possibility of the Rama-story to be taken as an allegory. He describes the evil condition of the world just before Rama's incarnation in the following words: "No words can describe the dreadful iniquity the demons wrought; their great ambition was to hurt; what limit could there be to their ill-doing? Evil doers flourished; thieves and gamblers and lechers who coveted their neighbour's goods and wives; those too, who honoured not mother or father or gods, and compelled the good to serve them. People who act thus, Bhavani, hold thou to be *Nisicara* (i.e., demons, followers of Ravana).

Another passage of the *Yuddhakanda* points to the allegorical nature of Rama's struggle against Ravana—

"Seeing that Ravana was mounted on a chariot and Raghuvira on foot, Vibhisana was apprehensive". Rama gave him this answer, "The victor needs another kind of chariot. Heroism and courage are the wheels of that chariot; truth and virtuous conduct its firm-set flags and pennants; strength, discretion, self-control, and unselfish action are its horses, harnessed with compassion, kindness and impartial judgment. The worship of God is its skillful charioteer... There is no foe, my friend, who can conquer him who rides upon this chariot of righteousness".

(Extracted from The Ramayana Tradition in Asia: Sahitya Akademi, Ed.V.Raghavan, New Delhi 1989)

THE RAMAYANA TRADITION IN
KANNADA

V.SITARAMIAH

The coronation of Sri Rama and its public celebration and expression of the joy are brought off with an exposition of *Rajadharma* by Vasistha like the one given to Dasaratha when he ascended the throne and as the tradition came down from Manu and Ikshvaku onwards. It speaks of kingly duty and utter devotion to the welfare of the people. The king is the Agent and the representative of that supreme power which presides over the fortunes of the Universe which can work out its purposes only through the king. It can make a little handbook of political ethics sanctified by custom and the rule of *Dharma*. Rama's realization that it is the duty of a king to protect the good and Sita's declaration that the privilege of the Arya is to be kind to all;—for, who is without defect or failure in conduct? "*Na kascinnaparadhyati?*". The essential truths of the Ramayana are conveyed simply in language which all can understand and which if one does not hear or read attentively, may easily miss.

The modern period has thus a distinct contribution to make in understanding the significance of the *Ramayana*, inherited as it has the wealth of past and present and of all climes and tongues and persuasions. It has had its triumphs and distortions but the experience is one of deep appreciation. Only we do not have aberrations like Menon's or Dutt's *Meghanada Vadha*.

Our *Ramayana* tradition in the country is one of reverence and written about or spoken or sung; such as will establish the enduring worth of Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Bharata and Hanuman. The *Ramayana* story has deeply influenced the life of the people. Men and women are named after

many of them and from times past men and women gather together to celebrate the birth-day of Rama and his marriage with Sita and their coronation as well as the great episodes in Valmiki's work. Whether scholarship accepts the authenticity of Sita's exile or not, it touches a tender chord and has earned for it cherishment. Almost all parts of the country claim place and name and even the lives and memories of these worthies. To one section of the Hindu population, the *Kainkary* of Lakshmana is the greater; to the other Bharata and his *Paduka-Pattabhiseka* are a consummation and in both the disinterested regard and self-denial are adored. Both are Ramanujas, each in his great way. Surrender (*Saranagati*) of Vibhishana is another memorable event. And the Brothers and Sita and Hanuman are parts of what they have liked to cherish and worship as expression of the Divine.

(Extracted from 'The Ramayana Tradition in Asia' Sahitya Akademi Ed.V.Raghavan, New Delhi 1989.)

THE RAMAYANA IN LAOS (Vientiane
Version)
KAMALA RATNAM

The culture of Laos, Thailand and Cambodia is made up of the earliest forms of Hinduism or *Vedic Brahmanism* and *Hinayana (Theravada)* Buddhism. Consequently it shows the deep meditative and philosophic aspect of the teachings of the Buddha coupled with the aesthetic imagination and literary aspects of Hindu mind. This entire region is dotted with temples dedicated to Buddha, decorated with figures of Hindu gods and goddesses, united and protected as if within the mother-like embrace of long rows of guided paintings on the walls depicting the story of the *Ramayana*. Apart from their artistic merits as mural paintings and the sanctity and reverence attached to them as objects of temple worship, the frescoes play an important part in the reconstruction of the *Ramayana* story as known in this area.

In Laos the *Ramayana* is present in five forms—(1) Dance (2) Song (3) Painting and sculpture (4) Sacred texts to be recited on festive occasions and (5) Manuscripts, and enjoys popularity in that order. The *Ramayana* as dance-drama enjoys the pride of place, in the Royal Palace at Luang Prabang and the '*Natyasala*' dance school at Vientiane. With the dance-drama goes its appropriate music and song. The *Ramayana* in painting and sculpture is seen within the temples. In its richest forms it is found in the court-temples of Luang Prabang, a detailed account of which has been published as an illustrated article by me. Following the Indian way of life and the teachings of the Buddha, which found expression in their art and poetry, the Lao have remained a people of simple customs and habits, deeply marked

by a religious awareness synthesized by a feeling of peace and brotherhood with all living beings.

The Indo-Chinese Peninsula was the recipient of ancient Indian civilization and culture epitomized by the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and later it received the Buddhist *Theravada* philosophy which came to it via Burma and Ceylon. While Buddhism provided the moral basis and a practical code for daily life, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* became entrenched in the emotional and artistic life of the people. In time the art of temple-building, sculpture, carving on wood and stone, drama, theatre and ballet drew their inspiration from the episodes of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Since artistic expression requires ample material resources and comparative freedom from the cares of daily life, the Royal Courts became the repositories of the *Ramayana* culture. The Buddhistic temples with the humanistic approach were catering to the social needs of the community. They provided seminaries, scholars, hospitals and homes for the aged and disabled, they looked after the poor. The corridors of these temples resounded with the reading of the *Ramayana* text, while their walls were ornamented with murals describing scenes from the sacred Indian texts. In many temples figures of pre-Buddhistic Hindu gods and goddesses were boldly chiseled or carved on wood or stone. They were rich spiritual fare for the kindly and simple people of greater India. And in all these countries the fabric of beauty inspired by the *Ramayana* provided a splendid canopy for preservation and protection of the pure moral teachings of the Buddha.

(Extract from : The *Ramayana* Tradition
in Asia: Sahitya Akademi;
Ed.V.Raghavan, New Delhi 1989.)

RAMAVATAR (RAMAYANA) BY GURU GOBIND SINGH

BALJIT TULSI

Anation survives which has the strength of character, which has sense of high-souled duty, which has power of self and collective discipline, which has high mental and moral conduct and above all which has resources of inspiring literature.

India is fortunate to have *Ramayana* as its spring of inspirational literature. Literature is the main and most fundamental medium which has the force to bring about change in the pattern of thinking, which has the strength to brighten up the heights of the high ideals, which has the power to move the highly hard and ever unmoved individuals, which has the capacity of performing miracles of transforming human, mental and moral self.

Three hundred years ago, a great heroic drama was enacted on the soil of the five rivers against communal tyranny, narrow-mindedness, treachery and perfidy of the fanatical rulers of those times and their myopic policies. It was a crusade for truth, justice, human freedom and equality. Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth master of the *Sikhs*, was the hero of the

play. Communal tyranny had rendered the nation weak, timid and insecure. Guru Gobind Singh revived the oriental spirit of the Indian, infused in them the spirit of nationalism, filled in them the spirit of courage and heroism, made them fearless and dauntless, stirred in them the spirit of truth and self-respect. He changed the outlook of the common man. He transformed them into heroes of the great epic, *Ramayana*, made them realize their own intrinsic and essential worth. He was a great litterateur. He was an eminent scholar. He wrote the great epic in the language of the common man and effected a thorough change in the mental, moral and spiritual life of the people.

Aim of writing:

In the most explicit words he made a declaration "call me Gobind Singh only if I am able to produce great warriors, distinguished soldiers and brave heroes". He applied all his force, all his strength, all his knowledge, all his ability, all his competence and all his talents of writing to make it a living reality.

(Extracted from 'The Ramayana Tradition in Asia:' Sahitya Akadami Ed.V.Raghawan, New Delhi 1989)

ORAL TRADITION OF THE RAMAYANA IN BENGAL

Introduction

ASUTOSH BHATTACHARYA

Oral tradition of literature in a social group develops in two ways—firstly it is derived from literary source, secondly it originates in an unlettered social group of ultimately becomes the source of its art literature. The oral tradition of the *Ramayana* in the various States of Indian Union has been based on the great Indian epic, the *Ramayana* by the great poet Valmiki. Though composed in classical Sanskrit not intelligible to the unlettered, yet due to the efforts of a class of oral expounders it was made understood to the unlettered mass irrespective of caste and creed. It is apparent in the *Ramayana* itself that Lava and Kusa, the two sons of Ramachandra, the hero of the *Ramayana* were the first two expounders of the *Ramayana* and the great poet Valmiki himself gave special training to them in this method. Therefore, it seems that since the very completion of the great epic by Valmiki it is being expounded before the mass in a method intelligible to the unlettered. Thus illiteracy has never been a bar in India for learning in literature, philosophy and even higher scriptures. This practice of popular exposition of the *Ramayana* continued throughout the centuries and throughout the whole of India and has been handed down to the present day in an absolutely unbroken tradition.

Kathakata :

By *Kathakata* is meant discourse of the *Puranas* and the epics specially the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavata* by a literate person making the theme more attractive than understandable to the unlettered and half-literate by means of music, dramatic monologue and prose narrations. It is only one man's performance. The *Kathak*, the reciter or the expounder first of all recites a couplet from the texts either in Sanskrit or in archaic Bengali and then goes on to elucidate it by quoting parallel couplets from the recognized authorities making his elucidation popular by appropriate popular similes and metaphors and music sung by himself and reciting some monologues. As far as the *Ramayana* is concerned this may continue for a week, twelve days or even upto a full month, according to the demand of the situation. In the Bengali translation of the *Ramayana* by Krittivasa, some of the traditions which developed orally due to *Kattakata* have also been incorporated.

(Extracted from “the *Ramayana* Tradition in Asia”. Sahitya Akadami Ed.V.Raghavan: New Delhi 1989)

THE ROLE OF THE SACRED BOOK IN RELIGION-THE RAMAYANA

HARRY S.BUCK

Rama has taught me that each of us must work authentically according to our own best light.

Ramayana to me is human experience.

Religious traditions are like waves, and as waves pass through their various mediums, individual particles remain in the same area with relation to each other, moving in circular or elliptical paths. The wave itself moves lineally, but when it encounters an obstacle or change in the ocean floor, it responds in new and complex patterns. The particles may be compared to individual phenomena, remarkably similar throughout human society. The wave can suggest a religious tradition passing across generations and cultures, radically changing its characteristics when it encounters new contexts. The figure of Rama is such a wave. It rolled across south and southeast Asia changing with each new medium but maintaining its own vital power.

Rama, like religious matters generally, must be viewed as part of human experience, not separable from the other modules of experience. In its fullest sense, the experience of religious living encompasses a total commitment to something seen as ultimate concern, lived out with such intensity that it transforms the life of the devotee and conditions his relationship with those about him. Thus, religion can be used to discover meaning in existence and to organize life into significant patterns, even if the average worshipper at shrine, mosque, church, or temple is no more aware of the nuances of what its syntax or grammar. "The

externalia of religion—symbols, institutions, doctrines, practices—can be examined separately. But things are not themselves religion, which lies rather in the area of what these mean to those who are involved". Thus, recalling the incident where Hanuman's chest was ripped open to display Rama and Sita seated on a throne in his heart, we can adapt the words of an old Christian song. "He lives. He lives... you ask me how I know he lives, he lives within my heart". From this point of view, the *Ramayana* is not a sixth century or third century book. It is a contemporary book, changing its meaning with each succeeding age.

The Story and Book

Fundamental human needs lie behind all great masterpieces of religious literature. The great scriptures never appear in a vacuum, but they rather combine various approaches with differing degrees of subtilty in order to invest temporal existence with an aspect of eternity. No book can become an object of veneration unless it both speaks to the spirit of a people and reflects that people's values. Although such a book can be appreciated throughout the world—the *Ramayana* is often studied as great literature apart from any devotional commitment—sacred books as such remain the peculiar property of faithful communities where they can be nurtured by their accredited teachers. Typically, events believed to bear redemptive significance are transmitted through a narrative, and just as typically, the narrative itself becomes more important than the events it narrates, as the events

described are endowed with cosmic significance.

The Story

Few of us approach the world simply as object; we encounter it within whatever frame of reference we live. Whatever we describe reveals as much about our own presumptions as it does about the object being described. Gods, then—whether in India, Greece, or Canaan—are neither separate entities nor concepts so much as they are projections of human searches of significance and meaning and the preservation of order. Theoretical explanations, which can satisfy the minds of a spiritual or intellectual elite, disappoint most persons who turn more readily to a narrative.

The story inevitably takes on certain archetypal aspects as it is told and retold because it becomes community property. The repetition of the story brings salvation by recalling an archetypal event in which God acted—in which he is still acting—for human benefit. In saving stories, persons see themselves and the world not just as they are but as they believe they ought to be.

In many cases there may be some factual basis for the narrative, but the mature form of the story will almost invariably be told in an archetypal mythic pattern. Hence, the episodes recounted are not merely *historisch* (“something that happened”), they constitute a *Geschichte* (“an event of enduring significance”), or to rebaptize a world that has often a particularistic connotation, a *Heilsgeschichte* (“the story of an archetypal event that brings salvation”). The narrative recalls God’s redemptive acts, but it also recreates them. Such a story is more than story. It is a reality lived, a sanction for a

way of life, and a pattern for conduct and for worship. In it, the power of the Word itself releases grace by its repetition.

(Extracted from “The Ramayana Tradition in Asia” Sahitya Academi Ed.V.Raghavan, New Delhi 1989.)

THE EPICS AND THE PURANAS (1/11)

C.P.RAMASWAMY AIYAR

1. Introduction:

A study of the *Itihasas* and the *Puranas* is of particular significance to modern India. One of the major problems facing the country today is the need to resuscitate and reinterpret those material ideals, which for the most part lying dormant, may still be clearly discerned as the life-force which, through countless centuries, has maintained the continuity in India's culture. Those ideals are treasured in our *Itihasas* and *Puranas*, in simple language woven into narrative and dramatic episode and exemplified in characters portrayed. Perusal of our scriptures especially a study of our *Itihasas* and the *Puranas* will play a part in the realization of the present day need to grasp afresh those ancient national ideals, so that they may once more become the basis of national life and a bond of national unity. May they become a guiding light not only to India, but to the whole world in its complex journey through the maze of modern civilization.

The Epic Age during which the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* received their final shape was a period of racial and ideological conflict and historically speaking, this period produced the two great Epics as well as the Manu *Dharma-sastra*, the Codes of Yajnavalkya, Narada, and Parasara and the earlier *Puranas*. Great mental expansions and new political outlooks were the characteristics of this age. Gradually, the idea was evolved that India, in spite of its various kingdoms, races, and

creeds, was essentially one. This fundamental unity is enforced in several passages of the *Mahabharata*. The Kurma *Purana*, in describing *Bharatavarsa*, emphasizes its unity notwithstanding the diversities of race and culture; and the earlier *Vayu Purana* strikes the same note. The Hindu scheme of life expressed in the formula, *dharma-artha-kama-moksa* which had originated earlier was, during this period, perfected and codified. Ideal types of character representing all stages of human life became epic heroes. Not only the ideal *sannyasin* or the *rsi* but the ideal king, the loyal wife and the brother, the disciplined and diligent student, the citizen active in his vocation and the peasant as the guardian of fundamental virtues and loyalties were presented in the *Itihasas* and *Puranas* as examples and symbols of the variegated Indian life. The influence cannot be exaggerated of such examples of human potentiality and achievement as Rama, Lakshmana, Kausalya, Sita, Hanuman, Bharata, Yudhishtira and Bhishma. The formula afore-mentioned of *dharma-artha-kama-moksa*, became more than formal when it was illustrated by the lives of the countless characters described in the *Puranas* and the *Itihasas*. The stories, epilogues, and parables contained in them were not put together for the purpose of furnishing a chronologically accurate history. Recent researches have demonstrated that the *Itihasas* and the *Puranas* are more accurate historically, geographically, and chronologically than was at one time supposed; but it can never be forgotten that they were composed rather to furnish examples and models

than to record specific historical incidents in dry detail. Moreover, while each *Purana* exalts a particular deity, it must be noted that the catholicity and the uniformity of the Hindu approach to the Supreme are affirmed at every turn. For instance, Rama is described as a devotee of Siva and Aditya; and so was Arjuna. The *Vayu Purana*, in fact, asserts that he who affirms superiority or inferiority among the divine manifestations is a sinner.

From the time of Macaulay, it has been a favourite pursuit of some critics to deride the geography and description of the *Puranas* and to accuse them of exaggeration or distortion. Some special virtues are, in their opinion, grossly over-accentuated as in the cases of Sivacakravartin, Hariscandra and Karna. In many ancient scriptures, including the Egyptian Book of the Dead and the Old and the New Testaments, there are to be found similar inherent improbabilities and historical contradictions. But it must not be overlooked that these great products of the human mind were not intended to be substitutes for historical handbooks or for Directories like those of Baedeker or Murray.

It can well be asserted that the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* have throughout been the foundations of Hindu ethics and beliefs.

Whereas the Epics deal with the actions of heroes as mortal men and embody and illustrate both human virtues and frailties, the *Puranas* mainly celebrate the power and the work of various super-human personages and deities.

The contents of many *Puranas* are very old but many of the later ones have a definite sectarian bias. They are nevertheless a valuable record of the various Hindu beliefs which originated next in order to the *Vedas* and incorporated hero-worship as well as divine worship, and they may be rightly described as essentially pantheistic in character. Although a particular divinity may be glorified, nevertheless, there is an underlying quest for unity of life and of Godhead.

Regarded as a whole, the *Puranas* and the *Upapuranas* are neither mutually contradictory nor even purely sectarian. They furnish a compendious portrayal of human rights and obligations and an expressive description of Hindu life as it has been and ought to be lived.

The *Ramayana* furnishes impressive illustrations of cause being followed inevitably by effect-karma, rebirth and destiny; it embodies generalizations of experience in private and public affairs enshrined in proverbs, maxims, and rules of chivalry and statecraft.

The *Mahabharata* on the other hand contains an illuminating account of the Indian genius, both in its nobility and greatness, and its tragic weakness and insufficiency. It stresses that an underlying purpose and a guiding destiny are inseparable from human history.

Devotion and detachment in several forms are embodied in attractive stories in the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavata* and other *Puranas*.

The *Itihasas* and the *Puranas* contain in them a number of remarkable episodes: The *Bhagavat Gita*, *Astavakra Samhita*, *Avadhuta Gita*, *Anu Gita*, *Uddhava Gita* etc.

The basic message of all the *Gitas* is thus enunciated in the *Astavakra Samhita*: You (the immanent self) do not belong to the *Brahmana* or any other caste, nor to any *asrama*. You are beyond visual perception and detached (i.e. beyond attachment) and beyond forms, witnessing all phenomena, you are happy (i.e. you preserve your equilibrium)

(Extracted from the Cultural Heritage of India Vol.II. The RKM Institute of Culture, Calcutta 1993.)

THE PURANAS-PHILOSOPHY MADE CONCRETE

We see that in every religion there are three parts—I mean in every great and recognized religion. First, there is the philosophy which presents the whole scope of that religion, setting forth its basic principles, the goal and the means of reaching it. The second part is mythology, which is philosophy made concrete. It consists of legends relating to the lives of men, or of supernatural beings, and so forth. It is the abstractions of philosophy concretized in the more or less imaginary lives of men and supernatural beings. The third part is the ritual. This is still more concrete and is made up of forms and ceremonies, various physical attitudes, flowers and incense, and many other things, that appeal to the senses. In these consists the ritual. You will find that all recognized religions have these three elements. Some lay more stress on one, some on another.

ANCIENT VEDIC LITERATURES REFER TO *ITIHASAS* AND *PURANAS*

K.K.HANDIQUE – (2/11)

1. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* refers to *Itihasas* and *Puranas*:
2. The *Chandogya Upanishad* talks of *Itihasas* and *Puranas*
3. Gautama recommends a study of *Itihasas* and *Puranas* in his *Dharma Sutras*.
4. Panini refers to *Puranas* as ancient.
5. Late *Vedic* and early classical period knew *Puranas* and *Itihasas*.
6. Asvalayana *Grihya Sutra*, Apastamba *Dharma Sutra*, Gohila *Grihya sutras*, *Vedic hymns*, talk about *Itihasas* and *Puranas*, the Sastras quote from then extant *Puranas*.
7. Yaska and Brihaddevata (pre 5th century BC) refer to the *Itihasas*.
8. The *Artha shastra* equates the *Itihasas* with the *Veda*.
9. A *Bharata* epic existed prior to *Sutra* Literature and Panini.
10. Apart from *Itihasas* and *Puranas*, two other forms of narrative composition *akhyayika* and *akhyana* were in vogue in early classical Sanskrit. (They are mentioned in Panini and the *Mahabhashya* of Patanjali.

(Extracted from the Cultural Heritage of India Vol.II, The RKM Institute of Culture
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INFLUENCE OF THE EPICS ON INDIAN LIFE AND LITERATURE (4/11)
NILMADHAV SEN

The *Vedas*, the *Upanisads*, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and the eighteen *Puranas*, form the massive basement on which stands the magnificent edifice of Indian religion and thought, culture and literature. Of these, the two great epics form the strongest single factor that has sustained and held together Indian Life, in all its growth and ramifications, through the vicissitudes of centuries. The *Vedas* were confined chiefly to the priestly and aristocratic classes, and the *Upanisads*, to the intellectuals and philosophers; it was the epics and the *Puranas* that became the real *Vedas* for the masses and moulded their life and character for the last two thousand years. There is hardly any other work whose influence on all aspects of life in India has been so profound, lasting, and continuous as that of the epics and the *Puranas*. Language being the first and foremost means of expressing feelings and communicating thoughts, an account of the influence which epic poetry has exercised over Indian literature embodied in the different languages and in their various stages is given at some length, in every survey of Indian literature.

(Extrated.....)

BOX ITEMTHE CULTURE OF RAMAYANA
SWAMI NIHSREYASANANDA 3/11

There is no doubt that Rama's character as a hero and as a man of virtuous action and that of Sita as a model heroine have been instrumental in shaping the lives of many who genuinely aspire after *dharma*. Valmiki has wisely upheld the ideal of *dharma* which has a comprehensive sweep and which enables its votaries, irrespective of their vocation or status in society, to enjoy inner perfection and freedom while dedicating their virtues to the welfare of others. If this ideal, exemplified by the sage in the motives and activities of his numerous characters, is grasped and put into practice, all the creeds may survive the present crisis, work side by side without the feeling of hostility, and make people intelligent, efficient, and self-sacrificing enough to solve the problems of the family, country, or even of the world as a whole.

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(6/11)

The influence of the **Ramayana** and the **Mahabharata** on the Life of Indians

NILMADHAV SEN

The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* portray pictures of ideal men and women, and preach through a popular medium the gospel of *Bharata-Dharma*. The *Ramayana* does this by glorifying domestic relations and family life 'sustaining the entire social structure', and the *Mahabharata*, by its lesson 'that hatred breeds hatred, that covetousness and violence lead inevitably to ruin, that the only real conquest is the battle against one's lower nature'. Rama represents an ideal son and king, a perfect Man, Laksmana and Bharata ideal brothers, Sita an ideal wife, a perfect Woman, Hanuman an ideal devotee, Yudhisthira an ideal upholder of moral virtues, and Bhishma and Arjuna ideal heroes. Parents and elders have for generations used the themes and stories of the epics for imparting wisdom and instruction to the younger generation. The themes are at once appealing and entertaining, and they create an indelible impression on the young minds; every incident and story (and the moral going with it) become deeply engraved thereon. The educative influence of the epics on an Indian further is sustained through all the stages of life by such means as mass recitations of the epics in the temple, or in public on festive and other occasions (the earliest reference to which is found in Kumaralata's *Kalpana-manditika*, a work of second century A.D.) and by such open-air popular performances as the *Rama-lila* and *Bharata-lila*, *Yatras* and *Palaganas*, *Yaksaganas* and *Dasavataras*, dances like the *Kathakali* and *Pandavanrtya*, and

regular dramatic performances—these are entertainments which always attract vast and varied crowds, irrespective of creed or faith, and they are an evidence of the perennial and dynamic appeal of the epics to all. To millions of Hindus it has been a religious duty to recite at least a few verses from the epics before taking their meals.

Works which have affected so large a population over so long a period of time and moulded the character and the civilization of so vast a region, often transcending geographical limits, can ill afford to be termed mere 'epics'. Indeed, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* should better be regarded as the *true history of India*, history not of events, but of the urges and aspirations, strivings and purposes of the nation. Encyclopaedic in nature, together they form 'the content of our collective unconscious' wherein breathe 'the united soul of India and the individual souls of her people'. The two epics represent the two 'moods of our Aryan civilization', viz. moral and intellectual, and it is, indeed, impossible to grasp the true spirit and meaning behind 'the moving drama of Indian life' without a thorough and intelligent understanding of the epics. 'And to trace the influence of the Indian epics on the life and civilization of the nation, and on the development of the modern languages, literatures, and religious, reforms', in the words of R.C.Dutt, 'is to comprehend the real history of the people during the three thousand years'. The epics have thus been

the 'deep well of strength' to our forefathers, from which they derived—and which inspires us to derive—the 'enduring vitality' of our cultural and spiritual basis as well as of our social and political life.

Glory to the twin poets whose names are lost in the morass of time, but whose message brings strength and peace in a thousand streams to the door of millions of men and women even to this day, and incessantly carries silt from long-past centuries and keeps fresh and fertile the soul of India” – Rabindranath Tagore.

(Extracted from the Cultural Heritage of India, Vol.II The RKM Institute of Culture, Calcutta 1993)

BOX ITEM

INFLUENCE OF THE EPICS ON INDIAN LIFE AND CULTURE (5/11)

NILMADHAV SEN

From a study of epic derivatives in classical and regional literature, it is very easy to imagine how profound the epic influence must have been on art and culture, and on the general texture of social life. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are, in the words of Havell, 'as much the common property of all Hinduism as the English Bible and Shakespeare belong to all English-speaking people. The Indian epics contain a portrait-gallery of ideal types of men and women which afford to every good Hindu the highest exemplars of moral conduct, and every Hindu artist an inexhaustible mine of subject matter'.

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GITAS IN THE PURANAS (7/11)

PARAMESWARA AIYAR

The Vedic religion expounds the goal and the means; the goal is *tattva-jnana*, knowledge of the Reality, which is expounded in the *jnana-kanda*, while the means to it is expounded in the *upasana-kanda* and the *karma-kanda*. In expounding the *dharma* taught by the Vedas, the preceptors sought to co-ordinate and harmonize all the texts and to resolve the apparent contradictions in them. This is known as the synthetic method (*ekavakyata* or *samanvaya*). In the *Karma-Mimamsa* the texts of the *karma-kanda* are sought to be co-ordinated and harmonized and explained. The theory about the goal and the practice laid down for its attainment must also be harmonized with each other. The Upanisads and the *Sariraka-Sutras* lay greater emphasis on *tattvajnana*. The Bhagavad-Gita further emphasizes the practice of the means of attainment. Freedom from bondage comes only to him who in his daily life sincerely practises *niskama-karma* enunciated by Sri Krsna, which demands unbounded *prema-bhakti* (loving devotion) to Paramesvara. *Tattvajnana* and *Paramesvara-bhakti* must therefore exist together and work together for their mutual development and final consummation. Any system of religious philosophy which does not bestow equal importance on both these branches will be defective. The *Bhagavata purana* brings out this point prominently by saying: The practice of *dharma* generates *bhakti*, *bhakti* generates *vairagya* (dispassion), these two together generate *jnana*, and all the three must function jointly to enable the

sadhaka to realize, integrally and differentially, the Reality called *Brahman*, *Paramatman*, and *Bhagavat*. Sri Sankaracarya propounded the Advaita system establishing the synthetic unity of the *Prasthanatraya* (the triple foundation of Vedanta) by applying the synthetic method to it and harmonizing the teachings contained therein. To bring out this harmony prominently, he had to bring the *Bhagavad-Gita* to the forefront and glorify it as a work of great authority, as weighty as the *Upanisads* and the *Sariraka-Sutras*. All the great spiritual preceptors who appeared after him followed his example and adopted the same method. *Visistadvaita*, *Dvaita*, *Suddhadvaita*, *Bhedabhedadvaita*—all sought the sanction of the *Bhagavad-Gita*. All of them sought to establish that the *Bhagavad-Gita* supported their particular doctrine. When they could not directly get the sanction of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, they composed *Gitas* to fit their cults by imitating the *Bhagavad-Gita*, or copying from it without acknowledgement. Such are *Rama-Gita*, *Surya-Gita*, *Ganesa-Gita*, *Devi-Gita*, *Siva-Gita* and the like. Just as the *Bhagavad-Gita* speaks of Vasudeva as Paramesvara, the other *Gitas* speak of Rama, Surya, Ganapati, the Goddess, Siva and the like, as the highest Deity according to their predilections.

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THE MYTHOLOGY OF POPULAR
HINDUISM
R.N.DANDEKAR

The mythology of popular Hinduism has always tended to become richer and richer, as time passed, on account of the addition of legends pertaining, on the one hand, to the victories of the numerous gods, goddesses, and godlings over the various *raksasas* or Titans of Hindu mythology, and, on the other, to their acts of grace in respect of their devotees and worshippers. There was further added to Hinduism an ever increasing mass of mythological details, whose origin can be traced to various minor cults, such as the serpent-worship and the worship of *grahadevatas* (planetary deities) and *grama-devatas* (village deities). Again, we must not forget the large number of legends occasioned by the remarkably ingenious manner in which the characters of certain ancient sages, like Narada, have been developed by the fertile mythological imagination of Hindu poets, bards, and minstrels. Philosophy is often described as the foundation of religion, ritual as its superstructure, and mythology as its detailed decoration. In the case of Hinduism, however, mythology is not merely its decoration; it is its essential constituent factor. Mythology is at once the strength and weakness of Hinduism—strength, because mythology represents some of the distinctive features of Hinduism, such as toleration, broad sympathy, liberal outlook, and assimilative dynamism and, at the same time, elevating power; and weakness, because there is the danger of the true spirit of Hinduism being undermined by the weight of its mythological richness.

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GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE
PURANAS
RAJENDRA CHANDRA HAZRA

After the present sectarian *Puranas* had come into existence, Hindu society did not become stagnant and immune from further disturbances, but had to fight hard against the influence of the Tantric religion and the foreign invaders such as the Abhiras, Gardabhilas, Sakas, Yavanas, Bahlikas, and outlandish dynasties, the successors of the Andhras. In order to face successfully these fresh troubles, the Hindu rites and customs had again to be modified and adapted to the needs and circumstances of the people. Hence, with the changes in Hindu society during the four centuries from the third to the sixth, the *Puranas* also had to be recast with the addition of many new chapters on worship, vows, initiation, consecration etc., which were rendered free from Tantric elements and infused with Vedic rituals, in order that their importance as works of authority on religious and social matters might not decrease. With the great spread and popularity of Tantric religion from the seventh or eighth century onward, the *Puranas* had to be re-edited once more by introducing more and more Tantric elements into the *Puranic* rituals. Now, the work of re-editing could be done in three different ways: (i) by adding fresh chapters to the already existing ones, (ii) by replacing the latter by the former, and (iii) by writing new works bearing old titles. All these processes having been practised freely with respect to almost all the *Puranas*, not rarely by people of different sects, a few retained much of their earlier materials, some lost many of the earlier chapters, which were replaced by others of later dates, and some became totally new works. But they had all come to possess a common feature, namely, that

all comprised units belonging to different ages. It should be mentioned here that additions to the *Puranas* were not always fresh compositions, but chapters and verses were often transferred from one *Purana* to another, or from the *Smṛti* and other Sanskrit works to the *Puranas*. That this practice of transference began much earlier than A.D. 1100, is evidenced by King Ballalasena, who says in his *Dana-sagara* that the *Linga Purana* took its chapters on 'big donations' from the *Matsya*, and that the *Viṣṇu-rahasya* and *Siva-rahasya* were mere compilations.

The great importance given to the *Puranas* as authoritative works on Hindu rites and customs roughly from the second century A.D. perverted the idea of the people of later ages as to the real contents of these works. It was thought that the five traditional characteristics—*sarga*, *pratisarga*, etc.—were meant for the *Upapuranas*, whereas the *Mahapuranas* were to deal with ten topics relating to cosmogony, religion, and society. Thus the *Bhagavata Purana* names these ten topics as follows: *Sarga* (primary creation), *Visarga* (Secondary creation), *Vṛtti* (means of subsistence), *rakṣa* (protection), *antara* (cosmic cycle ruled over by a Manu), *Vamśa* (genealogy of kings), *Vamśanucarita* (dynastic accounts), *Samsthā* (dissolution of the world) *hetu* (cause of creation etc.) and *apasraya* (final stay of all). According to the *Brahma-vaivarta Purana* they are: *srstī* (primary creation), *Visrstī* (secondary creation), *Sthiti* (stability of creation) *Palana* (protection), *karma-vasana* (desire for work) *Manu-varta* (information about the different Manus), *Pralaya-varṇana* (description of the final destruction of the world) *mokṣa-nirupana* (showing the way to release from rebirths) *Hari-kīrtana* (discourses on Hari), and *deva-kīrtana* (discourses on other gods).

How could the eighteen *Puranas*, which were the mouthpieces of sectaries following different faiths, be grouped together and regarded as equally important and authoritative by all of them, and how could they have believed deeply in this group, even at the sacrifice of their respective sectarian interests? In reply to these questions we may refer to the spirit of religious syncretism and sectarian rivalry, that went hand in hand in ancient India, and is found in Hindu society even at the present day. These tendencies must have supplied incentives to the recasting or rewriting of the same *Purana* sometimes by different deities in a particular *Purana* must have also resulted in this manner. Thus all the *Puranas* attained equal, or almost equal, importance in the eyes of the worshippers of Brahma, Viṣṇu, and Siva before the grouping was made.

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INDIAN MYTHOLOGY 8/11
R.N.DANDEKAR

Mythology is very aptly described as the language of the primitive. If philosophy attempts to discover the ultimate truth, mythology must be said to represent the human effort to attain at least to the penultimate truth, of which all experience is the temporal reflection. It is possible to psycho-analyze a people by means of a critical study of its Mythology. Through their numerous legends of Cosmogony, of gods, and of heroes, the Indians have given expression fuller and finer than any other people in the world—to their beliefs, ideals and traditions.

- a) Early *Vedic* Mythology has religion, mythology and magic inextricably interlaced. Asura-Varuna, Indra, Soma, Maruts, Asvins, Agni, Solar Divinities, Vishnu, Mitra Savitru, Yama, Rudra, Gandharvas and Apsaras, and Mythical sages such as Manu, Angiras and Bhrgu belong to this period.
- b) Vedic religion, *Brahmanas* and *Upanishad* have their own mythologies, some of them at least are historical and biographical e.g. Harischandra and Sunahsepa, Indra, Virocana, King Janaka, Maitreyi, Katyayani, and Yagnavalkya, figure in the *upanishadic* Mythology. Taking advantage of the favourable conditions already created by the Upanishads, through their non-acceptance of the absolute validity of the Vedas, non-Vedic religious systems, such as Buddhism and Jainism quickly spread. They adopted from Vedic Mythology, *Brahmanic* ritualism and

Upanishadic spiritualism, whatever was beneficial to them.

- c) In the post-*Upanishadic* period, popular Hindu Mythology, the Krishna Religion of Western and Central India is very important. Emergence of Vishnu, Shiva, and Devi as principal deities worshipped, *Bhakti* as the means of attaining God, a greater emphasis on ethical teachings than on metaphysical speculations, mark this period. A life of activism was specifically recommended as against renunciation *Loka Sangraha*, or social solidarity rather than individual emancipation was recognized as the goal of life and synthesis rather than scholastic dogmatism was made the watch word of progress is the field of knowledge.
- d) In the later period, the *Mahabharata* attained its present form, with Krishna being identified with Vishnu as an *avatara*; Vishnu, Siva and Brahma, the *trimurtis* came to be recognized as the most important deities. The concept of *avatara*, *manvantara*, *yuga*, and the rise of female divinities marked this period

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THE PURANAS (11/11)
RAJENDRA CHANDRA HAZRA

It is as religious works that the *Puranas* have been respectfully studied for centuries, and are still read, by the people of this country, because these works have shown them the easiest way of attaining peace and perfection in life and have put forth, often in the forms of myths and stories, easy solutions of those difficult problems with which one is sure to be confronted in one's religious and social life. As a matter of fact, the *Puranas* have rendered the greatest service in effecting the racial and religious unification of the diverse people of India. They have treated every religious faith of the soil, unless it was dogmatically atheistic, with respect and with a synthetic attitude, and accorded to it a position in the *Puranic* pantheism by explaining its deity and its principles through a reconciliation of the teachings of *Samkhya* and *Vedanta*. It is the *Puranas* which have brought about unity in diversity, and taught religious toleration to the followers of different faiths by making them realize that God is one, though called by different names. It is mainly through these works that the *Vedic* ideas and ideals of religion and society have survived up to the present day and got wide circulation among the people of India, and outside. *The Puranas* are, therefore, perfectly justified when they say :

‘Yo vidyaccaturō vedan
sangopanisado dvijah
Na cet puranam samvidyan naiva sa
syad vicaksanah
Itihasa-puranabh hyam vedam
samupabrmhayet
Bibhety alpa-srutad vedo mama
yam praharisyati’.

That twice-born (*Brahmana*), who knows the four *Vedas* with the *Angas* (supplementary sciences) and the *Upanisads*, should not be (regarded as) proficient unless he thoroughly knows, the *Purana*. He should reinforce the *Vedas* with the *Itihasa* and the *Purana*. The *Vedas* are afraid of him who is deficient in traditional knowledge (thinking) ‘He will hurt me’.

The harmony which the *Puranas* brought about in the doctrines of ‘knowledge’, ‘action’, and ‘devotion’, and in the *Vedic* and non-*Vedic* view of life and conduct, exerted its influence in all strata of Hindu society, with the result that the life of the average Hindu of the present day presents a texture into which various ideas and practices of different times and regions have been interwoven with an unparalleled symmetry. In the eyes of a non-Hindu, the *Puranic* culture and religion appear as a bundle of contradictions. Yet a Hindu finds nothing difficult or inconsistent in his ideas and practices, and leads his life with perfect ease and harmony. He is rarely found to be absolutely foreign to the truths of life and conduct his ancestors discovered for him. Even an illiterate Hindu, living far away from the seats of learning, is not totally ignorant of the principles and philosophical truths taught in the *Puranas*; and as a result he has a very broad view of life and a deep sense of tolerance and accommodation, which can rarely be expected elsewhere of a person like him. This is so only because of the fact that the epics and the *Puranas*, have played a very important part in the life of the Hindus for more than two thousand years. They have brought home to the

common man the wisdom of the saints of the highest order without creating any discord. The authors of these works took every individual into consideration and made such prescriptions as would benefit him in his social and religious life. In giving recognition to a man's personal worth, they slackened the rigours of the caste system and declared, 'Being remembered, or talked of, or seen, or touched, a devotee of the Lord, even if he be a *Candala*, purifies (the people) easily. They allowed greater freedom to women and *Sudras* in social and religious matters, with the result that these neglected members of Hindu society could have their own religious life and worship their deities themselves. The religion and philosophy professed by the *Puranas* had such a great appeal that even scholars, philosophers, or religious reformers, like Vijnana Bhiksu, Ramanuja, Madhva, Vallabha, and Jiva Gosvamin, to mention only a few, very frequently drew upon the *Puranas* in their own works in support of their philosophical views; and this utilization led to the greater popularity of these works with all grades of Hindu population.

Sectarian excesses are sometimes found in the extant *Puranas*, but these are due to the want of proper understanding of the idea of absolute or unswerving devotion (*aikantiki bhakti*), on which the *Puranic* religion is principally based; and it is owing to this basic idea that Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, and other deities, have been praised individually as the highest one in some *Purana* or other.

From the survey of the eighteen principal *Puranas* it is evident that these works have been utilized through centuries not only for educating the mass mind and infusing it with the nobler ideas of life but also for tactfully solving the religious, social and economic problems which were created in

ancient India by the rise of various religious movements and the repeated invasions made by foreign races. A careful analysis of the devotional *vratas*, for instance, will amply testify to the *Puranic* Brahmana's deep insight into human nature as well as to their intelligence in cleverly tackling the various problems, especially those relating to women, from whom the life and spirit of a race proceed. It is undeniable that the extant *Puranas* can only on rare occasions, claim for themselves any real merit as literary productions, but it must be admitted that in addition to their character as records of ancient geography and political history, they are of inestimable value from the point of view of the history of religion and culture of the ancient Hindus. As a matter of fact, these works afford us, more than other works of the time, a great insight into all phases and aspects of Hinduism as well as into the inner spirit of the Hindu social system with its adaptability in all ages and under all circumstances, however unfavourable. They therefore deserve far more careful study than has hitherto been devoted to them.

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PERENNIAL MESSAGE OF THE *PURANAS*

DR.D.SRI RAMA RAO

Introduction :

The *Puranas* are stories which carry a perennial message of great importance in spiritual life. And the impact of the *Puranic* literature particularly on the Hindu Society, life and values is immense. Further it provides guidelines and instructions to man with regard to specific code of behaviour (*Swadharma*) and also supplies a general code of conduct. In other words, the *Puranic* literature provides a strong and broad basis for human development, inculcating such Universal values containing virtues like non-violence (*Ahimsa*), truthfulness (*Satyam*), control of body (*Dama*), and control of mind (*Shama*), compassion (*Daya*), charity (*Danam*) and cleanliness (*Shoucham*), austerity (*Tapa*) and wisdom (*Jnanam*), they also give instructions on specific behaviour pattern of each individual depending upon his life style, vocation and inclination. (*Varna, Ashrama and Dharma*). Thus *Puranas* serve a very practical purpose in bringing order and meaning into the individual and social life in the Hindu Society.

Vedic Symbolism :

All the *Puranas* are an attempt to convey a mystical message in a symbolic language. As a matter of fact, the source of inspiration for such an approach is the very *Vedas*. *Vedas* which are themselves mystical and symbolic.

The Ten incarnations ('*Dashavatar*') is a *Puranic* way of symbolizing the eternal drama that is going on within every human mind, that the Almighty always comes to the aid of the pious against the wicked.

Concept of *avatar*

The Lord Himself expounds the secret of His incarnation to his close devotee and friend Arjuna: 'Whenever there is a decay of righteousness and rise of unrighteousness, then I manifest myself'.

'For the protection of the virtuous and for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of *Dharma*, I am born in every age' (*The Gita* Ch IV 7-8).

When there is a moral or ethical crisis on earth and when the existing noble values are disregarded the Lord comes (takes an, *Avatara*) upon this earth to set the matters right. He sets before Himself the task of uprooting '*adharma*' and establishing '*dharma*' on firm foundations and achieves it as He wills. The message of each *Avatara* is for the evolution of mankind.

What is *dharma*?

Dharma connotes duty, virtue, righteousness, religion, charity all at once; in other words, that which helps us to morally sustain ourselves in this world is *Dharma*.

An interesting anecdote is narrated in one of the *Epics* pointing out the importance

and efficiency of *Dharma*. The *Mahabharatha* contains a story about a butcher, Dharmavyadha who carried on his duties without any attachment and who dutifully served his parents. As a result of this, he was recognized as a great follower of *Dharma*.

A certain celibate (*Brahmachari*) by virtue of his penance, acquired some supernatural powers. A bird innocently put its droppings on his head. The celibate looked up enraged and the bird was reduced to ashes. Later he went to a house begging for food. The lady of the house asked him to wait as she was serving her husband. The infuriated celibate started shouting at the lady. But the lady calmly replied, "I am no bird to be burnt up by you". The *Brahmachari* was very much surprised that the lady knew about the incident. Humbled, he sought her guidance. The lady directed him to the butcher. The latter gave detailed instructions about service to parents, which was particularly pertinent to the celibate, who had completely ignored his obligations to his parents. The butcher was blessed by the Lord. It therefore follows that a strict and meticulous observer of *Dharma* (his duty) need not be afraid of anybody (or even death). For treading the path of devotion and *Dharma* no specific qualifications are needed except faith in the word of the scriptures.

The *Puranas* are very ancient, yet very much modern. In this sense, they are said to have a perennial significance. As Sri Aurobindo shows, 'You meet yourself and your own personality factors over and over again in the *Puranas* as it happened in the *Vedas*. It is this personal encounter with oneself that makes the *Puranas* eternally new'. When we understand the deeper meaning of the *Puranas*, we find that it is pure *Vedanta*.

The Philosophical Interpretation

In *Kenopanishad*, the third chapter contains a story which is a symbolic representation of the *Upanishadic* Truth. It attempts to objectify the philosophical and subjective narrations.

The gods (*Devas*) once won a victory over the demons (*Asuras*), but blinded by their success they started gloating over their achievements. In order to teach them a lesson, the Absolute Truth, gave a vision to the Gods in the form of an enchanting *Yaksha*. The gods requested Lord *Agni* and asked him to ascertain the identity of the spirit. Lord *Agni* hastened towards the spirit boastfully declaring that he is the Lord of Fire. The spirit placed a piece of grass in front of *Agni* and asked him to reduce it to ashes if he could. Lord *Agni* could not even warm the blade of grass and thus completely accepted his complete failure. Then for the second time, Lord *Vayu* was chosen to enquire and ascertain the identity of the strange vision. As before, the *Yaksha* ascertained the identity of *Vayu* and placed the same grass in front of *Vayu* and said, 'Please move this a bit if you can', and *Vayu* returned defeated and disappointed. Then *Indra*, was deputed to investigate the grand vision. But the tantalizing vision disappeared and *Indra* never turned back from his quest. At the very form where the Supreme had disappeared, Goddess Uma, appeared to bless the honest seeker. From her, on enquiry, *Indra* learnt that the *Yaksha* was none other than the Eternal Truth who assumed this vision and came to warn the gods against their stupidity in believing that they had won a victory over the demons on their own. For the victory and

glory of gods is due to that Eternal Truth (Brahman).

In order to understand the full depth of the story, a certain preliminary knowledge of the scriptural (*Shastric*) tradition and belief is necessary. The five phenomenal Elements viz. Ether, Air, Fire, Water and Earth *Akasa, Vayu, Agni, Jala* and *Prthvi* represent among themselves the sense-organs and the scriptural injunctions declare each one of them as a presiding deity of each of the organs.

In short, the failure of the two mighty gods *Agni* and *Vayu* to investigate, understand and know the exact identity of the *Yaksha*, is a statement of the *Upanishadic* Truth—“That it is different from what is known and It is beyond what is unknown—It being none other than the knower Himself”.

In the *Yaksha* story, Indra represents a student who is initiated into the Truth by Umadevi Herself—Science of Eternal Truth, (*Brahma Vidya*) which is the supreme Goal of peace within oneself. Examples, illustrations, comparisons and stories are often used in the *Upanishads* to explain to us the Inexplicable. So every story or illustration employed by the Seers of *Upanishads* needs a deep enquiry. But, the *Puranas* kept them alive (in *Vedic* language) in their structure and symbolism. Herein lies their great value.

Shrimad Bhagavatham continues to be a perennial source of inspiration, awakening the intellect of the humanity in general and particularity of this ancient land. Parables, stories, illustrations are used by the seers of the *Upanishads* to show us that spiritual realisation is very simple. In one line Brihadaranyakopanishad indicates what a seeker must do in order to make himself

fit for the final spiritual experience. These personal disciplines are (1) Calmness (*sama*) (2) Self-control (*dama*), (3) Mind withdrawn from all object-emoting-thoughts (*uparati*), (4) Capacity to suffer silently and nobly the little pin-pricks of life (*titiksha*), (5) Faith in yourself, in the scriptures and in Reality (*shraddha*) and (6) contentment with what you have been blessed with (*samadhana*). Equipped with these disciplines, when an individual ‘Wakes up’ to the ‘Higher’ plane of consciousness, he will have no more oscillations of the mind. These points can be gleaned from the life of Suka, who was the son of *Veda* Vyasa. To Suka is attributed the narration of Bhagavatam to Parikshit. Because Shuka knew the *Vedas* without being taught it is said that he was born with the knowledge of the Truth.

By the grace of Lord Shiva, right from his birth, Suka was endowed with wisdom and was conversant with the *Vedas*. However he approached Brihaspati as a student, and learnt quickly the *Vedas* and the scriptures at the feet of the teacher of the *Devas*, Brihaspati. Thus the necessity and importance of a preceptor is established here.

Vyasa, later instructed his son Suka to go to King Janaka to learn more about ‘Moksha’ and told him not to show his *yogic* powers but approach Janaka with humility. For all the questions posed by Suka, Janaka’s sagacious reply was, ‘It is only by means of knowledge and direct realization of the Truth that one becomes liberated. Such an understanding and realization cannot be acquired without the guidance of a *Guru*’.

‘Beholding ones *Atman* in all beings and all beings in one’s *Atman*, one should live without being attached to anything. He who views all beings as the same, praise and censure, pleasure and pain, gold and iron and the life and death with equanimity reaches the Supreme’. Janaka added, ‘You have already apprehended the Truth. Your mind is steady and tranquil. You are free from desires and are truly even-minded’. On hearing King Janaka’s words, Suka’s doubts and vacillations ceased.

Once it so happened, that Vyasa sat near the Ganga. When the naked *apsaras* sporting in the Ganga saw him they became agitated. Filled with a sense of shame, some plunged deep into the waters; some ran into the groves while some quickly covered themselves with their clothes. Recalling that the *apsaras* had not minded remaining undressed in Suka’s presence, Vyasa felt proud of his son but he was ashamed of himself.

One day, the celestial sage Narada met Suka when the later was alone and spoke to him at length about *Moksha*. However, Suka decided to display his *yogic* powers to the world and then cast off his body through *yoga* and attain the state of disembodied liberation. Though Vyasa felt proud of his son Suka, he was plunged into grief when Suka left him finally.

Dispassion, equanimity and mind control are vital for a spiritual aspirant—these are some of the lessons from Suka’s life.

The *Vedas* determine what is *Dharma*. *Dharma* is the main source of peace and happiness in this world. Even the acquisition of wealth and satisfaction of desires should be based on *Dharma*.

So *Veda* Vyasa proclaims in Mahabharata: ‘Why should not *Dharma* be observed if it yields wealth and desire’.

Hence the Lord incarnates to protect the good and destroy evil and for establishing righteousness (*Dharma*).

THE TRIBAL VIEW OF THE RAMAYANA: AN EXERCISE IN THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE

N.N.VYAS

The Ramayana constitutes a structural part of the Indian 'great' tradition, the other parts being the Mahabharata, *Puranas*, *smritis* and *brahmanas*. Robert Redfield has used the concepts of 'little' and 'great' traditions in his studies of Mexican communities. Influenced by this model, Milton Singer and McKim Marriott have conducted some studies on social changes in India utilizing this conceptual framework. The basic ideas in this approach are civilization and the social organization of tradition. The social organization of these civilizations operate on two levels, first that of the folk or unlettered peasants including the tribals, and second, that of the elite, or the 'reflective few'. The cultural processes in the former comprise the 'little' tradition and those in the latter constitute the 'great' tradition. There is, however, a constant interaction between these two levels of tradition.

It would be erroneous to believe that Indian civilization consists only of the Hindu-view of life. It also includes folk traditions and folk ways of the people who do not have a written history. The unity of Indian civilization is maintained by its cultural structure which perpetuates a unity of world view through cultural performances and their products. These cultural performances are institutionalized in festivals, fairs and rituals. In fact, Indian civilization can hardly be described either through the dichotomy of the Sanskritic and western traditions or that of the 'little' and 'great' traditions. S.C.Bube, among other social scientists, had expounded in his piece, 'The Study of Complex Cultures', in the book *Towards a Sociology of Culture in India*, edited by T.K.N.Unnithan, Indra Deva and Yogendra Singh (1965) that Indian tradition is far too

complex, besides consisting of a hierarchy of traditions, each of which needs to be analysed in order to unravel all the ramifications of change.

The tribals who have been living with caste Hindus have also acquired many of the traits of Hindu religious and folk tradition. There has been a constant interaction between the 'little' tradition of the tribal society and the 'great' tradition of caste Hindu society. The tribal society is a whole society and each social structure in it is segmentary. Each tribal ethnic group has a separate identity. We can argue that the multiple ethnic tribal groups residing in different cultural and ecological contexts have interacted similarly with the 'great' tradition of caste Hindus. This explanation is based on the premise of the anthropology of knowledge. Though a large number of tribal groups are found at different levels of development, they have a common existential basis, that is, they are found in hills and forests. Their illiteracy, general backwardness and above all their existence in the midst of nature—forest, hill and game—have provided them an ethno-methodology which interacts with the Hindu 'great' traditions in similar ways. It is this tribal existential basis which interprets the Hindu traditions in a specific way. And this is what is called the anthropology of knowledge. In other words, the knowledge of the tribals about the Hindi 'great' tradition, namely, in the present context, the Ramayana, is derived from the existential basis of the elements of tribal social structure. The classical story of the Ramayana as told by the Sanskrit poet, Valmiki, or the Hindi poet, Tulsidas is given

a different and an altogether distinctive interpretation of by the tribals of the country. If we investigate the story of the Ramayana prevalent at the folk level among the diverse tribal groups of the country (whether the Bhils of Rajasthan, Santhals of Chhotanagpur or Korkus of Madhya Pradesh), we find that they have a similar comprehension of the story of the Ramayana. This can be explained by the fact that though the tribal social structures have a social differentiation, they spring from common existential situations. The tribal reality of life everywhere in the country is the same. And this anthropological knowledge is the cause a similar interpretation and understanding of the Ramayana.

(From Ramakatha in T/F tradition of India
ASI/Seagull books, Calcutta 1993)



THE PURANAS ON EVOLUTION

Man is like an infinite spring, coiled up in a small box, and that spring is trying to unfold itself; and all the social phenomena that we see the result of this trying to unfold. All the competitions and struggles and evils that we see around us are neither the causes of these unfoldments, nor the effects. As one of our great philosophers says—in the case of the irrigation of a field, the tank is somewhere upon a higher level, and the water is trying to rush into the field, and is barred by a gate. But as soon as the gate is opened, the water rushes in by its own nature; and if there is dust and dirt in the way, the water rolls over them. But dust and dirt are neither the result nor the cause of this unfolding of the divine nature of man. They are co-existent circumstances, and, therefore, can be remedied.

Now, this idea, claims the Vedanta, is to be found in all religions, whether in India or outside of it; only, in some of them, the idea is expressed through mythology, and in others, through symbology.

‘FROM GANDHIJI TO GONDS EVERYONE HAS USE FOR RAMAKATHA’

BY K.S.SINGH

The epics, aptly described by Jawaharlal Nehru as the story of India, were not only religious texts but also historical documents, anthropological treatise. Chakravarty Rajagopalachari, who may be described as a modern Valmiki because of his rendition of the *Ramayana* into English and because he did more than anyone else to popularize the work among the Indian elite, mentions an incident. Once, while discussing with Gandhi how love could develop between their daughter and son, sheltered and separated by distance, the *Mahatma* asked, ‘Has she not read the *Ramayana*?’

As one interested in the secular aspects of the diffusion of epic traditions I could not but be impressed by the manner in which I saw them at work. When I started my career as a researcher about thirty years ago I saw the process of diffusion as a two-fold one in what we call a culture contact situation. On the one hand I collected a number of songs on *Rama-katha* composed by tribal and non-tribal poets which seemed like verbatim translations of the story, rendered with passion and conviction. This also reflected the influence of the Oriya and Bengali versions of *Rama-katha* prevalent in the Hindi belt. On the other hand—and this is important—there were also songs which appeared older, more closely related to the tribal world view and their mores, which suggested that some aspects of *Rama-katha* had almost been internalized. In the course

of researches subsequently conducted I came across various versions of *Rama-katha* among the Mundas, Gonds, Korkus, Kols, Savaras, Bondo and so on, which did not suggest the existence of any mini-*Ramayana* or mini-*Rama-katha* as such but represented an echo from the past, a stirring of tribal memorial, of what they might have imbibed through the teachings of the mendicants called Gossains who traveled through their land. They also reflected a sense of awe and admiration for the heroes; and, sometimes, delight and fun at their presence in their homeland. There is even a streak of irreverence in the *Rama-katha* versions of some of the tribes who also identify themselves, without any inhibition and in a forthright manner, with what we might call the anti-heroes, such as Meghanada or Ravana.

We might recall at this stage the two major works which have influenced scholarship in the area. The first consists of the writings of Verrier Elwin in the area of what he always loved to describe as the aboriginal *Purana*. He collected and wrote down the folklore, including the epic and *puranic* lore, in the tribal areas of middle India and the north-east. The other was masterly survey of *Rama-katha* done by the distinguished Jesuit scholar Fr Gamil Bulcke. Originally published as a Ph.D. dissertation, *Rama-katha* in Hindi went into two editions by 1972. It deals with the origin, evolution and spread of *Rama-katha*.

Ramakatha in T/F Traditions of India
ASI-Seagull Books Calcutta 1993.

INFLUENCE OF THE RAMAYANA TRADITION
ON FOLKLORE OF CENTRAL INDIA

MAHENDRA KUMAR MISHRA

The present study is based mainly on the available folklore material of central India. While studying it, the influence of the *Ramayanic* tradition upon the indigenous tradition has been noted; and the parochialization of the universal characters of the great epic tradition and its influence on many ethnic groups have also formed part of this micro-study.

The authors of the epics have given due importance to each and every part of India encompassing lands, rivers, mountains, forests, different ethnic cultures and customs. Again, the assimilation of the *Ramayana* tradition into regional cultures and subcultures has involved from a spiritual phenomenon identifying the incarnations of God (*avatara*) with folk heroes. They are associated with various regional traditions of India. By identifying the respective regions and places with the *avatars* and their mythical and miraculous events, the local folk groups identify themselves as part of the larger Indian Culture, thus contributing to national and cultural unity. Many little communities with their regional traditions have been deeply attracted towards the mainstream of the Indian 'great' tradition through these epics. Thus the *Ramayana* forms the 'centre of the integration' of Indian civilization and has a great influence on the 'network of regional cultures'.

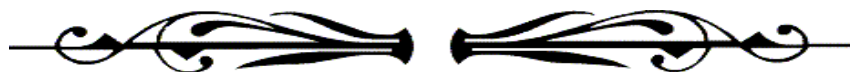
Much of the story of the *Ramayana* remains the same with the tribals. If we analyse the tribal *Ramayana* from the

perspective of the anthropology of knowledge in terms of the interactions of the Hindu 'great' tradition and the tribal local traditions, the following interpretations can be made :

1. Rulers are seen as always cruel, deceitful and exploitative.
2. Tribal life is sustained through the observance of magic and rituals.
3. Human subsistence lies in killing animals and eating their meat.
4. Procreation provides continuity to society.

In conclusion it may be observed that tribal knowledge about the world, including the Hindu 'great' tradition, depends much on this existential social situation. the tribal ethno-methodology plays a vital role in borrowing culture traits from other cultures. Knowledge is not created in a vacuum: it emerges out of the wider social contexts.

(Ramakatha in T/F traditions of India
ASI-Seagull books Calcutta 1993.)



SOME INSPIRING RAMA-KATHA FOLK VERSIONS

In Chhatisgarh also the popularity of *bansgeet* is predominant, with similar forms and matter, though the language is different from that of western Orissa. The Gaur bard Bhajan. Nial of Kapsi village in Kalahandi district is the informant. The name of the epic is *Kotrabaina-Ramela*, the names of the hero and heroine.

The story form of the folk epic is as follows:

Kotrabaina was village farmer. His job was to tend sheep and cows and to sell milk and curd. His wife *Ramela* was extremely beautiful. She had a six-month-old child. The king of the land had an eye for beautiful women. *Kotrabaina* prevented his wife from going to Bendul city to sell milk or curds as he was constantly afraid that if the king came to know of beautiful *Ramela* he might abduct her. One day, when *Kotrabaina* was away visiting his sister, *Ramela* could not resist her desire to visit Bendul city. She went there with her milk and curd, leaving her child with her *nanad* (husband's sister). The

king's soldiers saw her and subsequently the king forcibly took her to his palace.

While *Kotrabaina* was asleep in his sister's house, his clan deity showed him the abduction of *Ramela* in a dream. Hurriedly he returned home to find that the dream was true. He gathered his twelve *lakh* bulls and twelve *lakh* sheep, along with a magical bull named *Kurmel Sandh* and sheep named *Ultia Gadra*, and attacked the city in order to free *Ramela* from the clutches of the king. The cattle and sheep destroyed the whole city. *Kotrabaina* killed the king and freed *Ramela*. But Gaur society was not ready to accept *Ramela* without testing her chastity, as she had been abducted by the evil king. To prove her chastity, she arranged an ordeal by fire and passed it. But the society wanted to test her again, and put forward the condition that if her six-month-old child crawled from his bed to his mother's breast to suck milk, she would be treated as chaste and accepted by them without hesitation. *Ramela* was successful in this test as well and she was accepted by Gaur society.

Ramakatha in T/F Traditions of India
ASI-Seagull Books, Calcutta 1993.

FOLK TALES OF EPICS

M.K.MISHRA

Claus says: 'The *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are continually localized in a welter of folk performance forms all over India'. It is true that by reading or listening to the *Puranas*, the people quench their religious thirst, but it does not satisfy the masses, as only a particular section of the society hears it. But on the folk stage, the whole society, irrespective of age and sex, gets the opportunity to witness the *Ramalila*, which not only fulfils their religious feeling but also gives them immense pleasure. Their moral values are heightened by its various ideal characters and events.

(Ramakatha in T/F Tradition of India ASI-Seagull Books, Calcutta 1993)

AN ORISSA FOLK TALE

T.B.NAIK

Orissa state tells an interesting story to account for the origin of diseases. Raja Dasharatha ruled in Jaita Nagar. Whenever he talked to his subjects, he used to wag his finger at them. This angered them, and one day they assembled and cursed him: 'He wags his finger at us. Let his finger rot'. Two to four months later the Raja's finger began to hurt; soon it swelled and sores broke out and pus oozed from it. The Raja took medicine and consulted the best doctors and magicians but to no avail. Then his pandits referred to books and said, 'O Raja, send your sons Rama and Lakshmana into exile if you want the sores on your finger to heal'. The Raja thought his advice absurd and for a long time refused to follow it. But when the pain in his finger grew unbearable, he called his two boys and said: 'Go to the forest and search for medicine for twelve years'. They went to the forest and after twelve years brought medicine which their father put on his finger. The sores healed. But after that, anyone who wagged his finger at another while he talked became a leper.

(Ramakatha in T/F Tradition of India ASI/Seagull Books Calcutta 1993)

FOLK VERSIONS OF RAMA-KATHA IN EARLY ASSAMESE

SATYENDRA NATH SARMA

Kings used to maintain bards or minstrels to sing the glorious exploits of their own ancestors as well as of heroes of bygone ages. These bards were called *suta*, *magadha* and *bandi* in ancient India. Their functions were not exactly identical. The *sutas* usually recited the ancient lore of the royal families. The *magadhas* and *bandis* recited panegyrics. There were also reviving *sutas* or *bhatas* who used to entertain people with their heroic and pathos-laden tales of ancient times. According to most of the *Ramayana* scholars, it was originally a bardic poem with different versions prevalent in different parts of the country. It was compiled, systematized and given a unified character by Valmiki, designated as the *adi-kavi* by later rhetoricians because of his sophisticated use of poetic imagery. The later Sanskrit Ramayanas like Adhyatma, Adbhuta, Ananda, Bhusundi etc., though composed with sectarian intentions, are replete with folk elements. The only exception is the *Yogavasistha* where philosophical and ethical elements predominate.

As regards the regional Ramayanas composed in local languages, the intrusion of folk elements, regional beliefs, ceremonies and practices can be noticed in almost all of them.

From Ramakatha in the T/F traditions of India" ASI/Seagull books, Calcutta 1993

BOX ITEM

TAGORE ON THE RAMAYANA

We have the sociological interpretation as given by Tagore and latter day scholars like Dr.Suniti Kumar Chatterjee. The main contention of Tagore's argument is that with the expansion of money power, the importance of agriculture was receding. Sita as daughter of Mother Earth represents the best of agriculture, while the golden deer of Ravana represents the avarice of man for gold. The importance of agriculture, its production and the peaceful way of rural life cannot satisfy the man who is hungry for money. Ravana was the symbol of money power, and he was always afraid of losing that power and wealth.

 THE RAMAYANA CONQUERS SOUTH East Asia

BY SWAMI BANGOVINDA PARAMPANTHI

The Ramayana travelled to South East Asia and other remote areas through a band of intrepid missionaries like Matanga Kashyapa Kaundinya as also through sailors, traders and settlers who travelled overland through Assam to South East Asia. The local versions that have developed in Sri Lanka, Siam, Laos, Burma, Tibet, even though they maintain the basic structure of the story, introduce slight variations by adapting and mixing strains from their local cultural milieu. The Rama story was carried outside India by the 2nd and 3rd century and was readily accepted by Mons, Khmers, Khotanese, Mongolians etc., giving rise to newer versions of the epic incorporating local traditions.

From Ramakatha in T/F tradition of India ASI/Seagull Books, Calcutta 1993

BOX ITEM

ELWIN ON TRIBAL RAMAYANA

Referring to the Ramayana, Verrier (the tribals) Elwin observed: 'It is most significant to find, even so long ago, an attitude towards them which anticipates the friendliness and respect which has come to fruition in modern times. And in the figure of Sabari there is a symbol of the contribution that the tribes can and will make to the life of India.'

ASSAM WELCOMES RAMA

SWAMI BANGOVINDA PARAMPANTHI

The tribes of the plains such as the **plains** Mikirs, the Miris (Misings), the Lalungs, the Rabhas, the Hajongs and the Bodos are greatly influenced by the Hindu way of life, maintaining at the same time their own traditions and customs. They have easily adopted the Hindu culture, assimilating some Hindu gods and goddesses into their daily life.

Several versions of the Rama story exist in the tribal traditions and mention may be made of the few extant ones. First, there is the Karbi Ramayana (*Sabin Alun*) of the Mikirs (Karbis). It has two versions with slight variations. One has been traced and compiled through the efforts of Prem Kanta Mohonta and published by Diphu Sahitya Sabha and the other was found in the Hamreu subdivision of Karbi Anglong. The Mizo (Lushai) Ramayana story which was collected by some scholars shows the extent of the influence of *Rama-katha* in their life. Old Mizos still sing it. The Khamti *Ramayana*, which is a Tai version, has been rendered into Assamese by Phani Bora, a teacher of Hindi at Jorhat. This has not appeared in printed form so far. It is also known as *Lik-Rameng* which means the Book of Rama. It is preserved in the Buddhist temple in Narayanpur (Lakhimpur District of Assam) where there is a conglomeration

of Tai-Khamti people. Another version of the Tai Ramayana is at the house of Jadav Gohain of Silapathar, a Buddhist village in the district of Sivasagar. The manuscript is in Tai script and is known as *Choi Rameng* (the story of Rama). Both the Tai versions of the *Ramayana* glorify Buddhism. They convey that after seeing the sorrow and misery of the world Rama took the form of a Bodhisattva. The Lalungs (Tiwas) have their own *Ramakatha*. The majority of the tribes have adopted the Rama tradition into their own culture is still debatable. Perhaps it is because these tribes, who live off the land, have been naturally drawn to its simple values.

Thus the whole of the north-east is vibrant with the story of Rama. Many *puranic* legends are also associated with this region which was never out of touch with the mainstream of Indian culture. The great Assamese poet Madhava Kandali had not only rendered the Ramayana into Assamese but had also helped to spread its message throughout the north-east as is evident from the folksongs in the form of *nichukani-git*, *husarinam*, *nao-khelar git* and so on.

Ramakatha is T/F tradition of India,
ASI, Seagull Books, Calcutta 1993

RAMA-KATHA IN TRIBAL AND FOLK TRADITIONS OF INDIA

Before breaking the bow Rama warned all the people present that the breaking of the bow would cause a very big bang with sparks and that there would be an earthquake which may damage peoples hearing and eyesight. People sitting in high places and on branches of trees would fall down and break their limbs. Rama advised them to keep their eyes and ears shut and to hold down to the ground. But some people took Rama's warning too lightly and suffered the consequences. Rama relented, saying that those who have willfully ignored his warning would remain handicapped all their lives, but the others would be cured. This is the reason why there are lame, blind and deaf people on earth.

“*Ramakatha* in T/F tradition of Asia’: ASI/Seagull Books Calcutta 1993

RAMA-KATHA AMONG THE TRIBAL
COMMUNITIES OF THE NORTH-EAST
BIRENDRANATH DATTA

Rama-katha has penetrated the various tribal societies in the plains and the hills of Assam and its ad-joining areas in varying degrees. The Bodo Kacharis, the Rabhas, the Misings, the Tiwas and other tribal communities living in the plains who have close contact with their non-tribal neighbours have not only accepted the epics into their tradition, but some have gone to the extent of creating legends linking their origins with characters and / or episodes from the epics. Stories from the *Ramayana* are almost as familiar to these groups as to the non-tribal Hindus. While in some cases such stories have been given characteristic ethnic twists, basically remaining Hindu-oriented, in certain other cases the entry of *Rama-katha* has been through Buddhistic connections or contracts. Of the tribal people living in the hills, the Karbis, the Dimasas and the Jaintias are more or less well-acquainted with the *Ramayana* lore. Of the others the Khasis' the Turaon Mishmis, the Garos and the Mizos have tales obviously influenced by the Rama legend. It is interesting to note that although the Mizos are said to be late arrivals in the north-eastern region and are comparatively free from Hindu influence, the *Ramayana* story has entered their folklore and made a place for itself as an 'indigenous tale'. Not only that, Rama and Lakshmana (Khena in Mizo) are invoked as deities in some Mizo divination charms.

(From *Ramakatha* in the T/F Traditions of India, ASI/Seagull Books, Calcutta 1993.)

A TELUGU FOLK TALE
D.RAMARAJU

Rama narrates an incident which occurred during their exile. One day when they were wandering at Chitrakut, Sita prepared for her bath. She smeared her body with raw turmeric and went to the pond to take a dip. But she returned almost immediately, complaining to Rama her Lord and the descendant of the Solar race that there was something strange near the bathing pond, with innumerable bees flying over it, making it impossible for her to bathe. She asked him to accompany her so that he could see for himself. Rama was perturbed and followed her to the pond. When they reached, Sita pointed to the 'moon and bees'. Rama was amused and told her that the 'moon' was her own face and the 'bees' were locks of her hair. When she realized her mistake, she bashfully bowed her head. 'Therefore, Hanumana, you must narrate this incident to Sita so that she may know you to be my confidante', Rama told him.

(From *Ramakatha* in the T/F traditions of India ASI/Seagull Books, Calcutta 1993)

EPIC LITERATURE PRODUCES AN EPIC LIFE

Loka Manya Tilak's greatest work was the *Gita-Rahasya*, a philosophic inquiry into the secret of the teaching of the *Gita*, the holiest book of the Aryadharm. In this volume he reinterpreted the *Gita* in its classical sense, restoring the proper emphasis to the philosophy of action, the Karma yoga; and his is considered one of the outstanding studies of the *Gita* in modern Indian literature. The *Gita-Rahasya* assured Tilak's place among the greatest of India's scholars and philosophers. His classical studies enabled him to recapture the spirit of India's classical philosophy of life. In his heart of hearts, he always remained a humble student of India's greatness. Even after he had become the foremost political leader of India, he often said that he wished he could devote his life to teaching mathematics and pursuing his scholarly research into the wisdom of India's ancient civilization.

From The Legacy of 'the Lokamanya' by Theodore L. Shay OUP Bombay 1956

A KARBI (ASSAMESE DIALECT) FOLKSONG

Sugriva looked below
And saw two youths,
One dark and one fair,
The dark one lying asleep
On the lap of the fair one.
For twelve days and nights
Was the dark one sleeping
On the lap of the fair one
Sugriva mused thus –
From their looks they must be brothers
How one brother is sharing
The other brother's burden
And here I am,
Fighting my own brother
For a throne—he mused.
Tears rolled down from his eyes.
So runs the song.

Quoted in "Ramakatha in T/F tradition of India" ASI/Seagull books, Calcutta 1993.

WESTERN INTERPRETATIONS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL PHENOMENA

Dr.SHIVARAM KARIKAL

We live in an objective world of plurality, diversity, and complexity. However, the convincing truth behind the experiencing of this objective reality is that it is the perennial sense of 'I-ness' or subjectivity which really matters to us. This 'I-ness' is a greater and more direct fact of existence to us than the galaxy of objects presented to it. What is imminent, intrinsic, and immediate in our experience is our CONSCIOUSNESS of self-existence.

Are there two realities? The subjective and the objective? Are consciousness and matter mutually opposing polarities? What is the real nature of this apparent dichotomy? Is there a background SELF which is at once the subject and the object? Is this background SELF a state of superconscious existence to which order, symmetry and auto regulation are intrinsic? Is our existence and awareness continuous and eternal subjectively at the realm of experience, but intermittent and spasmodic at the realm of form and appearance? Does our existence begin with the appearance of our bodies and end with their disappearance? Is there anything permanent

in us? In there an eternal core of self-existence around which we have projected our outer garments: physical, social and psychological? Is self-existence an eternal saga of **self-experience**? To the psychologist, these questions seem irrelevant and unrelated to the domain of his reasoning. Our modern Western psychology has not been able to reveal the real nature of man. Western psychologists have offered us a model of man: dualistic, deterministic and a mechanistic robot.

In a book Vedic thought and Western philosophy Dr.Shivaram Karikal, the author has attempted to show the epistemological and social limitations of Western Psychology in answering these questions. He then draws the reader's attention to the inherent wisdom of vedas, which throw a ray of hope to man, enabling him **to answer** these riddles and realize his own real nature. **The philosophy of Yoga presented here stands in striking contrast to Western Psychology in its comprehensive approach to the understanding of the human personality in its wholeness.**

NAGAS DOWN THE HISTROY

It should not, be construed that the Nagas were unknown to the kings ruling in the Gangetic Valley. The references to the Kiratas, of whom the Nagas were a subtribe, in the Vedas and the epics have already been mentioned. According the legend, Ulupi, the Naga princess, fell in love with Arjuna, the great hero of the *Mahabharata*, when she saw the handsome Pandava prince in the course of the latter's sojourn in Eastern India. Ulupi took Arjuna to *Nagalok* (the land of the *Nagas*) and they lived happily for some time until Arjuna moved on to Manipur. In the great war of the *Mahabharata* fought at Kurukshetra, in which contingents of almost every Indian potentate participated, the *Nagas* rallied their might on the side of the Kauravas.

(Nagaland, Prakash Singh, National Book Trust, India, New Delhi—1981)

The most important legendary account connected with the Arunachal tribe of Mishmis is that of the *Brahmakunda*. It is also popularly known as Parasuram Kundra; for, Parasuram, according to the *Kalika Purana* came to the Kunda to cleanse himself of the sin he had incurred by slaying his own mother Renuka on his father's orders. This Kunda is in the heart of the Mishmi area. It is traditionally believed that the parasuram Kunda as a holy place was originally a Mishmi institution and the Mishmis used to collect toll from the visiting pilgrims. The Mishmis claim to have originated from Rukma, eldest son of King Bhismaka of Kundila. Also they believe that the King's only daughter, Rukmini, whom Krishna married, was a Mishmi girl. Her marriage was at first arranged with Sisupala, a local prince. At her own request, Krishna came and took her away, defeating Sisupala in a fierce fight. The city of Kundila or Kundin was situated some fifty miles from modern Sadiya and Sisupala's fort lay a few miles farther, both being situated in the heart of the Mishmi hills. Hem Baru writes: "As a mark of their defeat in war with Sri Krishna, they still wear round their foreheads silver badges, otherwise known as *Kopalis*".

(Folklore of Assam Jogesh Das, National Book Trust, India, New Delhi 1980)

SHRAVAN-PITRUBHAKTHI:

One day young Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi eyes fell on Sharavana Pitribhakti nataka. (a play about Shrivana's devotion to his parents) Mohandas read it with great absorbing interest. He had also seen pictures shown by itinerant showmen. One of the pictures was Sharavana carrying, by means of selangs fitted for his shoulder, on his blind parents on pilgrimage'. "Here is an example for you to copy" I said to myself. The agonized lament of the parents over Shrivana's death is still fresh in my memory.

It is quite understandable as Mohandas was very much attached to his parents and they were almost his idols of worship. Another reason is, his mind which had grown in a devotional atmosphere of religion and Jainism-impact on it was naturally very much. I think it is to this influence, on his mind that all respect he had for tradition, elders and sacred scriptures could be traced, although there were eventual deviation now and then on minor details.

Harish Chandra:

Another drama which had made equally deep impression on his mind if not greater, is Harischandra. It had become part and parcel of Mahatma Gandhi's idea of truth in later days in its manifold aspects. All his pronouncements could be traced to this. His idea there should not be any gulf between thought, word and deed had its source in this. Gandhiji writes "why should not, all be truthful like Harishchandra? Was the question is asked myself day and night. To follow truth and to go through all the ordeal's Harishchandra went through was the one ideal it inspired in me. I literally believed in the story of Harishchandra. The thought of it all often made me weep. My commonsense tells me to-day that Harishchandra could not have been a historical character. Still both Harishchandra and Shrivana are living realities for me and I am sure I should be moved as before if I were to read those plays again to-day. Here it is clear that whenever the historicity is doubted either in case of Rama or others, Gandhiji gives an allegorical interpretation of tradition as Sri Aurobindo did. The influence of this drama and the impression of adherence to truth was such that Mohandas would not copy from his neighbour even when prompted by the teacher when inspector visited his school. (The Growth of the personality of Mahatma Gandhi, N. Satyanarayana, Sarvodaya press, Patamata, Vijayawada-6, 1988)

A piece from Cherusseri's Krishnagatha which depicts the life of Krishna noted for sweetness of spoken Malayalam and the flow of the folk metre:

As she saw the place from a distance
She went close and shyly sneaked in
Even as the python stealthily goes
Close to the perch of the king of birds.
She stood there for a while
Watching the darling's charming face,
As though she waited in impatience
Why the lord of death had not come.
She went forward and stood touching
That flower-soft body, softer than tender leaves.
As if to touch real fire.
Taking it for a jewel.
Then she picked up the darling child
Like taking a serpent for a rope.

(Folklore of Kerala, Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, National Book Trust, India, New Delhi 1991).

SILENT ELOQUENCE

Lakshman Brahmachari from Sri Ramakrishna Mission asked: Enquiry of 'Who am I?' or of the 'I'-thought being itself a thought, how can it be destroyed in the process?

Sri Bhagavan replied with a story.

When Sita was asked who was her husband among the rishis (Rama himself being present there as a rishi) in the forest, by the wives of the rishis, she denied each one as he was pointed out to her, but simply hung down her head when Rama was pointed out. Her silence was eloquent.

Similarly, the Vedas also are eloquent in 'neti' – 'neti' (not this – not this) and then remain silent. Their silence is the Real State. This is the meaning of exposition by silence. When the source of the 'I' thought is reached it vanishes and what remains is the Self.

Spiritual stories as told by Ravana Maharshi Ramanashram Tiruvannamalai 1986.

RAMANA MAHARSHI REFERS TO PURANAS
Twenty-four Gurus

A king was passing through a forest in all pomp and pageantry, with his army and retinue behind him. He came across a man with not even a cod-piece on, lying on the ground, with one leg coked over the other. He was laughing away, apparently supremely happy, contented with himself and all the world. The king was struck with the man's happy state and sent for him. But when the king's men approached the rude ascetic and delivered the king's message, he took absolutely no notice and continued in his ascetic bliss. On being told of this, the king himself went to the man and even then the man took no notice. Thereupon it struck the king that this must be no common man, and said: 'Swami, you are evidently supremely happy. May we know what is the secret of such happiness and from which Guru you learnt it?' thereupon the ascetic told the king: 'I have had twenty-four Gurus. Everything, this body, the earth, the birds, some instruments, some persons, all have taught me'. All the things in the world may be classed as either good or bad. The good taught him what he must seek. Similarly, the bad taught him what he must avoid. The ascetic was Dattatreya, the avadhuta.

Spiritual stories as told by Ramana Maharishi Ramanashram, Tiruvannamalai 1986

RAMANA HAS USE FOR PURANAS
Bhakta Ekanath

A discussion in the hall centered on the story of Kulasekhara Alwar, which had appeared in the Vision magazine. During a Hari Katha, Kulasekhara identifying himself so completely with the situation of the story felt it his duty as a worshipper of Rama to at once hasten to Lanka and release Sita. He ran to the sea and entered it to cross over to Lanka when Rama appeared with Sita and Lakshmana and showered His grace on him. This led others in the hall to remark, "Some Maratha Saint also did a similar thing. He leaped up to the roof, I think". Thereupon Sri Bhagavan was asked to relate the story.

Ekanath was writing the Ramayana, and when he came to the portion in which he was graphically describing that Hanuman jumped across the ocean to Lanka, he so identified himself with his hero Hanuman that unconsciously he leaped into the air and landed on the roof of his neighbour's house. This neighbour had always had a poor opinion of Ekanath, taking him for a humbug and religious hypocrite. He heard a thud on his roof and, coming out to see what it was, discovered Ekanath lying down on the roof with a cadjan leaf in one hand and his iron stile in the other. The cadjan leaf had verses describing how Hanuman leapt across the sea. This incident proved to the neighbour what a genuine bhakta Ekanath was and he became his disciple.

Spiritual stories as told by Ramana Maharshi – Ramanashram Tiruvannamalai-1986

THE TRIBAL VIEW OF THE RAMAYANA: AN EXERCISE IN THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE

B.N.VYAS

The Ramayana constitutes a structural part of the Indian 'great' tradition, the other parts being the Mahabharata, *Puranas*, *smritis* and *brahmanas*. Robert Redfield has used the concepts of 'little' and 'great' traditions in his studies of Mexican communities. Influenced by this model, Milton Singer and McKim Marriott have conducted some studies on social changes in India utilizing this conceptual framework. The basic ideas in this approach are civilization and the social organization of tradition. The social organization of these civilizations operate on two levels, first that of the folk or unlettered peasants including the tribals, and second, that of the elite, or the 'reflective few'. The cultural processes in the former comprise the 'little' tradition and those in the latter constitute the 'great' tradition. There is, however, a constant interaction between these two levels of tradition.

It would be erroneous to believe that Indian civilization consists only of the Hindu view of life. It also includes folk traditions and folk ways of the people who do not have a written history. The unity of Indian civilization is maintained by its cultural structure which perpetuates a unity of world view through cultural performances and their products. These cultural performances are institutionalized in festivals, fairs and rituals. In fact, Indian civilization can hardly be described either through the dichotomy of the Sanskritic and western traditions or that of the 'little' and 'great' traditions. S.C.Bube, among other social scientists, had expounded in his piece, 'The Study of Complex Cultures', in the book *Towards a Sociology of Culture in India*, edited by T.K.N.Unnithan, Indra Deva and Yogendra

Singh (1965) that Indian tradition is far too complex, besides consisting of a hierarchy of traditions, each of which needs to be analysed in order to unravel all the ramifications of change.

The tribals who have been living with caste Hindus have also acquired many of the traits of Hindu religious and folk tradition. There has been a constant interaction between the 'little' tradition of the tribal society and the 'great' tradition of caste Hindu society. The tribal society is a whole society and each social structure in it is segmentary. Each tribal ethnic group has a separate identity. We can argue that the multiple ethnic tribal groups residing in different cultural and ecological contexts have interacted similarly with the 'great' tradition of caste Hindus. This explanation is based on the premise of the anthropology of knowledge. Though a large number of tribal groups are found at different levels of development, that have a common existential basis, that is, they are found in hills and forests. Their illiteracy, general backwardness and above all their existence in the midst of nature—forest, hill and game—have provided them an ethno-methodology which interacts with the Hindu 'great' traditions in similar ways. It is this tribal existential basis which interprets the Hindu traditions in a specific way. And this is what is called the anthropology of knowledge. In other words, the knowledge of the tribals about the Hindi 'great' tradition, namely, in the present context, the Ramayana, is derived from the existential basis of the elements of tribal social structure. The classical story of the Ramayana as told by the Sanskrit poet, Valmiki, or the Hindu poet, Tulsidas is given

a different and an altogether distinctive interpretation of by the tribals of the country. If we investigate the story of the Ramayana prevalent at the folk level among the diverse tribal groups of the country (whether the Bhils of Rajasthan, Santhals of Chhotanagpur or Korkus of Madhya Pradesh), we find that they have a similar

comprehension of the story of the Ramayana. This can be explained by the fact that though the tribal social structures have a social differentiation, they spring from common existential situations. The tribal reality of life everywhere in the country is the same. And this anthropological knowledge is the cause (From Ramakatha in T/F tradition of India a similar interpretation and understanding of the Ramayana. ASI/Seagull books, Calcutta 1993.)

INFLUENCE OF THE RAMAYANA TRADITION ON FOLKLORE OF CENTRAL INDIA

MAHENDRA KUMAR MISHRA

The present study is based mainly on the available folklore material of central India. While studying it, the influence of the *Ramayanic* tradition upon the indigenous tradition has been noted; and the parochialization of the universal characters of the great epic tradition and its influence on many ethnic groups have also formed part of this micro-study.

The authors of the epics have given due importance to each and every part of India encompassing lands, rivers, mountains, forests, different ethnic cultures and customs. Again, the assimilation of the *Ramayana* tradition into regional cultures and subcultures has involved from a spiritual phenomenon identifying the incarnations of God (*avatara*) with folk heroes. They are associated with various regional traditions of India. By identifying the respective regions and places with the *avatars* and their mythical and miraculous events, the local folk groups identify themselves as part of the larger Indian Culture, thus contributing to national and cultural unity. Many little communities with their regional traditions have been deeply attracted towards the mainstream of the Indian 'great' tradition through these epics. Thus the *Ramayana* forms the 'centre of the integration' of Indian civilization and has a great influence on the 'network of regional cultures'.

Much of the story of the *Ramayana* remains the same with the tribals. If we analyse the tribal *Ramayana* from the perspective of the anthropology of knowledge in terms of the interactions of the Hindu 'great' tradition and the tribal local traditions, the following interpretations can be made :

1. Rulers are seen as always cruel, deceitful and exploitative.
2. Tribal life is sustained through the observance of magic and rituals.
3. Human subsistence lies in killing animals and eating their meat.
4. Procreation provides continuity to society.

In conclusion it may be observed that tribal knowledge about the world, including the Hindu 'great' tradition, depends much on this existential social situation. the tribal ethno-methodology plays a vital role in borrowing culture traits from other cultures. Knowledge is not created in a vacuum: it emerges out of the wider social contexts.

(Ramakatha in T/F traditions of India
ASI-Seagull books Calcutta 1993.)

‘FROM GANDHIJI TO GONDS EVERYONE HAS USE FOR
RAMAKATHA’

BY K.S.SINGH

The epics, aptly described by Jawaharlal Nehru as the story of India, were not only religious texts but also historical documents, anthropological treatise. Chakravarty Rajagopalachari, who may be described as a modern Valmiki because of his rendition of the *Ramayana* into English and because he did more than anyone else to popularize the work among the Indian elite, mentions an incident. Once, while discussing with Gandhi how love could develop between their daughter and son, sheltered and separated by distance, the *Mahatma* asked, ‘Has she not read the *Ramayana*?’

As one interested in the secular aspects of the diffusion of epic traditions I could not but be impressed by the manner in which I saw them at work. When I started my career as a researcher about thirty years ago I saw the process of diffusion as a two-fold one in what we call a culture contact situation. On the one hand I collected a number of songs on *Rama-katha* composed by tribal and non-tribal poets which seemed like verbatim translations of the story, rendered with passion and conviction. This also reflected the influence of the Oriya and Bengali versions of *Rama-katha* prevalent in the Hindi belt. On the other hand—and this is important—there were also songs which appeared older, more closely related to the tribal world view and their mores, which suggested that some aspects of *Rama-katha* had almost been internalized. In the course of researches subsequently conducted I came across various versions of *Rama-katha* among the Mundas, Gonds, Korkus, Kols, Savaras, Bondo and so on, which did not suggest the existence of any mini-*Ramayana* or mini-*Rama-katha* as such but represented an echo from the past, a stirring of tribal

memorial, of what they might have imbibed through the teachings of the mendicants called Gossains who traveled through their land. They also reflected a sense of awe and admiration for the heroes; and, sometimes, delight and fun at their presence in their homeland. There is even a streak of irreverence in the *Rama-katha* versions of some of the tribes who also identify themselves, without any inhibition and in a forthright manner, with what we might call the anti-heroes, such as Meghanada or Ravana.

We might recall at this stage the two major works which have influenced scholarship in the area. The first consists of the writings of Verrier Elwin in the area of what he always loved to describe as the aboriginal *Purana*. He collected and wrote down the folklore, including the epic and *puranic* lore, in the tribal areas of middle India and the north-east. The other was masterly survey of *Rama-katha* in Hindi done by the distinguished Jesuit Scholar Fr.Council Bulcke went into two editions by 1972. It deals with the origin, evolution and spread of *Rama-katha*.

Ramakatha in T/F Traditions of India
ASI-Seagull Books Calcutta 1993.

SOME INSPIRING RAMA-KATHA FOLK VERSIONS

In Chhatisgarh also the popularity of *bansgeet* is predominant, with similar forms and matter, though the language is different from that of western Orissa. The Gaur bard Bhajan. Nial of Kapsi village in Kalahandi district is the informant. The name of the epic is *Kotrabaina-Ramela*, the names of the hero and heroine.

The story form of the folk epic is as follows:

Kotrabaina was village farmer. His job was to tend sheep and cows and to sell milk and curd. His wife *Ramela* was extremely beautiful. She had a six-month-old child. The king of the land had an eye for beautiful women. *Kotrabaina* prevented his wife from going to Bendul city to sell milk or curds as he was constantly afraid that if the king came to know of beautiful *Ramela* he might abduct her. One day, when *Kotrabaina* was away visiting his sister, *Ramela* could not resist her desire to visit Bendul city. She went there with her milk and curd, leaving her child with her *nanad* (husband's sister). The king's soldiers saw her and subsequently the king forcibly took her to his palace.

While *Kotrabaina* was asleep in his sister's house, his clan deity showed him the abduction of *Ramela* in a dream. Hurriedly he returned home to find that the dream was true. He gathered his twelve *lakh* bulls and twelve *lakh* sheep, along with a magical bull named *Kurmel Sandh* and sheep named *Ultia Gadra*, and attacked the city in order to free *Ramela* from the clutches of the king. The cattle and sheep destroyed the whole city. *Kotrabaina* killed the king and freed *Ramela*. But Gaur society was not ready to accept *Ramela* without testing her chastity, as she had been abducted by the evil king. To prove her chastity, she arranged an ordeal by fire and passed it. But the society wanted to test her again, and put forward the condition that if her six-month-old child crawled from his bed to his mother's breast to suck milk, she would be treated as chaste and accepted by them without hesitation. *Ramela* was successful in this test as well and she was accepted by Gaur society.

Ramakatha in T/F Traditions of India
ASI-Seagull Books, Calcutta 1993.

FOLK TALES OF EPICS M.K.MISHRA

Claus says: 'The *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are continually localized in a welter of folk performance forms all over India'. It is true that by reading or listening to the *Puranas*, the people quench their religious thirst, but it does not satisfy the masses, as only a particular section of the society hears it. But on the folk stage, the whole society, irrespective of age and sex, gets the opportunity to witness the *Ramalila*, which not only fulfils their religious feeling but also gives them immense pleasure. Their moral values are heightened by its various ideal characters and events.

(Ramakatha in T/F Tradition of India ASI-Seagull Books, Calcutta 1993)

AN ORISSA FOLK TALE

T.B.NAIK

Orissa state tells an interesting story to account for the origin of diseases. Raja Dasharatha ruled in Jaita Nagar. Whenever he talked to his subjects, he used to wag his finger at them. This angered them, and one day they assembled and cursed him: 'He wags his finger at us. Let his finger rot'. Two to four months later the Raja's finger began to hurt; soon it swelled and sores broke out and pus oozed from it. The Raja took medicine and consulted the best doctors and magicians but to no avail. Then his pandits referred to books and said, 'O Raja, send your sons Rama and Lakshmana into exile if you want the sores on your finger to heal'. The Raja thought his advice absurd and for a long time refused to follow it. But when the pain in his finger grew unbearable, he called his two boys and said: 'Go to the forest and search for medicine for twelve years'. They went to the forest and after twelve years brought medicine which their father put on his finger. The sores healed. But after that, anyone who wagged his finger at another while he talked became a leper.

(Ramakatha in T/F Tradition of India
ASI/Seagull Books Calcutta 1993)

FOLK VERSIONS OF RAMA-KATHA IN
EARLY ASSAMESE

SATYENDRA NATH SARMA

Kings used to maintain bards or minstrels to sing the glorious exploits of their own ancestors as well as of heroes of bygone ages. These bards were called *suta*, *magadha* and *bandi* in ancient India. Their functions were not exactly identical. The *sutas* usually recited the ancient lore of the royal families. The *magadhas* and *bandis* recited panegyrics. There were also roving *sutas* or *bhatas* who used to entertain people with their heroic and pathos-laden tales of ancient times. According to most of the Ramayana scholars, it was originally a bardic poem with different versions prevalent in different parts of the country. It was compiled, systematized and given a unified character by Valmiki, designated as the *adi-kavi* by later rhetoricians because of his sophisticated use of poetic imagery. The later Sanskrit Ramayanas like *Adhyatma*, *Adbhuta*, *Ananda*, *Bhusundi* etc., though composed with sectarian intentions, are replete with folk elements. The only exception is the *Yogavasistha* where philosophical and ethical elements predominate.

As regards the regional Ramayanas composed in local languages, the intrusion of folk elements, regional beliefs, ceremonies and practices can be noticed in almost all of them.

(From Ramakatha in the T/F traditions
of India" ASI/Seagull books, Calcutta
1993)

TAGORE ON THE RAMAYANA

We have the sociological interpretation as given by Tagore and latter day scholars like Dr.Suniti Kumar Chatterjee. The main contention of Tagore's argument is that with the expansion of money power, the importance of agriculture was receding. Sita as daughter of Mother Earth represents the best of agriculture, while the golden deer of Ravana represents the avarice of man for gold. The importance of agriculture, its production and the peaceful way of rural life cannot satisfy the man who is hungry for money. Ravana was the symbol of money power, and he was always afraid of losing that power and wealth.

THE RAMAYANA CONQUERS SOUTH East Asia

BY SWAMI BANGOVINDA PARAMPANTHI

The Ramayana travelled to South East Asia and other remote areas through a band of intrepid missionaries like Matanga Kashyapa Kaundinya as also through sailors, traders and settlers who travelled overland through Assam to South East Asia. The local versions that have developed in Sri Lanka, Siam, Laos, Burma, Tibet, even though they maintain the basic structure of the story, introduce slight variations by adapting and mixing strains from their local cultural milieu. The Rama story was carried outside India by the 2nd and 3rd century and was readily accepted by Mons, Khmers, Khotanese, Mongolians etc., giving rise to newer versions of the epic incorporating local traditions.

From Ramakatha in T/F tradition of India ASI/Seagull Books, Calcutta 1993

BOX ITEM

ELWIN ON TRIBAL RAMAYANA

Referring to the Ramayana, Verrier Elwin (the tribals) observed: 'It is most significant to find, even so long ago, an attitude towards them which anticipates the friendliness and respect which has come to fruition in modern times. And in the figure of Sabari there is a symbol of the contribution that the tribes can and will make to the life of India.

ASSAM WELCOMES RAMA

SWAMI BANGOVINDA PARAMPANTHI

The tribes of the plains such as the **plains** Mikirs, the Miris (Misings), the Lalungs, the Rabhas, the Hajongs and the Bodos are greatly influenced by the Hindu way of life, maintaining at the same time their own traditions and customs. They have easily adopted the Hindu culture, assimilating some Hindu gods and goddesses into their daily life.

Several versions of the Rama story exist in the tribal traditions and mention may be made of the few extant ones. First, there is the Karbi Ramayana (*Sabin Alun*) of the Mikirs (Karbis). It has two versions with slight variations. One has been traced and compiled through the efforts of Prem Kanta Mohonta and published by Diphu Sahitya Sabha and the other was found in the Hamreu subdivision of Karbi Anglong. The Mizo (Lushai) Ramayana story which was collected by some scholars shows the extent of the influence of *Rama-katha* in their life. Old Mizos still sing it. The Khamti *Ramayana*, which is a Tai version, has been rendered into Assamese by Phani Bora, a teacher of Hindi at Jorhat. This has not appeared in printed form so far. It is also known as *Lik-Rameng* which means the Book of Rama. It is preserved in the Buddhist temple in Narayanpur (Lakhimpur District of Assam) where there is a conglomeration

of Tai-Khamti people. Another version of the Tai Ramayana is at the house of Jadav Gohain of Silapathar, a Buddhist village in the district of Sivasagar. The manuscript is in Tai script and is known as *Choi Rameng* (the story of Rama). Both the Tai versions of the Ramayana glorify Buddhism. They convey that after seeing the sorrow and misery of the world Rama took the form of a Bodhisattva. The Lalungs (Tiwas) have their own Ramakatha. The majority of the tribes have adopted the Rama tradition into their own culture is still debatable. Perhaps it is because these tribes, who live off the land, have been naturally drawn to its simple values.

Thus the whole of the north-east is vibrant with the story of Rama. Many *puranic* legends are also associated with this region which was never out of touch with the mainstream of Indian culture. The great Assamese poet Madhava Kandali had not only rendered the Ramayana into Assamese but had also helped to spread its message throughout the north-east as is evident from the folksongs in the form of *nichukani-git*, *husarinam*, *nao-khelar git* and so on.

Ramakatha is T/F tradition of India,
ASI, Seagull Books, Calcutta 1993

RAMA-KATHA IN TRIBAL AND FOLK TRADITIONS OF INDIA

Before breaking the bow Rama warned all the people present that the breaking of the bow would cause a very big bang with sparks and that there would be an earthquake which may damage peoples hearing and eyesight. People sitting in high places and on branches of trees would fall down and break their limbs. Rama advised them to keep their eyes and ears shut and to hold down to the ground. But some people took Rama's warning too lightly and suffered the consequences. Rama relented, saying that those who have willfully ignored his warning would remain handicapped all their lives, but the others would be cured. This is the reason why there are lame, blind and deaf people on earth.

Ramakatha in T/F Tradition of Asia ASI/Seagull Books Calcutta 1993

RAMA-KATHA AMONG THE TRIBAL
COMMUNITIES OF THE NORTH-EAST
BIRENDRANATH DATTA

Rama-katha has penetrated the various tribal societies in the plains and the hills of Assam and its adjoining areas in varying degrees. The Bodo-Kacharis, the Rabhas, the Misings, the Tiwas and other tribal communities living in the plains who have close contact with their non-tribal neighbours have not only accepted the epics into their tradition, but some have gone to the extent of creating legends linking their origins with characters and / or episodes from the epics. Stories from the *Ramayana* are almost as familiar to these groups as to the non-tribal Hindus. While in some cases such stories have been given characteristic ethnic twists, basically remaining Hindu-oriented, in certain other cases the entry of *Rama-katha* has been through Buddhistic connections or contracts. Of the tribal people living in the hills, the Karbis, the Dimasas and the Jaintias are more or less well-acquainted with the *Ramayana* lore. Of the others the Khasis, the Taraoon Mishmis, the Garos and the Mizos have tales obviously influenced by the Rama legend. It is interesting to note that although the Mizos are said to be late arrivals in the north-eastern region and are comparatively free from Hindu influence, the *Ramayana* story has entered their folklore and made a place for itself as an 'indigenous tale'. Not only that, Rama and Lakshmana (Khena in Mizo) are invoked as deities in some Mizo divination charms.

(From *Ramakatha* in the T/F Traditions of India, ASI/Seagull Books, Calcutta 1993.)

A TELUGU FOLK TALE
D.RAMARAJU

Rama narrates an incident which occurred during their exile. One day when they were wandering at Chitrakut, Sita prepared for her bath. She smeared her body with raw turmeric and went to the pond to take a dip. But she returned almost immediately, complaining to Rama her Lord and the descendant of the Solar race that there was something strange near the bathing pond. The mischievous moon was playing in the pond, with innumerable bees flying over it, making it impossible for her to bathe. She asked him to accompany her so that he could see for himself. Rama was perturbed and followed her to the pond. When they reached, Sita pointed to the 'moon and bees'. Rama was amused and told her that the 'moon' was her own face and the 'bees' were locks of her hair. When she realized her mistake, she bashfully bowed her head. 'Therefore, Hanumana, you must narrate this incident to Sita so that she may know you to be my confidante', Rama told him.

(From *Ramakatha* in the T/F traditions of India ASI/Seagull Books, Calcutta 1993)

EPIC LITERATURE PRODUCES AN EPIC LIFE

Lokmanya Tilak's greatest work was the *Gita-Rahasya*, a philosophic inquiry into the secret of the teaching of the *Gita*, the holiest book of the Aryadharma. In this volume he reinterpreted the *Gita* in its classical sense, restoring the proper emphasis to the philosophy of action, the Karma yoga; and his is considered one of the outstanding studies of the *Gita* in modern Indian literature. The *Gita-Rahasya* assured Tilak's place among the greatest of India's scholars and philosophers. His classical studies enabled him to recapture the spirit of India's classical philosophy of life. In his heart of hearts, he always remained a humble student of India's greatness. Even after he had become the foremost political leader of India, he often said that he wished he could devote his life to teaching mathematics and pursuing his scholarly research into the wisdom of India's ancient civilization.

From *The Legacy of the Lokamanya* by Theodore L. Shay OUP Bombay 1956

A KARBI (ASSAMESE DIALECT) FOLKSONG

Sugriva looked below
And saw two youths,
One dark and one fair,
The dark one lying asleep
On the lap of the fair one.
For twelve days and nights
Was the dark one sleeping
On the lap of the fair one
Sugriva mused thus –
From their looks they must be brothers
How one brother is sharing
The other brother's burden
And here I am,
Fighting my own brother
For a throne—he mused.
Tears rolled down from his eyes.
So runs the song.

Quoted in "Ramakatha in T/F tradition of India" ASI/Seagull books, Calcutta 1993.

WESTERN INTERPRETATIONS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL PHENOMENA

Dr.Shivaram Karikal

We live in an objective world of plurality, diversity, and complexity. However, the convincing truth behind the experiencing of this objective reality is that it is the perennial sense of 'I-ness' or subjectivity which really matters to us. This 'I-ness' is a greater and more direct fact of existence to us than the galaxy of objects presented to it. What is imminent, intrinsic, and immediate in our experience is our CONSCIOUSNESS of self-existence.

Are there two realities? The subjective and the objective? Are consciousness and matter mutually opposing polarities? What is the real nature of this apparent dichotomy? Is there a background SELF which is at once the subject and the object? Is this background SELF a state of superconscious existence to which order, symmetry and auto regulation are intrinsic? Is our existence and awareness continuous and eternal subjectively at the realm of experience, but intermittent and spasmodic at the realm of form and appearance? Does our existence begin with the appearance of our bodies and end with their disappearance? Is there anything permanent

in us? In there an eternal core of self-existence around which we have projected our outer garments: physical, social and psychological? Is self-existence an eternal saga of **self-experience?** To the psychologist, these questions seem irrelevant and unrelated to the domain of his reasoning. Our modern Western psychology has not been able to reveal the real nature of man. Western psychologists have offered us a model of man: dualistic, deterministic and a mechanistic robot.

In a book Vedic thought and Western philosophy Dr.Shivaram Karikal, the author has attempted to show the epistemological and social limitations of Western Psychology in answering these questions. He then draws the reader's attention to the inherent wisdom of vedas, which throw a ray of hope to man, enabling him **to answer** these riddles and realize his own real nature. **The philosophy of Yoga presented here stands in striking contrast to Western Psychology in its comprehensive approach to the understanding of the human personality in its wholeness.**

NAGAS DOWN THE HISTROY

It should not, be construed that the Nagas were unknown to the kings ruling in the Gangetic Valley. The references to the Kiratas, of whom the Nagas were a subtribe, in the Vedas and the epics have already been mentioned. According the legend, Ulupi, the Naga princess, fell in love with Arjuna, the great hero of the *Mahabharata*, when she saw the handsome Pandava prince in the course of the latter's sojourn in Eastern India. Ulupi took Arjuna to *Nagalok* (the land of the *Nagas*) and they lived happily for some time until Arjuna moved on to Manipur. In the great war of the *Mahabharata* fought at Kurukshetra, in which contingents of almost every Indian potentate participated, the *Nagas* rallied their might on the side of the Kauravas.

(Nagaland, Prakash Singh, National Book Trust, India, New Delhi—1981)

AN ASSAMESE FOLKSTORY

The most important legendary account connected with the Arunachal tribe of Mishmis is that of the *Brahmakunda*. It is also popularly known as *Parasuram Kunda*; for, Parasuram, according to the *Kalika Purana* came to the *Kunda* to cleanse himself of the sin he had incurred by slaying his own mother Renuka on his father's orders. This *Kunda* is in the heart of the Mishmi area. It is traditionally believed that the *parasuram Kunda* as a holy place was originally a Mishmi institution and the Mishmis used to collect toll from the visiting pilgrims. The Mishmis claim to have originated from Rukma, eldest son of King Bhismaka of Kundila. Also they believe that the King's only daughter, Rukmini, whom Krishna married, was a Mishmi girl. Her marriage was at first arranged with Sisupala, a local prince. At her own request, Krishna came and took her away, defeating Sisupala in a fierce fight. The city of Kundila or Kundin was situated some fifty miles from modern Sadiya and Sisupala's fort lay a few miles farther, both being situated in the heart of the Mishmi hills. Hem Barua writes: "As a mark of their defeat in war with Sri Krishna, they still wear round their foreheads silver badges, otherwise known as *Kopalis*".

("Folklore of Assam" Jogesh Das, National Book Trust, India, New Delhi 1980)

SHRAVAN-PITURBHAKTHI

One day young Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's eyes fell on *Sharavana Pitribhakti nataka*. (a play about Shrivana's devotion to his parents) Mohandas read it with great absorbing interest. He had also seen pictures shown by itinerant showmen. One of the pictures was Sharavana carrying, by means of slings fitted his shoulder, for his blind parents on pilgrimage'. "Here is an example for you to copy" said to himself. The agonized lament of the parents over Shrivana's death was still fresh in his memory.

It is quite understandable as Mohandas was very much attached to his parents and they were almost his idols of worship. Another reason is, his mind which had grown in a devotional atmosphere of religion and Jainism-impact on it was naturally very much. It is to this influence, on his mind that all respect he had for tradition, elders and sacred scriptures could be traced, although there were eventual deviation now and then on minor details.

Harishchandra:

Another drama which had made equally deep impression on his mind if not greater, is Harishchandra. It had become part and parcel of Mahatma Gandhi's idea of truth in later days in its manifold aspects. All his pronouncements could be traced to this. His idea there should not be any gulf between thought, word and deed had its source in this. Gandhiji writes "Why should not, all be truthful like Harishchandra? Was the question is asked myself day and night. To follow truth and to go through all the ordeal's Harishchandra went through was the one ideal it inspired in me. I literally believed in the story of Harishchandra. The thought of it all often made me weep. My commonsense tells me to-day that Harishchandra could not have been a historical character. Still both Harishchandra and Shrivana are living realities for me and I am sure I should be moved as before if I were to read those plays again to-day. "Here it is clear that whenever the historicity is doubted either in case of Rama or others, Gandhiji gives an allegorical interpretation of tradition as Sri Aurobindo did. The influence of this drama and the impression of adherence to truth was such that Mohandas would not copy from his neighbour even when prompted by the teacher when inspector visited his school. (The Growth of the personality of Mahatma Gandhi, N.Satyanarayana, Sarvodaya press, Patamata, Vijayawada-6, 1988)

A MALAYALAM FOLK SONG

A piece from Cherusseri's Krishnagatha which depicts the life of Krishna noted for sweetness of spoken Malayalam and the flow of the folk metre:

As she saw the place from a distance
She went close and shyly sneaked in
Even as the python stealthily goes
Close to the perch of the king of birds.
She stood there for a while
Watching the darling's charming face,
As though she waited in impatience
Why the lord of death had not come.
She went forward and stood touching
That flower-soft body, softer than tender leaves.
As if to touch real fire.
Taking it for a jewel.
Then she picked up the darling child
Like taking a serpent for a rope.

(Folklore of Kerala, Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, National Book Trust, India, New Delhi 1991).

SILENT ELOQUENCE

Lakshman Brahmachari from Sri Ramakrishna Mission asked Ramana Maharshi: Enquiry of 'Who am I?' or of the 'I'-thought being itself a thought, how can it be destroyed in the process?

Sri Bhagavan replied with a story.

When Sita was asked who was her husband among the rishis (Rama himself being present there as a rishi) in the forest, by the wives of the rishis, she denied each one as he was pointed out to her, but simply hung down her head when Rama was pointed out. Her silence was eloquent.

Similarly, the Vedas also are eloquent in 'neti' – 'neti' (not this – not this) and then remain silent. Their silence is the Real State. This is the meaning of exposition by silence. When the source of the 'I' thought is reached it vanishes and what remains is the Self.

(Spiritual stories as told by Ramana Maharshi Ramanashram Tiruvannamalai 1986.)

RAMANA MAHARSHI REFERS TO PURANAS
Twenty-four Gurus

A king was passing through a forest in all pomp and pageantry, with his army and retinue behind him. He came across a man with not even a cod-piece on, lying on the ground, with one leg cocked over the other. He was laughing away, apparently supremely happy, contented with himself and all the world. The king was struck with the man's happy state and sent for him. But when the king's men approached the nude ascetic and delivered the king's message, he took absolutely no notice and continued in his ascetic bliss. On being told of this, the king himself went to the man and even then the man took no notice. Thereupon it struck the king that this must be no common man, and said: 'Swami, you are evidently supremely happy. May we know what is the secret of such happiness and from which Guru you learnt it?' thereupon the ascetic told the king: 'I have had twenty-four Gurus. Everything, this body, the earth, the birds, some instruments, some persons, all have taught me'. All the things in the world may be classed as either good or bad. The good taught him what he must seek. Similarly, the bad taught him what he must avoid. The ascetic was Dattatreya, the *avadhuta*.

Spiritual stories as told by Ramana Maharishi Ramanashram, Tiruvannamalai 1986

RAMANA HAS USE FOR PURANAS
Bhakta Ekanath

A discussion in the hall centered on the story of Kulasekhara Alwar, which had appeared in the Vision magazine. During a Hari Katha, Kulasekhara identifying himself so completely with the situation of the story felt it his duty as a worshipper of Rama to at once hasten to Lanka and release Sita. He ran to the sea and entered it to cross over to Lanka when Rama appeared with Sita and Lakshmana and showered His grace on him. This led others in the hall to remark, "Some Maratha Saint also did a similar thing. He leaped up to the roof, I think". Thereupon Sri Bhagavan was asked to relate the story.

Ekanath was writing the *Ramayana*, and when he came to the portion in which he was graphically describing that Hanuman jumped across the ocean to Lanka, he so identified himself with his hero Hanuman that unconsciously he leaped into the air and landed on the roof of his neighbour's house. This neighbour had always had a poor opinion of Ekanath, taking him for a humbug and religious hypocrite. He heard a thud on his roof and, coming out to see what it was, discovered Ekanath lying down on the roof with a cadjan leaf in one hand and his iron stile in the other. The cadjan leaf had verses describing how Hanuman leapt across the sea. This incident proved to the neighbour what a genuine *bhakta* Ekanath was and he became his disciple.

Spiritual stories as told by Ramana Maharshi – Ramanashram Tiruvannamalai-1986

RELEVANCE OF OUR TWIN EPICS

SWAMI KRITARTHANANDA

What they teach

It is said in the Ramayana that at the death of his beloved son Indrajeet, Ravana, overpowered with grief that he was, came to the battlefield to settle the final issue with Rama. But Rama, observing that his sworn enemy was tired and lacked vigour to fight, said to him, 'Go back, Ravana, and get refreshed before you come to fight me.' In other words, Rama, with all his might and chance to defeat Ravana who abducted his most beloved wife Sita, **forgave** his enemy and gave him another lease of life.

What can be a more impressive scene than this? Rama, a *kshatriya* king, with all the grief of separation from Sita, pardons the villain who is at his mercy! This great act speaks only of **strength and liberality that find expression in forgiveness**. A really strong man can forgive even when grief-stricken. Swami Vivekananda once said, 'Only one who is strong enough to give back a blow for a blow, to overthrow his enemy at will, has the power to forgive—not a weakling.' This idea reigns supreme in both the great epics of our land—the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The great values of human life, the inherent culture of our land, and many other qualities of the head and the heart are reflected through the various characters depicted therein. The absolute Vedantic principles become meaningful only when they are reflecting through a personality. It is with this purpose that these epics have been created by the enlightened sages. If there is a truth in life, it must find expression in all walks of life, even in the busiest field of life like a battlefield.

Both the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* emphasize and corroborate the Upanishadic truth—***satyameva jayate, nanrutam—truth alone triumphs, not falsehood***. One thing, however, should not be lost sight of. It is true that truth alone triumphs, but that is in the last analysis. Till the end truth has to pass through fiery ordeals to shed the dross of untruth that attaches itself fast to truth. And this truth can best be tested in human life only, in man's weal and woe. There is no other go.

The other point these epics hint at is that **this world is not at all a mirth of joy**. We are born here with our inherent tendencies and cartloads of past actions, and we have to work them out in order to go beyond this cycle of birth, death, and misery. There is no way out of this maze. Swami Vivekananda has succinctly pointed out this fact by comparing this world to a **gymnasium** where we come to exercise our muscles and sinews. Contrary to the common belief, this world is not a place of enjoyment. Every bit of enjoyment carries with it the message of death—we approach nearer to death by revelling in the senses.

This truth holds good even in the case of great souls or incarnations of God. Even a Rama or a Krishna are not spared the pains of life. The Law of Nature is there to squeeze life out of them too. And this is but natural. What is extraordinary is that these great souls are brave enough to hold fast to the higher moral and ethical values of human life at all costs. For example, Rama vanquished Ravana and established

the triumph of goodness over evil once again. But the question arises: Could he lead a happy life thereafter? Just an off-hand adverse comment from a washerwoman led to his separation from Sita and Rama had to bear the agony of that. Even Krishna had to die by accepting the curse of the sages from a poisonous arrow from a hunter. And that very Krishna proclaimed on the battlefield, 'I take birth in every age to establish virtue over vice.'

The truth is that it matters very little what you are getting from the world, how the world impinges upon you. But it does matter what you are giving the world in return to that. One who is really brave, will not budge an inch from his virtue, come what may. Bhartruhari, in his *Nitisatakam*, has beautifully depicted this. There he says that a truly bold person never deviates from the righteous path even when criticized in either way by the upholders of law, whether the goddess of fortune showers all wealth upon him or denies him any wealth, whether he meets with death today or hundred years hence. And what a unique expression that came out of the pen of Swami Vivekananda! In a small poem entitled "To An Early Violet" he gave expression to his deep feeling that can move even a stony heart:

*What though if love itself doth fail
Thy fragrance strewed in vain
What though if bad o'er good prevail
And vice o'er virtue reign?*

*Change not thy nature, gentle bloom,
Thou violet, sweet and pure;
But ever pour thy sweet perfume
Unasked, unstinted, sure.*

This, then, is the Indian way of life that finds expression through all our epics. The world continues to be the same for the high and the low. No one will be spared the

pains of life. But how you react to a situation is the real test for you.

Relevance to the Present Age

Let us now cast a glance at our present age. With the advancement of technological facilities our physical distance has been removed almost completely. We have become much more comfortable than our forefathers. But the fact remains that we are lonelier than our ancestors; we feel something is lacking on our way to happiness. We feel that we have become more and more selfish, eccentric, and pleasure seeking, and hence no question arises as to our taking lessons from the epics. This is a totally misguided conception. Our epics are immortal and universal. Universality is ascribed to an epic only when it is equally applicable in all ages irrespective of corruption or low standard of morality. What makes an epic immortal is the deep impression its characters produce in the mind of the common man who is subject to stress under all circumstances. Every trying situation lures him to go down to a low level of brutality, and yet his soul, sitting in the cavern of his heart, cries out to uphold its high level of humanity. This is a perpetual struggle in human life. We like to remain merged in the pleasures of life, and something from within does not let us do that. That 'something' protests silently, yet we cannot but listen to its admonitions. Because our true nature is divine.

It is said in the *Mahabharata* that whatever is there in the world has been exhaustively dealt with in that epic. In all ages there can be no character in the world that does not find expression in the book. In fact even the most cruel characters in both the epics speak volumes to us. There goes a satirical comment in the present age that the lives of both Hitler and Gandhi

teach us the same thing. From the life of Hitler we learn 'do not do violence', and from that of Gandhi we learn 'do non-violence'. However humorous it may be, this comment applies equally in the case of the bad characters depicted in these epics. Ravana knew it very well that the consequences of provoking Rama would be serious, but he could not desist from his mean act. Similarly, Duryodhana in the Mahabharata once expressed to Krishna that he knew what is virtue but was unable to hold fast to it; and he also knew what is vice but could not desist from the evil practices. This is the wailing of a weak-minded, namby-pamby pessimist of modern times. Such people like to dive into any number of fanciful undertakings but are not ready to take up the responsibility on their own shoulder. They just pass on the buck to others the moment their authority is questioned. These people end up in blaming the whole world for all their failures. With all their good intents and purposes they get converted into hardcore cynics in the long run. This is why Swami Vivekananda exhorted, 'Do evil, if you must, with manliness.' It is this great lesson of taking up responsibility of one's action that turned the gangster Ratnakara into the immortal poet Valmiki.

One must have deep conviction in the triumph of good over evil, come what may. But at the same time this also should be learnt that both good and evil are but the obverse and reverse of the same coin and that man has to go beyond them both. When Socrates was given life sentence for his deep conviction for certain truth he, standing on the death podium, declared boldly, 'Gentlemen of the jury, please hold fast to the fact that to a good person no evil can happen in this world or hereafter. Even gods cater to his well being.' This is called manliness.

Meaning in Suffering

When we read the Ramayana we feel like crying at the agonies of Sita or Rama. The modern youth may not like this sort of weeping story because he is an optimist. Whatever he likes to have he can get just for the asking. So he finds no meaning in such agonizing sufferings. 'Well', he thinks, 'Rama could very well get over such useless emotion by adopting a firm political measure in his kingdom; and Sita could very well divorce Rama who abandoned him.' Here comes a great truth which the modern man has to learn from our epics. If he does not want to learn from these epics, he will have to borrow it from the foreigners. Dr. Viktor E. Frankl, for one, in his famous book 'Man's Search for Meaning' has pointed out this great fact that **if there is a meaning in life then there must be a meaning in suffering, misery, and even death.** Your suffering may be a source of inspiration and learning to many. And this Dr. Frankl was taken a prisoner of war in the Second World War and sent to a Nazi camp where they encountered death with every breath. Still he did not give up hope for life and went on secretly recording all his experiences that in later years triggered to a momentous discovery named logotherapy by him. This is a special kind of psychological treatment in which the patient is made to realize the nature of his problem and, what is more, to face it himself instead of handing over the responsibility to the psychiatrist. This type of treatment at once reminds us of the Vedantic dictum of facing the truth by oneself. If truth is immanent in the whole creation then there must be relevance in every experience—happiness and suffering as well.

Both the epics deal with the **grim realities of life.** They are not just concocted stories. We should not forget the

background in which the story of Ramayana was mooted. It was the heart-breaking cry of one of a pair of birds whose partner was shot dead by a cruel hunter. So the *Ramayana* cannot but be an eternal tragedy taken from real life. And it is this tragedy that makes the epic so living and acceptable to all. Generally speaking, people love to read stories which in the end put everything together. But those stories fail to create a lasting impression in the minds of people. It is such stories with tragic ends that arouse us with a jolt to the realities of life while warning us beforehand of the vagaries of an easy-going life.

The Irony of Fate and Spiritual Solution

Once Vidura, one of the wisest men of his times, was badly insulted by Duryodhana and left the kingdom of Hastinapura on a pilgrimage tour. Long later, he learnt of the ghastly battle of Kurukshetra and the murder of all the members of the Kuru dynasty; he also heard of the demise of the Lord Krishna along with the whole Yadava clan. This heart-rending news made Vidura restless

and evoked certain critical questions in his mind about life. He opened his heart to a wise sage who replied to him by saying that the threefold misery of life has, in fact, no lasting solution. What we take pride in solving the problems is only a temporary solution that is like moving a heavy load from the head to the shoulder. The only solution that is lasting is to go beyond this vicious circle of the world. In other words, there is only a spiritual solution to all the problems of life.

At the end of the whole story of the Mahabharata, its author Vyasa wails: 'I ask people repeatedly and with upraised hands to follow the path of goodness which will bring them prosperity as well as liberation in the long run; but nobody pays any heed to me.' This is the trouble with the common man. He reads and knows a lot without assimilating them. His life is not tuned to a high culture that comes down from his ancestors. So he suffers. Man seeks the good results from his actions but refuses to do good acts. On the other hand he does not like to suffer from the results of his evil deeds but he commits evil acts willfully. And this is called *Maya*.

VYASA AND VIDURA

SWAMINI NIRANJANANANDA

The *Mahabharata* is the greatest epic poem in the world, being eight times as long as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* put together. It is longer than the united extent of all the poems in European languages. The Indians hold this book in great reverence while people all over the world regard it as the greatest classic of world literature. It is called the 'fifth *Veda*' and is the treasure house of ancient wisdom and Hindu culture. It has moulded the heart and mind of an entire race in a way no other epic in the world has done. Our magnificent epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were crucial in the formation of national traditions and character and have left a deep impression on the texture of Indian life. *Mahabharata* is a voluminous epic of more than one lakh verses, with many stories and anecdotes touching on almost every aspect of human welfare and *dharma*.

Veda Vyasa – the author

The authorship of this great work is attributed to Veda Vyasa who was also known by other names such as Badarayana, Krishnadvaipayana and Parasharya. This great poet philosopher has become an institution representing the entire Hindu heritage. No single individual in the past or the present has contributed so much to the preservation of Hindu *dharma* as Sri Veda Vyasa has done. He excels all other writers in his extraordinary mental insights, social awareness and vision of Truth. This mighty intellect evokes the greatest admiration and wonder even in the hearts of western critics.

It is believed that Vyasa was born as the son of a Brahmin *rishi* and a fisherwoman. He combined in his nature the *sattwa* quality of his father and the daring adventurousness of his mother. He was born at a time when the Hindus were in the process of forgetting their glorious *Vedic* heritage. Sensing the growing preoccupation of his generation with material prosperity and the falling standards of spiritual values, Vyasa set out to revive Hindu *dharma*. He was a revivalist who contributed the maximum to Hindu renaissance of that critical era. He was a daring religious revolutionary who put Hinduism back on its pedestal.

Compiling the Vedas

Veda Vyasa was the title given to this great poet-seer because he compiled the then existing *Veda Mantras* into four written volumes in a daring attempt to preserve this priceless knowledge for future generations. Much of the *Vedas* was already forgotten and it is his vision which led him to perpetuate the *Vedas* as we know them today. In compiling the *Vedas*, he brought about a harmonious rhythm by dividing each book into four sections – *Mantras* (chants), *Brahmanas* (rituals and rules of conduct), *Aranyakas* (methods of subjective worship) and *Upanishads* (philosophic revelations).

The Brahma Sutra

After compiling the *Vedas*, he found that the majority of the people were interested in the *Karma Kanda* portion of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishadic* portion

which is the essence of the *Vedas* was being totally neglected even by the scholars. Veda Vyasa therefore crystallised the *Upanishadic* thoughts enshrined in the *Upanishads* and wrote the famous text called the *Brahma Sutra*. The *Brahma Sutra* became the definitive text of *Advaita Vedanta*.

The Puranas

Still dissatisfied, since his famous works would not be able to reach the common man, he evolved a new kind of literature called the '*Puranas*'. Through them, he brought together the quint-essence of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* by means of stories and anecdotes to the understanding of the uneducated and the underprivileged. The eighteen *Puranas* and the *Bhagavata Mahapurana* are the unique contribution of Maharshi Veda Vyasa to Hindu spiritual literature.

Mahabharata

However, the greatest achievement of this genius was the *itihasa* called the *Mahabharata*, which was instrumental in changing the very fabric of thought of generations of Hindus. It is called the fifth *Veda* and is basically a *Dharma Sastra*. In the middle of his masterpiece, Vyasa introduced 'The Song Celestial', which shines like a dazzling pendant in a garland of enchanting lyrics. It is often said that whatever is not there in the *Mahabharata* is not there in the outer world – *Vyasocchishtam jagat sarvam*. Indeed the entire *Mahabharata* is the story of Vyasa's own children and grandchildren. The characters in it are so human that even a perfect man like Yudhishtira had his own little weaknesses and an evil Duryodhana also had his own good points. Kunti, Gandhari, Draupadi, Karna and Sakuni are some of the unforgettable characters

in this great epic. Not only was Vyasa's intellect mighty but he also held in his embrace of love the entire universe of living beings. To bring to all creatures a sparkling life of joy and exuberance was the anxiety in Vyasa's heart, and the result is this greatest of all epics.

Writes Pujya Swami Chinmayananda, "The versatile genius of Vyasa has never left anything that he has touched without raising it to the sublimest heights of sheer perfection. A brilliant philosopher, an incomparable poet, a consummate man of wisdom, a genius in worldly knowledge – now in the palace, now in the battlefield, now among the silent, snowy peaks strode the colossus, Sri Vyasa as an embodiment of what is best in the Hindu tradition."

Vidura

One of the outstanding characters in the *Mahabharata* is Sri Vidura, who was the half-brother of Dhritarashtra and Pandu. Born as the son of Sri Vyasa and a maid servant in the palace, Vidura is an embodiment of *dharma*. In the *Mahabharata* there is an interesting story about the birth of Vidura. There was a great *tapasvi* called Mandavya Rishi who was once doing penance standing knee deep in a river. Suddenly there was a commotion as the officers of the king who were chasing some thieves caught them with their booty which was thrown where the saint was doing penance. Taking the saint to be an accomplice of the thieves, they took him into custody and later impaled him along with the common thieves. While all the thieves died, the *rishi* was alive which amazed and frightened the king. He rushed to him and ordered him to be released and apologized for his thoughtless action. When the time of death finally came, Mandavya Rishi questioned Dharma Raja his undeserved suffering and

was told it was because as a little child, he had strung butterflies in a thin stick. The *rishi* became angry for having been cruelly punished for the ignorant act of a little child and cursed Dharma Raja to be born as a human being. Dharma Raja was thus born as Sri Vidura.

Vidura was indeed a superhuman being who was well versed in all the *shastras* and all branches of knowledge given to a royal prince. His intelligence was colossal and because of his immense learning and wisdom, he became the advisor of his brother, King Dhritarashtra. If only the blind king had listened to the wise counsel of Vidura, the *Mahabharata* war would not have taken place. To Vidura, righteousness was far better than fighting. Being a *dharmic* man his love was always for the Pandavas who revered him, and always sought his wise counsel. During the war, however, he remained with Dhritarashtra, pulled as he was by a sense of duty and brotherly affection.

Due to his partiality towards his own evil sons, Dhritarashtra refused the legitimate share of the kingdom to the Pandavas and Vidura was so hurt that he left the palace and lived in a humble dwelling. Dhritarashtra's conscience

pricked him and he sent for Vidura and sought his counsel. The advice of Vidura is known as *Viduraniti* which is a celebrated work and is valid even in our days. Vidura describes the duties of a father and a king. He spoke to Dhritarashtra without fear or favour and *Viduraniti* is an excellent guide to all politicians. But alas! The good counsel of Vidura fell on deaf ears as Dhritarashtra was overcome with attachment towards his sons.

When the Pandavas were banished and were living in the house made of lac, Vidura saved them from the tragedy of being burnt by the wicked Duryodhana.

After the war, he accompanied his brother, Dhritarashtra, Gandhari and Kunti to the forest and turned away from all worldly preoccupations. Always a great devotee of the Lord, Vidura was blessed to hear the counsel given by the Lord to Uddhava from the mouth of *Maitreya*. Finally, in deep contemplation, he left his body and merged in the Highest.

Vidura's life exemplified the virtues of duty, loyalty, simplicity, wisdom and desirelessness. He was truly an incarnation of *dharma*.

SATI AHALYA

PROF. SEEMA MANDAVIA

Out of two types of women, described in Ramayana, Sati Ahalya belongs to the first type. The women of this type were called ascetic, who retired to the forests to lead a contemplative life. They are found staying practically alone, spreading the fragrance of their inner perfection for the benefit of those who get into their immediate neighbourhood. The names of Anasuya, Shabari, Swayamprabha, Ahalya etc., can be mentioned in this category, where Ahalya is described in greater detail. Her struggles, her fall and her further disciplines teach us a number of lessons.

The story of Ahalya has to be approached with respect and reverence by all who sincerely struggle to achieve self-mastery, because it shows that spiritual eminence is hardly achieved at one bound by anyone, but that it comes as the culmination of a series of victories over the lower impulses in oneself.

Hala means ugliness. As there was nothing blamable in her, Brahma himself gave her the name Ahalya. It is said, the deity left her in the care of the sage Gautama for a long time. The self-controlled Gautama looked after her carefully and gave her back, pure and unsullied to Brahma. Highly pleased with this virtuous conduct, Brahma gave her in marriage to Gautama himself. Marriage did not make any change in their attitude towards discipline, as they continued their ascetic practices with the same intensity and rigour as before.

But, this spiritual life or ascetic life is not smooth. Many hurdles come in

between. Something untoward happens in the life of Ahalya too. There was, however in Ahalya's character a small trace of 'perverse understanding' and curiosity which combined with her 'matchless beauty' exposed her to temptation. And that temptation came through the treachery of Indra. When she was married to Gautama, Indra got jealous, as he imagined himself to be the proper husband for her. So once, in the absence of the sage, Indra assumed the form of the sage Gautama and found no difficulty in seducing her, since, apparently, her austerity was not at that stage strong enough to triumph over the demands of the senses.

As one advances in austerity in the spiritual path, one gets some powers called 'siddhis'. This austerity makes speech creative and what a saint utters comes true. An angry speech then becomes a curse, while a speech with goodwill behind it becomes a blessing. Gautama in righteous indignation cursed Indra as well as Ahalya. To Ahalya he said, "Though Indra is the supreme God of all gods, but ultimately he is '*Rajoguna*' personified. *Rajoguna* leads to the path of temptation or any such vices. But I am grieved that a *sattavik* person like you have succumbed to temptation. You are gifted with beauty and youth but your mind is fickle. You shall not continue as the single, beautiful maiden in the world. For thousands of years you shall live here unseen, feeding on air, without food and tormented by repentance". Ahalya felt very bad of her mistake and expected consolation from her husband, but she got contrary result!—the curse of her husband and

listening to this she was really grief-stricken to such an extent as her heart got the biggest blow and as if it were frozen. The sage had, however, then assured her saying, 'When the irrepressible Rama will come in this dense forest, you will be cleansed of your sin by giving him hospitality'. Thus the time was passing in days, months and years...but she was not eating, drinking or doing anything, became just like a stone! For sometime the sage didn't look at her, but afterwards when he got conscious of his anger, his heart got softened and in repentance went to Ahalya, gave her consolation, offered his services but of no avail!

Then after many years, when Rama and Lakshman were passing through the forest with Vishwamitra, they came to this place and at the sight of Rama her curse ended. Both the princes took hold of her feet, seeing the magnificent lady flaming in ascetic energy. And she, remembering Gautama's words took hold of theirs. Thus by austerity, she was taken back by her saintly husband. In this way her life is a scintillating example for the seekers of truth, who are walking on the path of spirituality.

MAHARISHI ATRI AND SATI ANASUYA : THE IDEAL COUPLE

K.NARAYANASWAMI

A fair glimpse of the beautifully simple and austere life led by the ideal couple, the great sage Atri and his virtuous wife Anasuya, in their ripe old age in the forest of Chitrakuta is provided to us by Valmiki in Ayodya Kanda.

After Bharata returned to Ayodhya from Chitrakuta with his retinue, taking Rama's *padukas* with him, Rama found that the ecological balance of the peaceful forest had been disturbed very much by the vast army. Therefore, he decided to quit the place and move to deeper regions of the forest. Moreover, many sages who were doing the penances in the *ashramas* in Chitrakuta, also started moving away from the place for various reasons, one of them being their fear that the serenity of the place would be disturbed frequently in the future.

Rama, Sita and Lakshmana reverentially called on Sage Atri, to take his blessings before leaving the place. The sage received Rama with much affection as if he was his own son and showed him every courtesy as an honourable guest.

Atri who knew what was right and what was good to all creatures called his aged his highly blessed wife Anasuya by her name and introduced her to Rama. He chose such kind words of praise that showed what amount, of affection and esteem he had for his aged wife bent down by years of austere life and practice of virtues.

He said, "Rama, here is my wife the celebrated Anasuya, who has distinguished herself with practice of severe asceticism and difficult sacred vows for many years. Once, when the whole world had been dried up by a continuous period of drought for ten long years, she saved and nurtured the entire plant kingdom with the power gained from her ascetic life. By virtue of the same power she made the river Ganga flow close to my hermitage with the name Mandakini. She gave the benefit of her long penances to gods and all living beings. Let Sita pay her respects to this celebrated *tapaswini*, who has never known anger, and take her blessings".

Rama turned to Sita and said, "Now that you have listened to the words of this great sage, you may quickly approach, this hermitess reverentially and seek her blessings. She is shown great reverence by the entire world for her virtuous life and good actions and is well known as 'Anasuya', one who is free from jealousy and also at the same time one to whom no one can have an attitude of jealousy or ill will, because she is so good.

Anasuya took Sita to the inner enclosure of the hut and made her feel quite at home. Thereafter she discoursed to Sita in very kind words about the greatness of a life of virtues and chastity and how a married woman could rise to great heights of glory by leading a life of perfect understanding with her husband and helping him with utmost faith, sincerity and ability in the pursuit of religious disciplines.

When Sita took her leave Anasuya blessed her and presented to her garments, unguents and jewels.

The greatness of Sage Atri is referred to in several stories contained in *Vedas*, *Mahabharata* and other puranas. His name commonly finds a place in the different lists of names of the seven great sages (*Saptarishis*) appearing in various *Puranas*. Many *Rig Veda mantras* are ascribed to him (*as Mantra Dhrashta*). Every where he is spoken of with reverence, as one given to severe austerities and sacrifices and as one ready to help the gods and creatures with his *mantrabala* and *tapobala*.

One such story describes how the whole Universe was plunged in darkness when the demons led by Swarbhanu attacked the Sun God ;and the Moon God and how Atri came to the rescue of the gods by lighting up the Universe with radiance, using his power of austerities.

The birth of Soma (the Moon God) as his son is also symbolically described in one *Purana*. By virtue of his long ascetic discipline his body had acquired such a brilliance that its luster spread over the entire sky and ultimately helped in the emergence of Soma.

It has also been said that he was known by the very name "Atri" (A-tri) because he proved himself to be beyond the influence of the three *gunas*, *Satwa*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*.

The *Puranas* describe his devoted wife Anasuya as a model of virtues, piety and chastity and as an ideal wife worthy of emulation by all women at all times. Her chaste life of discipline and asceticism gave her a great store of power, which she used only in

exceptional circumstances, either to protect her own chastity or to save the world at times of great peril.

A few such instances are worth recounting.

Once sage Narada wanted to show to the entire world, the greatness of Anasuya and the glory of chastity. He held a difficult contest for the three supreme goddesses, Lakshmi, Parvati and Saraswati, which was intended to prove who among them was the most virtuous and powerful one. When they failed to win the challenged him to show to them any other woman who could come out successful in the same contest. He showed to them how Atri's a faithful wife Anasuya could easily prove herself by winning the contest. Then the three goddesses individually requested their respective spouses, Vishnu, Siva and Brahma to deprive Anasuya of the power held in store by her. They took the cue from Narada and played their part in the whole "Leela". They went to Anasuya in the guise of pious mendicants and asked for '*Bhiksha*', with a precondition which no virtuous woman would accept. But the great Anasuya understood who they were and the purpose of their visit, with the help of her power, and changed them into cradle babies and fed them fulfilling their conditional wish.

When everything ended well the *Trimurtis* gave their *darsan* to Sage Atri and *Sati* Anasuya in their proper forms and granted their wish for progenies. With their blessings three sons were born to the pious couple in due course, each with the *amsa* of each of the trimurtis and they were the great Dattatreya, Durvasa and Soma.

In another popular story (which has *puranic* support) it is described how Anasuya intervened at the behest of gods when the entire creation was threatened with doom and the gods themselves were helpless.

That is the story of Nalayini, another virtuous lady who wanted to save her husband from instant death at daybreak, by the operation of a curse, unwittingly pronounced on him by a sage called Mandavya, Nalayini prayed to Sun God and appealed to him not to rise at all, so that there would not be a day break and her husband would not die. The Sun God feared her because she was so chaste and virtuous and therefore complied with her wish. The activities of the entire world stopped abruptly. The Gods in heaven did not get their share of oblations, as sacrifices were not performed by the people. The entire cycle of seasons, rains, sunshine and so forth came to standstill and there were chaos in the whole Universe.

The gods approached Brahma for advice and he directed them to propitiate Anasuya, the epitome of womanly virtues.

In Markandeya Purana Brahma's advice is given in beautiful words:-

“Majesty is subdued by majesty indeed, austerities also by austerities, Oh, you immortals! Hence, now that you desire the Sun should rise you have to propitiate Atri's faithful wife Anasuya who is rich in austerities”.

The kind-hearted Anasuya was moved both by the plight of Nalayini on the one hand and that of the Universe on the other hand she agreed to intervene. She came to Nalayini and gave her the word that if she withdraw her appeal to the Sun God, her husband would be given a new lease of a healthy and virtuous life. Putting her faith in Anasuya, Nalayini gave her consent to the Sun rising as usual and the activities of the Universe restarting. Anasuya, with her power preserved the life of the lady's Husband, who not only got a fresh lease of life but also turned to be a man of virtues and fine healthy, which he was not previously.

The *Trimurtis* who were present as witnesses to the wonderful event were pleased with Anasuya. The blessed Atri and Anasuya with freedom *samsara* (the cycle of birth and death) and *Moksha*.

There are many such exhilarating stories eulogizing the virtues of Sage Atri and *Sati* Anasuya. They have always been a source of inspiration to all pious men and women to lead a simple and noble life of high thinking, idealism and compassion to all living beings.

Vyasa and Vidura

By Swamini Niranjanananda

The Mahabharata is the greatest epic poem in the world, being eight times as long as the Iliad and the Odyssey put together. It is longer than the united extent of all the poems in European languages. The Indians hold this book in great reverence while people all over the world regard it as the greatest classic of world literature. It is called the 'fifth Veda' and is the treasure house of ancient wisdom and Hindu culture. It has moulded the heart and mind of an entire race in a way no other epic in the world has done. Our magnificent epics Ramayana and Mahabharata were crucial in the formation of national traditions and character and have left a deep impression on the texture of Indian life. Mahabharata is a voluminous epic of more than one lakh verses, with many stories and anecdotes touching on almost every aspect of human welfare and dharma.

Veda Vyasa – the author

The authorship of this great work is attributed to Veda Vyasa who was also known by other names such as Badarayana, Krishnadvaipayana and Parasharya. This great poet philosopher has become an institution representing the entire Hindu heritage. No single individual in the past or the present has contributed so much to the preservation of Hindu *dharma* as Sri Veda Vyasa has done. He excels all other writers in his extraordinary mental insights, social awareness and vision of Truth. This mighty intellect evokes the greatest admiration and wonder even in the hearts of western critics.

It is believed that Vyasa was born as the son of a Brahmin rishi and a fisherwoman. He combined in his nature the *sattwa* quality of his father and the daring adventurousness of his mother. He was born at a time when the Hindus were in the process of forgetting their glorious *Vedic* heritage. Sensing the growing preoccupation of his generation with material prosperity and the falling standards of spiritual values, Vyasa set out to revive Hindu *dharma*. He was a revivalist who contributed the maximum to Hindu renaissance of that critical era. He was a daring religious revolutionary who put Hinduism back on its pedestal.

Compiling the Vedas

Veda Vyasa was the title given to this great poet-seer because he compiled the then existing *Veda Mantras* into four written volumes in a daring attempt to preserve this priceless knowledge for future generations. Much of the *Vedas* was already forgotten and it is his vision which led him to perpetuate the *Vedas* as we know them today. In compiling the *Vedas*, he brought about a harmonious rhythm by dividing each book into four sections – *Mantras* (chants), *Brahmanas* (rituals and rules of conduct), *Aranyakas* (methods of subjective worship) and *Upanishads* (philosophic revelations).

The Brahma Sutra

After compiling the *Vedas*, he found that the majority of the people were interested in the *Karma Kanda* portion of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishadic* portion which is the essence of the *Vedas* was

being totally neglected even by the scholars. *Veda* Vyasa therefore crystallised the *Upanishadic* thoughts enshrined in the *Upanishads* and wrote the famous text called the *Brahma Sutra*. The *Brahma Sutra* became the definitive text of *Advaita Vedanta*.

The Puranas

Still dissatisfied, since his famous works would not be able to reach the common man, he evolved a new kind of literature called the '*Puranas*'. Through them, he brought together the quintessence of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* by means of stories and anecdotes to the understanding of the uneducated and the underprivileged. The eighteen *Puranas* and the *Bhagavata Mahapurana* are the unique contribution of *Maharshi Veda Vyasa* to Hindu spiritual literature.

Mahabharata

However, the greatest achievement of this genius was the *itihasa* called the *Mahabharata*, which was instrumental in changing the very fabric of thought of generations of Hindus. It is called the fifth *Veda* and is basically a *Dharma Shashtra*. In the middle of his masterpiece, Vyasa introduced 'The Song Celestial', which shines like a dazzling pendant in a garland of enchanting lyrics. It is often said that whatever is not there in the *Mahabharata* is not there in the outer world – *Vyasocchishtam jagat sarvam*. Indeed the entire *Mahabharata* is the story of Vyasa's own children and grandchildren. The characters in it are so human that even a perfect man like Yudhishtira had his own little weaknesses and an evil Duryodhana also had his own good points. Kunti, Gandhari, Draupadi, Karna and Sakuni are some of the unforgettable characters

in this great epic. Not only was Vyasa's intellect mighty but he also held in his embrace of love the entire universe of living beings. To bring to all creatures a sparkling life of joy and exuberance was the anxiety in Vyasa's heart, and the result is this greatest of all epics.

Writes *Pujya Swami Chinmayananda*, "The versatile genius of Vyasa has never left anything that he has touched without raising it to the sublimest heights of sheer perfection. A brilliant philosopher, an incomparable poet, a consummate man of wisdom, a genius in worldly knowledge – now in the palace, now in the battlefield, now among the silent, snowy peaks strode the colossus, Sri Vyasa as an embodiment of what is best in the Hindu tradition."

Vidura

One of the outstanding characters in the *Mahabharata* is Sri Vidura, who was the half-brother of Dhritarashtra and Pandu. Born as the son of Sri Vyasa and a maid servant in the palace, Vidura is an embodiment of *dharma*. In the *Mahabharata* there is an interesting story about the birth of Vidura. There was a great *tapasvi* called Mandavya *Rishi* who was once doing penance standing knee deep in a river. Suddenly there was a commotion as the officers of the king who were chasing some thieves caught them with their booty which was thrown where the saint was doing penance. Taking the saint to be an accomplice of the thieves, they took him into custody and later impaled him along with the common thieves. While all the thieves died, the *rishi* was alive which amazed and frightened the king. He rushed to him and ordered him to be released and apologized for his thoughtless action. When the time of death finally came, Mandavya *Rishi* questioned *Dharma Raja* his undeserved suffering and

was told it was because as a little child, he had strung butterflies in a thin stick. The *rishi* became angry for having been cruelly punished for the ignorant act of a little child and cursed *Dharma Raja* to be born as a human being. *Dharma Raja* was thus born as Sri Vidura.

Vidura was indeed a superhuman being who was well versed in all the *shastras* and all branches of knowledge given to a royal prince. His intelligence was colossal and because of his immense learning and wisdom, he became the advisor of his brother, King Dhritarashtra. If only the blind king had listened to the wise counsel of Vidura, the *Mahabharata* war would not have taken place. To Vidura, righteousness was far better than fighting. Being a *dharmic* man his love was always for the Pandavas who revered him, and always sought his wise counsel. During the war, however, he remained with Dhritarashtra, pulled as he was by a sense of duty and brotherly affection.

Due to his partiality towards his own evil sons, Dhritarashtra refused the legitimate share of the kingdom to the Pandavas and Vidura was so hurt that he left the palace and lived in a humble dwelling. Dhritarashtra's conscience

pricked him and he sent for Vidura and sought his counsel. The advice of Vidura is known as *Viduraniti* which is a celebrated work and is valid even in our days. Vidura describes the duties of a father and a king. He spoke to Dhritarashtra without fear or favour and *Viduraniti* is an excellent guide to all politicians. But alas! The good counsel of Vidura fell on deaf ears as Dhritarashtra was overcome with attachment towards his sons.

When the Pandavas were living in the house made of lac-, Vidura saved them from the tragedy of being burnt by the wicked Duryodhana.

After the war, he accompanied his brother, Dhritarashtra, Gandhari and Kunti to the forest and turned away from all worldly preoccupations. Always a great devotee of the Lord, Vidura was blessed to hear the counsel given by the Lord to Uddhava from the mouth of Maitreya. Finally, in deep contemplation, he left his body and merged in the Highest.

Vidura's life exemplified the virtues of duty, loyalty, simplicity, wisdom and desirelessness. He was truly an incarnation of *dharma*.

**PURANAS: The Reading glasses for
the Vedas**

Kanchi Paramacharya

1. As a reading glass shows small letters as big ones, the Puranas enlarge the laws of Dharma, enunciated succinctly in the Vedas.

2. A short version may not touch the heart. The same, told in the form of a long story will make a deep impression. The Veda says just “Satyam vada”. The story of Harischandra narrates in a number of chapters, the glory of speaking the truth. What is mentioned in the Veda just in two words ‘Dharmam chara’ ‘Practise righteousness’, is reexpressed in a long story in the Mahabharata as the life of Dharmaputra. The Vedic dictum – ‘Matru devo bhava’, ‘Pitru devo bhava’; ‘(Let your father be your god; Let your mother be your goddess)’ is enlarged by the lenses of Sri Rama’s story. The commands of the Vedas in the form of humility, forbearance, compassion, chastity and other Dharmas have been taken up by the heroes and heroines of Puranas. Through their life-stories, the Vedic commands are illuminated. Listening to them and reading them, we develop a keen interest in these Dharmas.

3. These noble characters have been subjected to trials and difficulties, much more than us, the erring mortals. They have undergone terrible tribulations. Yet when we read their stories we do not feel ‘The practice of dharma would lead us only to misery. “Let us abandon Dharma!” We never feel so.

The mental clarity and peace these characters achieved—that alone touches our minds and hearts. They never budged in the face of their trials and stood firm like a rock. Our hearts melt when we hear

of their suffering and this cleanses our hearts. The final victory and fame they achieve make us hold on to Dharma firmly.

4. Some scholars do not consider the Puranas as history. They quote them whenever it suits them—to ‘prove’ the Arya - Dravida divisive theories. And they discard the Puranic references to the miracles, supernatural events as fiction and myth. As they believe the super-sensorial events to be untrue, they reject the Puranas as historical evidence.

5. The Puranas also repeat themselves as History repeats itself. But Puranas lead the readers on the moral path. History does not have any such message.

6. Though Puranas are also histories, they teach the basic lessons on merit and sin to the people and select only such educative stories for the readers. They teach us that people of righteous behaviour win in this birth itself and *adharmins* lose here itself. There is no Puranic story that does not teach us the effects of *papa* and *punya*.

7. Though the Puranas list the names of kings of the Solar and Lunar dynasties, they dwell on the lives of meritorious characters for long and dismiss others in a line or two. For example, the Bhagavata describes *in extenso* the story of Dhruva, a living example of Devotion, constancy of effort and firmness. Dhruva’s father, Uttanapada, Dhruva’s son etc are disposed off in just two or three lines.

8. The Englishmen called our Puranas, Myths, untrue statements. But when they wrote our History, they incorporated in it their ‘Divide and Rule’ ideology in the form of the ‘Race theory’, pretending that they were objective researchers. Now efforts are on, to reconstruct Indian history and free

it from the British interpolations. These people may have their own prejudices. Truly objective history may not be written at all.

9. Vyasa who wrote the 18 Puranas, the noble people who wrote the *Sthala Puranas* and Sekkizhar, the composer of the Tamil *Periyapuranam* were the truly objective writers.

10. The stories of kings alone need not be the true history of a people. But our *Puranas* keep *Dharma* at the centre and to illustrate it, use not the Royal people, but the righteous people, the seers and the ordinary people. The *Puranas* give us information about all other aspects of life. The *Puranas* bring to us the messages on the political and cultural life of the people as well as the arts and sciences of those times. But the key points are *Dharma* and spiritual well-being of the people.

(Translated from Tamil 'Deivathin Kural II' Vanati – Chennai 1978)

Are Puranas True?
Kanchi Paramacharya

If everyone wants to excise from the *Puranas*, what he takes to be an interpolation, there will be nothing left at the end. Therefore even if we believe that there are some mistakes and confusion in them, we have to conserve the *Puranas* in the same form in which they have reached our hands. If there is anything of fiction in it, let it be there. At least they serve the purpose of leading us to God and thereby quieten our minds!

We go to a shop for purchasing some grocery. We get good stuff and we are satisfied that our purpose is fulfilled. We should not complain that the shop has

such and such deficiency or that the shop keeper has this fault or that.

If there are some errors in geography, astronomy and of aeons (*manvantaras*) let us ignore them. We have “Geographical” “Astronomical” “Historical” lessons (of modern studies). The principles of the Supreme God, the principles of Devotion, *Dharma*, which cannot be proffered by these (modern) books are given to us by the *Puranas*.

Some people argue that Rama could not have lived in the Tretaye Yuga or so many lakhs of years back. The kind of civilization portrayed in the Ramayana could not have existed then. I do not agree with them. Still for the sake of argument, I say this. Let us say Treta yuga was not the age of Rama. Let the stories of the earlier Krita yuga be not of that antiquity. Let us say all the events took place within the last seven to eight thousand years. Will that all bring down the values of the story of Rama? Or of the other tales? Will their lessons be different or wrong?

The Shastras say that Vyasa gave us the *Puranas* 5000 years ago in the beginning of the Kaliyuga. There were *Puranas* in the earlier periods too. In the Chhandogya Upanishad, Narada mentions the *Puranas* where he catalogues the Vidyas (arts and sciences) he has mastered. That gives us the indication that puranas were there in the Vedic and Upanishadic period also. To suit the less energetic people of the later times, Vyasa divided the Vedas into many branches (*shakhas*). Similarly he might have elaborated on the *Puranas* also.

But the English educated people say that the *Puranas* are not very ancient. Let them be so. The researches about the age of the *Puranas* are meaningless. The purpose of the *Puranas* is to cleanse the

mind, to remove the *vrittis*. With that kind of attitude and, respect, if we study the *Puranas*, with devotion and concern for righteousness, many objections would vanish.

The biggest superstition is to believe implicitly if anything is called "Research". The present day researches have many holes in them. Even if this research is true and the *Puranas* fictitious, they imprint on our mind the great lesson "the righteous people lived; the errant men perished". That is how the *Puranas* deliver their goods.

Not only the modernists, even the learned in the scriptures and the wise people give secondary importance to the *Puranas*. The exponents of *Puranas* are considered inferior to the lecturers of other scriptures. But great scholars *Mahamahopadhyaya* Yagnaswamy sastrigal, *Mahamahopadhyaya* Kape Ramachandrachar and others lectured on the *Puranas* frequently. Of late Shrivatsa Somadeva Sharma is trying to bring out summaries of 18 *Puranas*.

(Translated from Tamil "Deivathin Kural II" Vanati – Chennai 1978)

Box Item Size of the Puranas

The 18 *Puranas* are made up of 400,000 *granthas*. Each *grantha* is made up of 32 letters. *Skandha purana* is made of 1,00,000 *granthas* the other 17 make 3,00,000 *granthas*. *Mahabharata* is of 1,00,000 *granthas*. Ten of the eighteen *puranas* are on Shiva.

The authority of the Puranas Kanchi Paramacharya

1.Many well known episodes of our religious life are from the *Puranas*.

2.The *Puranas* carry philosophy, story and history.

3.Parashara the father of Vyasa, wrote the *Vishnu Purana*. It is quoted as an authority by Shankara in his *Vishnu-Sahasranama Bhashya*. In Ramanuja's philosophy too, *Vishnu purana* is an important source book.

4.Alavandar's posthumous instruction to Ramanuja was that the latter should glorify Parasara and Vyasa.

5.Vyasa rewrote the *Puranas* so that all people can receive the message of the *Vedas*.

6. *Bhagawata* was recited by Suka son of Vyasa to Parikshit.

7. The term *Bhagawata* may signify *Vishnu Bhagawata* or *Devi Bhagawata* or both.

8.The *Markandeya Purana* has the *mantra-Durga Saptashati* - the 700 *mantras* worshipping Durga through *yagna*.

9. Chaitanya, Nimbarka or Vallabha place in their philosophies the *Vishnupurana* on par with the *Vedas*.

10. *Garuda purana* is studied on the occasion of funerals and shraddha.

11. *Lalita Sahasranama* is a part of *Brahmandapurana*.

12. The popular 108 names, 1008 names, *Kavachas*, *Aditya Hridayam*, *Pradosha stotra* are all parts of *Puranas*/epics.

13. There are *Puranas* glorifying various months, *tirthas* and pilgrim centres.

14. There are *Puranas* about devotees of god. '*Periya Puranam*' is in Tamil. It has

been adapted in Samskrit as '*Upamanyu Bhakti vilasam*'. Bhakta Vijayam/ BhaktaMala talks of the lives of the devotees of Pandurang Vitthala.

(Source: "Deivathin Kural II" Vanati – Chennai 1978)

STHALA PURANAS

By Kanchi Paramacharya

1. Learned believers say that *Sthala puranas*, localized epics and *puranas* are repetitions of the same events age after age (*Kalpa*). An event associated with a particular place in one *Kalpa*, may occur in a different place in the next *Kalpa*.

2. The *Sthala puranas* create faith, shape the characters of the people, intensify devotion in the minds of the local people, giving their village or region a place in the larger stories.

3. *Thevarams*, the *Shaiva* scriptures, and *Divya Prabandhams* the *Vaishnavaita* scriptures are as sacred and authentic as the *Vedas*. These scriptures do glorify *Sthala puranas* and refer to events from them. For example The *SriRanga Sthala purana* refers to Vibhishana receiving the idol of Ananta Shayana Vishnu from Sri Rama. But the idol took roots and got installed at Shrirangam thwarting Vibhishana's efforts to carry the same to Sri Lanka. Then the Lord Ananta Shayana Ranganatha condescended to lie facing south, in order to assuage the feelings of Vibhishana. This event has been referred to Tondaradipodi Azhwar (Vipra. Narayana) in an authoritative text.

4. The *Sthalapurana* of Kanchipuram mentions that Devi Kamakshi embraced a Shivalinga to save it from a flood. Sundarar a great saint confirms this event in his *Thevaram*.

5. These events show that Saints of great influence too accepted and quoted from the *Sthala puranas*. Such references are made not only about large, great and famous temples, but too about small places and temples. In a region, a number of temples are linked by a common history and one local *purana*. For example the tale of a pot full of Nectar which was shattered and scattered by Shiva's arrow has a multi-centred evidence in a dozen places around Kumbakonam in TamilNadu.

6. Rameshwaram, Vedaranyam and Pattishvaram are related by stories of Rama. Rama had visited these places and worshipped Shiva there as an act of expiation for killing Ravana, a *brahmana*, a valorous hero and a glorious person. Rama had to install three Shivalingas as a *prayascitta* for killing a *brahmana*, a hero, a glorious devotee. Incidentally this tale linking three places of wide interval, nails the bluff that the Ramayana is the story of Rama (an Aryan) killing Ravana (a "non Vedic") Dravidian!

7. Similarly a story of one pious Brahmin of Mayuram (in Tamil Nadu) tallies event-for-event to a story of the same person in Kashi. Two highly localized *puranas* thus refer to a same person in two places 2000 km from each other. Such highly improbable coincidences confer great reliability and authenticity on *Sthalapuranas*.

8. *Sthala puranas* supplement and compliment one another and fill in the details missed in *Mahapuranas* and epics. They are great source books of information about local usages, customs and cultures.

9. Thousands of such *Sthala puranas* are extant and they enlighten us on the practice of *Dharma* in minute details. The great poets of Tamil Nadu, following the

footsteps of great *rishis* and incorporating oral, local traditions, have composed these *Sthala puranas*. *Mahatmiyams*, *Kalambakams* and *Ulas* rank with the *Sthala puranas*.

10. The 16th century in Tamil Nadu is marked by scholars as the century of *Sthala puranas*.

Gnanaprakasa, Shaiva Ellappa Navalar, Umapati Shivacharya, Shiva Prakasha swami, Veeraraghava, the Blind poet, The lame-blind duo of poets, Shivakozhundhu Desikar, Trikoota Rajappa and Mahavidwan Minakshi Sundaram Pillai were men of great eminence, scholarship and wisdom and they have authored these *Sthala puranas* adding to their weightage. The rulers patroined these works with open handed generosity.

(Translated from Tamil "Deivathin Kural II" Vanati – Chennai 1978)

Specific Folk forms Related to the Mahabharata in TamilNadu Saraswati Venugopal

Ramaraju remarks: The rural folks of Andhra have culled out from the great epic *Mahabharata*, some topics here and there and composed their own lore of ballads. Just like the augmentation of Ramayana episode, the Bharata epic was also enlarged and strange-ballads and tales woven into it" These remarks hold good for Tamils also.

To create new stories and invent new episodes is a common folk tendency. The traditional stories are altogether changed, altered, and recast in a unique manner. Their own innate creative genius is blended into the previously existing story-format. New creations were made and added to the Ramayana epic and similarly with the Mahabharata such deviations

from and extensions of the original stories are made not only by the rural folk but also by classical writers. This interpolatory tendency is mainly the outcome of the mental attitude of the politically incensed people both sophisticated and unsophisticated" –Says Ramaraju.

This is equally true in the Tamil context.

(Extracts: The Mahabharata in the Tribal and Folk Traditions in India. I.I.A.S. Shimla – 1993)

Why did the Westerners carry Away our Manuscripts if they are worthless? Kanchi Paramacharya

Libraries are to the cultural wealth of a Nation, what treasuries are to its material wealth. At a time when printing presses were not known in India, only one or two copies of rare books were preserved in the palm-leaf-manuscript libraries. To destroy the manuscript was to destroy the book itself. The invaders would violate women, destroy temples and burn down the libraries of the countries they attacked.

I am proud to say that in our *Rajaniti shastras* there is no permission for such offences. When a Jain Amarsinha was defeated in an argument with Adi Shankara, he rushed to consign his writings to flames. Adi Shankara stopped him, defending the right of a philosophy to survive.

But the invaders into this country had no use for such goodness. They were more interested in burning our libraries and hurting our sentiments.

When the Carnatic Nawabs and others ascended to power, the Muslim army fanned out into Tamil Nadu. They considered the destruction of Saraswati

Mahal Manuscript library of Tanjavur as an equivalent to razing down the Big Temple. They eagerly marched forward to finish off the library. Dabir Pant was a Mahrashtrian Brahmin who was the minister to the Tanjavur ruler, a descendent of Shivaji. He thought of a way out of the crisis. He told the marauders "We have not only Hindu scriptures here, we have copies of Koran too in the library." The muslims said "Oh! Are there Koran copies here. We won't burn them!" Thus the library was saved.

The Britishers, Frenchmen and Germans saw whether they could benefit from our scriptures. When Mc. Kenzie was the Surveyor General he went beyond the call of duty and he arranged to have the palm leaf records perused, preserved and catalogued. Mc Kenzie's officers came to the math at Kumbakonam too and collected information.

A number of science books especially of Dhanur Veda were taken away from the Saraswati Mahal library. It is the popular perception that Hitler constructed bombs and aeroplanes with designs based on these books.

Bhoja's Somarangana Sutra and other books, reveal the fact that we possessed a variety of weapons. Brihad Samhita of Varaha Mihira refers to a number of sciences.

(Translated from Tamil 'Deivathin Kural II' Vanati- Chennai 17-1978)

The Quantum of Loss of Manuscripts

Michael Hahn

Dr. Wolfgang Voigt, then director of the Oriental Department of the Prussian State Library, Berlin, once told me the story when and how a project was founded. During a meeting of the German Oriental Society (Deutsche Morgenlandische Gesellschaft) which took place in the second half of the fifties, a group of the leading orientalist in Germany met and agreed upon the necessity to prepare scientific catalogues of all the oriental manuscripts kept in German libraries. An estimate of the time and size of the project was made and all the experts were convinced that it would take about four years to compile the about 20 volumes they believed to be sufficient to cover the material. Today the project runs for almost 35 years, more than 80 volumes have appeared and nobody dares to predict when and with how many volumes the project will be concluded. Four years ago one of my former staff-members at Marburg was given a life-time position with the sole task of cataloguing the Indian collections in Germany which are not yet dealt with in the 17 volumes which have so far appeared in the series "Description of the Oriental Manuscripts in Germany" At the end of the sixties the aforementioned cataloguing project turned into something much bigger, transcending the original scope and geographical confinement by far. Since the middle of the 19th century it had been known that in the small area of the Kathmandu valley in Nepal a great quantity of manuscripts are kept which distinguish themselves in two respects from those kept in India; first, the older ones among them are much older than the Indian manuscripts and, second, among them there are quite a few which are no longer extant in India. There is a third aspect also, a considerable portion

of the Buddhist literature which is more or less completely absent in India is available in Nepal in many copies. It is in early collection of these Buddhist manuscripts from Nepal on which the first scientific description of Indian Buddhism is based, the Hodgson collection which was distributed among libraries in Calcutta, Cambridge and Paris. For about one century Nepal had remained almost as inaccessible to foreigners as Tibet. Only a few Westerners like S. Levi or G. Tucci had been permitted to enter the country. After 1950 the country opened itself again to foreigners and very soon it became evident that the cultural heritage of this small and poor kingdom had little chance to withstand the aggressiveness of Western tourists. Anticipating the sellout of precious and irreplaceable documents, the plan was conceived by German Indologists to preserve the Nepalese manuscripts and documents by microfilming them.

In 1970 the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project was officially launched as a joint venture of the German Oriental Society and HMG Department of Archaeology. Over a period of 24 years more than 100,000 manuscripts with more than 4 million pages were microfilmed under this project, and many scholars all over the world have benefited from the possibility of easily and inexpensively ordering a microfilming text they are particularly interested in. Since then the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project has served as model for several minor and major projects and if I am not mistaken also the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts has used German experience to order microfilms of Indian manuscripts now kept outside India.

(The Perennial tree – I.C.C.R – New Age international (p) Ltd. New Delhi 1996)

Mahabharata in Tamil

By Ranganayaki Mahapatra

Tamil Nadu, like other parts of India, takes great pride and pleasure in the legendary connections it has with Mahabharata. The famous Mahabalipuram has as its proud tourist attraction-the rock which is actually butter chewed by Bhima. Arjuna's penance, which is a famous piece of sculpture there, is another local pride.

Draupadi has been raised to the highest place again by the Tamil national poet Subrahmanya Bharati. What Bankim Chandra dreamed for Bengali language-that is to make it a language full of life and vitality, Bharati wanted for Tamil Nadu. What is needed is that languages should be the languages of the common man, original and creative work should be produced in simple and easy language which a common man would understand and appreciate-all these and many more ideas were translated into action by Subrahmanya Bharati, to rejuvenate his mother tongue, Tamil. He wrote the epic *Pancali Sapatam*-the vow of Pancali-in Tamil, in a beautiful, lucid style, full of native genius using folk metres and rhymes. Though as literature it did not get to the masses then, his message to the Indian people, calling them through Pancali, was appreciated rightly.

She symbolized the fettered Bharatmata, queen in chains, left unprotected by the weak impotent natives, in Pancali, calling for help, for freedom.

She symbolized Indian woman, bound hand and foot by the ignorant, selfish, blind society, which does not realize that

real freedom for the country lies first in freeing the woman from her shackles and treating her as man's equal.

He has again brought into focus the *Mahabharata* which is an eternal drama that is going on today, the struggle between good and bad. In his *Panchali Sapatam*, Subrahmanya Bharati has mingled nationalism as well as his very philosophy of life too. So it has been again brought back as the mirror in which the modern man can see himself and understand. The moral perhaps is that the nation cannot be pawned to satisfy the personal egos and fancies, however mighty the leaders are. That scriptures can be interpreted by clever politicians, to suit their ends, not necessarily always in the interest of the vast multitude-the people. (From *Mahabharata* in the Tribal and Folk traditions of India. I.I.A.S. Shimla 1993)

Epics and Puranas influence Proverbs

The measure of an idea touching the heart of the common people, is how they express that idea in their own words. Proverbs are the distilled essence of custom, usage and tradition. Rich in meaning dressed in minimum of words, proverbs combine wisdom and wit. They are popular, wide-spread in appeal, and in India we find proverbs travelling across language barriers. Their wisdom has been tested by the touch-stone of time. Epic and Puranic events, characters, and messages, similes abound in Indian proverbs. Sita's chastity, Hanuman's monkey-like pranks, Sugriva's inviolable orders (to monkeys to discover Sita) Rama-Lakshmana's brotherly love, Rama's obedience to his father, Bhima's strength, Sakuni's cunning-ness, Kumbhakarna's sleep, are all part of the vocabulary of Indian languages, each word conveying a hundred

words' worth of meaning and significance. That is how in India, civilization has become a part of religion and not vice-versa.

Mahalaxmi is the standard for beauty and prosperity. A Telugu, proverb says "In a village where there are no cows, the barren buffalo is Shri Mahalaxmi". The Ganga is the example and standard for majestic flow but it does not make much sound, and is humble. The proverb again in Telugu goes "The flow of Ganga is always majestic but the gutter water flows with great sound."

The Bangla proverb ridicules a pampered son "A single son of a mother is so much pampered that he moves about like Yama's emissary."

A proverb in Kannada ridicules the efforts of mean persons who attempt what is impossible even for the mighty. "Who is to care for Uttarkumar when there are renowned and valiant warriors.?" Uttarkumar was the cowardly son of the king of Virata *desha*, where Arjuna and others lived in disguise.

One's own possessions are praised by oneself as the best of the lot. An Oriya proverb puts it thus "To each his home is like Mathura; to each her husband is like Krishna". Telugu has a slight variant. The woman whom one likes is Rambha; and the water one prefers to bathe in is Ganga."

The glory of self-help is brought out in the Hindi proverb. "One's own hand is the Jagannath". An Oriya proverb puts this idea slightly differently. "There is no seeing Yama without dying oneself."

Proverbs warn man to act in time. It is useless to do something after its proper time. A Punjabi proverb likens this to "Lighting after Deepavali." A Bangla

proverb asks "Laxman lies dying, when would the medicine be coming?"

All Indian languages have proverbs poking fun at the name of a person, whose characteristics do not go with that name. A Telugu proverb is "His family name is Kshirsagar (Ocean of milk) but every morning he begs for buttermilk." A Hindi proverb jokes "Ringworm all over the body, yet his name is Chandrachud." A Marathi proverb repeats the idea. "Her name is Annapurna (one Rich with Food) but there is never any bread left in her basket." Another Marathi proverb is of similar tone "His name is generous Karna, but he loses his life while giving away a single cowrie (sea shell)."

When a certain item is in short supply and a large number of people want it, a set of proverbs are used. In Hindi it is "A thousand milk maids aspiring for one Krishna."

When one has a particular fault or strength, and then one is given an instrument to increase it with, some proverbs come in handy to describe the situation. A Bangla maxim says "Rama alone was quite formidable, now Sugriva joins him."

When two things of vastly differing merits are mentioned together, the gap is described by proverbs. In Punjab they say "Where holy chanting of Rama Nama and where a meaningless noise!" The same idea expressed through a Marathi proverb is "Where the magnificent elephant of Lord Indra, where the pony of a Brahmin Shyambhat"

People take for granted any person or object of their own village. Anything that comes from outside is respected most, confirms a Bangla proverb "Madho in his

own village, he is called Madhusudan (with respect) in three other villages."

If small objects can kill things or do a job why waste a bigger object on it? This idea is conveyed through a Tamil proverb "What! Discharge Rama's arrow on a sparrow?" A Telugu proverb concurs "Why use Indra's thunderbolt for a sparrow?"

When those younger in experience or unlearned give advice to their elders or better ones, proverbs take a jibe at them as in Hindi He recites the Vedas before Brahma (the creator of the Vedas and the Universe)."

Innate qualities cannot be changed. A Tamil proverb asserts "A snail born in the Ganga is not a Shaligram."

When a person pretends to be something and is actually something else, this archetypal man is ridiculed as in the Tamil and Telugu proverbs.

"He reads the Ramayana but pulls down temples."

The epics and the *puranas* supply role models, titles, events and archetypal occasions that describe the day-to-day predicaments of the people most appropriately. That is why common usage plumps in for these names to express all-time and standard wisdom through this examples.

(The English Translations of proverbs are taken from "Proverbs of India:" V.D. Naravane part I Triveni sangam – Language-Dept. Pune Jan. 1978)

Tamil Proverbs show widespread Puranic influence

K.V. Jagannathan

- 1) A crocodile fallen into the moat takes it to be the Vaikuntham (Heaven)
 - 2) Begin again at the beginning O! Bharata reciter!
 - 3) He has no wife to address yet. But he wishes to name his son Ramakrishna!
 - 4) One who is praised by the king is Rambha.
 - 5) Sita's beauty and Draupadi's tongue brought them their misfortune.
 - 6) Even if one has Kubera's wealth, he should count his pennies.
 - 7) Hanumar can cross the ocean to reach Lanka. What would an elephant do?
 - 8) As long as Hanuman's tail.
 - 9) To come out as a Shivalinga, a stone had to take a thousand hits by the-chisel.
 - 10) Even Adisesha the thousand tongued cannot describe it.
 - 11) The *mangal-sutra* knotted by Harischandra cannot be seen by anyone else.
 - 12) Hidimban sets his foot on all the heads that come his way!
 - 13) When the King is like Rama, the servant would then be like a Hanuman.
 - 14) He heard the Ramayana recited through the night, and then asked 'How is Rama related to Sita?'
 - 15) All those born in Lanka are not Ravana's.
 - 16) Like a Lanka burnt down by a monkey!
 - 17) When a man sits down (is lazy) Moodevi, - Alaxmi catches him. When a man is up and about Shridevi bestows her graces upon him.
 - 18) As if he was rescued from Yama's mouth.
-

Puzzles full of Puranic imageries

- 1) Harichandra gets into a well which no one else can fathom (a ladle with a long handle)
- 2) It has a long body – it is not Siva's snake. It plays with fire; it is not Shiva Himself. It has a spring –like bow, it is nor Arjuna, It threatens the people; it is no thief! Its round faces emits smoke; it is no cloud! It eats through its mouth, spits through its mouth; its not a bat. It has no equals in the world, what is it (A rifle)
- 3) It dances and grows - it is not a public woman, It is beaten all over, no thief it is It has undergone a fiery ordeal, it is not Sita no It takes a dip in water and drinks; it is not a bull. It is carried on the hips of women it not a garment It carries the Ganga, it not Lord Shiva, Tell me what it is! (A mud pot)
- 4) There is an owl sitting under the Banyan tree It has a thousand eyes like Indra. If you discover it, there will be a woman with it. (A sieve)
- 5) He has a thousand eyes; He is not the Devendra, He has many a crown He is not Ravana, He kills living beings, He is not Yama, He climbs on to the shoulders of men. He is not a child. Who is he? (A fish net)
- 6) When the shortee enters the fattee, the Doors of Kubera's riches open; what is it? (A lock and a key)
- 7) The Banyan tree sleeps, the whole earthly world sleeps Sri Ranga sleeps.

So does the ocean of milk.
But one person never sleeps; who is he?
(Breath)

Ramakatha in the Tribal and Folk Traditions of India

K.S. Singh

1) *Ramakatha* is prevalent among the tribes of Rajasthan and of the Nimad region of Madhya Pradesh. In this tradition Sita was born in a year of drought, a victim of drought like any other tribal child. The golden deer was to be killed for its flesh, a typical tribal need at the behest of Sita.

2) Chattisgarh, Western Orissa (South Kosala) areas boast of Bondo, Baiga, Gaur versions of *Ramakatha*. The traditions have been localized here. To invoke rains in a dry year *Rishyashringa yagna* is performed here.

3) Bihar's Bhils in their Bhilodi Ramayana, believe that Rama during his 14 year exile, conferred upon them their occupation of trapping and approved their food habits.

4) The Mundas diffused, readapted and recreated the Ramayana in their own fashion. They spread the story among the Austro-Asiatic language speaking communities. They believe Sita was found under the plough, she was a tribal girl, grazing goat and was whisked away by Ravana.

5) The Avadhi and Bhojpuri folk songs feature Rama Katha with a woman's sympathy for Sita in her hour of grief and misfortune.

6) The episode of the squirrel forms the bridge between Northern and Southern folk regions. In south, Sita is a *devi* who has not even been touched by Ravana. Rama is god incarnate who can do no wrong. Southern versions have the unique Mahiravana story. Similar to Mizo versions, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada folk versions have a lot of common features and episodes.

(From *Ramakatha in Tribal and Folk traditions of India* Anthropological survey of India; Seagull books, Calcutta 1993)

VALIDITY OF THE RAMAYANA VALUES

Sukumari Bhattacharji

1) Popular religions teach ethical values to the masses through stories – epics. One should behave as Rama did and not as Ravana.

2) National epics present eternal humanistic values through aesthetically convincing characters; people see these values, are impressed with their truth and subconsciously emulate them. Valmiki after bursting forth into an inspired stanza asks Narada "Who answers to this catalogue of high moral values?" Narada says "Not even among gods do I find one endowed with all these virtues. Hear of the great man who has all these virtues!" So the hero is not a god, but a man, for only a man could become a convincing ethical model. The Ramayana performs this task by creating a set of convincing characters, placing them in complex, critical situations, and by presenting moral acts together with their causes and effects. What enhances the value of the epic is that, in it there is no character totally good or totally evil. Even the best three characters, Rama, Sita and Lakshmana, behave questionably at times. Also the characters look true to life, because there is no major or sudden change of heart, although in many instances they do change. The adult attitude of accepting the fact that people seldom, if ever, undergo radical moral change renders the epic aesthetically acceptable and prevents it from being merely romantic or juvenile.

3) Temptation is a crisis situation, and all major characters face real temptations; it is through their response to them that they become or remain good or bad. Transgression from the accepted code of

ethics is portrayed as sinful. In the Ramayana too, what constitutes its essence is its attempt at reevaluation of the accepted values. This is achieved by placing the characters in critical situations and letting them act, deliberate, act and suffer the consequences.

4) These crises come in two forms 1) Obvious temptations that deflect them from the path of virtue, from the broad human values for the sake of selfish, personal gains. 2) The characters are torn between two sets of equally valid but mutually contradictory situations. Such situations test the moral fibre of the people and only the great or good pass the test.

5) Today the Ramayana ethics is part of the Indian mental make up even though the socio-economic and the political background is so utterly different. At the subconscious level the Indian mind is steeped with the Ramayana lore, and charged with its moral values; so on this level the validity still persists.

6) The Dasaratha –Viswamitra encounter is a crisis situation; The interest of one person against that of the sacrificing sages; selfish love and joy against social welfare; This gives meaning to the act and makes it morally significant.

7) Sagara too took a morally significant step and banished Asamanja, his son. He took not a slothful step a drift and indecision, but an active step, for the greater good of the people.

8) Kaikeyi tempted by Manthara succumbs to her selfishness, and allows her innate goodness to give way. The epics are full of implied condemnation for moral weaklings. It is not enough to be passively good because on the ethical level there is no such thing as passive goodness. One is continually pushed to take moral decisions and one's mettle is tested by these decisions. The Gods do not fight man's battles. They assist man to fight them, provided man's initiative is in the right

decision. Such episodes underline the need for discrimination, judgement and courage to oppose the apparent reason of self interest for the higher reason of truth and justice.

9) Faced with the choice of walking away to the forest at the behest of Dasaratha or of tarrying for the situation to turn in his favour, Rama acts decisively. His unhesitating assent to give the throne to Bharata, to release his father from his vow and clear the doubts in Kaikeyi's mind, shines all the more, because, only the previous night he had purified himself ritually for assuming the kingship.

10) There was a world of difference between Siddhartha and Mahavira on the one hand and Rama on the other; for, while the former two abdicated through a conviction of the futility of worldly enjoyments, even regarding them as evil, in Rama's case there was no such motive. Rama left the kingdom because he had to, and he did so without any self-pity. What was later upheld as the true Karmayogin's attitude in the Vedanta or in the Bhagavadgita-the unperturbed mental calm in the face of tumultuous upheavals of fortune-is here presented in the young prince. Since such catastrophes are bound to appear in life in some form or other, the validity of Rama's reaction remains.

Sita and Laksmana had no obligation to follow Rama; they offered to do so voluntarily.

11) Bharata's decision to go to the forest to bring Rama back to Ayodhya, Rama's deep faith in his brother, Rama's decision to stay put in the forest inspite of the tempting arguments of Jabali, show that moral decisions are to be taken in the face of great dilemmas. An untested, unproved goodness is no goodness at all!

12) Maricha in conversation with Ravana is likened by modern critics to the unwilling American recruits to the Vietnam War. The penalty for conscious moral acquiescence is inescapable.

13) Jatayus knew that he had little chance of winning the battle against Ravana, carrying away Sita. Yet his integrity demanded that gesture which eventually cost him his life. The policy of non-interference sometimes leads to security but only at the cost of self-respect. The epic morality is an active morality; for each significant situation is open at two directions; the good become good because they can sacrifice the petty self-interest and security in the bigger interest of those in need. This sacrifice vindicates their manhood.

14) Rama's casuistry to justify his act of killing Vali is a warning that the best of men may slip.

15) Ravana, who had everything life can offer to a man was a person of gigantic proportions. Yet his insatiable greed, lust and inordinate ambition, bring about his downfall.

16) Vibhishana is the character who faces the worst ordeal in the epic. His advice to Ravana was prompted by a desire to prevent a National calamity. Failing in his bid, insulted, he sacrifices the security of his life at Lanka for a future that would be totally bleak. He burned his boats at Lanka, where from now on he was looked upon as a traitor and at Rama's camp he could not hope of being taken for anything but a spy. After initial hostile reaction at that camp, the personal intervention of Rama saves the situation for Vibhishana.

How often in the present day situations and political complexity, we are

faced with the moral choice similar to Vibhisana's when the option is between two apparently ignominious and dangerous courses. The criterion Vibhisana brought to bear upon his decision was that of the greatest good of the greatest number. By coming over to the righteous side he was of immense help to expedite the outcome of the battle. Besides, this way alone could he live peacefully with his own conscience.

17) The fire ordeal of Sita is the worst any human being can ever face in life.

One element which makes the Ramayana a fully adult literature is its equivocal situations. It is not the linear sort of medieval European heroic epic like the Kalevala, Gid, the Sagas or the Digenes Akrites. Here the moral choice itself is equivocal. In the episode of Rama slaying Valin, for example, the act is palpably unheroic and unjust and Valin blames Rama squarely for it. Then Rama retorts saying that Valin has been living with Ruma (Sugriva's wife) which was wicked; he Rama, as the king, had to punish the evil-doer in his territory. Also, men hunt animals from an ambush and what was Valin but a monkey? Similarly, in Ahlaya's case she had recognized Indra, but then she had only admitted her husband, since Indra had approached her in his shape. The slaughter of Sambuka is cruel, but according to the current ethical code of the time it was Rama's way to prevent untimely deaths. Expediency is brought in as a factor. There are two sides to these apparently condemnable acts. On a higher level of ethics they reveal the complexity of moral decisions in life without which the epic would have been puerile and artistically unsatisfactory. By presenting the extenuating circumstances, by unfolding the inherent ambiguity of complex moral situations the appeal of the

epic remains contemporary and it is possible to respond to it on a serious adult level.

In good and evil the epics set the model of conduct in each country. The moral values upheld in the Ramayana are mostly noble and worthy or it would not be cherished by the millions through all these ages. Even minor characters like Guhaka offered unstinted help not only to Rama, Laksmana and Sita but also to Bharata; Visvamitra offered to sacrifice his own sons for the sake of Sunahsepha who had fled to him for refuge.

Ambition and violence are part of the heroic ideal and are not sinful in themselves until they lead man to other sins. Man's normal instincts demand legitimate satisfaction and fulfillment and it is not sinful to satisfy them. The metaphysics behind this epic ethic is that sin is the violation of social harmony. Whatever threatens the inner cohesion of the accepted hierarchy, whatever jeopardizes the homogeneity of community life is sinful. Thus lust in man, unchastity in women, disrespect to elders and social superiors are sinful because society rests on the proper observance of these relationships. Above all, man is bound to cosmic harmony by the code of truth, hence vows and promises assume cosmic proportions.

The epic has its peculiar limitations and advantages. It has to be aesthetically acceptable. It was no set of dry tenets, like the scriptures, but tenets presented through human beings. So the epic character must look life-like.

Even on the human level the good suffer while sometimes the wicked prosper. The impact of this apparently anomalous and morally incongruous reality on the

sensitive mind is deep and abiding. We see that the greatness or goodness of man is determined in proportion to his capacity to suffer, and his response to suffering. While the weak and inferior character collapses and is totally crushed under the weight of grief, the morally powerful man bears it manfully and walks on the crest of the waves of his grief. Happiness on the mundane level is for the lesser figures in the epic, in the truly great characters there is that mysterious capacity to subordinate the purely personal interest to an ideal, a creed or a cause. By making this clear through characters who live and shine through the choices they make at the time of a moral crises, the Ramayana conveys the highest moral value, viz., the proper attitude to suffering in life. And this eloquent message is ageless; it remains even in our troubled times when suffering has assumed many different forms but remains unchanged in content.

(From "The Ramayana Tradition in Asia:" Sahitya Akademi Ed.V. Raghavan New Delhi 1989)

Ramakatha in Tai-Phake Cultural Tradition

Aimya Khang Gosain

Rama-katha known as Lama-Mang is represented in the Tai-Phake cultural tradition of NE India, in folk here, dance-drama, and literature.

Rama is born as Gautama Buddha, Sita as Yasodhara, Dasaratha as Suddhodana and Bharata as Ananda.

The Lama Mang portrays the accepted social values of Justice, gratitude, filial piety, morality, law of Karma, the transitory nature of all things and the ultimate triumph of good over evil. Such social values are ideals to be upheld and

are important for the existence of a society. Even the minor incident of Kunti's washing the fallen mango fruit before offering it to Gods has some social significance.

(Ramakatha in T/F tradition of India ASI – Seagull books Calcutta 1993)

Rama katha in the Tribal and Folk Traditions of Tripura

Jagadis Ganchaudhri

In the interior hills and deep forests of Tripura and Chittagong Hill Tract, the old tribal people are often found, reading the epics. The same tradition is to be found among the plains people also. The two epics have proved themselves to be perennial sources of inspiration and an ocean of wisdom from which folktales, proverbs, riddles poems, songs, dramas, dances, dialogues, and visual art items have been derived. Place names, names of children, rituals, individual plants and vegetables are associated with Ramayana and remind one of its characters and places. Masks, drums, cymbals, flute and horns are used. People dress themselves as epic characters while dancing. The calendar of these people is full of epic festivals and reminders.

(Ramakatha in the T/F traditions)

The Pavados of Dublas of Surat - Gujarat

A tribal song Pavados of Dublas of Gujarat goes thus. Lakshmana digs a well and Sita plants **a damro** plant which she diligently waters everyday. But a deer eats it daily. Sita asks Rama to go after the culprit but when both the brothers return with the slain animal, she is not to be found in the cottage. This is depicted tragically. "Deserted is the cottage and deserted is the garden and crows fly over the deserted cottage. Rama weeps sitting in his hut, looking at her foot prints."

(Ramakatha in T/F traditions)

The Folk and Tribal Versions of the Ramakatha in the NE India

K.S. Singh

1) In NE India, the classical narrative account of Valmiki is adopted by Assam's poets. They also make use of local traditions and regional beliefs in elaborating and developing the Ramayana themes. Most of these accounts centre around the Vaishnava tradition.

2) The Ramakatha has been a powerful element in the Vaishnava tradition of Assam. The poetic work composed by Durgavar called "the Durgavari Giti Ramayana" popularised the episodes of Rama among the rural people. They also inspired "**ojapali**" which is one of the ancient traditional art forms of Assam.

3) The Ramakatha traditions among Bodo-kacharis, have left a striking impact on their myths, tales and beliefs.

4) The Ramakatha traditions among Karbis, Tiwas, Mizo, Mising, Khanti and Manipur versions of Ramakatha provide an opportunity for variations within a contiguous area.

5) The Karbis have a fairly elaborate version of the Ramakatha, with strong ethnic peculiarities.

6) Among Tiwan and Lalungs, the Ramakatha is seen only as stray stories and tales not as a pervasive tradition.

7) The Mizo version of the Ramayana has evidently been influenced by the South Asian versions which again are influenced by the versions carried by the immigrants from different parts of India. This was evidently an eastern and Southern version. Ravana had seven or twelve heads. Lakshman is the hero in the version. The Mizo version give prominence to Lakshmana and Hanumana.

8) The Ramakatha is embedded in the Tribal and folk traditions of Tripura.

9) There is a Buddhist version of the Ramakatha in the Tai-phat cultural tradition in which Rama is described as a Bodhisatva. He seeks pardon from Sita, who returns to live happily with Rama and their children till the end of their life.

(Ramakatha in Tribal and Folk Tradition of India ASI - Seagull - Calcutta 1993)

Box Items

Ramayana - Art forms in Assam

1) Ankiya - Nata, 2) Bhaona- popular performance Text by Sankaradeva and others. 3) Natya and Nritya 4) Ojapali (with singing, dancing and narration) 5) Kathakata 6) Biyahar ojapali 7) Ramayana-gowa-ojapali 8) Bhaira-ojapali 9) Durgavari Ojapali 10) Sattriya ojapali 11) Duladi ojapali.

Ramakatha among the

Bodo-Kacharis of Assam

Basanta kumar Deva Goswami

The main Bodo-speaking tribal communities settled in Assam are the Bodos, the Dimasas, the Rabhas, the Lalungs (the Tiwas) and the Sonowal-Kacharis.

In order to suit their own cultural milieu, the Bodo Kachari may have rearranged, reconstituted, and reconstructed the Ramayana, story. They added episodes, tales and songs basing them on the thematic arrangement of the written or oral tradition of the Ramakatha.

The places such as Madhya Baska (the city of Bali) names of people, names of places, worship of Hanumana, martial arts, social customs etc are influenced by Ramakatha.

The Bodo Kacharis believe in the efficacy of Ramayana-weapon like *nidravan* (arrow

causing deep sleep) *arvan* (Brahma's arrow) etc.

Due to its dynamic character, the Ramakatha has played a vital role in the NE India for a longtime. Besides reflecting the beliefs, customs and lifestyles of the tribal Bodo-Kacharis, it has become an integral part of the culture of this region. (Ramakatha in Tribal and Folk Tradition of India, ASI - Seagull - Calcutta 1993)

Karbis love Ramakatha

Karbis live in the Karbi Anglong District of Assam.

1) They claim that their lineages begin from Treta yuga when Rama lived.

2) Traditional singers and story tellers tell them Rama stories. Prose, lyrics, songs are the forms used.

3) *Stotras* use Rama, Sita and similar names in Mantras.

4) Rituals propitiate Rama.

5) A rainbow is called the bow of Rama and Lakshmana.

6) Venomous fish got their poison from Ravana they believe.

7) Karshala snake is believed to be the arrow of Rama.

8) Rama and Lakhman are popular as names of Karbis.

9) Karbi children love tales of Rama, Lakshmana and their encounters with demons.

10) Karbis locate Ayodhya, Janakpur, Kishkindha in their own villages.

11) Shifting cultivation, funerals, hospitality, astrology all have Ramayana memories.

(Ramakatha in T/F traditions of India ASI – Seagull Calcutta 1993)

Role a of Mythologies in the life of a Nation

Ninian Smart

- 1) Mythologies are the memory of the collective past.
 - 2) They give identity to a group.
 - 3) They define groups, sacred entities and persons.
 - 4) They affirm continuity which gives a group greater importance since it is no longer a random collection of persons.
 - 5) By implication, mythologies help a person to connect to aspects of his/her past which he/she values.
 - 6) Even disasters reinforce group memory and tell people that they have overcome them.
 - 7) They enhance the dignity of the group.
 - 8) They provide the script for the ritual action.
 - 9) Mythologies explain origins of people, races, Nations, things.
 - 10) Mythic thinking depicts how things will end, they explain how things will be at the end of the world.
 - 11) They provide a framework, sequence of events.
 - 12) They depict how god acts in order to deal with humanity, *avatara*, grace, heaven, hell, punishment, rebirth etc.
 - 13) Mythologies provide a sense of stability and order through stories.
 - 14) They predict a victory of good over evil and give man a positive view of life.
 - 15) Mythologies talk about stability, possibility of immorality, the ways of overcoming evil, hierarchical cosmos (as told by the *Varna* system), the theme of an ideal monarch (Rama) and the spirited lover (Krishna)
- (From "Dimensions of the Sacred". Harper Collins publishers. London 1996)
- 2) They strengthen our will, help us to internalise values and turn our minds inwards.
 - 3) Values such as National unity, Patriotism, are imprinted in the minds of the pilgrims through mythologies.
 - 4) We feel one with mountains, rivers, plants and places of India.
 - 5) We recall our relationship to the great spiritual giants, the *puranic* and epic characters.
 - 6) Rites help us convert knowledge into experience.
 - 7) Social ceremonies, human values, bind the society together.
 - 8) They bless, praise, consecrate and purify us.
 - 9) They focus our energies into the observance for a specific period.
 - 10) They harness, control and direct our energies, feelings, behaviour and intellect.
 - 11) Through superimposition and internalization of values the human quality is enhanced.
 - 12) They integrate action, thought, chant and mind with Atman and Paramatman.
 - 13) Rituals seek to abolish space and time that separate man from God.
 - 14) Travelling in groups, visiting places ordained by the scriptures are useful in vivifying faith and unifying people.
 - 15) Temporary separation from social obligations in order to fulfill higher obligations to religion and god is important in developing detachment.
 - 16) Pilgrimage is a symbol of the ultimate journey.
 - 17) Ancestor worship is glorified in Mythological literature reinforcing traditions.

Festivals, fasts, vows and pilgrimages are inspired by the Epics and the Puranas

- 1) They enthuse people, develop kinship, make us forget our petty animosities.

Puranas and observances
Kanchi Paramacharya

The scriptures recommend and promote self-restraint in food. Sattwic food, self-cooking, are recommended for monks and students respectively.

Food is that which goes into a person through the five senses and shape him. Most important is the food consumed through the mouth.

Fasting on days like Ekadasi is recommended by the Puranas. *Upavasa* means to live with God and it relieves man from body-consciousness. Fasting and keeping silent are highest vows. Fasting is recommended by Indian systems of medicine also.

Gandhiji has repeatedly said that fasting leads to - clarity in thinking.

There are specific *purana* stories to be studied and heard on days of fasting.

Both Sri Krishna as well as Adi Shankara exhort us to avoid extremities in feasting and fasting. Sri Krishna recommends moderation in food, movements, actions, deeds, sleeping and vigil.

The scriptures do not recommend fasting for many days at a stretch. Occasionally skipping meals and total fasting once in a fortnight are recommended. Gradual and not forced observance of vows is always the emphasis of the scriptures.

Such vows including fasting are to be observed by all, including the kings for whom the scriptures permit enjoyment of food etc. In fact Rukmangada and Ambarisha observed Ekadasi fasting and helped their subjects observe the same. It is thus that Puranas influence rituals. (From "Deivathin Kural III" Vanati, Chennai 1982)

Vows, Observances and Festivals

Some of the vows, observances and festivals are based on the calendar. Birthdays of Sri Rama, Krishna, Narasinha, Hanuman, days sacred to Shiva, Devi, Ganesha, Saraswati and Kartikeya are days of sacred memories. Extra lunar month, New moon days, Full moon day, Eleventh day of the fortnight, sacred days of the week dedicated to various gods, Sunday for Sungod, Monday for Shiva, Friday for Devi, Thursday for Guru, are all designated on the basis of the calendar.

Vasant Panchami, is based on season. *Ashad 18 (Adi -18)* is related to irrigation and agriculture. *Sankaranti (Pongal)* is based on the movement of the earth relative to Sun. Eclipses as sacred days are not fixed dates, but they shift. They are based on planetary movements. Festivals, vows and observances related to trees and plants such as *Ashwattha*, *Vata*, *Tulsi* extol nature worship. Similarly mountain and rivers are also worshipped. *Chaturmas* (Four rainy months) vow is observed by Hindus, Buddhists and Jains alike.

As a human being conceived in the mother's womb, is born and grows, there are observances and rituals such as Nativity, tonsure, beginning of education, etc. These rituals are authenticated by the

Epics and the *Puranas* by saying that the epic characters practised them.

Festivals such as Holi, Raksha Bandhan, Ganesh Chaturthi and Durga puja, have come to assume great social and community significance, bordering on political importance.

By a judicious mixture of presenting man with feasts and fasts, medications, use of seasonally available herbs, leaves and vegetables, the *Puranas* and epics have taught human beings to live in harmony with nature, love nature conserve nature and not to destroy it. All pilgrim centres are authenticated by the Epics and the (compiled) *Puranas*.

Epics and the Puranas teach mankind the ecological principles

All the epics and purana's are Nature friendly, forest friendly. Except in Mahabharata, in which Khandavavana is burnt down to give place for constructing a city, the Epics and the *Puranas* invariably depict forests and hills as man's natural home.

Dandaka in the Ramayana, the forest in the Mahabharata and Naimisharanya in the *Puranas* are as much the theatres for epic action, as Ayodhya or Kurukshetra.

Man's love for the five elements of nature is emphasized in our Mythology. Hanuman is Vayu's son. Heaven and hell are in space. Draupadi is the daughter of Agni. Rivers are worshippable. Sita is the daughter of Mother Earth. Natural boundaries such as Seas, Rivers and Mountains can be crossed only after getting due permission from the deities presiding over them. Habitats such as Ayodhya and Lanka are worshipped in their incarnate forms as deities. Sita offers ritualistic worship to the Ganga while

crossing it. Agastya commands the Vindhya hills not to grow too tall.

Throughout the epics and the *Puranas* there is a living, reciprocal, and functional relationship between human beings and the elements of Nature. Nature is god incarnate.

With plants and trees the relationship is much more hearty. There are entire *mahatmyams* (Eulogies) on *Tulasi* plant and the *Peepul* and the *Banyan* trees.

Sthalapuranas glorify locally worshipped trees under which temples have come up. Sacred groves have come around temples. Worshipping the tree, the local sacred pond, learning the local legends, worshipping the deity in the temple and remembering His/Her name is a fivefold ritual to be carried out for any South Indian pilgrim to a temple.

Ofcourse the seven sacred rivers, Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Sarasvati, Narmada, Sindhu, and Kaveri are to be remembered everyday.

All living beings are sacred and practising Ahimsa (non-violence) towards them is a sacred obligation for every human being. Hunting animals for food is to be on 'need to be done' basis. Various animals/birds are associated with God; the Garuda with Vishnu, the Bull with Shiva, the Hamsa with Brahma, the Tiger with Ayyappa etc.,

Sri Rama befriended Jatayus a vulture and Sri Krishna is Gopala – a cow herd. Squirrels, monkeys, bears and vultures are helpful to Rama in his mission.

The worth of a seer/sage was measured by the love and freedom with which the birds and animals would roam about in his *ashram*.

¹⁹ Describing nature, pointing out man's happiness in his association with Nature, referring to women playing with animals and birds, are parts of the poetic requirements of an epic or a (compiled) *purana*.

THE TIRUKKURAL AND THE HINDU MYTHOLOGICAL LORE

A KENDRA WORKER

Scholar C.Arunaivadivel Mudaliar has listed a series of *puranic* instances, referred to by Tiruvalluvar. The sage-poet has repeatedly stated in his work, that he pays obeisance to tradition. Making use of traditionally known similes, episodes, allegories and parables is a well known technique in literature. This helps in economy of expression without loss of meaning—a vital component in literature. By using fairly widely, the puranic episodes, words, examples etc., Tiruvalluvar indicates in unmistakable terms, where his cultural, spiritual and religious loyalties lie. Combined with Tiruvalluvar's repeated assurances that he follows the traditions, these expressions that touch both the content and form of his teachings show that the poet is an innovator within the broad referential terms of tradition.

Verse 610 refers to Vishnu as Trivikrama. Markandeya's victory over Yama, the God of Death, is indicated in verse 269. Shiva consuming poison is the theme of verse 580. The Gautama-Indra episode is recalled in the *Kural* 25. Agastya cursing Nagusha to become a python is indicated in the *Kural* verse 899, the episode of pandava's *agnatavasa* (life in disguise) can be guessed from verse 935. S.Dandapani Desikar, a respected scholar, feels that verse 72 is indicative of the story of Dadhichi or Shibhi.

God as the creator of the world (1062) Vishnu as the lotus eyed (1103), Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth (179), Her occupying a seat of red lotus (84, 617) are some other references confirming Valluvar's verbal provenance as *pauranic*. Prosperity's elder sister is wretchedness. This pair is referred

to *Shridevi* and *Moodevi* in the *Puranas*. Valluvar chooses to go by that usage. A world higher, better, and happier than this is a recurring theme in Valluvar's gallery of portraits of moral and charitable life. Verses 58, 86, 213, 966, and 1323, invariably suggest, that the reward of moral life is the increased capacity to be aware, to be conscious, and to be blissful.

Men of righteous deeds go and dwell in heaven. Heaven is inhabited by *devas* of lustrous bodies. Indra is the chief of *devas* (25). Life on this earth even influences the skies and rains (18). It is obvious that Valluvar does not consider the body to be mere combination of atoms and molecules. The actions of this corporeal body controlled by a disciplined mind have a far-reaching domain of influence.

Yama is a great divider, severer. He is called *Kutruvan* because he cuts the body asunder from the spirit at the time of death. Leading a life of penance is the way of gaining victory over Yama. A life of compassion, non-killing (326) and austerities (269), will help the seeker to overcome death itself. As these victories over Yama, the God of Death, are mentioned as possible for an ascetic (a seeker of spiritual freedom—*moksha*), it is clear that Valluvar was only referring to *moksha*, a victory over death.

On the other hand, life in hell, *naraka*, is the threat that Tiruvalluvar holds out for a life of ignorance, and evil actions. The verses 121 (darkness as opposed to life among *devas*) (168) fiery hell, (not eternal fiery hell as a translator would have it!)

243 (dark and bitter world) and 255 (the pit of hell) show that Valluvar believed in the hell as a place of punishment for evil doers. Swami Vivekananda has observed that the Vedas do not talk of hell and the idea is of *Puranic* origin.

Valluvar appears to recognise a few intermediate phases or life between man and *devas*. Verse 1081 refers to an angel. Demon (565), evil spirit (850), *Dharmadevata* (77), the five elements (*bhutas*) (271), Kama as Manmatha (1197), and the snakes Rahu and Ketu seizing the moon (1146) are also mentioned. These are

also ideas from the *Puranas*. What is equally important is that Valluvar who is very careful about the choice of appropriate words as vehicles of his ideas allows the reader to feel that he is not against a particular diction and imagery. The *amrita* of heavens for example is a frequently occurring word (702, 1164, 1106, 968, 82).

(Extracted from "Saint Tiruvalluvar And His Message of Life as Dharma" Vivekananda Kendra Prakashan Trust, Chennai-5/2000

THE ULTIMATE SOURCE

SRI AUROBINDO

The Vedas and the Upanishads are not only the sufficient fountain-head of Indian philosophy and religion, but of all Indian art, poetry and literature. It was the soul, the temperament, the ideal mind formed and expressed in them which later carved out the great philosophies, built the structure of the *Dharma*, recorded its heroic youth in the Mahabharata and Ramayana, intellectualized indefatigably in the classical times of the ripeness of its manhood, threw out so many original intuitions in science, created so rich a glow of aesthetic and vital and sensuous experience, renewed its spiritual and psychic experience in *Tantra* and *Purana*, flung itself into grandeur and beauty of line and colour hewed and cast its thought and vision in stone and bronze, poured itself into new channels of self-expression in the later tongues and now after eclipse re-emerges always the same in difference and ready for a new life and a new creation.

(Extracted from-The foundation of Indian Culture Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry-1968}

SRI AUROBINDO ON RELIGION FOR
THE COMMON MAN

The highest spirituality indeed moves in a free and wide air far above that lower stage of seeking which is governed by religious form and dogma; it does not easily bear their limitation and, even when it admits, it transcends them; it lives in an experience which to the formal religious mind is unintelligible. But man does not arrive immediately at that highest inner elevation and, if it were demanded from him at once, he would never arrive there. At first he needs lower supports and stages of ascent; he asks for some scaffolding of dogma, worship, image, sign, form, symbol, some indulgence and permission of mixed half-natural motive on which he can stand while he builds up in him the temple of the spirit. Only when the temple is completed can the supports be removed, the scaffolding disappear. The religious culture which now goes by the name of Hinduism not only fulfilled this purpose, but unlike certain other credal religions, it knew its purpose. It gave itself no name, because it set itself no sectarian limits; it claimed no universal adhesion, asserted no sole infallible dogma, set up no single narrow path or gate of salvation; it was less a creed or cult than a continuously enlarging tradition of the Godward endeavour of the human spirit. It is only if we have a just and right appreciation of this sense and spirit of Indian religion that we can come to an understanding of the true sense and spirit of Indian culture.

(Extracted from "The Foundations of Indian Culture" Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 1968.

A DYNAMIC AND FLEXIBLE APPROACH
TO TRUTH

THE PURANAS AND THE INDIAN MIND

SRI AUROBINDO

The many-sided plasticity of Indian cult and spiritual experience is the native sign of its truth, its living reality, the unfettered sincerity of its search and finding; but this plasticity is a constant stumbling-block to the European mind. The religious thinking of Europe is accustomed to rigid impoverishing definitions, to strict exclusions, to a constant preoccupation with the outward idea, the organization, the form. A precise creed framed by the logical or theological intellect, a strict and definite moral code to fix the conduct, a bundle of observances and ceremonies, a firm ecclesiastical or congregational organization, that is western religion. Once the spirit is safely imprisoned and chained up in these things, some emotional fervours and even a certain amount of mystic seeking can be tolerated—within rational limits; but, after all, it is perhaps safest to do without these dangerous spices. Trained in these conceptions, the European critic comes to India and is struck by the immense mass and intricacy of a polytheistic cult crowned at its summit by a belief in the one infinite. This belief he erroneously supposes to be identical with the barren and abstract intellectual pantheism of the West. He applies with an obstinate prejudgment the ideas and definitions of his own thinking, and this illegitimate importation has fixed many false values on Indian spiritual conceptions, —unhappily, even in the mind of "educated" India. But where our religion eludes his fixed standards, misunderstanding, denunciation and supercilious condemnation come at once to his rescue. The Indian mind, on the contrary, is averse to intolerant mental

exclusions; for a great force of intuition and inner experience had given it from the beginning that towards which the mind of the West is only now reaching with much fumbling and difficulty, —the cosmic consciousness, the cosmic vision. Even when it sees the One without a second, it still admits his duality of Spirit and Nature; it leaves room for his many trinities and million aspects. Even when it concentrates on a single limiting aspect of the Divinity and seems to see nothing but that, it still keeps instinctively at the back of its consciousness and sense of the All and the idea of the One. Even when it distributes its worship among many objects, it looks at the same time through the objects of its worship and sees beyond the multitude of godheads the unity of the Supreme. This synthetic turn is not peculiar to the mystics or to a small literate class or to philosophic thinkers nourished on the high sublimities of the Veda and Vedanta. It permeates the popular mind nourished on the thoughts, images, traditions, and cultural symbols of the Purana and Tantra; for these things are only concrete representations or living figures of the synthetic monism, the many-sided Unitarianism, the large cosmic universalism of the Vedic scriptures.

Indian religion founded itself on the conception of a timeless, nameless and formless supreme, but it did not feel called upon like the narrower and more ignorant monotheisms of the younger races, to deny or abolish all intermediary forms and names and powers and personalities of the Eternal and Infinite. A colourless monism or a pale vague transcendental Theism was not its beginning, its middle and its end. The one Godhead is worshipped as the All, for all in the universe is he or made out of his being or his nature. But Indian religion is not therefore pantheism; for beyond this universality it recognizes the supracosmic

Eternal. Indian polytheism is not the popular polytheism of ancient Europe; for here the worshipper of many gods still knows that all his divinities are forms, names, personalities and powers of the One; his gods proceed from the one *Purusha*, his goddesses are energies of the one divine Force. Those ways of Indian cult which most resemble a popular form of Theism, are still something more; for they do not exclude, but admit the many aspects of God. Indian image-worship is not the idolatry of a barbaric or undeveloped mind, for even the most ignorant know that the image is a symbol and support and can throw it away when its use is over. The later religious forms which most felt the impress of the Islamic idea, like Nanak's worship of the timeless One, *Akala*, and the reforming creeds of today, born under the influence of the West, yet draw away from the limitations of western or Semitic monotheism. Irresistibly they turn from these infantile conceptions towards the fathomless truth of Vedanta. The divine Personality of God and his human relations with men are strongly stressed by Vaishnavism and Shaivism as the most dynamic Truth; but that is not the whole of these religions, and this divine Personality is not the limited magnified-human personal God of the West. Indian religion cannot be described by any of the definitions known to the occidental intelligence. In its totality it has been a free and tolerant synthesis of the spiritual worship and experience. Observing the one Truth from all its many sides, it shut out once. It gave itself no specific name and bound itself by no limiting distinction. Allowing separate designations for its constituting cults and divisions, it remained itself nameless, formless, universal, infinite, like the *Brahman* of its agelong seeking. Although strikingly distinguished from other creeds by its traditional scriptures, cults and

symbols, it is not in its essential character a credal religion at all but a vast and many-sided, an always unifying and always

progressive and self-enlarging system of spiritual culture.

(Extracted from "The Foundations of Indian Culture" by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondichery 1968)

THE PURANAS AS AN EXTENSION AND ADVANCE OF THE VEDIC FORMS SRI AUROBINDO

The *Vedic* gods and goddesses conceal from the profane by their physical aspect their psychic and spiritual significance. The *Puranic* trinity and the forms of its female energies have on the contrary no meaning to the physical mind or imagination, but are philosophic and psychic conceptions and embodiments of the unity and multiplicity of the all-manifesting Godhead. The *Puranic* cults have been characterised as a degradation of the *Vedic* religion, but they might conceivably be described, not in the essence, for that remains always the same, but in the outward movement, as an extension and advance. Image worship and temple cult and profuse ceremony, to whatever superstition or externalism their misuse may lead, are not necessarily degradation. The *Vedic* religion had no need of images, for the physical signs of its godheads were the forms of physical Nature and the outward universe was their visible house. The *Puranic* religion worshipped the psychical forms of the Godhead within us and had to express it outwardly in symbolic figures and house it in temples that were an architectural sign of cosmic significances. And the very inwardness it intended necessitated a profusion of outward symbol to embody the complexity of these inward things to the psychical imagination and vision. The religious aesthesis has changed, but the meaning of the religion has been altered

only in temperament and fashion, not in essence. The real difference is this that the early religion was made by men of the highest mystic and spiritual experience living among a mass still impressed mostly by the life of the physical universe: the *Upanishads* casting off the physical veil created a free transcendent and cosmic vision and experience and this was expressed by a later age to the mass in images containing a large philosophical and intellectual meaning of which the Trinity and the *Shaktis* of Vishnu and Shiva are the central figures; the *Puranas* carried forward this appeal to the intellect and imagination and made it living to the psychic experience, the emotions, the aesthetic feeling and the senses. A constant attempt to make the spiritual truths discovered by the *Yogin* and the *Rishi* integrally expressive, appealing, effective to the whole nature of man and to provide outward means by which the ordinary mind, the mind of a whole people might be drawn to a first approach to them is the sense of the religio-philosophic evolution of Indian culture.

It is to be observed that the *Puranas* and *Tantras* contain in themselves the highest spiritual and philosophical truths, not broken up and expressed in opposition to each other as in the debates of the thinkers, but synthetised by a fusion, relation or grouping in the way most

congenial to the catholicity of the Indian mind and spirit. This is done sometimes expressly, but most often in a form which might carry something of it to the popular imagination and feeling by legend, tale, symbol, apologue, miracle and parable. An immense and complex body of psycho-spiritual experience is embodied in the *Tantras*, supported by visual images and systematized in forms of *Yogic* practice. This element is also found in the *Puranas*, but more loosely and cast out in a less strenuous sequence. This method is after all simply a prolongation, in another form and with a temperamental change, of the method of the *Vedas*. The *Puranas* construct a system of physical images and observances each with its psychical significance. Thus the sacredness of the confluence of the three rivers, Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati, is a figure of an inner confluence and points to a crucial experience in a psycho-physical process of *Yoga* and it has too other significances, as is common in the economy of this kind of symbolism. The so-called fantastic geography of the *Puranas*, as we are expressly told in the *Puranas* themselves, is a rich poetic figure, a symbolic geography of the inner psychical universe has, as in the *Veda*, a spiritual and psychological meaning and basis. It is easy to see how in the increasing ignorance of

later times the more technical parts of the *Puranic* symbology inevitably lent themselves to much superstition and to crude physical ideas about spiritual and psychic things. But that danger attends all attempts to bring them to the comprehension of the mass of men and this disadvantage should not blind us to the enormous effect produced in training the mass mind to respond to a psycho-religious and psycho-spiritual appeal that prepares a capacity for higher things. That effect endures even though the *Puranic* system may have to be superseded by a finer appeal and the awakening to more directly subtle significances, and if such a supersession becomes possible, it will itself be due very largely to the work done by the *Puranas*.

The *Puranas* are essentially a true religious poetry, an art of aesthetic presentation of religious truth. All the bulk of the eighteen *Puranas* does not indeed take a high rank in this kind: there is much waste substance and not a little of dull and dreary matter, but on the whole the poetic method employed is justified by the richness and power of the creation.

(Extracts from "The Foundations of Indian Culture" Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 1968)

ETHICS OF *PURANAS*

C.S.VENKATESWARAN

1. *Dharma* or duty is the basis of *Puranic* ethics. It embraces all those factors which contribute to the progress and well being of the individual, society, and the world at large. The factors are 1. *Gunas*-possession of virtues and 2. Proper discharge of one's duty (*karma*). The *Puranas* recognise two types of *dharma*: *Sadharana* (generic) and *visesa* (specific). The latter is also known as *Svadharma*. The idea of *Purusharthas*, pleasure, wealth, *Dharma* and liberation find an important place in the *Puranas*. *Puranas* also successfully reconcile *Sadharama dharma* with *Svadharma*. *Sadharana dharma* encourages of possession of certain humanizing virtues, and actions based there on, conducive to the welfare of the entire creation. *Svadharma* is a practical application of the *sadharana dharma*, within a particular sphere by the individual belonging to a class, characterized by certain prominent quality. The scheme of *Varna* and *Ashrama* is advocated by *Puranas*. It is based upon duties of individuals of a class and has as its aim the efficiency, welfare, smooth working, and material and spiritual perfection of the society as a whole.
2. The *sadharana dharmas*, universal in scope and eternal in nature, are 1) forbearance 2) self-control 3) compassion 4) charity 5) purity 6) truth 7) penance and 8) wisdom. They are advocated by most of the *Puranas*. Other virtues 1) fortitude and freedom from anger 2) renunciation 3) non-stealing 4) uprightness, 5) learning 6) celibacy 7) meditation 8) sacrifice 9) worship of gods 10) sweet speech 11) freedom from back-biting 12) freedom from avarice and 13) freedom from jealousy are

- presented either as independent values or as derivatives of the first set of values mentioned above.
3. *Ahimsa* is declared as the *dharma par excellence*. It comprehends all other *dharmas*. *Agni*, *Padma* etc. stress this.
 4. *Satya* is the basis of purity of speech, non-stealing all laws of nature (*rta*) accuracy and changelessness. *Satya* is illustrated in the *Puranas* through the stories of Harischandra and Rukmangada. *Satya* promotes unity, trust and welfare and is an ethical and social virtue.
 5. *Sauca* (Purity) extolled in the *Agni Purana*. It is both external and internal. Evil propensities such as desire and anger are to be cleansed and *vairagya* (spirit of renunciation) and forbearance are to be promoted. *Bhakti* is an effective means of mental purification. *Vishnu* and *Bhagavata Puranas* stress on *Bhakti*.
 6. *Dana*, charity, is a social duty based on compassion-
renunciation, truth-fullness and equanimity. The stories of Sibi, Karna, and Dadhici illustrate this virtue. *Padma Purana* and *Brahma Purana* extol this virtue. *Padma Purana* classifies *Dana* as i) *nitya*-daily ii) *Nai-mittika* occasional iii) *Kamya* desire-induced and iv) *Vimala* given for God. *Dana* includes such philanthropic acts as digging wells, tanks and canals constructing parks, hospitals and temples, hospitality etc.
 7. The *Puranas* recommend the five types of sacrifices or *Yagna* (i) *Rsi Yagna*-study and teaching of scriptures (ii) *Pitru Yagna*, remembering and worshipping one's ancestors (iii) *Deva Yajna* worshipping Gods (iv) *Manushya yagna*, hospitality to guests and (v) *Bhuta Yagna* feeding the lives both visible and invisible around us.
 8. By the *Varna and Ashrama* systems the *Puranas* place each person in a well defined place in a social grid.
 9. The theory of *Karma* and transmigration plays a prominent
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role in *Puranic* ethics. "As a man sows so he reaps". Any action, good or bad or indifferent yields its corresponding fruit. It is declared that the *karma* of a previous birth seeks out its doer in this birth to yield corresponding fruits, just as the calf finds out its mother from among thousands of mother cows. Good or bad actions give a person nobler, godly or inferior birth. Sinners go to hell. Noble action takes one to heaven.

10. The doctrine of *Karma* and hell is a moral law which controls existence favouring morality and discouraging immorality. *Karma* is an ethical force which tends to improve the world by bringing its spiritual elements to perfection. In penalizing wrong and rewarding right, it treats virtue as coincident with happiness.

11. Many *Puranas* deal with expiation for the sins of omission and commission. It includes repentance and expiatory rites. A sin is considered as such because it is

anti-social. It implies lack of self-restraint, a tendency to trespass into other's rights. Hence theft, murder, adultery, envy and avarice are considered sins, transgressions against the whole society. They are to be eschewed.

12. Fasting and observing certain *vratas* are stressed by *Puranas*. Their spiritual and ethical values lie in purifying, disciplining and sublimating the mind of man.

13. *Puranic* ethics is intensely practical and utilitarian. It takes into consideration the welfare of society as a whole and prescribes the caste and customary duties for the individual. The scheme of *varnasrama-dharma* has this end in view. While prescribing the practice of great virtues like self-discipline and renunciation as in the absolutist systems, it advocates their practice as far as they are practicable in consonance with *svadharma*. It is a synthesis of the ethical principles enunciated in the literature of the *Vedas*, the *Brahmanas* and the *Upanisads*. The *Vedic* emphasis on truth, duty and respect

for superiors receives greater emphasis in the *Puranas*. The sacrificial cult of the *Brahmana* literature is merged in the scheme of *varnasrama-dharma*. The *Upanisadic* conception of the immanent Soul is utilized here for inculcating equanimity, kindness, and love towards all the grades of creation. Moreover the *Puranas* attempt a *rapprochement* between the ritualistic ethics of *Brahmanism* and the moralistic ethics of Buddhism, and Jainism. The sacrificial cult of the *Brahmana* literature appears here in a more popular and acceptable form in the form of the *panca-maha-yajnas*, *sraddhas*, and other rites which eschew injury to and promote love for animal life. The scheme of *sadharana-dharma* lays down general ethical principles common to all ; and that of *svadharma* prescribes specific duties for the betterment and welfare of society. the common good of all is the supreme standard and law according to which virtues are to be determined. *Puranic* ethics shows how one should lead a normal life of duties and responsibilities, and yet be in peace and contentment, and in a state of equanimity and communion

with God. The *Bhakti* cult is given a supreme place in the scheme of self-purification. The law of *Karma* and transmigration serves as a deterrent to evil, and promoter of good in society. The scheme of fasting and other *vratas* helps to discipline and purify the mind. The system of religious ceremonies like *sraddhas* enables the individuals to discharge his obligations in a spirit of detachment and to contribute to the balance of social economy. The expiatory rites for the sins of omission and commission serve to rectify wrongs, to purify the mind, and thus to point out the right path of duty. Thus *Puranic* ethics, besides synthesizing the earlier ethics of the *Vedas*, the *Brahmanas*, and the *Upanisads* has embraced the ethics of Buddhism and Jainism also without detriment to the ethics of the earlier literature. It is highly practical and utilitarian.

(Extracts from “the Cultural Heritage of India Vol.II” The RKM institute of Culture Calcutta 1993)

IMPACT OF VEDIC MYTHOLOGY, EPICS AND **PURANAS** ON THE LIFE AND LITERATURE OF SANGAM TAMILS

PROF.M.SHANMUKHAM PILLAI

Introduction: The Vedas were referred to as *Marai* (hidden knowledge) and *voimozhi* (oral tradition) in the life of the Tamils in the Sangam age. *Anthanas* (Brahmins) were referred to those who preserved the four *Vedas*. The six *vedangas* and the *Brahmins* performing *Yagnas*, were part of the Tamil life. The Sangam poetry refers to a number of sacrificial performances carried out, with the support of the rulers of the land. The common people also were interested in *Yagnas*. There are elaborate descriptions on the gains of *Yagnas*, the life of *Brahmins* performing *yagnas*, their virtues and life styles. Pure *Brahmins*, those carrying their household fires, Brahmins with three rods, the fallen few and all are described *in extenso* in Sangam poetry. Indra, Yama, the 33 *Devas*, 18 groups of *devas*, *digpalas* (protectors of the eight cardinal directions) Sun and Moon are described as worshippable gods

Mal (Vishnu) of dark hue was the god of forests. Murugan (Kartikeya) the red skinned was the God of the hills. There are plenty of references to them. Vishnu was referred simply as *Mal* and the now popular Tamil Name *Tirumal* (Sri Vishnu) is a later development. Vishnu's mount (Garuda), flag, His weapons, His associates Shri (Lakshmi), Brahma, Adishesha and Manmatha were well known in Sangam times. His heroism in destroying the evil and protecting the world is described. Shrirangam, Thiumalirunjolai and Tiruvananthapuram the famous shrines are described. Vishnu is also referred to as the supreme God, the originator, the preserver and the destroyer of all life. Methods of worshipping Him are catalogued. His descents (*avatars*) were well known. Murugan dwells in His six cantonments. He is the Dweller of Hills. He is worshipped by the hill tribes. His advent gets elaborate treatment in Sangam literature in a manner

proportionate to His popularity. His six faces and twelve arms shower grace on the devotees. His mount is the peacock. His physical features, the episode of His destroying the evil Shooran, His act of throwing His divine spear to destroy the Krauncha hill, etc. are described. He released the *Devas* from the prisons of *Asuras* and became the commander in chief of the divine Army. He married the daughter of Indra, He was also united with Valli the tribal woman in a *Gandharva* marriage. The ecstatic dance of the devotees, the details of Muruga worship, the elaborate rituals of Murugan worship in Tirupparankundram (Madurai) all get a fine treatment in the Sangam poetry.

The name Shiva does not find a place in Sangam life. But He is referred to as the father of Muruga. The three eyed, One of Ardra star, the Blue throated, One who is associated with Konrai (*laburnum*) flower, and as One with a stream of water on His head. His mount and weapon, are listed. His divine power, compassion etc are extolled. His consort Uma, Kotravai (Durga) are also referred to. By Sangam

age, Vishnu and Shiva were accepted as Supreme Gods.

In true regional tradition, from hills to home, a variety of minor deities are mentioned as adored. Even small villages boasted of their own deities. The hill-dwellers, forest-dwellers, dwellers of gardens and trees, deities protecting bathing ghats, deities which create trouble (*Anangu*, *Soor*) goddess of the Lute (a musical instrument *Yazh*), spirits presiding over weapons, drums, and demons, ghosts, spirits dwelling in a) stones planted in honour of the virtuous b) road crossings c) junctions, d) places where the villagers meet, e) homes, f) chests of women g) wall paintings h) altars built of bricks and i) poles, are listed as various objects of worship.

References are made to variety of minor female deities (*Paavai*). The nine planets, 27 stars, a circle of shining objects painted on walls, Sun worship, moon-worship and eclipses, selection of auspicious days for marriages, stars sacred to Vishnu or Shiva, *Saptarshis*,

Murugan, Arundhati were part of the daily life of the Sangam Tamils. Birthday celebrations, based on stars, the good and evil effects of stars and planets, calculation of time based on their movements find treatment in Sangam poetry .

Methods of worship and festivals of Sangam people deserve mention. Temples were located centrally in villages. The deities were of various shapes and forms, depending upon the mental attitude of the people who adored them. Various sweet-smelling pastes, incenses, lamps, and flowers, were carried for worship. Milk-pudding, sacrificial offering of rice(*havis*) were also taken to the temples. The open air deities were also offered animals as sacrifice. *Havis*, musical instruments, going round the temples, offering various articles to gods, promising offering to Gods on successful realisation of the wishes of devotees, combined to mark the religious culture of the Sangam society.

Festivals attracted large crowds. They were observed in the bright fortnight. Taking the deity around the town was also

known. Tirupati, Uraiyoor (Trichy) and Koodal (Madurai) come in for special description as places of festive gatherings.

Praying for children, adorning the child with ornaments, birthday celebrations, initiation of the child into education, were part of the religious usage of the Sangam Tamils. Young girls took vows and observed penances (*Pavai Nonbu*). They danced in groups (*Kuravai*). They either chose their husbands or married the boys selected by their parents. There was an elaborate marriage ceremony. House-hold deities were placated prior to a marriage ritual. The bride was adorned with a *thali* (*Mangala Sutra*). Women lighted a lamp of worship at Sunset. They also worshipped the crescent moon. Hospitality and festivities were accompanied by ritual gifts. Omens were believed. Those who renounced the world practiced penance. In extreme cases some sat facing north and fasted unto death. Widows observed many vows. The dead bodies were given ritualistic burial or cremation, the sons offering water to the departed. At least a

few persons renounced the ephemeral world and sought spiritual liberation. Their lives find description in poetic records.

Holy people guided the common people, taught them the facts of life and were the examples and models to the masses.

Worship and rituals such as marriage were conducted by these holy persons. They steered the masses in peaceful ways of life, dispensed justice from seats of the court, pulled up the erring rulers. The *Brahmins* occupied an exalted status in Sangam life.

The life at large of the Sangam Tamil people appreciated ethical values such as gratitude, respect for the elders, giving up intoxicants, foreswearing lust, truthfulness and non-injury. The motto of the society at large was “All places are mine; All are my kinsmen:

(From the Tamil book
“Sangathamizarin Vazhipadum
Chadangukalum-ie. ‘Worship and rituals
of the Tamils of Sangam’ period” by
Professor M. Shanmukham Pillai,
International Institute of Tamil studies,
Madras 113, 1996)

RAMAYANA IN THE ARTS OF ASIA

KAPILA VATSYAYAN

1. Introduction

A stage manifestation in the 20th century may represent a moment of time strictly contemporary unconnected with the past of a people or it may hold within its contemporary, and often modern form a content and a theme which continuously recalls many moments of a historical cultural past, which has meaning and validity on the stage and the power to determine pattern of living, behaviour and thought.

The theatrical spectacle lasting two or three hours or a series of nights thus brings forth responses from audiences which lie deep in the psyche of a people. Asian drama has many such theatrical manifestations which cover a very vast geographical region and these can be traced back to many centuries in time. In spite of the complex and staggering multiplicity of forms, there have been certain themes which have travelled from one part of the Asian Continent to another with amazing mobility and fidelity. A cultural history of Asia could be reconstructed through a systematic tracing of a particular theme in many countries. This could be done with the lives of Buddha or the stories of the Jatakas and with other myths, legends and fables which travelled thousands of miles without mechanical vehicles of transmission and without the printed word. The fascinating story of the movement of the *Pancatantra* and the *Hitopadesa* to countries in West Asia, Europe etc. is too well known to be recounted. Equal only to the wide-spread prevalence of the story of the *Hitopadesa* and the *Pancatantra*, is the story of Rama—a hero once, a god at other times, a mere

man yearning and conquering and a god in pain and anguish, a man destined to make choices between his Love and his sense of Duty. The story of Rama seems to have bewitched and hypnotized generations of Asians belonging to countries with different religious, literary, and cultural traditions. Although the story of the Buddha, both as literature and as a religious and spiritual message, spread far and wide, and holds a unique place in this Civilization and Culture, the story of Rama has equally held the imagination of all classes of people ranging from the most sophisticated and affluent to the most humble and lowly. It has permeated all aspects—living, religious, canonical and artistic.

Unlike the story of the Buddha, in some countries of the continent, it continues to be a vibrant tradition on the stage in many dance and drama-styles, shadow and puppet plays of all varieties; in operatic manifestations ranging from ballad singing to stylized recitation, it lives in the framework of the dances of magic and exorcism, and still determines the nature of musical orchestration in some countries. It also continues to be painted, whether in traditional forms, such as scrolls or mural paintings or through a fresh treatment by modern artists. Its popularity has not been confined to the traditional framework, but has impregnated a variety of modern media, such as comics, film strips, feature films, documentaries and the rest. The countries where the theme has survived in the traditions of the plastic and the performing arts could easily be identified as all the countries of the regions known as South Asia, South-East Asia and some countries of Central Asia.

2. The literary theme is basic and in India, Indonesia, East Java, Cambodia, fundamental to both the plastic and Thailand, Burma, Nepal and Sri Lanka. performing arts. All the stage 7. The most effective and yet intangible arrangements have rested heavily on the oral tradition facilitated mobility and literary works of the region or the period. flexibility. This may be the one single
3. Ballads, plain narrative poem, epic element which accounts for the amazing moving with architectonic grandeur, or continuity the freshness and endless drama with acts and scenes present potential for adaptability of the theme. Ramayana to the masses. 8. The traditions of Ramayana in Asia are
4. Sculptors, musicians, dancers, and literary, artistic and theatrical. There are actors base their artistic interpretation on many points of similarity, and the literary form. destructiveness of the traditions in South
5. Ramayana theme was popular in bas- East Asia, i.e. India, Burma, Thailand, relief and bronze-sculpture and other Laos, Cambodia, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The plastic arts. tradition of Ramayana in Indonesia and
6. Fresco, mural paintings, Indian Malaysia help us to understand the other miniature paintings, stage forms, puppets, traditions. stone reliefs and marionettes, are found 9. The Ramayana literary tradition spans a time frame from 3rd century BC to day.

10. Pre-Valmiki references are found in Rg Veda, Taittiriya *Brahmana*, and Krishna Yajurveda regarding Rama.
11. Valmiki (3rd Century BC) Regional language versions in India (9th Century AD afterwards, Chinese Dasaratha Jataka (251 AD), Lankan Kumaradasa(7th Century AD other, versions (7-9 century AD) Kalmuk language and others Mangolia, Indonesia (9th century), East Iran (9th century), Khmer (7th century AD), Laos, Malaysia (13th century) and Thailand (8-9 centuries AD), are the regional versions of Ramayana.
12. To this list can be added many versions of the languages and dialects of India. A bibliography alone would make a volume.
13. It would be hard for an artist to copy and imitate earlier models and challenging to create new forms on an age-old theme which had been treated by poets, painters, musicians, and dancers for centuries exploring every nuance and shade of interpretation. And yet this very fact paradoxically has caught the imagination of the creators of today, namely to present a theme, which would strike responsive chords in every heart and yet to present it in a manner which would be both new and meaningful. In fact a careful analysis of the literary versions of Ramayana, along with versions in the performing arts reveals the strength and buoyancy of tradition which was continuously assimilating and adapting itself to new conditions.

14. The sculptural and painting traditions of South East Asia reinforce and supplement the literary evidence. The temple at Deogarh (Gupta period), the Kailasa temple in Ellora, the magnificent portraiture in Angkor Vat, Benteay Srei etc. depict the Ramayana Story. Nageswaraswami temple in Kumbakonam (9th century) and Prambanan in Indonesia (10th Century) are very old. From the 12th century onwards, the Ramayana theme appears in practically every temple of Vishnu.

15. In Thailand, Ramayana mural paintings, show the influence of contemporary history, topology and the rest.

16. Folk art, village paintings, scrolls, terracotta figures, textile designs,

embroidered table-cloth, wall-paintings, ivory handles and hanging, and paper-machie effigies made for festive occasions, show representations of Ramayana theme.

17. The traditions of plastic arts and literary arts provide the material for full and rounded flowering of the traditions of the performing arts.

18. In the early part of 18th century there was a spurt of Ramayana writing activity, in different parts of India, Burma, Thailand etc. The oral traditions kept alive the Ramayana theme. Political and social impetus and official sanction resulted in literary creations which could be written and disseminated.

19. The Ramayana theme is found in contemporary Asia in different expressions at several levels. rests on the spoken word. In dance-drama, the recitative word forms the basis of the interpretations.

a) At the plane of ritual or institutionalised religion Rama is worshipped as God. e) Full glory of survival and interpretation of the tradition is achieved in dance-

b) It is found in the agricultural calendars as the life cycle, Rama's birthday as the New Year, *Navaratra* as his day of victory etc. It is found in tableau like narration in the cart play tradition of Burma. Mobile drama. *Khon* play in Thailand, plays in India—*Kudiyattam*, *Bhagavata Mela*, *Ankianat (Assam)* *Mayurbhanj chau*, Purulia, Ramayana and *Kathakali* show Ramayana scenes.

theatre is known in other countries too. f) Shadow and puppet theatre includes,

c) Plain ballad singing or recitation with marionettes, Glove, Rod and Shadow plays or without a book, with different levels of from different regions of India and the sophistication is known all over South East entire South East Asian Countries.

Asia. *Charana*,- a ballad singer, minstrel g) *Survival* and revival of traditions depend upon new creations. Many choreographers narrator goes from village to village.

d) In Drama proper, folk and traditional have volunteered for this theme without theatre, *Jatra*, *Tamasha*, *Bhavai*, state-patronage or social pressure.

Yakshagana and *Nautanki*, the theatre

20. In all art forms of Ramayana, there was a close relationship, between the declaimed verse, sung poetry, the music, the plastic manifestation and the stage presentation. Over the South-East Asia region, artistic expressions are comparable in some aspects and distinctly locale-specific in others. which has facilitated the survival and continuance of the traditions in contemporary Asia. Even when the theme seemed to run into a dry sand-bed, it never died, for the oral tradition was sustaining it. Also the oral traditions supported, supplemented and complimented the traditions of the written word and of brick,

24. The principle of stylized pose of the gesture is followed by all traditions. Facial miming and gesticulation with words are found in *Kathakali* and *Bharatanatyam*. A basic colour symbolism is also common. Green is always associated with Rama, white with Hanuman and red and black with Ravana. mortar, clay, stone, colour and paint. It was also responsible for facilitating process of assimilation without 'electric shock' experiences and providing the basis of integrated amalgamation. The world-view, the affirmation of life-death continuum, the adherence to a concept of cyclic time, through a method of transmission which

And above all is the phenomenon of the amazing tenacity of the oral traditions which was a total integrated approach, have led to art creations on Ramayana in all centuries, including the 20th, which have

many dimensions in time. A single “As a cat standing on the shores of the spectacle has elements in it which can be ocean of milk thinks it can lick up the traced back not to one moment of whole ocean, I hope to retell the Ramayana historical time, but to several: it has other story already told by Valmiki”. But from elements which echo cultures of distant Kamban to Gandhi in India and from the lands: and yet the creation is new and Rulers of Champa to Maha Eisey in Khmer contemporary with a distinct identity and and from the rulers of Srivijaya to Dhani personality. It is not an artificial Nivat, creative minds in Asia have been resurrection of a dead language, a piece drawn to this epic of all epics. of antiquity but a living being of the present.

(Extracted from “The Ramayana Tradition in Asia”, Sahitya Akadami Ed.V.Raghavan, New Delhi 1989).

And yet more vistas and avenues of exploration await the interest of creative minds and artists. Kamban, the Tamil poet, begins his Ramayana with the words:

BOX ITEMS		
THE PURANAS	4.	Anu Gita
	5.	Uddhava Gita
1. The Admitted achievements of	6.	Utathya Gita
India, in the directions of assimilation,	7.	Vamadeva Gita
adaptation and synthesis of diverse, and	8.	Rsabha gita
even conflicting points of view should be	9.	Sadaja Gita
properly recorded. It will be great lesson	10.	Sampaka Gita
for the humanity. In the <i>Puranas</i> , we find	11.	Manki Gita
such reconciliation of various elements of	12.	Bodhya Gita
India.	13.	Vicakhnu Gita
(Cultural heritage of india VOL.II RKM	14.	Harita Gita
Institute of Culture, Calcutta).	15.	Vrtra Gita
	16.	Parasara Gita
BOX ITEM	17.	Hamsa Gita
2. The Gita literature as a part of <i>Itihasas</i>	18.	Brahma Gita
and <i>Puranas</i>	19.	Brahmana Gita
1. Astavakra Samhita	20.	Kapila Gita
2. Bhagavad Gita	21.	Bhikshu Gita
3. Avadhuta Gita	22.	Devi Gita

- | | | |
|-----|---------------|---|
| 23. | Ganesa Gita | whether of individuals, classes or |
| 24. | Suta Gita | functionaries, the harmony not only of a |
| 25. | Yama Gita | particular State of community, but of the |
| 26. | Siva Gita | whole creation was held to depend. Life |
| 27. | Rama Gita | was a continuum not interrupted by death; |
| 28. | Surya Gita | and so were deed and thought. |
| 29. | Vasistha Gita | C.P.Ramaswamy Aiyar. |
| 30. | Uttara Gita | (From the Cultural Heritage of India II |
| 31. | Pandava Gita | RKM Institute of Culture, Calcutta). |
| 32. | Isvara Gita | BOX ITEM |
| 33. | Hari Gita | <u>The Mahabharata and Achieving</u> |
| | | <u>Purusharthas</u> |
| 34. | VyasaGita | |

BOX ITEM

The Hindu View of Life

In the Hindu view of life, ideals and activities were considered to be interdependent. Society was viewed as indivisible, and on the reconciliation and equipoise of duties and obligations,

The *Mahabharata* describes the four *Purusharthas* or human ends. *Dharma* is the code of life, the bond which keeps the society together. Whatever is conducive to social welfare is to be done. What one is ashamed of doing is never to be done.

Dharma is the genus and applies to all.

MARKANDEYA PURANA AND DEVI

The *Ashramas* and *Varnas* are the species.

MAHATMYA

In the course of Samskritization of the *Mahabharata*, several myths, legends,

Chapters 81-93 of the Markandeya *Purana*, constitute an independent and

narratives, and discourses were added, exalting the *Brahmanas* and placing them

complete work called Devi Mahatmya, alias *Candi* or *Saptasati*, which must have been

on a level superior to gods themselves.

inserted into it at a comparatively later

However the ascetic poetry found in

date, but certainly not later than 600 AD.

interspersed in the epic takes a broader view and reveals a generous mind. It is

The Devi *Mahatmya* glorifies the supreme goddess Durga (Devi) in Her different forms

said "Truth, Self-control, asceticism, generosity, non-violence and constancy in

and is very favorite work of worshippers of Shakti. Its wide popularity is shown by its

virtue-these are the means of success, not

manuscripts still found in all parts of the

caste or family. One has to observe the

country and by a large number of its

rules of the *asrama* also. One has to fulfill

commentaries.

his duties as a householder before

(Cultural Heritage of India Vol.II)

becoming an anchorite. The observation

of *acara*, following the footsteps of the

great are obligatory to all.

MINOR SCIENCES, PRACTICES AND	21. use of other arms, 22. agriculture,
TOPICS DEALT IN THE <i>PURANAS</i>	23.gardening, 24. metrics, 25. grammar,
	26. dramaturgy, 27. poetics, 28. music,
1.Duties of various castes, 2. various	29.dancing, 30.architecture, 31.
magic acts including curing diseases and	construction of images of deities, 32.
defeating the enemy, 3. <i>moksha dharma</i> ,	myths, 33. legends, 34. stories, 35. division
4. methods of worship, 5.geography, 6.	of time, 36. manners and customs, 37.
summaries of epics and other <i>Puranas</i> ,	marriage, 38. proper conduct and duties
7.geneology, 8. lexicography, 9. the science	of women, 39. penances, 40. results of
of testing gems, 10. praise of holy temples,	actions, 41. rules about the devotional
11.medical science,12. treatment of	vows, 42. funeral ceremonies, 43.
children suffering under unfavourable	description and praise of various kinds of
planetary conditions, 13. treatment of	donations, 44. praise of holy places, 45.
cows, horses and elephants, 14.	law, 46. pathology, 47.cookery,
knowledge of snakes, 15. treatment for	48.manufacture of perfumes,
snake-bite, 16. knowledge of precious	49.horticulture, 50.rhetoric, 51. dancing,
stones, 17. coronation and duties of kings,	52. vocal and instrumental music, 53.
18. politics, 19. science of war, 20. archery,	painting.

BRAHMARISHI VISWAMITRA

K.R.KRISHNAMURTHI

The names of the *Rishis* of our Gotras reflect our ancient lineage going back to the times of our revered *Rishis*, the originators of so many different families forming the great Hindu society of India, today! By years of intense *sadhana* (*tapas*) our ancient *Rishis* acquired amazing spiritual powers, as to bless or curse a person with instant effect!

All *Rishis* are not Brahmins! Some of them are known to belong to different castes, as the *Nayanmars* and *Azhawars* of Tamil Nadu and the Saints of Maharashtra. Wives of some *Rishis*, by their austerity skill and accomplishment, flourished as *Rishis* in those days. Lopa Mudra, Anasuya, Ahalya, Devahuti, Aditi, Mytrei, Gargi, Gosha etc. are some of them.

Rishis are generally known as *Maharshis*, *Brahmarshis*, *Devarshis*, *Rajarshis*, *Paramarshis*, *Srowtarshis* and *Khandarshis*.

Great reseach scholars, eminent scientists of celestial spheres, exponents of sacred and highly efficacious *mantras* etc. were referred to and classified as *Rishis*.

Extraordinary achievements, expert and special knowledge over various technical fields of human knowledge etc. were taken into account, while assessing the capabilities of different categories of *Rishis*. Those whom we call scientists and research scholars in highly specialised fields of today were called *Rishis* in those days!

Maharshi Viswamitra was the son of the King Gadhi and grandson of Kuchika. A

friend of many is what is meant by the name Viswamitra. He was aware of *Maharshi* Vasistha's several gifts and extraordinary spiritual powers. Once he paid a visit to Vasistha's *Ashrama*, without prior intimation. However Vasistha arranged for a feast to him and his retinue, by bidding his divine Cow Kamadenu. Viswamitra was very much surprised to find the amazing powers of Kamadenu and wanted to have it for himself! But it strongly resisted. Attempts to take it by force resulted in failure, as the sudden appearance of a fleet destroyed the forces of Viswamitra. The arrows of Viswamitra aimed at Vasistha fell at the feet of the *Yoga danda* of the sage!

Humiliated, enraged and sorrowful, Viswamitra left the *Ashrama* in shame, taking a vow that he would become a *Brahmarshi* like Vasistha, with all the spiritual powers he had!

Vasistha was not in agreement with Viswamitra on many issues but would yield later, after much consideration. This may be due to the several conflicts the latter had with the sage!

Vasistha is one among the *Saptha Rishis* and he is honoured with a distinct place with his wife Arundhati, among the seven stars that comprise the *Saptarshi Mandala*, that goes round the pole star *Dhruva Nakshatra*, in the North Pole!

Viswamitra started his intense *sadhana* (*tapas*) by going to the four directions for the purpose of qualifying himself to be recognized as a *Brahmarshi*! He went to the South first. As an astronomer, he discovered some important

southern stars, not included among the 27 stars till then, also not explored by anybody and went with a step forward and brought to the notice of other *Rishis*, the existence of a constellation that behaved strangely called Trishanku. He revealed its movements to the world in the form of a funny story! It is nearest to the earth and also one nearest to the South Pole!

He then went Westward for tapas (i.e. exploration). There he saved the precious life of a young boy about to be offered as sacrifice in the Aswamedha *Yaga* of King Ambarisha. Viswamitra taught him two *mantras*, by which he praised Indra and Vishnu, who came to his timely rescue and saved his life!

When he went Northward for pursuing his *sadhana*, he was disturbed by the charming damsel Rambha, instigated by Indra in a plot to divert Viswamitra's attention from his tapas. After living with her for sometime, he got tired of her and cursed her to become a stone!

Lastly, he travelled Eastward to intensify his *tapas*, mobilizing all his efforts to achieve his goal, the position of *Brahmarshi*. At one stage some *Rishis* approached him to persuade him strongly to give up such a severe penance, to which his reply was that they should make Vasistha acknowledge and call him a *Brahmarshi*. After assessing the record of Viswamitra's achievements, they left.

Vasistha finally relented and called him "Hey Viswamitra *Brahmarshi*, *Swagatam*". Thus Viswamitra stood glorified in the assembly of many *Rishis*!

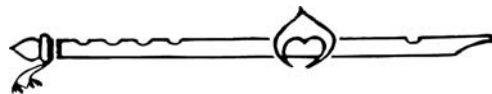
Once Viswamitra's intimacy with Menaka, a bewitching *apsara* girl, whom Indra had sent to spoil his *tapas*, gave birth to a baby girl, which she left near a bush and made her way unnoticed. Rishi Kanva when he saw a crying baby, took it to his *Ashrama* and brought it up as young beautiful Sakuntala, whom he married off to King Dushyanta. King Bharata was their illustrious son!

Though Viswamitra had conjugal relations with Rambha and Menaka at an early period, in life, he rose to the exalted position of *Brahmarshi*, by unique determination and great discipline, in pursuit of his spiritual attainments.

As we all know, Viswamitra is a distinguished Rig Vedic *Rishi* along with Vasistha. But it is Viswamitra who has bequeathed to us the great, sacred and supreme *Gayatri Mantra*, which has the unique distinction of being proclaimed, that no other *mantra* is greater than *Gayatri*!

The discovery of this sacred *mantra* alone is enough to proclaim Viswamitra as a *Brahmarshi*.

Just like Vasistha's name is perpetuated in association with a star in the *Saptarshi Mandala* at the north Pole, Viswamitra's name is also assigned to a star likewise, called Crux (southern cross) that lies close to the constellation Trishanku, which was discovered by him.



PILGRIMAGE OF VISWAMITRA FROM GREED TO ENLIGHTENMENT

T.RAGHUNANDAN

A white lotus blushes crimson, while greeting the dawn. As the sun hesitatingly lights up the east, it blossoms, and the cool breeze carries its ethereal fragrance in all directions. The bee gratefully accepts the invitation to partake of its ambrosia. For a nature lover or a poet the sight may trigger ecstasy. But those who are pre-occupied may not even notice this wondrous sight. And unfortunately for those, whose attention is only on the stagnant muddy swamp, they will see the lotus as an extension of the mud! The muddy swamp is a haven for magnificent lotuses. A seed protects a mighty banyan in its bosom. An egg is a refuge for a peacock with all its exotic feathers. A formless foetus has in it a thinking, conscious and sensitive human being. But those, who cannot look beyond the smallness of the seed egg or the mud in the swamp, are unable to behold the wonderful tree or the bird or the lotus. And yet, the seed, egg and the foetus, have to negotiate a long and arduous journey to fulfill their respective destinies.

The life of Viswamitra—one of the seven greatest *Rsis*, represents the pilgrimage of the soul from the lower needs like greed, anger, ambition and lust, to the higher ones like effort, sacrifice, compassion and love, on to the highest fulfillment of enlightenment. Viswamitra for many of us represents anger and lust or ambition and vengeance. Unfortunately, we overlook his industry, perseverance and dedication for achieving his self-set goals. We ignore his

sacred *Gayatri*, the greatest contribution, which has the power not only to soothe the mind, but also to take us towards enlightenment. His pilgrimage makes an interesting story if not a study, that can be an inspiration for transforming the so-called ordinary life into life divine.

King Kausika visits sage Vasistha, who extends a very rich reception in his honour. Surprised to find richness and taste in the humble hermitage, Kausika discovers the source of the hospitality to be Nandini—the divine cow, which is capable of fulfilling all the requirements of the sage. Provoked by greed, Kausika asks Vasistha to give him the cow in lieu of thousand milch cows. Sage Vasistha explains that the cow is not his and cannot belong to any one, as its presence in the ashrama is for propitiating the *Devas*—divine beings. Proud of his royal privileges, Kausika wants to own the cow by force. Nandini, who can protect herself, creates wild people to destroy the king's trained army! Managing to escape with life, Kausika vows to return after acquiring powers to match those of Vasistha and Nandini. Enlightened Vasistha, who can see the potential of Kausika, instructs Vamadeva—one of his disciples to initiate him into the *Upasana of Rudra*—the God of arms and warfare, so that Kausika can fulfill his need to attack the *ashramal*

Giving up his kingdom and family, goaded by revenge, Kausika retreats to Himalayan foothills and meets Vamadeva who helps him acquire the arms from

Rudra after propitiation. He proceeds to the ashrama of Vasistha, who is away. Nandini warns Arundhati—the chaste wife of the venerable sage, who prays and gives the responsibility of protecting the *ashrama* to the staff (*brahmadanda*) of the sage, with a request that if possible it should help Kausika in eliminating his animosity! When Kausika attacks the *ashrama* after giving sufficient time to the inmates for escaping, he finds his weapons no match to the *brahmadanda*—the holy staff of Vasistha, which injures him making him unconscious! When it is about to eliminate him, Vamadeva reaches the spot in the nick of time and prays it not to do so. However, when it circumambulates him, a dark shadow like being leaves him. Vamadeva brings the unconscious Kausika back to health. Shaken, Kausika realises a change in him, when he discovers that instead of animosity, there is a strong wish to emulate and if possible, to become a Vasistha. Vamadeva tells him that the change is due to the effect of *brahmadanda*, which also protected the *ashrama*, while Vasistha was away!

The turning point in the life of Kausika is his desire to possess the divine cow. Being a king and necessarily *rajasic*, Kausika is eager to fulfill the desire. When he does not succeed in doing so, his natural reaction is anger and use of force. Failure to possess the cow, and the subsequent defeat, make him take Vasistha as his adversary and an enemy who is standing between him and the cow. He is also aware that the prowess of Vasistha is neither physical nor martial but spiritual.

And so begins Kausika's journey into himself through greed. At the same time, the behaviour of Vasistha and his disciple brings home another very important point:

always be very careful in choosing the enemy. If the enemy is noble, lofty and spiritually more advanced than you, then he will always help you in your growth. Vasistha is a Self-realised person, and all his actions are for the welfare of the existence. Though Kausika considers him as his adversary, Vasistha does not recognize any such emotion. Even when Kausika attacks the *ashrama*, his wife Arundhati prays for his welfare and wishes him well, resulting in the transformation of his anger into deep respect and a quiet determination to emulate Vasistha. After understanding the basics of *tapas*, Kausika takes leave of Vamadeva, and moves south ward to build a small hut on the banks of river Rewa. The guidance received from Vamadeva helps him in his spiritual practice. Kausika's warrior-like attitude helps him to persevere and experiment with the *Vedic mantras*, *prana*—the life force, and understand the secrets of creation. With an aspiration to eliminate anger from his mind, Kausika starts calling himself "Viswamitra—the friend of the universe".

Trisanku—the king of solar dynasty, who nurtures a desire to go to heaven in his physical body, approaches Vasistha, his preceptor. Vasistha discourages him as he would be going to heaven after death, and also because that has never been done. When the king insists and urges his preceptor to create a new *yajna* for the purpose, Vasistha refuses on the ground that it will disturb the natural balance and that with the help of such ritual even the non-eligible persons will be able to go there. Observing the obstinacy of Trisanku, Vasistha sends him to *Rajarsi* Viswamitra. When Trisanku approaches him informing him that the great sage himself has directed him to do so, Viswamitra is flattered and promises him to create a

yajna with the help of Jamadagni—his maternal cousin and a seeker like himself.

In their effort to fulfil the desire of Trisanku, they learn many things. They invoke sage Atharvana to help them conduct the *yajna*, who points out that the king's body should first be transformed into a divine one; that while Viswamitra is proficient in *Rudravidya*, Jamadagni is an expert in *Varunavidya*; and that together they can propitiate Aswini Kumaras—the divine physicians and surgeons who can help in changing the body of Trisanku. The divine surgeons change the body of Trisanku. The two sages also discover that the main deity of the *yajna* is Indra, who can be invoked only in the presence of Vasistha or at least someone from his lineage. Knowing that Vasistha will not come for the *yajna*, they decide to invoke the auras of the great sage's sons on to someone. With intense enterprise, effort and grit they prepare for the *yajna*.

The *yajna* proceeds without any hindrance. However, for the *purnahuti*—the final offering, which is to be accepted by Indra, the king of *devas*—Indra does not come. Viswamitra tries to invoke one of Vasistha's son's aura into an officiating priest. In a struggle that follows, the combined strength of Jamadagni and Viswamitra kills Vasistha's hundred sons. Undaunted, and carried away by rage, the outcome of their failure, Viswamitra and Jamadagni send Trisanku to heaven through their combined power of *tapas*. But he falls, as he is not allowed to enter the heaven without the permission of Indra. Viswamitra stops him in mid-space and creates a small heaven, which has come to be called "*Trisanku-swarga*". Though the *yajna* as such has failed, the fact that Viswamitra and Jamadagni have succeeded in transforming the body of Trisanku and have created an exclusive

heaven for him makes them both venerable in the eyes of other seekers and sages. Many people follow them to the ashrama of Jamadagni.

Jamadagni, worried about feeding so many with his limited means, propitiates Agni, who offers him Sabala—another divine cow like Nandini, on a condition that he seeks the permission from Indra—the king of heaven. When Jamadagni invokes Indra, he willingly appears and presents the cow. Indra then gives audience to Viswamitra, and tells him that at the end of the first phase of Kritayuga—the golden age, a great personage has to take the misery on himself, and providence has chosen sage Vasistha for the purpose. All the events that led to the death of his sons was only for this end, and that only a Vasistha can bear the intensity of the misery.

Vasistha has already borne half the misery. Moreover, Indra says that through the *yajna* conducted for Trisanku, providence has planned to take Viswamitra through progressive stages to accomplish the ultimate goal of enlightenment. Viswamitra however is not listening and great is his repentance, as he realizes that he has directly caused the death of Vasistha's sons. He takes a vow in front of Indra that he will sacrifice his fifty sons willingly to take misery of Vasistha, on himself. Indra is extremely pleased with Viswamitra and invites him to heaven, but latter refuses on the ground that for a recluse the goal is something more meaningful than the heavenly indulgence. Indra smilingly observes that if he refuses the invitation, then it is quite likely that the heaven may come to him!

Once again, he seeks seclusion by withdrawing to north and settling down on the bank of river Saraswati. He gathers

enough power to understand that in spite of the fact that he had given up the animosity for Vasistha, the *tapas* he had performed, was goaded by ambition, ambition to outwit and overtake the great sage. He realises that unless the *tapas* is motivated by compassion and love, it is bound to breed pain and misery to oneself and others. He delves deeply within, to discover the secrets of cleansing of the body and mind through *prana*. In the process however, Viswamitra realizes that a strange attraction towards beauty of nature, a feeling of compassion towards the suffering and an indefinable friendship and love towards all creatures develop in him. He feels full and at the same time incomplete without someone to share that fullness.

Then happens perhaps the most misunderstood and infamous event of his life; indulgence with Menaka—the heavenly nymph! Usually this episode is considered to be one of the most vicious falls in his life—his defeat at the hands of lust, which happens to be one of the strongest forces of existence. Before we pass a judgment on Viswamitra, we will do well to remember that the stage he is in, is unimaginably lofty, as he is already a *Maharsi* who has not only control over his sense but also has control over external nature. Viswamitra's eyes are set on becoming a *Brahmarsi* like Vasistha. It is known that Vasistha is born enlightened and the only purpose of his life is for the guidance of mankind, whereas, Viswamitra has to acquire the sage-hood through the dint of his effort. That means, a warrior with his natural ambition and love for acquisition of power over others has to transcend his basic nature to become ego-less. *Paramahansa* Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the first as well as the last step in spirituality is becoming ego-less. He would give the

example of a fish caught in a net. It can become free in two ways. The first is by reducing itself to such an extent that it is able to come out of one of the openings in the net. The other way is to become so large that the net is unable to contain it and the fish breaks out of the net.

For Viswamitra the second path is suitable. Allowing the *ahamkara* to grow, ripen and fall on its own is more suitable for him. Menaka spends some time with him and her association helps Viswamitra to expand his learning. Taittiriyaopanisad, in its quantification of *ananda*—bliss mentions that the capacity for bliss of *devas* is 10^{10} times more than that of human beings! So the capacity of Viswamitra increases through sense experiences with Menaka. Moreover, he learns the most important aspects of sharing and giving. Menaka repairs to her abode after delivering a girl child—Sakuntala. Finding a suitable haven for the child in *Rsi Kanva's Asrama*. Viswamitra again plunges into *Tapas*. In the following period he meets many accomplished *Rsis* who share their wisdom with him. Through the spiritual experiences, he realizes his inner nature to a very great extent. At this time, he remembers his promise given to Indra for alleviating the misery of Vasistha.

Ghritaci—another celestial nymph appears in front of Viswamitra and expresses her wish to spend some time with him. He accepts her with a condition that she will bear him fifty sons who are aspirant *Rsis* and fifty others who are going to be the future *Rsis*, and that she should not protest if the aspirant *Rsis* are sacrificed for a noble purpose. She also accepts on a condition that the hundred offsprings will be borne by her in a single conception, as she wants to experience the delivery pain only once. It suits him and

they become man and wife to manage the *Asrama* that looks after the interest of so many seekers.

Out of the one hundred sons, peculiarly enough the first fifty form an extremely proud and angry team, while the second fifty are humble, receptive and eligible seekers. An occasion presents itself when Hariscandra—the monarch of the solar dynasty approaches him to be one of the officiating priests for a *yajna*, which will be presided over by Vasistha the great, himself! Viswamitra is overwhelmed and is convinced that the Providence has chosen to smile on him once again, and that he will be able to clear the debt. It is a *Narmedha*—a sacrifice of a human being. A boy belonging to the *gotra* of Angiras and son of Ajigarta is to become the sacrificial animal. Viswamitra's concern is swept aside when Hariscandra tells him that Vasistha has observed that an able person can not only save the boy, but complete the *yajna* as well.

The officiating priests meet to discuss the proceedings. Vasistha says that Varuna, the main deity of the *yajna* has instructed him in the whole procedure. In the discussion, Viswamitra, does not open his mouth, but is extremely silent but observant. In the hut where he is housed, Viswamitra meets the father of the boy to be sacrificed. He tells the *Rsi*, that he had sold Sunassepha—the boy, to Hariscandra for a hundred cows, due to poverty. But presently he has realized his grave mistake and want Viswamitra to save him. When Sunassepha is summoned, and Viswamitra beholds him, strong feeling of love and compassion is stirred in him. In the *yajna*, everything goes on without any obstacle. When the boy is about to be sacrificed, *mantras* in praise of deities like Prajapati, Varuna, Agni, Aswini-Kumaras and Usas, pour out of him. The deities set Sunassepha free and offer him to

Viswamitra as his son. Thereafter, he is called as *Devarata*—one who has been offered by the *Devas*.

Looking into the eligibility of Devarata, Viswamitra offers him many secrets. The first fifty sons of Viswamitra headed by Andhra protest this and want it to be solved at *Dharmasabha*—the assembly of Dharma. The sons are burnt to death due to the misinterpretation of the law and arrogance. Viswamitra's debt to Vasistha is absolved and Indra calls Ghritaci back to heaven. Viswamitra becomes a *Brahmarsi* in his own right and effort and is accepted as such by all, including Vasistha. He becomes the *mantradrashtha* of Gayatri, which has the power to soothe and enlighten the person, who chants it. In these thousands of years, it has been chanted by billions of people, who have been benefited by it. (Authorities are not agreed as to which Viswamitra was the seer of the Gayatri Mantra - Editor)

Indian ethos has the distinction of accepting *everything* as a necessary step towards growth. We have never divided the existence into divine and demonic, positive and negative or spiritual and mundane. Life as such has been taken as an organic whole—*advaita*. *Upanishads* offer us not only the philosophical foundations of our culture, but means and methods to attain the state of *advaita*. Our Risis realized that not all people in the society are capable of understanding, and so offered us mythology, which brings out the lofty truths in simple symbolic stories. These seeped into our day-to-day life to keep the culture alive through all the vicissitudes of foreign invasion and oppression. Life of Viswamitra—who has been one of the Seven Risis of this age, happens to be a source of inspiration for all of us. It fills us with a new hope, that in spite of all the limitations, one can rise above to make the life more meaningful and purposeful. Rather, the limitations are the steps, to be climbed up by them, who want to serve and save humanity through love and sacrifice.

BHARATA, THE IKSHWAKU PRINCE

V. RAMANATHAN

Bharata in the *Ramayana* and Bhishma in the *Mahabharata* are two characters though apparently different having many common traits. Both were entitled to the kingdom, one by his father's promise and the other by his rightful title. Both relinquished their rights on their own in favour of others; this is the quality of sacrifice which one has to learn from both. Their impact on Indian citizens in general has been great, but alas, those who rule the country have not learnt their lessons from these personalities.

It is in Valmiki Ramayana, Balakanda, that Bharata first makes his appearance. 'Bharato nama Kaikekiya jagne sathyaparakrama' put in Sanskrit (18th Sarga 13th Stanza). (Meaning Bharata the truthful was born to Kaikeyi). Compare this to Sri Ramavatara in stanza 11 : 'Kausalya janayadrama' Kausalya delivered Rama. In the matter of the birth of Sri Rama there are not many adjectives used. "tatascha dwadase mase chaitre navamike tithou nakshatre aditi daivatya socha samshteshu panchasu" put in Sanskrit. Even though it was Sri Rama who vanquished the evil forces of Ravana, he is referred to as Kausalya *supraja* Rama. Only Bharata is mentioned as *Satyaparakrama*. By this one adjective Sage Valmiki puts Bharata on a high pedestal.

One should get back to 16th canto 29 stanza. Kaikeyayai chavasisthartham dadhow putrarthakaranat. (King Dasaratha gave to Kaikeyi half of what was left intending to get a son by her). What does this signify? The sage Valmiki

predicts that the King knew that it is only Bharata who is going to do the final obsequies to him as the real PUTRA.

Apart from these, there is little reference or glorification to Bharata in Valmiki's or other Ramayanas. Is he such an insignificant character to be left unspoken? No, indeed, the different authors of this epic knew that he would shine as a symbol of devotion to Sri Rama and a person who sacrifices all the wealth of his father's empire to uphold Dharma. While Sri Rama went to forest for fourteen years to uphold the unspoken (to him) promise of his father, Bharata remained in Nandigram as a representative of his elder brother and administered the kingdom in his elder brother's name to uphold the spoken intention of his beloved father that Sri Rama is to inherit the kingdom. It was Bharata who laid the foundations for a welfare state where people enjoyed freedom and justice. Had this not been so, there would never have been a washerman who spoke aloud questioning the purity of Sita. It is only on such an edifice could Srirama establish *Ramarajya*.

One of the little known chapters in the Ramayana is the discussion between Sri Rama and Bharata before he agrees to get back to administer the state. Sri Rama advises him on administrative matters and on the right behaviour of a ruler in all times. This chapter is as important as the one in the *Mahabharata* where Bhishma enunciates rules of administration to Yudhisthira.

It is true that a son who does what he is told by his father is great; but one like Bharata who understands the true inclination of his father is indeed greater. It is to be remembered that as Sri Rama was not present when the promise was given to Kaikeyi, Bharata too was away when these incidents took place in Ayodhya. In spite of arriving at Ayodhya after his father's sad demise, he knew the real facts from his preceptor Vasistha and abided by his instructions.

Unlike Lakshmana, Bharata did not have to follow Sri Rama to prove his fidelity and integrity. The world understood and still understands his steadfastness to truth and claim to glory from his silence and remaining back to administer the state and its peoples. He is the real embodiment of *kshatriya dharma*. The king is duty bound to administer the state as per the *dharma sastras* and to look after the welfare of the state's subjects. This he did in earnest for fourteen continuous years and maintained law and order in his brother's absence. He achieved this in spite of the known feelings of love and affection of his subjects for Sri Rama. In the adverse circumstances where some among the citizens considered him as an usurper and were hostile to him, he maintained his calm and equanimity and did his job efficiently!

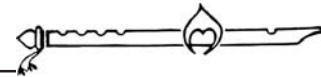
Having enjoyed the powers and honor of a ruler for fourteen uninterrupted years, he surrendered this right to the rightful heir without any regrets or compunctions at the appropriate time. In Kaliyuga it is rare that we find such persons; one refuses to vacate the ministerial chair or bungalow even if one is thrown out by the electorate! Bharata stands as a beacon light showing us how a ruler whether holding on a hereditary title or elected should behave in this world.

The word BHARATA is a synonym for FIRE too. He was as powerful as fire: he destroys evil which comes into touch with him, purifies the good ones. This is Bharata's characteristic. Fire is the first among five elements to have a body; hence it is linked to sight. Sky for conveying sound (ear). Air for touch (skin), Fire for sight (eyes). It is because of our respect to him that this land is called Bharatam too. [Conventional knowledge would have it that this land is named after Bharata the son of the Shakuntala - Editor]. No wonder in this India that is Bharat no function is complete without sacred fire whether it be in the form of a lighted lamp or *Havan*.

While one praises Lakshmana as the ideal younger brother, one should not forget Bharata, the silent one. (They also serve who stand and wait). Unlike today's silent majority, he remained back firm to cleanse the polity of all ills. Had he not ruled the state justly and laid the foundations on truth, honesty, and integrity, Sri Rama would never have been able to establish the Ramarajya in the blessed land of the Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Narmada, Sindhu, Kaveri, Sarayu and Krishna.

He had no opportunity to show his fighting prowess; still the world remembers him for his silent devotion to duty, adherence to the spirit of *dharma* and truth.

The authors like Valmiki and Kamban believed that Bharata's actions speak up for themselves; there was no need to glorify him in words. His stature alone will show his true worth, without anyone projecting him as a hero. We should realize his worth and follow in his footsteps in upholding *Sanatana Dharma*.



BHISHMA

V.RAMANATHAN

Bhishma is indeed a *Pithamaha*. He was born to sacred Ganga which flows in the three worlds. The waters of Ganga are considered sacred by one and all; it is everyone's wish to have his ashes immersed in the sacred Ganga. No wonder her son is hailed as *Pitamaha* by one and all who have even a scant knowledge of *Mahabharata*. He is the son of Shantanu. His father enamoured of the beauty of Ganga lived with her for years and produced many children, but threw them all out into the Ganga the moment they were born. The last one was Devavrata and the king believing that this son of his was to achieve greatness in life and was to play an important and significant role in the events in Kurukshetra, begged of Ganga to spare him. Ganga *Mata*, as ordained by the gods trained him in all *shastras* and then left him to the care of his father.

When his father fell in love with a fisher woman Satyawati and wanted to marry her, he agreed to all the conditions put up by the bride's father and relinquished his right to the kingdom. Further he promised to remain a bachelor and celebrate all his life. He kept this promise, in spite of the many allurements before him, unlike Sage Viswamitra who fell to the charms of *apsara* Menaka. As a result of his refusing the favours of Amba he had to suffer her curse and lay down arms when confronted by her in war in the form of a eunuch. He upheld his vow that he would never fight a eunuch. Perhaps had he not laid down arms, the future of the Pandava dynasty would have been different.

Apart from his steadfastness and adherence to truth, he had acquired vast knowledge of administration and political acumen. He had promised his father in his deathbed, that he will look after the progeny in times of good and bad and advise them in all matters personal or political. With this he remained as the *Pitamaha* and loyal to the blind King Dhritrashtra. (whom he ordained as the ruler when Pandu passed away).

The one character in this epic standing tall, witnessing from beginning to end all the intrigues, travails and the final disintegration of both Pandavas and Kauravas, is Bhishma. Sometimes he keeps silent, at others he advises both the warring cousins. But what he does not lose sight of, is the ultimate good of the country he is born in.

Moving away from established norms, he brought in the sage Vedavyasa to bring progeny to the ruling family.

It is in recognition of his knowledge and his high standard of morality in personal and public life, that Lord Krishna requests him (lying on a bed of arrows) to teach the laws of dharmic administration to Yudhishtira. Bhishma, in all humility, suggests that such advice should come from Sri Krishna himself. But the Lord says that he is cow a shepherd and Bhishma is a royal to the manor born and words from his lips would have authority and would be accepted by one and all. How one wishes that rulers of today read and understand the gems of administrative norms stated by this puranic character and follow them: if they do that India

would indeed be a *Ramarajya*; *Dharmakshetra*!

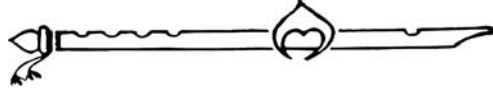
However at the end of the discourse on *dharma*, Sahadeva the younger of the Pandavas questioned him thus; '*Pitamaha*, knowing that one should stand by *dharma* alone, you still stood with the Kauravas who were embodiment of *adharma*, why?

The *Pitamaha* in his death bed answered Sahadeva: 'The blood in my veins is the result of eating the food of the Kauravas, it is the obligation to that blood which made me stand by them'.

It is a lesson for all of us particularly the ruling class: never associate even for a moment with evil forces to achieve life's aims. It will lead not only the person but the society too to disaster.

To conclude the ideals from Bharata and Bhishma which we have to follow are:

1. Strict adherence to truth
2. Never to break promises made
3. Living to *dharmic* standards.



MANDODARI

PROF. SEEMA MANDAVIA

A woman has her own unique place in Indian society from time immemorial. In present day, there are certain movements in western society, regarding women's liberation. But in India, the picture is completely different. In vedic period as well as in our Epics and mythology we can have the proof of this, the women were far ahead in each field, had equal rights and were at par with their male counterparts. They were excellent in their own respective fields, inspiring us even today.

In '*Ramayana*' great women described by Valmiki are of two main types. One is represented by such saintly ladies as Anasuya, Shabri etc., who cast off all worldly ambitions and led a life of '*tapas*' or mental discipline. The second type is represented by women, who remained in society, led a family life and rose to eminence by faithfully discharging their respective duties. Mandodari belongs to this type. Let us take her sketch in three roles of hers as – a wife, a mother and as a *Maharani* or *Rajmata*.

As a Wife :-

She was the daughter of a nymph Hema and Mayadanav. She was from her very childhood a beautiful and intelligent lady. She was married by her father to *Rakshas* Ravana, a powerful king of Lanka. We can stress her first appearance as a wise wife to Ravana in the scene when Ravana's sister Shurpanakha comes to Ravana after her nose and ears were cut by Lakshmana. She entered cursing two brothers Rama and Lakshmana. Ravana got angry at the sight of his sister and spoke ill of Rama and Lakshmana and

asked what was the wish of his sister. She asked. Ravana to drag Sita – spouse of Sri Rama to Lanka. During this conversation between the brother and the sister, Mandodari at first listened quietly, but couldn't keep mum when she listened to the wish of Shurpanakha she said "When a woman irritates a man against a woman and advises him to seduce a woman it is really an act of betrayal to the whole woman's race. Think farsightedly and suggest something else as your revenge, but not this". But Shurpanakha was not ready to listen to her noble words. Mandodari also advised as a noble wife to Ravana "If male power doesn't protect woman then the power of those men received nothing but hatred from the world". And with absolute modesty she said further, "Forgive me if I am arrogant in performing my hard duty as your spouse to make conscious of your duty. Though you are the descendant of *Pulsty Muni*. I must also remind you that you are the supreme devotee of Shiva, who has smeared the ashes of burnt lust all over his body; you have the right of using your earned riches in welfare only".

Her greatness was recognized even by Sita. When Ravana went to Sita to harass her by getting her frightened of his appearance, Sita got angry at this conduct and said, "I really get surprised how the noble woman like Mandodari has been married to you, who doesn't deserve an equal status with her, you are really a slave of lust, temptation and all other vices. You judge women only through their body-flesh, blood etc. Aren't you ashamed of this?".

Sita had love and respect for Mandodari. Mandodari had also a soft corner and high respect for Sita. She did not at all agree with her husband in such an evil design and act. So invariably she tried to persuade him to refrain him from the path he had taken. But Ravana turned a deaf ear to her advice everytime. She kept on asking Trijata to take care of Sita and her well being and all the time got worried about her life. She wanted to go personally to Sita but did not have the courage to violate her husband's order not to go to her. That also shows her *bhakti* towards her husband. Yet at the same time she also remained successful in convincing Ravana to protect Sita's chastity and also told Ravana that if anything untoward happened, she would give up her body.

As a Mother :-

As a dignified woman, she also performed her duty excellently as an ideal mother in persuading Meghnad against war. She also shared her grief with her daughter-in-law Sulochana, sympathetically. Both of them put their best efforts in persuading their husbands, but of no avail. When war had already started and Ravana and Meghnada were to go on field, all the people of Lanka were enjoying in feasting and dancing and drinking, except these two ladies. Both of them observed fast and prayed God for directing the minds of their husbands on right path.

Ultimately when Meghnada was killed, Sulochana rushed to Mandodari, seeking guidance whether she would go to Sri Rama for taking possession of his dead body. Here we witness her mother's heart and sharpness of intellect, she told, "My child, you may definitely go to Sri Rama, my blessings are with you. In the tents of Rama, there is no fear for a woman to go

alone. Sri Rama is not only a pure person but I have also heard that after entering the forests in the garbs of Sanyasin, he didn't even look at Sita with sensuality. So you may certainly go and on my behalf also please have his *darshan* more and more which may increase your purity ever more, my child!" Such lovable and compassionate words full of respect towards Sri Rama pacified Sulochana and she went to Sri Rama.

Even to Ravana, she was playing the role of a mother, as every woman possesses, the heart of mother first. After death of all kiths and kin, Ravana in the last was to go to the field of war. So, before going, he went to Mandodari and asked for her forgiveness, praising many of her virtues. He also took her promise that she might also help him in having forgiveness of Sri Rama and Sita. And Mandodari generously promised it. Ravana also confessed that he was really a supreme sinner in the world and for condolence, came to his wife who was nobility personified. He also told her "The love you have given to me has convinced me that woman is not simply a 'woman' but a 'mother' too. O Sati! Women only possess these virtues of forgiveness and generosity".

As Rajamata:-

In 'Ramayana' at many a place Mandodari expressed her thoughts as a responsible caretaker of the subject (people) of Lanka. She also instilled the spirit of patriotism among women and also made them conscious of their voice being expressed in the smooth running of the kingdom. When Ravana decided to declare war against Rama and Lakshmana, he called his officials. As women representatives Queen Mandodari, Sulochana, Trijata etc. remained present.

After listening to the decision of Ravana, Mandodari got angry, but couldn't express her hatred at that time, but agreed with Vibhishana, who told the truth to his brother with utmost courage. Later, with all her courage, she gave expressions to her thoughts thus, "In politics of Lanka if men and women are equally treated as its subjects the voice of women is clear that as women we cannot tolerate and witness the insult and trouble given to an ideal woman-the wife of Sri Rama, whom you have brought here by kidnapping. Of course, our voice is suppressed and such mental slavery is a shameful status of women's race. If you believe in the constitution of your state, you must listen to my claim. Though I may not understand your dirty politics, I feel ashamed of being the queen of a king of Lanka. Forgive me, *Maharaj*, but I can clearly see that your politics is neither subject oriented nor truth oriented but it is only lust oriented. But remember! Yama didn't hit anyone with a stick. A person who gives up his/her life for the sake of a principle is really fortunate. Today you have got ready to enter in to the jaws of Yama because of your lust and ego. As your spouse, I feel great pain and as a civilian of Lanka, I feel great anger but as a chief queen of a king, I feel a profound shock. Before witnessing such a war, it is better, if God took away my *Prana*". But unfortunately Ravana's heart had no effect for such words! She also reminded, Ravana of the death of her

uncle Maricha, Khara, Dushana and Jayanta and also reminded him of the real nature of Rama, who was the supreme authority of the whole of the universe, not an ordinary human being doing austerity. At last, in her utter helplessness, she prayed to God that let her husband, at the end of his life take the name of God! Such was her contribution as *Rajamata*. In other scene also we witness her role being played as *Rajamata*. After the death of Ravana, she along with *Rajaguru* (the priest of the kingdom) went to have *darshan* of Sri Rama and pleaded with him, "*Prabho!* Please bestow your blessing on my Vibhishana so that the kingdom of Lanka may run on the principles of truth and welfare of its people". How noble is her thinking of hers, expressed in such words! As a *Rajmata* she saw where lied the well being of the subjects (people). And Sri Rama accepted proposal of the Vibhishana coronation of and explained to him how to reign over the kingdom of lanka.

Thus, the character of Mandodari is an intelligent, compassionate, sympathetic, woman who had the moral courage to express her views clearly. And not only in the past but in the present also her character inspires thousands of women. The qualities she possessed are absolute values and in our Indian society, we always follow absolute values.

INFLUENCE OF THE EPICS ON INDIAN LIFE AND CULTURE (5/11)

NILMADHAV SEN

From A study of epic derivatives in classical and regional literature, it is very easy to imagine how profound the epic influence must have been on art and culture, and on the general texture of social life. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are, in the words of Havell, 'as much the common property of all Hinduism as the English Bible and Shakespeare belong to all English-speaking people. The Indian epics contain a portrait-gallery of ideal types of men and women which afford to every good Hindu the highest exemplars of moral conduct, and every Hindu artist as inexhaustible mine of subject matter'.

Extracted from "Cultural Heritage of India Vol.II--"
The RKM Institute of Culture Calcutta 1993.

VIDURA AND SANJAYA

KANUBHAI MANDAVIA

It is said by Mahatma Gandhi that “*Mahabharata* is a mine of jewels”, Dasgupta and Dey in their ‘History of Sanskrit Literature’ say that ‘*Mahabharata*’ is a commentary of life, traditions, habits and changing ideals of *Bharata*. *Lokmanya* Tilak said that it is a great epic discussing *Dharma* (righteousness) and *Adharma* (unrighteousness) “. *Yogi* Krishnaprem said, “it is the strongest possible evidence of the greatness and fineness of this ancient Indian Culture”. Here, we are to portray only two characters of ‘*Mahabharata*’ who are quite detached of the *Mahabharata* war and still influence the life of this nation as said above. They are VIDURA and SANJAYA.

Vidura was one of the three brothers of Pandu and Dhritarashtra. Pandu, who ruled Hastinapur met with premature death and Dhritarashtra ruled but was blind and hence the administration was run by Vidura. In the present language, he can be said to be a “Prime Minister”. He tried to rule according to *Dharma*. But Dhritarashtra, ‘infatuated’ by love of his son Duryodhana, did number of injustices to Pandavas. Vidura every time tried to refrain but of no avail! At last the great war of *Mahabharata* was looming large!

Vidura was *Dharma* personified as Yudhishtira is said to be! His life was full of austerity, he did not even enjoy the luxuries of Prime Minister, even though he was entitled to them. He was a real devotee of the Lord, when Sri Krishna came to Hastinapur for truce, he was state-guest. But he preferred to go to Vidura’s place as a common man, where

he most willingly relished “*Bhaji*” of Vidura.

When the war of *Mahabharata* was almost certain and talks of peace were in progress, Dhritarashtra sent his envoy—Sanjaya to Pandavas to make them understand the evils of war. But he was not prepared to part with a meager portion of the empire! The result was certain. Dhritarashtra became uneasy and he did not find peace to sleep. He called Vidura and wanted to hear some righteous sermons! Then Vidura spontaneously replied, “I know, Brother, these are the people who can not sleep peacefully – (1) Surrounded by mighty persons (2) Infatuated (3) Thief. So, where is your position?” Then he narrates the code of righteousness which now forms eight chapters of the *Mahabharata*. They are called “*Prajagara Parva*” or “*Vidura Niti*”, (means to arouse-awake the soul of man). In these eight chapters, it is described what “*Dharma*” is and Dhritarashtra could very well see and understand what his duty was. But alas! He did not want to understand. Really he was such a selfish man that he wanted his son to be on the throne of Hastinapur.

Then we see, Vidura leaving the post he had and also the city, as the war of *Mahabharata* was going to start. He left quite unattached to everything. After a long time, when the war was over, Yudhishtira remembered him and went to search him out. He found him in a forest wandering alone and quite immersed in the self like *Avadhoot*. When Yudhishtira saw him Vidura, stopped but did not speak to Yudhishtira’s invitation to return

was not complied with. But standing by a tree he penetrated in to the eyes of Yudhisthira and he left his body. Soul passed away! Thus a *Dharmatma* left the body entering another *Dharmatma*. After lakhs of years of this event, we still have the inheritance of Dharma, '*Viduraniti*' *Prajagatra parva*. They still apply to the life of men today. If one is sincere, one's soul can be roused.

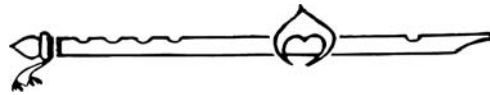
SANJAYA

Sanjaya is another person who did not take part in the war. But by the grace of Vyasa, he acquired the powers to see things happening hundreds of miles away. Dhritarashtra wanted to see but was blind. But he wanted to be told about the day to day events of the war. How can that be possible when Kurukshetra-war-field-was more than hundred miles away? So, Vyasa gave him the power to see the far off war field.

Before the war sanjaya also acted as an emissary of Dhritarashtra to Yudhisthira. So, Sanjaya saw sitting beside Dhritarashtra and narrate from the beginning '*Dharmakshetre, Kurukshetre*'. That is how *Gita* begins and also the war. Sanjaya saw all the 18 days of war and narrated everything to Dhritarashtra. Sanjaya is considered fortunate for this. But no! he was fortunate-privileged, that

he could hear and see events of the "*Gita*". There are only two actors in "*Gita* – drama". But Sanjaya is there as one to see and hear as a witness! So, unattached with the war and also an onlooker of the *Gita* – episode. In fact, it can be said that Sanjaya conveyed the message of "*Gita*" to the posterity also. He was also blessed to see "*Vishwarupa*" of the Lord. After the song – celestial the "*Gita*" – comes to an end, he expressed his feelings to Dhritarashtra...

He heard this supreme and most profound yoga, directly from *Yogeshwar* Krishna. The whole message of the eighteen chapters of the *Gita* is conveyed in one super word – "*Yogam*". He further says, "I rejoice again and again". What Sanjaya experienced of hearing '*Gita*' can be experienced by all if that attitude is there. From times immemorial the '*Gita*' has been the subject of meditation and many fortunate people have experienced that '*Amrita*', When one sincerely studies "*Gita*" one is wonderstruck. I have seen persons completely changed after reading and meditating over the '*Gita*'. It is science of '*yoga*' and Sanjaya has verified. Thus, this chapter of *Mahabharata* has contributed immensely for the rejuvenation and elevation of mankind. Hence, we see both these less known characters of *Mahabharata* have contributed for the essential culture of India which still inspires people for orientation to higher life.



IS KARNA A HERO?

DR.K.SUBRAHMANYAM

Heroism it is when egoism is submitted to the cosmic will, when it is annihilated in the fire of righteous service, eradicated in the ennobling abundance of universal love, or sublimated in the adoration of the all pervading divinity. Moral uprightness and ethical excellence are the basic marks of a hero. Indomitable will and invincible courage are mere appendages of a hero, not noble traits. They are seen even in villains of insufficient moral uprightness. Satan in *Paradise Lost* and Ravana in the *Ramayana* are known for their strong will and skill but are contaminated with ill will and egoism, deceit and treachery. The will of a hero is ever in tune with the cosmic will which is always established in Truth and righteousness, Satya and Dharma.

Karna in the *Mahabharatha* is “*Dambodbhava*”, the person of boastfulness; that is what the word implies. He is the embodiment of egoism and boastfulness, self love and self-assertion, craving always for recognition to his small self of worldly achievements.

Born of blue blood, Karna the son of the Sun is not only royal but also of sparkling splendour. Despite his regal veins and divine origin, he is known to all only as an orphan. He does not know his parents – his royal mother or divine father, Mother Nature and Father God. But ignorance is no license to tell lies. More so, in the case of a hero. Karna does not hesitate to produce a false birth certificate to seek admission into Parasurama’s Gurukula University. It is quite unbecoming of a hero to play foul in the game of life to win a few earthly laurels. Means are as important as the end. Moral uprightness is the very life spirit of a hero.

Ekalavya did not resort to improper means to get admitted into Drona’s institute of archery! Sathyakama Jabala was ignorant of his parentage. When the *Kulapathi* insisted upon knowing his parentage as a precondition for admission into his Gurukula, the young boy boldly declared the damaging truth about his parent as told by his mother. The magnanimous master appreciated the lad’s faith in truth and moral uprightness. So should Karna have stuck to truth without resorting to telling lies. Master Parasurama cursed Karna because the latter was a liar. All the achievements of Karna in archery were therefore of no avail when he needed them most.

It is unbecoming of anybody to tell lies. More so, when it is Karna the man of royal lineage and divine brightness. The image was tarnished, the moment he took to an unrighteous path for his self-glorification.

Professional rivalry and jealousy are never a mark of nobility. Karna was never an admirer of Arjuna’s dexterity. Even after knowing him to be his brother, he was unable to overcome his hatred for Arjuna. On the other hand, if Arjuna were to know that Karna was his elder brother, he would have surrendered his all at his feet. In spite of Sri Krishna’s assurance that Pandavas would be at his command, Karna refused to leave Kauravas and join his own brothers. Is it his friendship with Duryodhana that prompted him to brush aside Sri Krishna’s advice and Mother Kunti’s request No. His friendship is more for the glorification of his self than for self dedication in the service of his friend Duryodhana.

Friendship with Duryodhana sprang up from the genial but political gesture of

the Kuru prince when Karna was crowned as the Lord of Anga Kingdom. Suddenly the orphan youth of accomplishments was elevated to a position of social status. And the gratefulness to the benefactor is at the bottom of friendly bond. Unfortunately, even that bond is not strong enough to make Karna overcome his selfish interests. On two occasions he left his beloved Duryodhana in the lurch. At Uttaragograhana, while Arjuna single handed was fighting the Kuru army, when Duryodhana at one stage was in a tight corner, Karna took to heels leaving his dear benefactor in danger. Again when Chitraradha the Gandharva king took away Duryodhana as a captive, Karna failed to save his beloved friend. Above all Karna on account of his desire for self glorification did not hesitate to withdraw from the *Mahabharata* war weakening his friend Duryodhana. Self love and self glorification, ego and egotism, bragging and boastfulness alone seem to be the top most traits of Karna. Bheeshma is wise and realistic. His assessment of men and matters is just and accurate. He is correct when he allotted the position of an *Artharatha* to Karna in the Kuru army. Nobly Karna would have accepted the allotment for three reasons: 1. Army discipline according to which everybody should be obedient to the Chief of the Army Staff. 2. If Karna was of correct self evaluation 3. If Karna is a true friend of Duryodhana. By resorting to strike, he laid foundation stone to indiscipline, blew the balloon of self-esteem and weakened the bond of friendship. If Karna did not take part in the war, was it not weakening the support to his dear friend Duryodhana?

Karna is considered to be a hero, a tragic hero. If a hero, in spite of his noble traits, meets with failures and tragic end,

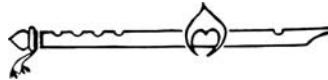
then he becomes a tragic hero. Karna no doubt is a giver of gifts. But lacks in the noble traits of a hero. Nor is he a tragic hero since he has never been a hero.

An ideal hero is one who respects womanhood. When Draupadi's honour was at stake in the court hall of the Kaurava kingdom it was Karna who added insult to the injury by speaking ill of the noble lady. What harm did Draupadi do to Karna or anybody else to be so abjectly subjected to humiliation in the public gaze? Should not Karna "the hero of compassion" come to her rescue? He was not even a passive spectator. He was an active and aggressive tormentor of an innocent lady. Does heroism anywhere in the world admit such behaviour as a noble trait?

Was Karna angry with Draupadi because he was unable to win her in the *Swayamvara*? It was after all his own insufficient skill, if he had failed to shoot the target. He should have accepted his defeat with the spirit of a true sportsman, if he is a hero. He should be noble enough to acknowledge Arjuna's accomplishments as an able archer. Instead, he developed hatred for Arjuna and Draupadi for no fault of theirs.

Heroes are ever righteous. Never do they resort to any conspiracy or treachery. Not only is Karna a conspirator along with Sakuni, Duryodhana and Dussasana, but a party to the treachery while killing the unarmed Abhimanyu.

Neither royalty nor divinity is absent in Karna. Nor is he devoid of a kind heart. Had he fostered them with a will to outgrow ego, he would have become an ideal hero. Unfortunately he yielded to pressures of egoism and resorted to boastfulness unbecoming of a man of merit.



THE SQUIRREL

In any appeal to charity often goes the expression 'please contribute your mite'. The construction of a floating bridge on the foaming sea to reach lanka is a stupendous task undertaken by the Vanara Army. Mighty monkeys like Human are able to hurl mountains into the sea. They vie with one another in their enthusiastic contribution to the huge construction. Then a squirrel enchanted by Rama's radiance, goodness and godliness wishes to contribute its mite to the mighty task. Its method is simple and amusing. It immerses its body in the water. It then rolls on sand with its body wet. Sand sticks to her wet body. Then it springs on to the bridge and shakes its body so that sand may fall on the bridge and make it smooth. It repeats this process endlessly and catches the merciful eye of Rama. Rama gathers the squirrel with his loving hands into this lap and passes his magnetic fingers on its body. The touch of divine touch is seen on all

squirrels, a golden impress of Rama's gratitude even to the humblest. This is in a nut-shell the story of the celebrated squirrel becoming proverbial for its humble devotion "Udatha Bhakthi".

What does this story teach us? It shows how a great man despite his heights of glory deigns to acknowledge even the humblest service. Disposition to show gratitude irrespective of its being politic, is a sign of true greatness. In this context the famous words of Samuel Johnson are quotable "Gratitude is a fruit of cultivation; you do not find it among gross people".

Benevolence is the distinguishing Characteristic of Rama. His benevolence flows not only to fellow human beings but also to bird and beast. In short he extends it to every creature that exists however low it may be. Never is he weary to dry up tears and soothe the sad.

JATAYU

JATAYU is a bird. It belongs to the category of birds which are ugly, carnivorous and avaricious. One hardly expects wisdom or devotion from such a bird. But by a stroke of luck, the bird, Jataayu conceives love and reverence for Rama. Rama recognizes devotion in a person ignoring in him other drawbacks if any.

Jataayu is full of joy when he is blessed with a sight of Rama. The beauty and goodness of Rama captivate the bird. He is full of admiration for Rama and he loses himself in adoration and service of Rama. Jatayu's devotion is two-fold. Like any other celebrated devotee, he chants the name of Rama and cherishes Rama's figure in his heart. Besides that he wants to do service to Rama. It is a rare privilege for him to serve Rama. His devotion finds its outlet in selfless service.

When he meets Rama, he says humbly to him thus, "My Lord, I am here at your beck and call. I am your servant. I deem it an honour to die in your service. I shall safe-guard Sita, whenever you and your brother happen to be away from the Ashram".

These words are prophetic. Something in him prompts him to utter the words 'I deem it an honour to die in your service'.

It really happens so, jataayu sees Raavana flying in the air with Sita in his Chariot. He stops Raavana. Raavana is young, energetic and he is equipped with weapons. But Jatayu is old and he has no weapons. His wings and claws are the only weapons. Yet Jataayu fights bravely wounding Raavana. Raavana wonders at the power of Jatayu. He little knows that

it is the spirit of devotion and faith in the success of righteous cause that give power to his strokes of wings and piercings of claws. When he is almost defeated, Raavana in a desperate bid takes up his sharp-edged magic sword and cuts off the wings of jatayu.

Jatayu lies helpless bleeding and gasping. Raavana resumes his flight and carries Sita with him.

Rama and Lakshmana while searching for Sita, happen to see Jataayu in his last moments chanting the holy name of Rama. He with his dying breath, informs Rama of all he has done to save Sita from the clutches of Raavana. Rama in his magnanimity offers to restore Jataayu to life. But Jataayu says "My Lord, I am very fortunate in that you are before me while I am breathing my last. If I have fresh lease of life now, can I get such a golden chance again. He who has your name on his lips while dying will never be born again. He will attain liberation (Mukti) Now you yourself are before my eyes. Looking on you, I wish to die and attain 'Mukti'. Can there be more glorious death than mine now? With tears of joy, he is freed from mortal coil and reaches the brighter worlds. It goes without saying that he experiences no death pangs, thanks to the holy presence of Rama.

What does the story of Jataayu teach us? Jataayu represents good men who fight for a good cause. A man may die in the fight for the cause. But the cause never dies. Subsequent strivers may continue the fight and ultimately the cause wins. A martyr is one who dies in the fight for a good cause. He dies only to live. He becomes immortal after his death.

Rama showers his affection on Jataayu and blesses him with liberation. It happens that when a man who espouses a noble cause dies during its pursuit, all those who hold the cause dear praise him and build memorials for him. They thus make his fame immortal. That is blessed state of immortality. His example inspires several others to fight evil "The only thing necessary for the triumph of Evil is for the good men to do nothing" If good men combine and put up a united fight evil can be rooted out. Raavana is dreadful. He strikes terror into triumph by a brave fight. His example teaches the good men to

change their dear into fight through faith in the cause they take-up.

Rama is noble generous and merciful. His example inspires one and all and puts the erring humanity on the path of righteousness. His nectarean smile, benign look, healing touch and kind word lift even the lowest and the humblest to the heights of glory and divinity.

It is quite fitting to conclude this lesson with the words of Cicero.

"In nothing do men more nearly approach the Gods than in doing good to their fellow men".

Page No133-134

Ilavala and Vatapi were brothers. They relished human flesh. They used to kill innocent saints methodically. They assumed the guise of Brahmins who were to perform religious ceremonies. They would invite a saint to preside over the ceremony. Vatapi would assume the shape of a goat. Ilvala would cut him into pieces and cook his flesh and dress it up into a delicacy. The ignorant saint would eat that as it was served to him in mock humility and reverence. After the meal, Ilvala would call 'Vatapi' and ask him to come out. Vatapi would tear the stomach of the innocent saint and come out. Then the two brothers ate the flesh of that man. In this deceitful manner, they were victimizing the human beings and eating them.

One day great sage Agastya purposely appeared in their way. They took him for an easy victim. Ilvala in the disguise of a Brahmin said to Agastya. "Holy Sir, today

I have to perform my father's ceremony. I wish to entertain you as a guest on the occasion. My ancestors will be blessed if you accept our hospitality". Agastya with a smile agreed to go to his house. As was usual with them goat meat was served to the meal. After eating, he said touching his stomach with his palm "Vatapi be digested'. At once Vatapi lost power to come back to life. He was digested. When Ilvala called Vatapi, there was no response. Ilvala tried to kill Agastya. But Agastya did this non-violent murder. The sages can burn with a look or subdue with a sound any cruel evil-doer. They do so only in case of extreme need to save the innocent fellow beings. Normally they encourage the Kshatriya princes to kill the evil doers that molest them. The Kshatriya princes pay due honour to these saints and protect them from the onslaught of the Rakshasas. Rama's purpose in his sojourn in the forest is to protect the sages by killing the Rakshasas.

MATANGA RISHI

Matanga is a great Rishi. In his asrama, perfect peace prevails. Man bird and beast live in all amity there in the Asram which is beautified by trees, plants and flowering creepers. The Rishi Matanga is very particular of the purity, piety and peace in the surroundings as he does his penance and meditation.

Vali happens to fight with a demon Dundhubi by name. he kills Dundhubi. In his anger he lifts the body of the demon and hurls it to a long distance. It is to him a child's play to hurl such a huge and heavy body.

Then drops of blood fall in the Ashram of Matanga, as the body of Dundhubi flies in the air, hurled by Vali.

The sage Matanga wakes up from his meditation into disquietude as the drops of blood wet the Sanctum. He divines the cause for the fall of drops of blood. He

understands Vali to be the miscreant. Anger swells up in him and it forms it self into an utterance of anticipatory curse. "If Vali happens to set foot within a radius of eight miles from his Asram, his head will be broken into pieces". His curse is not a punishment for Vali's present rash action. It is only a precautionary measure to keep off the villain and rule out further possibilities of pollution.

Just as Raavana is not able to cross the line guarded by the curse of lakshmana, Vali is not able to enter the area of Ashram guarded by Matangi's curse. The curse proves to be god-send to Sugriva who takes shelter in the area forbidden to Vali and thus escapes his torture.

Vali in spite of his physical strength, bravery, skill and power has to bow before the curse of sage. So potent is the Saatvic power-non-violent power arising out of practice of piety and penance.

MATRICIDE AND MIND-KILLING

DR.K.SUBRAHMANYAM

Man is a bundle of activities. Mind is a cell of thoughts. Man and his mind are full of experiences—physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. Experiences are incessant and inevitable. They are to be disciplined for the unfoldment of the blissful Soul which is the core Truth of existence, its origin and the ultimate goal of evolution. Man, the master of self-discipline, with his mind of total self-control discovers a few pathways to attain perfection – self-realisation: *Karma Yoga, Bhaktiyoga, Rajayoga, Jnana Yoga and Prapatti yoga*. While the first four are disciplines taking the aspirant to the threshold of the Supreme, the last and final *yoga* is total surrender at the altar of Grace for the *Atma Sakshatkara* or Self-realisation, merging with Truth or God-realisation. Paths take us only to the peak of *Prapatti*. All paths or *Yogas* terminate at and merge with *Prapatti* as the rivers enter the Sea, the source of all rivers.

Jamadagni is one of the *Saptarshis*. He is the embodiment of discipline. Jama or Yama is the fundamental discipline for all spiritual aspirants. *Agni* is fire. Jamadagni is the fire of discipline. His wife is *Renuka*, the mind. *Renu* is but a particle. *Renuka* is a small particle. Drops make an ocean. Small particles make matter. Thoughts make the mind. Nature abhors vacuum. Mind has no existence without thoughts, small and big (particles). This mind is the companion of man. A seeker of spirituality is a disciplined man of concentrated mind with thoughts kept at bay. Body is matter and mind is not matter. Matter never can be mind. They are made of particles gross and subtle. Together they strive with discipline and

concentrated meditation to transcend themselves. To be absorbed in spirituality is to go beyond body and mind through the paths they have paved. The story of Jamadagni and Renuka is significant to aspirants seeking self-realisation.

Rishi Jamadagni with his consort Renuka is engaged in his spiritual *Sadhana* at his *ashram*. They have five sons: Ramanvaka, Suhrota, Vasu, Viswavasua and Rama. Jamadagni is of rigorous austerities; so is his wife Renuka. Every day she is in the habit of going to the nearby lake or tank to take bath and to bring water for use in the *ashram*. She never carries a pot to collect water. After her ablutions, she makes a new pot every day out of the wet sand available at the tank bund. It is in that new pot of wet sand she collects water and takes it to the *ashram*. One day she finds Kartaviryarjuna, a king, with his wives sporting in the lake. She has to wait till they leave the lake. As soon as they have left, Chitraratha, a *gandharva* also referred to as a king of *Salva* enters the pond with his women for a sport in the same lake. They are highly indulgent verging on vulgarity. Manmatha has kindled their passions and they are lost in the pleasures of the body provoking the sensual urge even in the minds of the onlookers. Renuka, a *rishipatni*, for a fraction of second is disturbed by the sight of sensual indulgence. She has lost, for a while, the composure and concentration. As a result, she could not make a pot out of sand to collect water. A disturbed mind cannot concentrate, nor can it meditate. Distracted, Renuka could not make a container to hold water. Worldly mind

cannot contain God in it. Nor can it meditate on anything sublime.

Thoughts, when under control, can be used for any useful purpose. The concentrated mind of purity can be turned towards God in meditation for holding Him in the mind. Poor Renuka is drawn to the world for a while and so the pot could not be made. She has returned empty-handed and stood before Jamadagni, the fire of discipline. The *rishi* is able to know what has happened. He is furious at the loss of psychic purity. He has felt the need for killing the mind which is susceptible to distractions. Renuka should be killed. Mind of thoughts should be annihilated. So he commanded his sons or the paths he had paved to slay the mother-mind, the originator of all ways. But alas, the paths are incapacitated to fulfil the purpose. One after the other, the children representing Raja Yoga, Karmayoga, Bhaktiyoga and Jnana Yoga have expressed their inability to carry out the commands of discipline. Annihilation of the mind is not possible by them. Therefore, Sri Krishna in the Gita asks every aspirant to surrender his all at the feet of the Lord. Jamadagni finally has turned to Rama, his dear God-like son to kill the mind, the mother, Renuka.

Each *yoga* is only of a limited ability. Total annihilation of mind is not possible by any of the *Yogas*. It is only when we surrender our all in the *Prapatti Yoga*, that the Lord, by his Grace will remove the last trace of mind. Rama, the divine

incarnation has been (kind and) bold enough to do away with the mind, the creator of all. Even the most disciplined mind is likely to be diverted now and then, at least, for a short while. It slips from the clutches of discipline for a while. Therefore, the mind is to be annihilated. It is the self-surrender, (and divine grace) then, that fulfils the task of slaying the slipping mind. Rama does away with the mind (Renuka). Unless the *Atman* chooses to grant realization, no effort can ever succeed to attain *Atma Sakshatkar*. Unless God is willing to reveal Himself, no devotee can ever be successful in seeing God. The last trace of worldliness in the mind can be removed and mind itself can be killed and purified only by God or the Self when the *sadhaka* makes a complete self-surrender. And that is what is done in the story of Jamadagni and Renuka.

Sri Ramakrishna says God first, service next. It is only after self-realisation that the pure mind can work better for everybody's welfare. Rama after fulfilling the command wants the mother to be restored, or the mind to be revived. And Renuka has got her life back. The paths paved by her also have been revitalized.

All *sadhana* ends with self-surrender and it is only through self-surrender that divine grace can be invoked. And it is only by divine Grace that mind and its worldness can be done away with. When the worldly mind is shed, self-realisation shines resplendent.

MYTHS AND LEGENDS OF THE HINDUS AND THE BUDDHISTS

SISTER NIVEDITA

Philosophy, ritual and mythology are the three pillars of all ancient religions. But in India in particular, mythology has been an extremely important medium for teaching abstract spiritual truths, and it has had a profound influence not only on the religious tradition of the country but also on Indian Society. To Western educated readers, the numerous concepts, characters, and ideals presented in Indian mythology often seem bewildering at first glance. Yet once readers start peering into these myths through an introductory volume, they soon discover that they cannot help but be immersed in them. Moreover they find that a study of these stories can be one of the most rewarding experiences of their life.

The stories of India, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* the legends of Krishna, Buddha and Shiva and others from *Puranas* and *Vedas* are among the most beautiful in the world, while the characters and ideals they represent are some of the loftiest, most noble and the most enchanting the world has ever seen. Rarely does one find in the mythology of

the world, such a wonderful combination of these qualities. To Indians however, the characters in these myths are not just superhuman beings of some hoary past rather, they are paradigms. They are exemplars of eternal ideals. The lives of these characters are meant to be reflected on and emulated for the development of one's personality. This is why these religions and myths are still living today. Even now Rama, Krishna, Arjuna, Yudhishthira, Vasishtha, Vidura, Sita Savitri, Nala, Lakshmana, Bharata, Hanuman and Buddha serve as paradigms for their ideal ruler, hero, householder, hermit, devotee, wife, husband, brother, servant, monk and so on.

The tales of gods, goddesses and *Avataras* are delightful and charming. Though the stories of India are diverse, one common message runs through them all. No matter how hopeless things may seem, eventually righteousness prevails over unrighteousness, virtue defeats vice.

(Extracted from the Myths and Legends of the Hindus and Buddhists.

Sr.Nivedita and Ananda
K.Coomaraswamy, Advaita Ashrama,
Kolkata 14 – Nov.2001)

MYTHOLOGY OF INDIA AS A SOURCE FOR STUDY OF
MYTHOLOGY EVERY WHERE

SISTER NIVEDITA

Asia formed a vast breeding ground of civilization of which countries like Egypt, Arabia, Greece, India and China were the extremities. While other countries were run-over and their cultures destroyed, Greece and preeminently India formed what may be called *Culss-de-sac*. In India we may hope to discover means of studying as nowhere else in the world, the succession of epochs in culture.

It is not impossible to recover the story of the ideas which the Nile people have contributed to the world as we know it. But those people themselves have irretrievably relaxed their hold upon their own past. Between them and it there is only broken continuity, a lapse of time that represents no process of cause and effect, but rather a perpetual interruption of such a series, for a single generation enamoured of foreign ways is almost enough in history to risk the whole continuity of civilization and learnings. Ages of accumulation are entrusted to the frail bark of each passing epoch by the hand of the past, desiring to make over its treasures to the use of the

future. It takes a certain stubbornness, a doggedness of loyalty, even a medium of unreasonable conservatism may be, to lose nothing in the long march of the ages; and even when confronted with great empires, with a sudden extension of the idea of culture, or with the supreme temptation of a new religion, to hold fast what we have, adding to it only as much as we can healthfully and manfully carry.

Yet this attitude is the criterion of a strong national genius, and in India, since the beginning of her history, it has been steadily maintained. Never averse to a new idea, no matter what its origin, India has never failed to put each on its trial. Avid of new thought, but jealously reluctant to accept new custom to essay new expression, she has been slowly constructive, unfalteringly synthetic from the earliest days to the present time.

The fault of Indian conservatism indeed, has been its tendency to perpetuate differences without assimilation. There has always been room for a stronger race, with its own equipment

of custom and ideals, to settle down in the interstices of *Brahminical* civilization, uninfluenced and uninfluencing. (Extracts from "The Myths and Legends of Hindus and Buddhists")

THE MOTIVES OF RELIGION AND THEIR RECORDS IN EPICS AND *PURANAS*

SISTER NIVEDITA

Hinduism is an immense synthesis deriving its elements from a hundred different directions, and incorporating every conceivable motive of religion. The motives of religion are many fold. Earth-worship, sun-worship, nature worship, sky worship, honour paid to heroes and ancestors, mother worship, father worship, prayers for the dead, the mystic association of certain plants and animals, all these and more are included within Hinduism. And each marks some single age of the past, with its characteristic conjunction or invasion of races formerly alien to one another. They are all welded together now to form a great whole. But still by visits to outlying shrines, by the study of the literature of certain definite periods and by careful following up the special threads, it is possible to determine what were some of the influences that have entered into its making.

Now and again in history a great systematising impulse has striven to cast all or part of recognized belief into the form of an organic whole. Such attempts have been made with more or less success, in the compilation of books known as the *Puranas*, in the epic poem called the *Ramayana*, and most perfectly of all in the *Mahabharata*. Each of these, takes some ancient norm, which has been perhaps for centuries transmitted by memory, and sets it down in writing, modifying it and adding to it in such ways as bring it in the authors eyes, up to date.

(Extract from The Myths and Legends of the Hindus and Buddhists)

SISTER NIVEDITA ON THE *MAHABHARATA*

The *Mahabharata* is the result of the greatest of the efforts made to conserve in a collected form, all the ancient beliefs and traditions of the Race. The name *Mahabharata* itself shows that the movement which culminated in the compilation of this great work had behind it, a vivid consciousness of the unity of the *Bharata* or Indian people. For this reason one finds in this work a great effort made to present a complete embodiment of the ideals to be found in the social organism, religion, ancient history, mythology and ethics of the Indian people.

Hence, if we want to follow Indian Mythology from its dim beginnings to its perfect maturity through all its multiform intermediate phases, we cannot have a better guide than *the Mahabharata*. For in India, mythology is not mere subject of antiquarian research and disquisition; here it still permeates the whole life of the people as a controlling influence. And it is the living mythology which, passing through the stages of representation of successive cosmic processes and assuming definite shapes thereafter, has

become a powerful factor in the everyday life of the people. It is this living mythology that has found place in the *Mahabharata*.

In the infancy of the human mind, men used to mix up their own fancies and feelings with the ways of bird and beast, the various phenomenon of land and water and the movements of Sun and Moon and Stars and Planets and viewed the whole universe in this humanified form. In later times, when man had attained the greatest importance in the eyes of man, the glory of stellar worlds paled before human greatness.

We have to deal with both these stages of mythology the initial as well as the final. We have to study and get some glimpses of the primal forms which mythology assumed after passing through the hazy indefiniteness of primitive age. On the other, we have to study in greater detail, the stories of the age when mythology had reached its maturity.

(Extracts from "The Myths and Legends of the Hindus and Buddhists," Advaita Ashrama, Kolkatta Nov.2001)

ETHIC OF THE RAMAYANA

ANANDA K.COOMARASWAMY

Not the least significant feature of Valmiki's epic lies in its remarkable presentation of two ideal societies: an ideal good and an ideal evil. He abstracts, as it were, from human life an almost pure morality and an almost pure immorality. Tempered by only so much of the opposite virtue as the plot necessitates. He thus throws into the strongest relief the contrast of good and evil, as these values presented themselves to the shapers of Hindu society. For, it should be understood that not merely the law givers, like Manu, but also the poets of ancient India, conceived of their own literary art, not as an end in itself, but entirely as a means to an end, and that end, the nearest possible realization of an ideal society. The poets were practical sociologists, using the great power of their art deliberately to mould the development of human institutions and to lay down in the Nietzschean sense of one who stands behind and directs the evolution of a desired type. ("The Myths and Legends of the Hindus and Buddhists"-Advaita Ashrama, Kottatt 14-Nov.2001)

BOX ITEM

MAHABHARATA AND THE
CIVILIZATIONAL PROCESS IN THE
COUNTRY

The *Mahabharata* is truly the story of India, of its communities which have linked themselves to the epic traditions in their own way. The diffusion of *Mahabharata* traditions, and their adaptation and recreation in various situation is a continuing process, a matter of absorbing interest. It demonstrates, the inherent resilience and dynamism of the civilizational process in the country.

(From a Seminar report of Anthropological Survey of India)

BOX ITEM

THE MAHABHARATA A LIVING TRADITION

The objective of our organizing a seminar on Mahabharata was noted in our experience as anthropologists and field workers in tribal and folk areas. We have been witness to the epic traditions being continually adapted and recreated to reflect tribals perception and folk communities, aspiration as part of on going and developing process in performing arts and popular literature. Many of our folk artistry in recent years have won universal acclaim for their dramatic presentation of Panduvani which we in our early years interested as a simple folk form"

(K.S.Singh-The Mahabharata TFTI Indian Institute of Advanced study Shimla-5-1993)

KRISHNA

ANANDA K.COOMARASWAMY

The story of Krishna has sunk deep into the heart and imagination of India. For this, there are many reasons. It is the chief scripture of the doctrine of *Bhakti* (devotion) as a way a salvation. This is a way that all may tread, of what ever rank or humble state. The *gopis* (herd girls) are the great type and symbol of those who find God by devotion (*bhakti*) without learning (*jnanam*). It is for Krishna that they forsake the illusion of family and all that their world accounts as duty. They leave all and follow him. The call of his flute is the irresistible call of the infinite. Krishna is God, and Radha the human soul. It matters not that the Jamuna and Brindaban are to be found on the map; to the Vaishnava lover Brindaban is the heart of man, where the eternal play of the love of God continues.

(From "TheMyths and Legends of the
Hindus and Buddhist. Advaita Ashrama
Kolkatta 14, Nov.2001)

THE MAHABHARATA IN THE LIFE OF THE PEOPLE OF INDIA

SISTER NIVEDITA

The Indian National Saga, beyond all disputes is the *Mahabharata*: This is to the Indian village and the Indian home, what the Iliad was to the Greek and to a certain extent also what the Scriptures and Gospels are to ourselves (The people of the United Kingdom). It is the most popular of all the sacred books. It contains as an interlude, The *Bhagawad Gita*, the National Gospel. But with this it is also an epic. The story of a divine incarnation Krishna as he is called, has been wrought into and upon an immense ballad and military epic of unknown antiquity. Of this epic the main theme is a great battle waged between two families of cousins the sons of Pandu and the sons of Dhritarashtra.

Perhaps most of us remembering the work as ancient, will be still more impressed by the subtlety and modernness of the social intercourse which it portrays.

Its delicacy of character painting, in the play of personality, and in reflection of all the light and shade of life in society we find ourselves, in the *Mahabharata*, fully on a level with the novels and dramas of modern Europe. The fortitude of Karna when his mother embraces him; the low

voice in which Yudhirishthira says 'elephant' as a concession to his conscience; the laugh of Bhishma in battle, contending himself, with the slightly emphasized "Shikhandini?". These among others will occur to the others as typical instances.

The outstanding fact to be realized about the epic, however, is from end to end its main interest is held and centered on character. We are witnessing the law that as the oyster makes its own shell, so the mind of man creates and necessitates his own life and fate. The whole philosophy of India is implicit in this romance, just as it is in common household life. The *Mahabharata* constitutes, and is intended to constitute, a supreme appeal to the heart and conscience of every generation. For more than the National tradition, it embodies the National morality. In this fact lies the great difference between it and the Greek epics, in which the dominant passion is the conscious quest of ideal beauty.

(Extract from "The Myths and Legends of the Hindus and Buddhists" Advaita Ashrama, Kolkatta in Nov.2001)

THE MAHABHARATA IN THE FOLK AND TRIBAL TRADITIONS OF INDIA

K.S.SINGH

1. Folk and Tribal versions of the *Mahabharata* are prevalent in different parts of the country.
2. In Chotanagpur the Mundas sing a number of songs on the *Mahabharata* and Lord Krishna.
3. The *Mahabharata* presents a clear picture of Indian avunculate society. It has inherent contradictions. There are conflicts between avunculate and nonavunculate societies. *The Mahabharata* is the epitome of sibling rivalry while the *Ramayana* orders the sibling relations into positive channels. There is a continuity of many of the traits of the *Mahabharata* society into the present day Indian Society. There are a number of symbols and metaphors which have been common to Indian society over ages.
4. The relation between Kashmir and the rest of India in the *Mahabharata* pointed was pretty close. Krishna emerged as an All India personality with a remote role in Kashmir affairs. He helped Kashmir's widow queen Yasovati to ascend the throne after her husband was killed in a war. He thus reinforced his popular image as the defender of the honour of women.
5. The Himalayas have places visited by *Mahabharata* characters. They are identified with the places they visited. They are worshipped as folk deities. The Himalayan communities also worship the Kauravas, Duryodhana is idolised as Samsuri. A Himalaya deity Hidimba is incorporated into the *Mahabharata* through the process of spoucification. Her son Ghatotkach through Bhima is a powerful character.
6. The Dugganadesh area of Jammu has a distinct bias in favour of the Pandavas as gods and heroes.
7. Himachal Pradesh has tribal and folk traditions of *Mahabharata* in various parts of the state. The heroes of *Mahabharata* are associated with the temples and village gods in Himachal Pradesh. The Khosha people of Himachal Pradesh perform a martial game called Thoda.
8. In Garhwal region of the present Uttaranchal, the *Mahabharata* characters are metamorphosed into the living tradition, as evidenced by a number of folk songs.
9. The Brahmaputra valley of the North East region is vibrant with *Mahabharata* usages. Ojapali the art form is *Mahabharata* based.
10. In Bhojpuri, the caste prejudices have coloured the perceptions of the *Mahabharata* characters. Bhishma is a demi-god here. Draupadi is highly spoken as the symbol of a pious wife.

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| <p>11. In Rajasthan many communities recite folk songs on <i>Mahabharata</i>. They include the Muslim Jogis of Mirasi community.</p> <p>12. The tribals of Maharashtra and middle India consider <i>Mahabharata</i> characters as their gods and ancestors. Their folk songs and dances are connected with that theme.</p> <p>13. The Korku tribe of this area considers itself to have descended from Kauravas. The Korkus of Nimar trace their origin to <i>Karkotaka Naga</i> associated with the <i>Mahabharata</i> and Puranas. Here Draupati is the sister of Krishna. The Pandavas and Krishna are the presiding deities at dance festivals. The people wear masks during dance programmes. The masks take after <i>Mahabharata</i> heroes.</p> <p>14. Bhima the most popular hero in tribal India of the S. Kosala is credited to have introduced the brew, agriculture, crops like paddy, a wind machine, iron implements etc. He tamed wild buffaloes and other wild animals and made agriculture safe. He is also the rain God who is propiated in times of draught. Above all he is the cultural hero.</p> <p>15. The Oriya <i>Mahabharata</i> of Saraladasa (15th century) presents the most interesting example of the adaptation of the <i>Mahabharata</i> story to the historical situation and cultural specificities of medieval Orissa. This work appears to be the most complete work of its kind compared to other regional adaptations composed till then.</p> | <p>A number of folk tales from Orissa have been taken into Sarala's work. One way of linking the <i>Mahabharata</i> with local people was to marry the <i>Mahabharata</i> heroes locally. The Oriya got even the monogamous Yudhishtira married to Suhani an Oriya girl.</p> <p>16. The <i>Mahabharata</i> is tremendously popular in the Southern Region of India. There is a spontaneous, almost effortless merging of classical and folk traditions, inferior variations exist in the stories and art forms between the four regions.</p> <p>17. In Andhra, the women have their own folk lore about the <i>Mahabharata</i>. The story of Subhadra and Draupadi express the universal feelings of oppressed women against male domination. The Pandavalu are a community who trace their origin to <i>Mahabharata</i> and recite the <i>Mahabharata</i> stories for their patrons. The two stories of Jayanti and Pandavas have a lot of local material thrown into it in Andhra.</p> <p>18. In Kerala the <i>Mahabharata</i> is a living tradition in performing arts, and the communities which perform them, recall the <i>Mahabharata</i> story.</p> <p>19. In Tamil Nadu, the <i>Mahabharata</i> themes have a widespread impact. Both Arjuna and Karna were locally married. There are temples of Pandavas, particularly Draupadi, in Tamil Nadu, and Andhra. The Aravan festival celebrates Aravan a <i>Mahabharata</i> character.</p> |
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Mahabharata influences the compositions in Tamil. The village temples and deities adore *Mahabharata* characters. Draupadi is the caste deity of the Vanniars. There are many Dravidian elements in *Mahabharata* themes. Subramanya Bharati put Draupadi on a pedestal in his work 'Panchali *Sapatam*' as a symbol of revolt.

20. No account of *Mahabharata* will be complete without taking into account, the evergrowing corps of oral tradition.

(Extracts from "the Mahabharata in the Tribal and Folk Traditions in India. Hereafter referred to as M.T.F.I)

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The Cover page

Pictures showing Sri Rama embracing Guha the hunter, and Sri Krishna hugging Kuchela the poor Brahmin, reveal the fact that our epic heroes transcended differences of caste and status.

SYNOPSIS

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BALA BHARATAM

Child in India; its Past, Present and Prospects

A perfect *Jnani* is compared to a child in the Upanishads, because of its purity and innocence. Worshipping Sri Krishna, Ganesha, Kartikeya and Devi as a child is a Puranic tradition. Prahlada, Dhruva, Jnanasambandha, Adi Shankara, Lava and Kusha and a number of child prodigies find place in our history and mythology. India has a special way of looking at the factors that go to make a healthy child. Pre-Natal and Post-Natal samskaras (rituals) help children grow healthily in the physical, emotional, social and spiritual spheres.

In free India, education, nutrition and health programmes for children, special opportunities for their growth and for nurturing their talents have grown. Child prodigies, special children, girl children etc. receive focussed attention. Child labour problems, partly true, partly exaggerated, have caught the attention of the media.

What prospects does the future India told for its children, in terms of environmental cleanliness, job, educational and employment opportunities and health facilities?

All these topics are sought to be dealt with, in the forthcoming issue of the Vivekananda Kendra Patrika

ALL INDIA CHARACTER OF MYTHS

SISIRKUMAR DAS

The All India character of the myths is the first and foremost feature to be indicated. If there is any common core of Indian Literature if there are materials that are shared by Indians all over the country, it is the mythology of India. That the main components of this body of mythology is derived from the Sanskrit epics or *Puranas* or the Buddhist lore do not make it sectarian or even communal in the pejorative sense. *They have created a deep structure of perceptions on which are constructed new usages and allegories, fables and parables, types and archetypes.* These deep structures have become a part of the psyche of the whole literary community, irrespective of the levels of education, among them and the ideology and religious faith that divide them in varying degrees. Their presence in the subconscious and the unconscious of the community is partly manifested in the proverbs and idioms, and certain lexical items within which the myths lie dormant and sometimes almost in unrecognizable forms, only to come to life at the magic touch of the proper person. They are the part of the semantic structure of the language and they are materials which penetrate into languages quite often creating ambiguity and misunderstanding.

Myths then are even more a strong binding force than the materials of history. The history used by the Indian authors was more often than not conformed to a particular region to which the authors were emotionally

attached. The *STOFF* of historical plays and narratives was derived mainly from regional histories. The *stoff* provided by mythology, was more universal, relatively more widely known. Further, myths by their very nature are secular; they are stories about gods and heroes, stories coming down from the antiquity and therefore parts of the cultural heritage of a given society.

Firdausi the great Persian poet celebrated the exploits of the kings of Persia long before its Islamisation; his own faith in Islam did not stand against his love for the Pre-Islamic past of his country. The European Christian poets could respond fondly to their pagan heritage without any qualms as they accepted their Greco-Roman heritage, not only as legitimate but also as natural. In India too despite the narrowness of certain scholars or fanatical iconoclasts, myths irrespective of their Hindu or non-Hindu sources Indian or non Indian provenance have been always admired by writers and by the readers cutting across religious differences.

The other point is that mythological themes are recurrent in Indian drama and poetry but are rarely used in prose narrative. The history themes are frequent in prose narrative as in the drama and in poetry. The novels for example refuse to accommodate as it were mythological themes unless worked out allegorically. Myths contain in them an association of ancientness, if not an element of transcendental

quality, which appear to be incompatible with contemporaneity. It is false to suggest that genres are neutral containers of ideas and plots. The themes determine the choice, however indirectly, of the genre, as the genres also exercise certain influence on the thematic configuration.

The literary community in various parts of the country is in strong favour of the continuation of the ancient literary tradition and that is often carried out by the poets by working out the STOFF which is considered as the common property of the literary community. It is not a blind imitation of another work, but new work emerging out of the old, like new leaves and flowers coming out of old trees. There are certain themes that are recurrent in almost all languages at different stages of literary movements. It is not only that a particular group of writers, identifiable as traditional or conservative, are associated with them, but it is a feature, shared by the sophisticated or the iconoclastic. In this respect, these writings are comparable with the Greek plays where the themes are limited to a

fixed number of legends related to a few families, and the great and the mediocre poets displayed their power and skill without any feeling of being restricted in their choice of themes.

Looking at the recurrence of the same theme at different areas, one is tempted to construct a map of mythological STOFF as the scholars of dialectology identify the isoglosses. While certain myths are exploited by writers of different languages at different times, some are used by writers almost at the same time and some enjoy uninterrupted favour.

The epic heroines receiving such treatments are Sita, Savitri, Chitrangada and other Romantic heroines, Draupadi, Akalya, Rama, Ravana, young heroes like Abhimanyu, Karna, Krishna, Duryodhana, Bhishma, Ashwattama, Yayati, Manu, Parvati, Rukmini, Subhadra, Usha, etc.

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EPIC HEROINES SITA AND SAVITRI

Sisir Kumar Das

Sita:

Among the themes that have inspired and attracted the poets, the most outstanding and recurrent is the story of Sita, the heroine of the *Ramayana*. Sita who has been dominating the Indian psyche for several centuries, was apotheosized by the tenth or eleventh century along with her husband, Rama, the most venerable and the most loved poetic creation. So deep and pervasive is the influence of both these characters and so powerful is the impact of the *Ramayana* on the millions of Hindus that these two have been recognized as historical characters. In the mythological writings, however, the emphasis is not on their historicity but on their divinity and their role in history. Sita has been endowed with certain qualities, sacrifice and forbearance, devotion and faith, fidelity and nobility all contributing to the making of the most venerable character in poetry that has acted as the ideal of womanhood in Hindu society for the last several centuries.

Sita has been celebrated by innumerable poets since she was created with full glory by the Sanskrit poet Valmiki and yet never was there a time when she failed to inspire the Indian poet. Even in the twentieth century the number of works on Sita in different languages ran into hundreds and some of them were received by the contemporary readers with great delight. Among them are the Kannada play *Sita-Suvarnamrga natak* (1913) by Dugdhanath Khaund, the Oriya play *Janaki Parinaya* (1915) by Gopinath Nanda

and the Marathi play *Dhanurbhanga Natak* (1917) by Narayana Ramalinga Bamanagaonkar (1888-1961). One of the most memorable poem on the suffering heroine was written by the great Malayalam poet Kumaran Asan, *Cintavistayaya Sita*. The Oriya poet Gangadhar Meher, a member of the underprivileged class, wrote *Tapasvini* (1912), an epic in modern Oriya, on the life of Sita. Several prose works also have been written on the theme, most noted of them are the Telugu work *Janaki Kalyanam* (1919) by M. Ramakrishnyya and the Marathi prose narrative *Sita Vanavas* (1936) by Visram Dedekar. The Malayam play *Janki parinayam* (1951) by Rambhadra Diksita, the Manipuri play *Sita Banabas* (1936) by Ashangbam Minaketan Sharma and the Hindi poem *Vaidehi Vanavas* (1939) by Ayodhya Sinha Upadhyay are other important works written in this century. All these works are based on one of the four important episodes from the *Ramayana*: the marriage of Sita, the incident of the golden deer, the abduction of Sita by Ravana and the banishment of Sita by Rama. A few, of course, deal with the whole life of Sita such as the Bengali play *Sita* (1924) by Yogesh Chandra Chaudhuri, the play in which the legendary actor Sisir Kumar Bhaduri acted as the hero; the Maithili play *Janaki Natak* (1931) by Suryanarayan Jha, or the Gujarati play *Sita* (1943) by Chandravadan V. Maheto.

The number of works mentioned here are too few to indicate the wide distribution of this theme in different

language area and its tremendous power to sustain the interest of the readers. So deeply imprinted is the character of Sita on the psyche of the reader that even a casual reference to it evokes the memory of the community and a series of incidents and episodes flashes back into the mind establishing a relationship with the ancient story. Similarly a slightest change, minute irreverence, minimal criticism to any aspect of Sita can register a very serious protest, as they violate the composed figure of Sita stabilized through centuries. According to Indian poetics, perceptions about certain themes and characters have been 'fixed' for ever through association with the values of a particular community. This is a form of standardization of aesthetic values, any radical change in which violates aesthetic as well as social proprieties. This is normally known as *Siddha rasa*. While all other characters, even Rama, believed to be the incarnation of God by a section of Hindus, have been subjected to several changes, often criticized and condemned, defying the anger of the devout. Therefore Sita, is the only heroine generally spared by even the most radical. To keep the record straight, however, it must be mentioned that certain remarks of authors with regard to Sita have been misconstrued as the vilification of the ideal of the Indian womanhood and authors have been reprimanded. A comment on the Ravan-Sita relationship by a character in Rabindranath's novel *Ghare-Baire* (1916) raised a storm of protest. Despite the incompatibility of the apotheosization of Sita and the uninhibited freedom of expression demanded by the artists of Indian literature has been spared, till today, any serious confrontation between the guardians of religion and the *avant-garde* writers so far as Sita is concerned.

Savitri

In terms of popularity, if not importance, the story of Savitri and Satyavan comes next to the theme of Sita. Savitri was a princess married to Satyavan who was the son of an exiled king and was destined to die at a young age. The king of death, Yama, however, was finally persuaded by Savitri to give back the life of the young prince. Savitri has been canonized by the Hindus as one of the Satis' (noble women famed for their fidelity and devotion to husband) and has been celebrated by writers in every age. In twentieth century, too, her popularity remained undiminished. The Assamese writers Atul Chandra Hazarika and Pampu Sinha (both in 1937), the Bengali author Manmatha Ray (in 1931), the Marathi playwrights Khadilkar (1933), Madhavrao Joshi (1936) and Mama Warekar (1914), Ashvini Kumar Ghosh, the Oriya-dramatist (1918), the Punjabi author Brijlal Sastri (1925), the Nepali writers Ramprasad Satyal (1928) and Laksmi Prasad Devkota Jagadish Sharma wrote plays on Savitri theme. This theme was also attracted the Indian-English writers. Venkatesha Ayyenger (1891-1985) wrote a play on Savitri in 1923 and Sri Aurobindo's *magnum opus Savitri* (1950-51) is the landmark in the history of the Savitri theme.

Savitri is arguably one of the profound works of the twentieth century Indian literature. It is a blank verse epic which has assumed its present form after continuous revision by the seer-poet for nearly half-a-century. Its sub-title 'A Legend and Symbol' indicates its philosophical nature: it is an inner epic of mystical, spiritual and psychic dimension, its theme being man, death and

immortality cast within the epic tradition of the Western World as well as the Sanskrit. One hears the echoes of Milton and notices the structural elements of Homer, Valmiki, Virgil and Dante—as one does in the nineteenth-century Bengali epic *Meghanadbadh Kabya*, but thematically it is essentially an Indian epic. The very opening indicate its majestic movement and the high serious note :

It was the hour before the Gods
awake.

Across the path of the divine Event
The huge foreboding mind of Night,
alone

In her unlit temple of eternity
Lay stretched immobile upon
Silence' merge.

Its actions are largely internal and it is an unique epic poem as it has neither battles nor multitude of characters. Divided into eleven books—longer than the two Milton epics combined—the poem expands the simple and short legend of the

Mahabharata. Sri Aurobindo has not made any substantial alternation of the original story but invests complex and powerful symbolism on the characters. It is a story of man's success in transcending the physical and natural limitations including mortality, and the descend of the Divine power on the earth to redeem the human soul from Death.

The work has been criticized for its abstraction, heavy Latinized diction, long and slow movement and weak-kneed spiritual poetry. But its power lies in what has been called by K.D.Sethna and Srinivasa Iyenger, its '*mantric*' quality. It is indeed an epic conspicuous by its structural simplicity and internalization of action. The poem contains some of the loveliest lines in English poetry written by an Indian poet. *Savitri* is a landmark in the history of Indian poetry.

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EPIC METAPHOR IN THE MODERN CONTEXT OF INDIAN SOCIETY

JAWAHARLAL HANDOO

Colonial Paradigm

Anthropological and ethnological sciences including folklore were, as were other sciences, shaped by Western scholars and their theoretical conceptions upon which these sciences were built. These conceptions subsumed that technologically less developed (or pre-literate) societies of the ancient world—Asia and Africa for instance—were less civilized and hence “primitive”. Therefore, according to this notion, based on widely practiced Evolutionary Theory of Tylor which in turn was raised on the philosophies of Mill and Descartes, all human societies have finally to become “civilized” and look and behave like the technologically advanced so-called civilized societies of Europe. Furthermore, these so-called primitive societies, before they lost much of their “Primitiveness”, were, therefore, to be studied from the standpoint of these and other conceptions which originated in the technologically advanced West. The manner in which this task was carried out did not differ from the one in which a superior person studied his inferior subjects—a practice not unknown in many social sciences. Moreover, it was also felt that by doing so, it would be useful for understanding the past, present and, perhaps, the future of mankind and will thus accelerate the process of transformation of these primitive societies and usher them into the world of the civilized.

It is needless to emphasize that the European thinkers, who professed such knowledge, theorized on the basis of Descartes’ cosmological view and the “new vision” it thus created. This new vision, bizarre as it might seem to a native observer, was, as we know from the record of history, hugely successful in forming men’s view of the universe and the world they lived in, and “in enabling Western civilization to achieve an unparalleled domination of the Earth and nature. Consider, in this regard, the following remarks of Thomas.

Descartes’s explicit aim had been to make men ‘lords and possessors of nature’....he (Descartes) portrayed other species as an inert and lacking any spiritual dimension. In so doing he created an absolute break between man and the rest of nature, thus clearing the way very satisfactorily for the uninhibited exercise of human rule”.

The Cartesian vision was subsequently developed through analogical reasoning and applied by Newton to physical universe and by others to social and cultural spheres of human activity. Naturally this kind of reasoning, it seems, placed the non-European, pre-industrial, tribal societies in the realm of “other species” which lacked “spiritual dimension” and inspired the development of what is known as “the first scientific

colonialism”, in which non-European peoples and their cultures were assimilated to the world of objects to be controlled and manipulated at will.

The Cartesian cosmology, it seems, legitimized the British Industrial Revolution in the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It also made possible the development of modern science and technology, modern medicine and finally social science and anthropology. In return, these various social achievements served to reinforce the Cartesian world-view, and to make it seem increasingly self-evident, an unquestioned assumption. It is in the background of such philosophy that the colonial paradigm was born, and the foundations of a new discipline—a new science—namely Orientalism, were laid, in which the Orient was deliberately seen as a fixed text, and the Orientals as “other species”. This stereotyped text was, unfortunately for us, destined to remain “frozen” and unchanged. This fixed text, however, has now gained a complex philosophical dimension which encompasses questions of ideology, politics and global military and economic domination. Consider, for example, the following remarks of Edward Said:

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Orientalists became a more serious quantity, because by then the reaches of imaginative and actual geography had shrunk, because the Oriental-European relationship was determined by an unstoppable European expansion in search of markets, resources, and colonies, and finally, because Orientalism had accomplished its self-

metamorphosis from a scholarly discourse to an imperial institution.

Besides many shifts in the basic paradigm, speaking historically, anthropological sciences including folklore studies, by and large, continue depending on the Cartesian metaphor—both in theory and practice. In India the impact of this colonial paradigm can be felt both in folklore theory and its method including anthropology; which have remained highly diachronic, past-oriented and “devolutionary”. These weaknesses did not permit folklore theory to take into its gamut seriously the folklore of the modern world, such as mass culture or popular culture. Nor could it explain the important phenomenon of the continuity of the folk and mythic metaphor in modern Indian society. In other words, the past-orientedness of folklore theory did not permit it to recognize the dynamics of folkloric phenomenon.

Religious Metaphor

For centuries the Western scholars have marveled at the remarkable strength of the Hindu tradition in its various manifestations. More often than not, scholars have traditionally been fascinated by the “frozen” forms of the Hindu tradition. Many disciplines have thoroughly studied these “frozen” forms and the mass of textual data which represented such forms. However, very few scholars, if any, have studied the Hindu tradition as a forceful living phenomenon—the continuation of an ancient tradition—of modern Indian society, needless to emphasize the importance of capturing, describing vividly, and studying seriously these continuities in their various styles

so that the deep, diachronic structures of the Hindu religious as well as folk traditions could be realized and explained synchronically, i.e., in the context of contemporary Indian society.

If one looks into some of the major modern styles of Hindu religious traditions such as Radha Soami, Brahma Kumaris, Satya Sai Baba and many more, one will not fail to understand beyond doubt the fundamental unity in these styles of modern Hinduism and the single source all these derive from. In this respect then, these modern styles demonstrate the continuity of the basic core of Hindu religion, world-view, folk metaphor and the philosophy of life. Although one cannot fail to see that the belief system of these modern religious movements are different, yet they can only be understood properly in the wider context of Hinduism. The basic "images" of ancient Hindu religious culture, which are present in these modern styles, re-emphasize the continuity to religious metaphor and its importance in modern Indian society. For example, the concept of plurality, cyclical history or the theory of *yuga* (world time), ingesting or identification and union with the object of worship, seeing or awakened vision in which one sees himself and others "as souls not as bodies," and last but not the least, self realization. These basic metaphors of the Hindu traditions are then the elements which continue to shape and reshape these modern religious movements and link them very appropriately to the wider context of the ancient Hindu tradition. For example, is it not true that the pan-Indian cultural traditions, which are partly strengthened by the core of ancient Hindu religious thought, consistently rank scholarly ritualistic values above political power. The

meditative life-style is deemed superior to an assertive, active pursuit of comfort and status. Non-violence is honoured above warriorhood as a technique of coping with life's problems. The civilization-wide orthodoxy of this value perspective is well known to Indian mind and continues to shape the political and social life-style of modern Indians.

Epic Metaphor

At this point one might ask, do Indian epic traditions, just like the religious tradition, support this theory of the continuity of folk or epic metaphor in modern Indian society? The answer, though highly tentative, seems to be yes. It is believed that to become an epic, a legend or a narrative must become embroidered with a wide array of cultural, mythological and religious motifs. In such a process of transformation the original heroic tale need not lose its links with key historical events. It should, however, be remembered that the historical, political, religious and a variety of social factors shape the growth, development and popularity of an epic. Scholars have observed that ballads and epics grow and flourish during period of political upheaval. Moreover it has also been recognized that both ballads and epics as strong folk genres have initially tended to develop mainly among politically marginal people. It is difficult to know exactly what pressing political, social or cultural needs of India forced the simple narratives of Rama, Krishna and Arjuna to become the basic frame for a mass of mythological, historical, religious and social information frame for a mass of mythological, historical, religious and social information and blend these into the most important narrative epics of the sub-continent and

the greater parts of South Asia. However, one factor is very clear that both the stories of Rama and Krishna must have become *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* respectively when Indian might have struggled for a unified cultural identity; when this vast country might have suffered a political upheaval, when ethnic diversity, its conflicts and the deteriorating value system might have threatened the very structure of this country as a nation; when the ideal of a great civilization, a unified nation, a sound political and social system, particularly an ideal family broken; and finally when India needed heroes—real cultural heroes—who could by virtue of their own ideal attributes establish equilibrium and give direction to the traditionally conceived, like and accepted ideal social norm.

For example, viewing structurally, it is the threatened kinship order and the disequilibrium it can cause to the family and the society at large, which seems to have surfaced prominently in *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Of course attempts for reestablishing order in the system and maintaining equilibrium becomes the main task of these stories and their basic metaphors. Rama, for example, is an ideal of monogamous marriage system. He denounces and symbolically eliminates all such elements which try to support or stick to the polygamous system. Needless to say that in this task of establishing the ideal norm, Rama, as a cultural hero, eliminates those who oppose this ideal. Indeed both Dasharatha, his father and Ravana, his main antagonist (and also phallic rival) are eliminated or killed in this struggle of ideals. Undoubtedly, Rama as a strong cultural hero seems to achieve this objective by following his own example. Like all strong-willed cultural heroes he preaches only what he practises and finally

succeeds in establishing the ideal norm. In this sense, the *Ramayana* (Rama's story) shares many characteristics with *Mahabharata* (India's story) and yet stands quite opposed to it in many respects.

The *Mahabharata*, for example, presents a clear picture of Indian avunculate society and its inherent conflicts. Such societies are, primarily due to the matrilineal kinship order and sometimes without it, completely dominated by the maternal uncle or the mother's brother. In such societies, besides other things, such as inheritance etc., sister's children, particularly male children, obey the dictates of the maternal uncle (the *Mama*) rather than their own father. Avunculate societies, as we are aware, are not altogether lost to India. As a matter of fact, besides Kerala (Nairs, Tiyyas and others), many ethnic groups following avunculate cultures exist in many parts of India even today.

It is interesting to note that the *Mahabharata* is the epitome of conflicts between the avunculate and non-avunculate societies.

Equally important is another problem of kinship which seems very peculiar both to *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. This problem is of the siblings. *Mahabharata* is the epitome of sibling rivalry. *Ramayana* on the other hand reorders sibling relations into positive forces, as a supportive device for establishing equilibrium in the overall kinship norm threatened temporarily.

Students of folklore will recall that in fairy tales, more often than not, the youngest brother is always shown victorious in performing tasks which his elder brother or brothers fail to perform. Since fairy tale is a kind of fantasy in which

the normal roles are reversed, the victorious younger brother, more particularly in the Indian context, represents his low status in the real sibling hierarchy and social context. His position, as we are aware, when compared to his elder brother is very weak in all respects in the real social context. So it is not surprising to find that most of the Indian folk epics are generally raised on the sibling metaphor. Even the national epics have not escaped this folk theme. *Mahabharata*, for example, is the epitome of sibling rivalry. *Ramayana*, on the other hand, reorders sibling relations into positive forces as a supportive device for establishing equilibrium in the overall kinship norm threatened temporarily. Here sibling order of the hero and his brothers is purposefully used to express judgments on other hierarchically ordered Indian values. In many cultures the ordinal position of brothers is often used as a vehicle for constructing cultural models. Siblingship usually conveys moral responsibility and shared rights or understands. Hence, it is the type of human bond that can import meanings when used as a rationale for some wider set of social relationship. As a metaphor for encompassing hierarchies or for authority and control within a local setting, a reference to brotherhood means more than the recognition of kin bonds *per se*. In this respect, then, the sibling order of the *Mahabharata* and its conflicts with devastating results are purposefully used to express judgments about other hierarchically ordered Indian values. If Rama represents the ideal “elder brother” Laxmana and Bharat and others are idealized within their own respective positions. In India, as is said above, the formal bond between the junior and senior siblings in real life is commonly the reverse of the pattern found in stories. Usually the elder brother serves as the authority figure

in actual experience while younger ones control the outcome of events in popular legends. “In the world of make-believe, common assumptions about dominance orders are challenged through the use of stereotypes. Such inversions provide a context of catharsis and release of social tension.” This might be more true in respect of *Mahabharata* than *Ramayana*.

Both *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, as is obvious, raise a variety of questions about the role, powers and personality of a ruler or a king and the systems he controls. Needless to say that the dichotomy of the cultivated/non-cultivated (in Levi-Straussian terms nature/culture or even city/village), which seems a dominant cultural category of India’s folk-mind even today, has shaped the structure of kingship in both these epics. Rama, Krishna or Arjuna in their roles as cultural heroes seems to mediate the basic oppositions successfully in order to redefine the role and power of a just king and the politics of idealism. One should also remember that in *Mahabharata*, despite its dissimilarities with *Ramayana*, kingship—true kingship—was defined only in terms of overcoming the basic opposition. Pandavas had to roam in wilderness (just as Rama did) before they could establish the real order of kingship based on shared values of economic and political context. For example, didn’t Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba Ji (and many others now) follow the footsteps of these epic or mythic heroes in mediating this still-present opposition in Indian political and social systems. The *Padayatra*, as a folk metaphor of real or symbolic social and political change has its well defined roots in the ancient epics of India is an issue which needs a more serious treatment than given so far by the scholars. Surprisingly enough, it would seem that the function of *padayatra* has

not changed much since the epic days. The opposition between the city and the non-city in its all semantic dimensions in the Indian context seems to exist even now which very appropriately justifies not only the presence but also the continuation of these folk metaphors in the symbolic context of modern Indian society.

Of equal importance is the concept of *Ramarajya* in post-independent India: which, needless to emphasize, is a conglomerate of well-knitted folk metaphors into an ideal holloistic metaphor of a dream-like social and political order. The *padayatra*, and similar concepts are in fact the basic structures of such a multi-dimensional metaphor.

Similarly, the position of woman and her relationship with fire, which may not suit the modern Indian mind particularly the feminist mind, is nevertheless, in my opinion, an important aspect of the metaphor and has gained significance in the present context of, by and large, male-dominant Indian society and its attitudes towards women's participation in India's

political and social management. The selection of fire by Indian woman (who, more than man, works with it her whole life as the house-keeper, food-creator and food-giver) as the instrument of survival, power and purification and also of ultimate self- destruction (*agni pariksha*, *Sati*, and dowry death or bride burning), even in the present context in modern Indian society.

Cultural experts and folklorists need to discover these and similar ancient folk and epic metaphors and trace their patterns and continuities in modern Indian society. besides the ones we discussed above, we need to discover various other related metaphors such as of protest, violence, and change which, in my opinion, have deep roots in Indian oral and literary paradigm and which are so relevant in the context of present Indian society.

(Adapted from "The Mahabharata in the Tribal and Folk traditions of India, I.I.A.S. Shimla 1993).

FOLK TRADITIONS RELATED TO MAHABHARATA IN SOUTH INDIA

T.S. Rukmani

India has a very rich and vast repertoire of folk traditions. As it is not possible to deal with all of them in such a paper an attempt has been made to briefly describe the folk traditions of South India mainly that of Tamilnadu and Kerala. But before that it is necessary to understand what one means by the term 'folk tradition'.

A folk tradition by its very nature implies the 'other' which is 'not-folk' and therefore it is as against the 'other' that this is defined as 'folk'. The 'other' is the 'classical' be it literature, music, dance, painting , and so on. The classical is dependent on certain rigid aesthetic rules and regulations and is structured to a set pattern. Students of Sanskrit will know what this means in the context of a voluminous literature which is available, dealing with the various aspects of culture, including that of sculpture and temple construction. A holistic approach to life which underscored the philosophy of ancient India and permeated its various aspects encouraged this development, so much so, that all the classical arts aimed at discovering the rhythm of the universe, of which the human being himself was an expression. The classical arts were also connected with the goals of human existence and became different means to achieve the 'intangible experience of the unmanifested unity'. It was thus a part of the sacred lore and had a spiritual end in view.

At the same time it is interesting to observe that there is a rich source of evidence for both the classical and folk artistic traditions going back to vedic times. There is also ample evidence for the continued existence of music and dance, both classical and folk, throughout the ages. It is this rich tradition which finds expression in one of the earliest works of this kind extant anywhere in the world and called the *Natyasastra* whose author is Bharata.

Natya literally means dance and therefore one would expect the *Natyasastra* to deal with the theatre and staging of plays. But ancient theatre was not just the spoken word as in Greek theatre but a total experience both visual and intellectual where music and dance played vital roles in developing the theme. It was assumed that every actor or actress would combine himself/herself all the three functions of actor, dancer and singer. It is perhaps this legacy which finds place even in present day cinema where no movie is complete without the song and dance sequences and every hero or heroine is supposed to be an accomplished musician and dancer.

The *Natyasastra* talks about the *natyadharmi* as opposed to the *lokadharmi* styles or the *margi* as against the *desi* style. Bharata also talks of the four divisions as *Avanti*, *Dakshinatyā*, *Panchali* and *Odhrā-Magadhi* thus pointing to the prevalence of the art in all parts of the country. Thus the folk and the classical traditions have

existed side by side throughout for a very long time and it is therefore difficult to find something which is purely classical or vice-versa.

Can the *Bharatanatyam* style be completely separated from the *Sadir*, the *Bhagavatamelanataka*, the *Kuravanji* and the art of puppetry which are all folk forms of entertainment? Can the *Kathakali* style be separated from the influence of *Mudiyettu*, *Taiyyam*, *Thirayattam*, *Chakiarkoothu*, *Yakshagana* and many other folk tradition in Kerala, Tamilnadu and Karnataka? In fact the tradition of *Chakiarkoothu* is considered to be handed down from the time of the epics, the *chakiars* being considered as descendants of the traditional epic story tellers called the *sutas* (*bhatas*).

It is important to bear in mind that the history of the region known as South India is still not well-known and the folk traditions and different classical forms which are known as the South Indian forms do not have a strictly geographical delimitation as that of Tamilnadu, Andhra, Karnataka or Kerala. To some extent even Orissa with its common border with Andhra displays some common features of the classical and folk tradition of the south.

It is also not easy to determine whether the classical and the folk existed as separate forms at all times, each having its own clientele or whether there was an involvement of one from the other. Were there two separate styles at all times –if not which came first and which came later? Is it ever possible to clearly delineate the boundaries between what is classical and what is folk? This is a debate which can never be solved finally and is as difficult to decide as the origin of any

of the art forms which exist at two levels, be it sculpture, theatre, music, dance, etc.

While dealing with the South an equally difficult question to decide is whether the dance form was a part of the Dravidian scene or was a later development under Aryan influence. That there was a constant interchange at least in the early days of contact between the Aryans and Dravidians is amply illustrated by the number of words, which have been borrowed from those languages into Sanskrit. Thus the Sanskrit words *anala*, *alasa*, *ulukhala*, *katu*, *kathina*, *kaka*, *kancika*, *kanana*, *kuntala*, and many more words can be traced to Dravidian origins. In a similar way the present dance forms must definitely be an amalgam a coming together of many styles. Such an amalgam, in recent centuries after the advent of the Europeans is seen in Kerala in the *Chavittunatakam* which is a fusion between the dance drama traditions of Kerala and European opera. While this paper is on the folk forms and not on the tribal dance forms it is again not possible to strictly demarcate the two styles. For instance, the *Chenchus* are a semi-nomadic tribe considered to be proto-Australoid. Their dance and music are based on their world-view which has quite a few resemblances to the Hindu world view and the cult of Shiva. They believe that 'long ago in the archaic past Chencita, a forest girl, married Shiva as *Kirat* who, in this form, is known as 'Chenchu Malliah'. This forest setting of the Kiratarjuniyam episode in the *Mahabharata* probably made this transference easy for the Chenchus. One conclusive evidence for the existence of many dance forms in the Dravida country is the reference to the dancing girl who was adept in many different dance forms, in the *Silappadikaram*, a Tamil work of the second century A.D. it is interesting to

note that the *Natyasastra* is also considered to be a work belonging to the second century A.D. While the *Natyasastra* refers to the *Dakṣiṇatāya* there is no reference to the *Natyasastra* in the *Silappadikaram*. At the same time, the *Rasalila*, which is described in such great detail in the *Rasapancadhyayi* of the *Bhagavata Purana* is considered to have its basis in the *Kuravai* dance identified with the *Hallisaka* dance mentioned in Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra* and in the *Harivamsa Purana*.

For purposes of cultural expressions the entire South can be viewed as one as already pointed out at the beginning. In Karnataka there is what is known as the *Kargadha Kunitha* akin to the *Kargam* and *Kavadi* of Tamilnadu. The most famous of the folk dance drama (theatre) in Karnataka is the *Yaksagana* or *Bayalata*. As Kapila Vatsyayan remarks 'Here is a dance-drama form which contains a high literary tradition, a body of stylised technique of theatrical presentation and yet one which exhibits unmistakable links with the tribal and folk traditions of the region. Its themes are classical epic, its language is regional, its conventions of the stage are close to the Sanskrit theatre but in movement of the body, the manipulation of the head and the torso, it has many features of the folk dances of Karnataka. On another level, it has affinities with the *Bhagavatamela* of Tamilnadu and *Kathakali* of Kerala and even in one or two respects with the *Bhama Kalapam* of Andhra Pradesh.

The repertoire of the *Yaksagana* is again the stories of the epics and the *Puranas*. Some well-known stories staged from the *Mahabharata* are Bhismavijaya, Karna-Arjuna-Kalaga, Draupadipratapa, Krishn-Parijata and Abhimanyu Kalaga.

Yaksagana artists are mostly village folk like farmers and others who have undergone some training in the art.

When we look at Kerala we find living traditions of *Chakiarkoothu*, *Krishnanattam*, *Ottanthullal*, *Chavittunatakam*, *Mudiyettu*, *Taiyyam*, *Pathakam* and other dance forms. The Bhagavati cult is very potent in Kerala. Bhagavati is the mother goddess also called Kali, Bhairavi, Devi or Sakti. The colour symbolism cuts across all classes and groups, being as much part of the folk traditions as it is of the highly evolved *Kathakali* make up. In fact there are scholars who believe that *Kathakali* is a blending of the Aryan and Dravidian cultures, and that it is the culmination of a 'whole process of synthesis'.

This description of some of the folk traditions related to the *Mahabharata* in South India reveals some interesting points. First there are close interconnections between the various regions and the same dance form is found in all the four regions with minor variations. Secondly, it is not possible to clearly earmark the different levels as purely classical or purely folk. Thirdly, the amalgam between what was indigenous to the region and what came from outside as the *Mahabharata* tradition has been smoothly absorbed and conforms to the local customs and tradition. This was possible because these folk forms were centred round the temples and were part of the rituals connected with the deities. Fourthly, since this region was historically spared the kind of upheavals, which the North was subjected to, the various strands coming from different sources are somewhat discernible. Lastly, the tremendous popularity of the *Mahabharata* in this region, particularly Kerala, seems to be due to the characters being very

human and easily identifiable with everyday men and women. While the beginnings of this absorption are difficult to pinpoint one can only agree with Wendy O' Flaherty who said: 'The *Mahabharata* grows out of the oral tradition and then grows back into the oral traditions; it flickers back and forth between Sankrit manuscripts and village story tellers, each adding new lists to the old story, constantly reinterpreting it.' The

Mahabharata has the last laugh as its autobiographical statement that 'whatever is here is found elsewhere' is fulfilled in these folk traditions of the South.

(Extract from The Mahabharata in the T/F Traditions of India, I.I.A.S, Shimla, 1993).

THE MAHABHARATA INFLUENCES PROVERBS IN TAMILNADU

K. Lakshmi Narayanan

Proverbs of a society often reflect its social mores. In Tamil there are about thirty proverbs based on Mahabharata events and characters which expose the shades of popular psychology. The cause of Duryodhana's ruin, stripping off Draupadi's cloths and the oath of Bhishma are some of the famous events used in the proverbs. Karna seems to be more popular among the common folk and his is referred in a larger number of proverbs than the heroes of the epic. His bounty, duty-consciousness, friendship, integrity and sacrifice evoked both admiration and affection. People with sympathy for weaker sections of the society felt Karna as one among them and preferred him to the other heroes. His generosity is compared with rain and rainy season. His name became an idiom to indicate charitable persons. Next to Karna, Dharmaraja, Draupadi, Arjuna, Duryodhana and Sakuni are mentioned. Their names too are used as idioms for personalities. Dharmaraja is a synonym for righteous men and Duryodhana for haughty persons. Arjuna is cited for archery and amorous activities and Sakuni is famous for his cunning and evil designs.

In Hindu scriptures, Draupadi is accorded a higher place and she is one of five ideal women. People like poet Bharati have a high esteem for her. But quite contrary to this tradition some proverbs

based on Draupadi are not so palatable. The ordinary common folk without the intention of slighting the divinity of Draupadi whom they worship as their guarding deity, often compare very sarcastically the women of haughty nature and loose character to Draupadi. The saying, *Paanchali vesam podaathe* (don't play the role of Panchali) is often used towards the women of overbearing behaviour. Like that the proverb *Aivarkkum Devi Azhiyaatha pattini* (wife of five and still she is quite chaste) is used sarcastically to refer to women of loose character. Perhaps these are the outcome of acceptance by the common folk of a woman's adamant nature to wreck vengeance at all cost and her unusual marital relations.

(Extract from the The Mahabharata in the T/F Traditions of India. I.I.A.S Shimla 1993)

FOLK WISDOM IN SARALA DASA'S
MAHABHARATA

Salute the brother-in-law in fear of the wife

This episode has evolved from the Mahabharata of Sarala Das. It looks both ironic and humorous. Yudhishtira saluted Dhrustadyumna, the brother of Draupadi at the altar of *yajna*. Krishna smiled and requested Brahma to explain as to how far it was justified on the part of Yudhishtira to salute his brother-in-law. Brahma explained that according to the scripture, brother-in-law is equal to a servant. Listening to this, Krishna was very angry. He scolded Dhrustadyuma as being a brother-in-law and blessed Yudhishtira. Krishna was consoled by Yudhishtira and pleaded that in fear of Draupadi, he had saluted her brother.

In recent time also, one can find the brother-in-law being saluted.

LORD KRISHNA, TOUCHING THE FEET
OF AN ASS

Pravakar Swain

It is a popular saying that Lord Krishna had to touch the feet of an ass. It means that to reach the goal in life, to complete any work, one should not hesitate to take the help and assistance of anyone, however insignificant. It is narrated in the *Mahabharata* that the fort of Jarasandha had four doors. He was the unconquered hero. The first door was guarded by the prince, there was a clarion on the second door, a *simuli* tree near the third door and an ass watched the fourth door. Any outsider, who got into the fort, had to face the ass, who brayed loudly. Jarasandha took it as a warning and destroyed his enemies. Once Krishna, Bhima and Arjuna started their campaign against Jarasandha. It was difficult for them to control the ass. When the ass saw them, it started to bray loudly. Suddenly Krishna put the conch into its mouth. As a result of which the sound of the conch echoed all around. Krishna choked the throat of the ass with his left hand and ordered to remain silent. The ass could recognise Krishna and requested the Lord to touch his feet. Krishna agreed. Bhima reacted and prayed to Krishna not to do it. But Krishna explained that to complete any work, one has to follow any mean way. He touched the feet of the ass.

Today, when one takes the help of any insignificant being to complete any work or to reach the goal in his life, this episode is generally referred to.

(The Mahabharata in the Folk and Tribal Traditions of India)

HEROES IN EPICS

Sisirkumar Das

Rama and Ravana

The most popular and venerable hero from the Hindu mythology is Rama, the protagonist of the *Ramayana*. Despite the authors' shift from a theocentric world to a man centric universe and growing resistance to the divine halo of the characters of epic, Rama continued to shine with glory in twentieth century as well. It is not only that new *Ramayanas* were being written by poets –both Puttappa and Vishvanatha Satyanarayana wrote *Ramayanas*, *Ramayana Darsanam* in Kannada and *Srimad Ramayana Kalpavrksham* in Telugu respectively –but because the way the whole life of Rama had penetrated into the poetic language. It has become a part of the Indian poetic stoff. Ravana, the villain of the *Ramayana*, too whom Michael Madhusudan Data valorized as a protesting hero in the nineteenth century, continued to fascinate some poets but none could surpass the model created by Michael Madhusudan. P. Lakshmana Kavi wrote a poem in Telugu entitled *Ravanadammiyam* (1915). Hardayal Sinha wrote *Ravana Mahakavya* (1952) in Hindi, A. K. Velan wrote a play *Ravanan* (1948), with Ravana as the hero, in Tamil. It may be mentioned that with the consolidation of the Justice Party and the strengthening of Tamil Nationalism several writers in Tamilnadu denounced Rama and glorified Ravana as a Dravidian hero.

(A History of Indian Literature, Sahitya Akademi –New Delhi 1995)

MAHABHARATA IN *STHALA PURANAS*

K. Lakshmi Narayanan

Caste Hindus do not take Draupadi and Pandava brothers as their major deities. They regarded them only as semi-divine beings. But while composing *Sthala Puranam* of their temples, villages and cities, they brought the Pandavas as beneficiaries of the grace of major deities like Siva and Vishnu. This brought them nearer to rural Tamils and their memory is perpetuated among them. We can cite an example. The people of Vedambur, a village in Valankaiman taluk of Thanjavur district, have a *Mahabharata* story for the name of their village. As per their belief, their village is the place where the event of Kiratarjuna fight took place. Since Siva came here in the guise of Vedar (hunter) to fight with Arjuna, the place is called Vedambur. The *Sthala Purana* of Thirumaraikkadu Siva Temple in Vedaranyam tells us that the Pandavas during the time of their *Vanavasa* visited that place and worshipped Siva by establishing five *Lingas*. The same story has been told for the deities of Jayanthisvaram Shrine within the Suchindram temple complex. We may cite innumerable examples for the village and temple towns of Tamilnadu.

(From the Mahabharata in T/F Traditions of India I.I.A.S Shimla, 1993)

DRAUPADI –A TREATMENT IN THE
MAHABHARATA

N. Krishna Kumari

Duryodhana started losing whatever he gained from Dharmaraja. Then Sakuni came to his rescue and scolded him saying that it was a gross mistake to play with women. “Because women always have the help of Fire god. They play with fire while cooking. They are the incarnation of fire and they are one amongst the burning firewood and are like torches...”. Having heard these words of Sakuni, Duryodhana stopped playing with Draupadi. Meanwhile, Dhritarastra came to the spot, asked Draupadi to take all the booty she had won by playing dice with Duryodhana, but Dharmaraja refused to take the kingdom won by a woman and finally decided to go to the forest with Draupadi.

(From the Mahabharata in T/F Traditions of India I.I.A.S Shimla, 1993)

THE MAHABHARATA IMPRINTS BASIC
VALUES IN THE MINDS OF THE PEOPLE

D. Seeni Sami

Some of the basic components of Indian cultural values are belief in fate, accepting social hierarchy as natural order, and hope only in God’s *Avatar*. These cultural values were created in the background of a caste-oriented feudal society in pre-British India. Religion and *Bhakti* also contributed to these strongly rooted values. Literatures, particularly written literatures with highly intellectual meanings, exerted a great influence on people’s thinking process. As this process is a socio-historical one, it affects folk imagination also.

(Extracted from the Mahabharata in T/F Traditions of India I.I.A.S Shimla, 1993)

THE MAHABHARATA FOLK TRADITION
IN ANDHRA

P. Subha Chary

The *Mahabharata* and the traditions of *Mahabharata* have been deeply influencing the different spheres of the folklore of Andhra Pradesh. There are temples of Draupadi and Pandavas in Andhra Pradesh. A yearly big ‘*Jatara*’ takes place in the temple of Draupadi in Nellore district. Finding out *Mahabharata* tradition in the folklore of Andhra Pradesh is an interesting subject. The study of various versions of folk *Mahabharata* may bring out interesting facts of remote past, the influence of *Mahabharata* on caste myths etc.

(Extracted from the Mahabharata in T/F Traditions of India I.I.A.S Shimla, 1993)

GANESA AND KRISHNA IN
TAMILNADU'S FOLK MAHABHARATA

Ganesa and Krishna are two popular Hindu deities. Some of their iconographical features are formed according to the episodes described in the local as well as the classical versions of *Mahabharata*. The Ganesa figure in Tamilnadu –wherever it is –whether in the *Agamic* temple, on the roadside pedestal or in the *pooja* room of ordinary Hindu house, it is usually depicted with a broken tusk. For this iconographic feature different *puranic* stories and philosophic interpretation have been told. But at present in Tamilnadu, this iconographic feature is largely connected to the story of Ganesa breaking his tusk to write *Mahabharata* on Mount Meru. This event is told in 19th century minor Tamil literary work *Sarabendra Bhubala Kuravanchi* composed in praise of Thanjavur king Sarfoji III.

The role of Krishna as *Geetacharya*, the preacher of *Geeta* to the bewildered Arjuna in the battle field is so appealing to high caste Hindus that they adorn their temples and houses with this form. There is also a temple for this particular form, the form of Parthasarathi, the Charioteer of Arjuna. Thiruvallikkeni Parthasarathi Temple is one of the oldest and important temples of Vaishnavites. The *utsava* icon of this temple is in this particular form and the antiquity of this form is well attested by the song of Thirumangai Alvar in his *Periya Thirumadal*. He records his excitement by singing “*Kol kai Kondu Parthan thermun ninranai... Thiruvallikkeni Kan Kandene*” (I saw the one who stood with a stick in hand before Partha’s chariot in Thiruvallikkeni).

Thiruppadagam in Kanchipuram is another temple of classical order. There an event connected with *Mahabharata* is perpetuated. During Krishna’s diplomatic mission to Duryodhana’s court, the latter offered a very fine chair placed in a concealed deep pit in which strong wrestlers were kept to kill Krishna. As soon as Krishna sat on the chair, it began to fall in the pit. At that moment Krishna assumed his universal gigantic form, killed the wrestlers and spoiled Duryodhana’s intention. This *Periya Maameni* form (the great gigantic figure) is worshiped in Thiruppadagam temple and the sanctum of the temple is called as *Paandava Tutar Sanniti* (the *sanctum* of Pandava Ambassador) Thirumangai Alvar sings the lord of this temple by citing this episode.

(The Mahabharata in T/F Traditions of India I.I.A.S Shimla, 1993)

YAYATI AND MANU

Sisir Kumar Das

Yayati

Like Ashvatthama, the story of Yayati, also from the *Mahabharata* has a strong appeal to the modern mind. Yayati is the king who in his unsatiated lust for carnal pleasure shamelessly begs his son Puru to exchange his youth with his infirmity. Puru obliges his father. The earliest work on the subject in this century is *Yayati* (1908) by the prolific Tamil playwright P. Sambandha Mudaliyar. He was followed by Srikantha Satpathi, the author of the Oriya narrative *Yayati* (1927) and Govinda Ballabh Pant (Hindi play, *Yayati*, 1951) and V.S. Khandekar whose novel *Yayati* (1959) has been hailed as one of the greatest works in Marathi literature.

Sudhindranath Datta's 'Yayati' included in *Sambarta* (1953) is one of the memorable poems in modern Bengali literature. Similarly, Umashankar Joshi's *Pracina* (1944), a collection of seven dialogues, created a new form of verse-plays on themes borrowed from mythology.

Manu: The creation of a New Myth

Mention must be made of the Hindi epic *Kamayani* (1935) by the versatile poet-dramatist Jayshankar Prasad. *Kamayani*, which tells the story of Manu in search of a new human race, has been claimed by critics as an epic without any pronounced religious ideas, not to speak of any theology but a work 'motivated by the metaphysics of psychology'. Like *Savitri* it is also constructed on a grand scale; some

of its episodes can be traced back to the *Vedic* or *Puranic* literature, but the narrative is more than work of imagination. Certain parts of it are allegorical in character. This epic narrative is certainly rooted into a Hindu perception of the reality and it problematizes the eternal tension within man in search for perfections and ideals. Girija Kumar Mathur's observations may be quoted here:

Jayshankar Prasad was inspired by the fascinating legend of the great Deluge and the regeneration of earth's life by Manu, the first man who created human civilization in the post-diluvian period..... Manu is the primordial human mind perpetually in quest of peace. The two women who come into his life are *Sraddha*, symbolizing emotion and dedication, and *Ida*, symbolizing intellect. The conflict which develops due to Manu's attraction for both is finally resolved in a harmonious synthesis between emotion and intellect, faith and reality.

(*A History of Indian Literature*, Sahitya Akademi -New Delhi 1995)

EPIC CHARACTERS AND THE ETHICAL SYSTEM

Sisir Kumar Das

It is not only the great heroes like Karna or Bhishma or Arjuna who have been chosen as the subject of the modern poets but hundreds of episodes featuring the major and minor characters of the epics have been reworked by them. One Telugu scholar writes about Divakarala Tirupati (1871-1919) and Chellapilla Venkata Shastri (1870-1950) the dual poets of Andhra Pradesh who wrote several plays on the *Mahabharata*, most notable being *Pandava Pravasaamu* (1907) and *Pandavodyogamu* (1930), that they 'have thrilled the entire length and breadth of Andhra' and 'it is rare to come across an Andhra who cannot recite two or three poems' from these plays.

readership, the major part is by and large humanistic and secular. The dramatic poems of Rabindranath particularly 'Karna-Kunti *Sambad*' and '*Gandharir Avedan*' made a great impact on poets in Bengal and outside. Characters like Vishvamitra, Yayati, Ashvatthama became suddenly popular and were valorised by poets and dramatists without any particular religious dogma.

(A History of Indian Literature, Sahitya Akademi -New Delhi 1995)

The reworking of myths and episodes of the epics has by the large emphasized certain religious and ethical value system. The central motif in most of these works is the projection of an unshakable faith in the divine power. The natural and the supernatural penetrate into one another and cease to be a straightforward retelling of an old story. A large section of these works celebrate the divine glory and affirms the Indian faith in the unalterable law, the supreme power controlling the cosmos. It is in this religio-philosophical framework that the Indian author and the reader find their identity. It is, however, not simply a search for a religious meaning where dharma and moksha are the goals; it is also a reconstruction of the past. While certain parts of this literature were primarily intended for an exclusive Hindu

THE TRAGEDY OF DRAUPADI

P. Usha Sundari

As a lover and wife Draupadi remains unfulfilled. Playing the role of wife to five men, every year she has to efface the memory of one before starting conjugal life with another. Her conjugal life, like her denied childhood, is a disjointed experience. Though fresh and diverse it has no process of continuity. She desires and prefers Arjuna to others, but she could never have him all to herself. Her birth and death are rootless. The fullness of a life cycle naturally described is not there in Draupadi. Even after the appeasement of burning revenge in her, she is left empty. A woman of such fullness is ironically empty; loses every one in the war, her father, her brother, her children –both the links with the past and future. Going for her dived exile she leaves a kingdom in full splendour but returns after the war, to envy her glory, to rejoice at her laurel victory and finally none to hand over her queenly legacy. The unopposed burning anguish is finally quenched, on inhospitable snow midway through their walk to heaven. The divine born dies destitute.

Sita has a more natural fullness of life cycle. She is the child of earth and is taken in by the same earth. Draupadi describes only arcs of agonizing experience, heroic though. She dies on ice though fireborn while her husbands walk on without bothering to look back or drop a tear of fond farewell for a heroic life lived together.

Draupadi has none to mourn her. She is shed like a flower as soon as her role is acted out, dropped down as a piece of baggage on unpropitious grounds.

It is now clear why Draupadi is not an ideal of Indian womanhood. Her psychosocial alienation, if not rejection is not because of any vicious mole in her nature; she is distanced from Indian women by virtue of her heroic soul. She is too large for the ordinary aspirations of women. She is the instrument of revenge leading to destruction; she is also the least respected of women in the Mahabharata in spite of her vast soul. She has never enjoyed life as daughter, wife, mother, or queen. She is too large to be ordinary and too heroically empty to be an ideal. She shines as myth, her reality inspires fear: the fear of greatness. In the folk imagination she is otherworldly and literary. The common woman never wishes to be in her shoes.

(Extracted from The Mahabharata in T/F Traditions of India I.I.A.S Shimla, 1993)

MYTHS AND MODERN INDIAN LITERATURE THE POPULARITY OF THE PAURANIKA

BY SISIR KUMAR DAS

The treatment of mythological theme's in modern Indian languages is both a continuation of earlier traditions as well as a new and capacious feature that emerged in the 19th century. The critical vocabulary distinguishes a Pauranika from an aitihasika (historian). The ancient writers make no such distinction.

Contrary to the popular perception that there has been a steady decline in the mythological literature with the rise of modernity and apotheosization of history and science as the body of true knowledge, mythological literature in India had never been wanting in votaries. Whether it is Sanskrit or Nepali, Oriya, or Tamil, Telugu or Assamese, Marathi or Sindhi, mythological writings had always enjoyed an important position in the growth of their literature. Mythological writings undoubtedly form a part of the residual traditions in certain languages, but they also emerged as dominant streams in those which were under a strong Western influence and where the writers were critical of the traditional themes and forms.

Sanskrit represents the residual tradition rather than bold innovations in literary activities. Rukmini Haranam, Pandava Vijayam, Hariscandra Carit, Rati Vijayam, Samudra manthana, Nala Damayanti, Prahlad are the popular themes on which Sanskrit works were written. Ekalavya Guru dakshina was another work.

A continuing scholarly tradition that refused to take cognizance of the changing world and of new poetic sensibility, had its admirers, and they continued to thrive. Such works existed in several others languages irrespective of their relative richness, and claimed modernity-Bengali, Tamil, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya etc. The mythological themes used and value systems they propagated make the literature fall in some sub- groups. Marathi, Nepali, and Manipuri were exposed to western literary traditions little later than other languages. These languages had a strong traditional component in their letters, compositions and they passed through a stage dominated by strong motivations to preserve the rich indigenous literary heritage. One finds a rich crop of mythological works in these languages. The themes like Sita Swayamvara, Sita Banabas, (all in Manipuri). Abhimanyu, Lavakusa, Mahabharata themes etc. were glorified anew. Translations of *Mahabharata* were taken afresh by scholars. All India characters such as Sakuntala, Savitri, Damayanti, and Harischandra were celebrated by Nepali and Manipuri writers.

In certain languages it was the Sita theme. In some it was Savitri. No Bengal writer of merit showed interest in such themes. The all India character of the myths however is not questioned by the absence of the response of writers of a particular language. It is a question of

distribution of the themes in different languages, which is variable with factors, such as religious characters of the audience, the dominating literary ideals and the contemporary socio-political conditions. Konkani and Dogri were not very productive because of adverse social conditions. Sindhi created a space for

mythology within its Sufistic as well as Vedantic ambience.

(From A History of Indian Literature III
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THE MOST POPULAR THEMES IN INDIAN
LITERATURE IN THE LAST 200 YEARS

1. Draupadis' story, her *swayamvara*, the insult she faced.
2. Harischandra in Hindi, Gujarati, Assamese, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu and Sindhi.
3. Kichaka Vadha – Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Sanskrit and Tamil
4. Nala Damayanti Story
5. Prahlada Story
6. Sita Story

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Akademi-New Delhi 1 – 1991)

THE IMPACT OF THE MAHABHARATA ON FOLK AND TRIBAL CULTURE OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

B.R.SHARMA

It is a matter of interest and delight that many of the *Mahabharata* heroes and sages are being worshipped as village-gods in the region. In about sixteen thousand villages, some of the deities associated with the *Puranas* and the Epic can be enumerated as under.

Agastya *muni* in Kullu and Kathpaul mount in Solan district, Atri at Dattanagar in Shimla, the Pandavas as *panjpeer* in various households and at Masli (Matsyasthali) in Rohru, Nirmand and at several other places. Ashtakulnag in Kinnaur, Shimla and Chamba, Ishwar in Kinnaur, Kapil in Sirmour, Kuber in Kullu, Karkotak at Chamba. Kashyap in Sunni and Chamba, Kutti at Kuntabhyo lake above Rewalsar in Mandi, Gautam in Ghoshal village of Kullu and Lahul and at some other places, Vashishtha at Vashistha village near Manali, Vyasa at Bilaspur, Rohtang and Kullu; Parashar in Mandi and Kullu; Jamdagni as Jamlu in Kullu region, Takshak in Chamba, Narada in Kullu and outer Seraj areas, Narayan in various villages in Kinnaur and other areas. Parasurama in outer Seraj and Shimla region; Barbarik in Janchli (Mandi) and baridhar in Solan; Shukdev in Mandi area near Pandoh; Bhrigu in Karsog, Markandeya in Bilaspur and Hamirpur, Karna at Mahunag in Mandi district people relate a very interesting account of Mahu Nag, the village-god of Mahu that, he, being the incarnation of Karna, does not punish the *Kardars* (attendants) who

cheat or deceive in any way as Karna was liberal minded and took happiness of offerings and giving '*daan*' (offerings) to the people. The famous idol of Shiva and Parvati at Mumail village is said to have been installed by Pandavas in the temple. According to a popular belief Karsog area was known as EK Chakra Nagri where Pandava brothers rescued the son of a Brahman from the clutches of a demon, as per a legend mentioned in '*Adi parva*' of *Mahabharata*. The Pandavas killed Kirmir *danva*, who was later born as a village-god in one of the villages in Himachal Pradesh.

The sages of the Mahabharata time have had a great impact on the cultural traditions of the region. As already mentioned, these ascetics include Agastya (Van parva/90, 102-105) Angira (Van P.217), Ahalya, Arundhati, Asteek, Kashyap, Kapil, Kaushik, Garg, Gautam, Jamdagni, Dattatreya, Narada, parasurama, Parashar, Pulsatya, Vyas, Subha, Vaishampayan, Lomesh, Hari, Harit, Shandily, Shukdev, Shukracharya, Shrigvan-vridhkanya, Shrivig-Shaunik, Shonak, Shayukh, Satyakam, Jabal, Satyavan-Savitri, Sanak-Sanandan-Sanatan-Sanat Kumar, Soot Lomharshan, Aurav etc. These and some other characters of the *Mahabharata* are the village gods in the *Janapadas* of the state, Barbarik, who was made to see the *Mahabharata* battle from a high pole, is said to have come in the form of Kamru Nag in Mandi district, Karna is called

Mahu Nag and his temple is in Karsog tehsil of Mandi district. The *jal devta* of Sarpara in Shimla has nine sons who are the village deities of various villages in Shimla, Mandi and Kullu districts. This deity is typically interested in traditional musical notes and his oracle asks for such tunes from his musicians on auspicious occasions. The sons of the *Devta* are *Nagas* and as, as such, he himself is a water-god. In the Epic, the details of the Vanshavalis of various kings and sages are given. Out of the progeny of the *Brahmrishis*, Marichi, Atri, Angira, Pulastya, Kadmu, Indra Varun, Vivasvan, Vishnu, Bali, Banasur, Vritra, Vasuki, Takshak, Narad, Tumburu (son of Pradha, the *Apsara*); *Ekadash Rudra* including *Ishwar* (son of Sthanu), *Rakshasas*, *Vanar*, *Kinnar* and *Yakshas* (sons of *Maharishi* Pulastya), Lakshmi (the daughter of Daksh Prajapati), Kartikeya (son of Anala), Vishwakarma (son of Prabhavas), Ashwanikumar (experts of medicine who belong to Guhyaka community), Bhrigu, Shukracharya (grandson of Bhrigu), Chyavan (son of Bhrigu), Jamdagni (son of Richik and grand son of Anurav), Parasurama (son of Jamdagni), various *Nagas* of *Nagloka* as mentioned in Udyog Parva, Adhyay 103 are the deities in the area.

The Pandavas are the most upright and powerful characters in the folkmind of the tribal and non-tribal people. They, according to the legends, visited various regions of this state twice. During the first visit, they came across Hidimb and his sister Hidimba who later married Bhimsen. It is believed that during their first visit they traversed the Arki area of Solan district and passed through Panjgain village or Danvin area of Bilaspur reaching Pandoh in Mandi while

going of Kullu-Manali. According to a popular belief, the Pandavas entered the area ruled by demon Hidimb near Mandi and had an encounter with him somewhere near Rohtang pass. The Hidimba temple at Dhungari near Manali might have been constructed in the memory of the event. Tandi is another name of Hidimb and his area extended beyond Rohtang pass. Tandi is the conjunction of Chandra and Bhaga rivers and it is said that at the time of *Swargarohan* (ascending to heaven) Draupadi was put to flames here after her death. It is curious to note that a famous temple of Hidimba is also situated in Jahlma village of Lahul but we do not have any folkloristic evidence to show that she pushed the Pandavas back as is the case in Kinnaur region where folk ballads are a testimony to the belief that Hidimba tried to block the entry of the Pandavas into Kinnaur by putting iron rods on the top of mountain near Sungra village and hurling big boulders on them. Among the people of Sungra village, where the spirit of Banasura, the father of the Maheshura gods of the area is believed to big boulder lying outside the village was thrown by Bhim from the mountain top with an intention to kill Hidimba. According to their belief, the grass grown on the upper portion of the boulder is found only on high mountain ranges and nowhere else in the surrounding areas such type of grass is traceable.

There are numerous references to the Pandvas in Kinnaur folklore. In a folksong relating to the creation of the mankind, the Pandavas have been mentioned to have appeared along with other gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon.

According to another folksong in the dialect of Harijans, the Pandavas lived on the hilltops and the sixty Kauravas had their abode down below the mountain. They nourished enmity amongst themselves. The Kauravas made a house of cow-dung on the way and when the Pandavas wanted to come down, they had to enter it. There were no windows in the house. The Pandavas tactfully made a tunnel and escaped through it. The cat and the bitch of the Kauravas started searching for the dead

bodies of the Pandavas after the cowdung house was put to fire but the Pandavas had already left the place through the tunnel. The episode is based on the *Mahabharata* and has been localized by the people who only know about the cowdung which is burnt for want of wood and other objects.

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Tribal and Folk tradition of India,
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TWO EPICS AND ONE *PURANA*

DR.K.V.N.RAGHAVAN
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Bharat, the land of supreme culture, light and knowledge stands as the embodiment of eternal values since unknown time. *Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Kavyas* etc., are the treasures of this land. They are the eternal scriptures spreading the message of '*Sanatana Dharma*' which is everything for India. This universal value is echoed and re-echoed in each and every Philosophical work, Shastra, literary work and art form. Sri Aurobindo, the great patriot, poet and *yogi* clearly declared "*Sanatana Dharma* has for us is Nationalism". For Indians there is no Religion or Nationalism beyond '*Sanatana Dharma*'. It is the core principle ruling the Religion and the Nationalism. It is also the bedrock of the Indian culture.

This great culture has gifted two Epics to humanity. One is '*The Ramayana*' and the other is '*The Mahabharata*'. The *Ramayana* belongs to the period of '*Treta Yuga*' and the *Mahabharata* to the period of '*Dwapara Yuga*'. But their relevance and application are universal. As such, they belong to the entire human race and not confined to any one race or nation or period. Both the stories are related to universal man who is struggling to evolve from his limited consciousness. It reveals the journey of man from limited individual consciousness to Universal Consciousness. Further, the cosmic dance is mythified in the epics as a war between divine and *asuric* forces. At the human level, it is a war between *dharmic* and *adharmic* forces. The Epics expound the

path of *Dharma* and its influence on humanity. Hundreds of stories narrated in the two Epics illuminate the eternal values for the safe and secured journey of human race. Hence they are eternal.

The Indian tradition has prescribed a four fold path to experience life fully and finally to reach the ultimate reality. They are called '*Chaturvidha Purusharthas*'. Here *Purushartha* means things to be attained. They are *Dharma, Artha, Kama*, and *Moksha*. Here the first *Purushartha* is *Dharma* and the last is *Moksha*. But *Dharma* is not the things to be achieved. It is the binding principle of *Artha* and *Kama* towards *Moksha*. *Artha* and *Kama* are the *Purusharthas* to be achieved keeping in mind the ultimate *Purushartha* – *Moksha*. Both *Artha* and *Kama* belong to the visible and mundane world. The ultimate *Purushartha, Moksha* is invisible. The principle of *Dharma* bridges the visible and the invisible.

Artha means money or power and *kama* means sensual pleasures (procreative instinct) generally referred to-as desires. The *Ramayana* represents the *Kama Purushartha* and the *Mahabharata* represents the *Artha Purushartha*. The human consciousness is engulfed in *Artha* and *Kama* only. That is why the Epics the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* deal with these two predominant aspects of human consciousness. The psychologists contend that the *Ramayana* is based on the

pleasure principle (*Kama*) and the *Mahabharata* on power principle (*Artha*).

The Indian tradition and culture have not forbidden the individual from experiencing the mundane and sensual pleasures. But they insist that should be bound by the principle of *Dharma* with the sole aim of liberation – *Moksha*. In this process man's consciousness grows from the earthly plane to a universal plane. If one forgets and eliminates the sole purpose of life (*Moksha*) leading a worldly life, exclusively for the purpose of *Artha* and *Kama*, one lands in competition, conflict, chaos and destruction. The same gets reflected in society. The modern man is experiencing, *Artha* and *Kama* ignoring *Moksha* and the path of *Dharma*. He is getting caught in the web of sorrow and catastrophe.

In the *Ramayana*, Rama is praised 'Ramo Vighrahan Dharmah:'. Rama stood as the embodiment of *Dharma*. Rama took the responsibility of establishing *Dharma* not only in the domain of 'Asuras' (Lanka) but also in the domain of *Vanaras*. When Rama and Lakshmana were in search of Sita, they met Sugriva the brother of Vali. Sugriva had lost his wife as well as his kingdom and was even thrown out from Kishkindha. Rama and Sugriva were in similar plight. Rama enraged by the *adharmic* act of Vali and killed him to establish *Dharma* in the kingdom of 'Vanaras'.

Surpanakha the sister of Ravana was attracted by the fascinating personality of Rama. She expressed her desire for him, but Rama refused to accept her. When she tried to cross the line of *Dharma*, she was punished. Here Surpanakha is a symbol of *Adharmic Kama* like Vali and Ravana. She

aspired for pleasure for the sake of pleasure. Rama aspired for pleasure within the frame of *Dharma* and he elucidated the path of *Dharma* and declared "I will not tolerate even the shadow of *adharma* on this earth".

Ravana a learned person, acquired enormous powers by his *tapas*. He developed an animosity against great *rishis* and *Devas* without reason. He conquered the *Devas*, the *Dikpalakas* and imprisoned them. He did not allow the cosmic forces to perform their duties and controlled the heavenly world. He exhibited his strength and wealth before Sita in order to lure her. He sought pleasure by *adharmic* means. Due to his *adharmic* action he lost everything in his life, finally his life too.

After the war, Rama asked Sita to prove her chastity not in suspicion of her but to prove the purity of Sita to the world. Being the king of 'Ikshvakuvasa' he shouldered the responsibility of guard the *Raja dharma* and be an ideal to the subjects. Even at the time of sending Sita to the forest basing his charge on the casual utterance of a common man, he sacrificed his personal pleasures his principles to protect *Dharma*. Here the concept is, if a king compromises in protecting *Dharma* for the sake of personal pleasures, people will only follow him.

The Epic "The *Mahabharata*" deals with power conflict. *Pandavas* and *Kauravas* fought for the throne of Hastinapura. *Pandavas* sought for their legitimate share in the kingdom not for enjoining power but to establish and protect *dharma*. It is quite different in the case of *Kauravas*. If *Pandavas* had aspired for power for the sake of power and pleasure, they would

have played all cheap tricks as Kauravas did. They suffered a lot in the hands of Kauravas. Here the conflict is between *Dharmic* and *Adharmic* forces. Pandavas represent the *Dharmic* forces and Kauravas represent the *Adharmic* forces. That is why Lord Krishna stood on the side of Pandavas. God reveals his presence in the place where *Dharma* exists. In spite of facing humiliation at the hands of Kauravas, Pandavas waited patiently and at least asked for only five villages. Duryodhana, the symbol of lust for power refused to accede to the request of Pandavas. At last a war became unavoidable. In spite of knowing in advance the possible results of the war, Krishna did not interrupt the flow of events. For Krishna, the purpose of war is to establish *Dharma*. “Waging war is an *Arya Dharma*”. Said Sadguru Sri Sivanandha Murthy. In the *Bhagavadgita* Sri Krishna directed Arjuna to take *astra* and wage war to protect *Dharma*. He asked Arjuna to shed all his ‘passiveness’ and achieve ‘the eternal oughtness’ *Dharma*. Here we should remind ourselves that Non-violence is not the universal *Mantra*, while protecting *Dharma* and the *Nation*. This is one of the clear messages of Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavadgita*. Apart from *Gita* innumerable *Dharmic* principles are glorified in the noble and sacred lives of great Rishis in the *Mahabharata*. *Varna* and *asrama Dharmas* have been elucidated to remind man about his responsibilities towards the family, the society and the Nation. That is why the *Mahabharata* is revealed as the ‘*Panchamaveda*’ (Fifth *Veda*). It guides the humanity to fulfill its obligations in the mundane world and shows the way to the eternal truth. After the great war of the *Mahabharata*, Pandavas occupied the throne of Hastinapura and protected *Dharma*. They did not stick on

to the throne. They voluntarily retired from the mundane life and walked in search of Truth. Their journey is known as “*Mahaprasthanam*” an eternal journey. At last *Dharma Raja* alone could reach the goal. It is the path defined in the Indian scriptures to be followed by each and every human being on this earth. This is the path of *Dharma*. “One should live for *Dharma*. Leading *Dharmic* life is a reward in itself. No *Aryan* would ever seek a reward for upholding *Dharma*. It is only through *Dharma* that one can work out one’s life and become eligible for spirituality. If you skip this vital step, you will trip. After all if there was no *Dharma*, what is there to live for?” asked – Sadguru Sri Sivananda Murthy.

After classifying the *Vedas* and also after completion of the *Mahabharata* Vedavyasa Maharshi felt some discontent and found that some vitality is missing in life. He experienced unrest in. At that time *Narada Maharshi* appeared before Vedavyasa and explained the glory of ‘*Harinama*’ and ‘*Bhakti*’ which was missing in his earlier works and advised him to write ‘*Mahabhagavatam*’ to lead to mankind towards peace and *Moksha*. Vedavyasa wrote *Bhagavatam* and asked *Sukamaharshi* to read it.

In the *Bhagavatam* the king *Parikshit* was cursed by the sage ‘*sringi*’ the son of Sage *Sameeka* due to unmindful act of *Parikshit*. King *Parikshit* realized his mistake and agreed to undergo the punishment of embracing death on the seventh day. By the grace of Divine, ‘*Sukamaharshi*’ came to *Parikshit*. The king pleaded with him to show the way to ‘*Mukthi*’ within seven days. *Sukamaharshi* elucidated ‘The *Mahabhagavatam*’ to *Parikshit* to help him attain *Moksha*. Here *Parikshit* is symbol for ‘*Mumukshu*’ who

sought *Moksha* alone. He heard ‘*Mahabhagavatam*’ from ‘*Sukamarshi*’. Hence our tradition says that seekers of *Moksha* should read *Bhagavatam*. Here the king Parikshit is compelled to face death but as he heard *Bhagavatam* and chanted *Harinama*, he conquered death.

Reading or listening to *Bhagavatam* leads man towards *Moksha* or liberation which is the ultimate *Purushartha* to be sought uncompromisingly by the individual. Hence the *Mahabhagavatam* represents the last *Purushartha* that is *Moksha*. The stories narrated in it inculcate and imbibe the path of *Bhakti* in the minds of devotees. It is the collection of lives of, *Devotees*, *Maharshis*, *Sadhakas*, *Yogis*, *Avadhutas* and is also related to incarnation of God and evolution of creation etc., In the *Maha Bhagavatam* different paths to know the divine are secretly hidden. It is a perennial flow of *Bhakti*, that is why the *Bhagavatam* is called ‘*Nigama Tharorgalitham*’ (The fruit which has fallen from the tree of Vedas). In each and every *Skanda* (Canto) and also in each and every story the Supreme auspicious qualities of (*Kalyana Gunas*) *Srimannarayana* are luminously glorified. *Bhakti*, *Saranagati*, *Tapas*, *Dana*, *Yagna* etc., are revealed as the Supreme paths to reach God. In *Bhagavatam* the story of ‘*Gajendra Moksham*’ reveals the paths of *Saranagati*. The story of *Dhruva* is a typical one. He was insulted by his step-mother. *Dhruva* was wounded and did intense *tapas* and had the vision of *Srimannarayana*. The legends of *Prahlada*/*Ambarisha* represent the path of *Bhakti*. The story of *Bali*

represents the path of *tyaga*. Like that most of the popular and important stories bring to light the different paths to reach liberation. Particularly in “*Dasamaskanda*”, the story of *Srikrishna* is depicted and is continued to *Ekadasaskanda*. The *Gopis* are not ordinary human beings. They are the symbols of the evolved beings who experienced the passion for God and sought the divine presence and divine alone. *Andal*, *Meera*, *Alwars* *Nayanmars*, and other *Bhaktas*, poets, and artists sought God alone and expanded the path of *Bhakti*.

“A profound stress of thought on life, a large and vital view of religion and society, a certain strain of philosophic idea runs through these poems and the whole ancient culture of India is embedded in them with a great force of intellectual conception and living presentation. Thus framed, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* whether in the original Sanskrit or rewritten in the regional tongues brought to the masses by *kathakars*, rhapsodists, reciters, and exegetes – became and remained one of the chief instruments of popular education and culture, moulded the thought, character aesthetic and religious mind of the people and gave even to the illiterate, some sufficient tincture of Philosophy, ethics, Social and Political ideas, aesthetic emotion, poetry, fiction and romance “In these words, *Sri Aurobindo* summarized the essence of the two epics and their influence on humanity.

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