

# **Did Hanumaana really set Laṅkaa on fire?**

From the footnotes (Pages 568-574)  
of

**Aarya Saṅgeeta Raamaayaṇa**

by

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The episode of Shree Hanumaana setting the entire city of Laṅkaa on fire has been described differently by different authors of various Raamaayaṇas. Some of them are:

1. A lot of cotton was wrapped around Shree Hanumaana's tail. This cotton was then soaked in oil and set on fire. After this Shree Hanumaana was released from custody and he roamed around and set the whole city of Laṅkaa on fire.
2. An artificial tail was attached to Shree Hanumaana and then it was set on fire.
3. A lot of cotton was collected and set on fire. The purpose was to throw Shree Hanumaana in this fire; but, he instead threw some of the Raavaṇa's soldiers in the fire. When these soldiers escaped the fire, their clothes were burning which resulted in fire at other places as well.
4. In order to insult Shree Hanumaana, he was being taken around in the streets of Laṅkaa. He somehow managed to break the shackles and escaped. A torch bearer chased Shree Hanumaana. Shree Hanumaana snatched the ignited torch from him and started beating him. In this process some of the fire splinters fell on the nearby building and it was set on fire. This fire then spread through out the city of Laṅkaa.

etc. etc.

However, I have a very hard time believing that Shree Hanumaana set the city of Laṅkaa ablaze in any of these manner. The biggest objection in this matter is that Shree Hanumaana was a scholar and very well aware of the righteous conduct. It is hard to think that someone so scholarly would commit the sin of killing thousands of innocent residents of Laṅkaa. It was their king Raavaṇa who had committed a grave mistake. The residents of Laṅkaa had almost no control over the actions of their king. It is also hard to conceive that the entire city of Laṅkaa was burnt to ashes and only Vibheṣhaṇa's home remained intact. Also the fact, that the entire city of Laṅkaa was burning and echoing with the cries of women and children; and the security in-charge Prahasta tells Raavaṇa that he was sleeping and was completely unaware of the situation, cannot be reconciled.

All of the above are mere work of fiction and do not represent the facts. Let's examine each of them individually.

1. It is well established that Shree Hanumaana was a scholar and righteous human. He was not a monkey and hence had no tail which is said to have been set on fire.
2. An artificial tail was attached to Shree Hanumaana and was set on fire. Then he was released. This is unbelievable that someone with even slight intelligence would hand over a weapon of destruction to an enemy and then set the enemy free to roam around wherever he wants to go.
3. To set a person on fire a couple of liters of oil is sufficient. We hear those horror stories where someone's clothes were set on fire by accident by a lamp and that person sustained severe injuries and sometimes succumbed to the injuries. Why would they need several tons of cotton and barrels of oil for just setting Shree Hanumaana's tail on fire? Also this whole act is so despicable and unbecoming of a scholar like Raavaṇa. It is granted that Raavaṇa had issues related to ego and desire, but that does not imply that he was cruel and stonehearted. He had a lot of qualities as well, which should not be ignored. How could Raavaṇa jeopardize his treaties with other kingdoms by barbarically punishing an emissary?
4. The best time to humiliate someone by parading him on the streets is during the day, when everyone can look and jeer at him. Parading someone during the darkness of night when most of citizens are sleeping does not make sense. Darkness of night is best for deeds where one does not want to be seen, like thievery. It is unclear as to why Raavaṇa would decide that best time to humiliate Shree Hanumaana would be at night. If we closely look at the incident then we conclude that Shree Hanumaana was captured close to the dawn. Why were they waiting throughout the day, until night to punish him? Even if someone reasons that Shree Hanumaana was actually captured in the evening, did Raavaṇa not have prisons where he could have locked Shree Hanumaana up for the night? And when Shree Hanumaana somehow sets himself free, of all the people, a torch bearer ran after him! How ludicrous!

Actually, setting the whole city on fire is just a metaphor used to describe Raavaṇa's insult. Words like fire or wounds can be used metaphorically to describe emotions and mental state like jealousy, insult etc.

Raavaṇa's ego was reduced to ashes by Shree Hanumaana's fearless speech, in which he shamed Raavaṇa. And when Shree Hanumaana escaped from his captivity, it added insult to the injury. In author's opinion, the incident of Raavaṇa's ego being reduced to ashes was metaphorically described as city of Laṅkaa being set on fire and reduced to ashes.