

Storytelling Ramayana through Philately



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India 1947 photogravure print stamp with Jai Hind written in **Hindi**. Ramayana was written in **Sanskrit** which influenced many languages like Hindi, and both are written in the same script called Devanagari.

Introduction: Ramayana, one of the four largest epics of the world (other three being the Mahabharata, Iliad, and Odyssey), is also arguably the oldest continuous tradition of storytelling in the world. This Hindu epic teaches on the goals of human life. It has a profound impact on the culture, family relations, and moral values in India and many other countries, manifesting itself in literature, art, architecture, painting, dance, drama, and festivals. Ramayana was introduced to the West in 1843 in Italian by Gaspare Gorresio.

The term Ramayana literally means the march (ayana) of Rama (an avatar of the Hindu God Vishnu) in search of human values. The epic poem is written in Sanskrit and is composed of rhyming couplets called Slokas, teaching the concept of Dharma (moral). According to Hinduism, Dharma is the law that maintains the regulatory order of the universe, helping to achieve social harmony and human happiness.

According to Hindu mythology, the historic period or Yuga in which Rama lived is known a Treta Yuga, when Dharma (moral) of people are believed to be of high order. In subsequent periods, i.e., Dwapar Yuga when the story of Mahabharata took place and the present Kali yuga in which we live now, morality is believed to be declining. In this context, storytelling Ramayana comes as a relief by teaching moral and spiritual values.

Ramayana tells the story of Rama, the King of Ayodhya (India) whose wife Sita is abducted by Ravana, the ten-headed demon king of Lanka (Sri Lanka). Being the protagonists of the tale and the embodiment of morality, Rama portrays ideal characters like the ideal son, ideal father, the ideal brother, and the ideal king, standing as a pillar of righteousness. Rama rescues Sita with help from allies such as his younger brother Lakshmana and monkey king Hanuman.

After defeating Ravana, Rama returned to his kingdom Ayodhya. To celebrate Rama's return, the residents of Ayodhya lighted the city with millions of earthen lamps called Deep. Since then, this day is celebrated as Deepawali (also known as Diwali, Dussehra, Festival of Lights, Dashain, Navratri, and Vijaya Dashami), which translates into Row of Lamps symbolizing triumph of knowledge (moral values of Rama) over ignorance (ego of Ravana). Dussehra is derived from Sanskrit Dasha-hara, literally meaning removal of ten, referring to the defeat of the ten-headed Ravana. Its believed that defeating the ten-headed Ravana signify defeating the ten human egos - attachment, passion, pride, anger, greed, infatuation, lust, hatred, jealousy, and selfishness.

Many cultures have adapted Ramayana, resulting in many epics, notably the Ramavataram in Tamil, Dasaratha Jataka in Buddhism, Kavyadarsa in Burma, Yama Zatdaw in Myanmar, Reamker in

Cambodia, Kakawin Ramayana and Ramakavaca in Indonesia, Maharadia Lawana and Darangen in Philippines, Ramakien in Thailand, Malaysia (Hikayat Seri Rama), Mappilapattu (also known as Mappila Ramayana) in Kerala, and also Tibetan (Dunhuang manuscripts), Japanese (Hobutsushu, Sambo-Ekotoba), Russia (Kalmyk region), Persian (Dara-Sikoh translation), Chinese (Jataka stories), and Sri Lanka (Janakiharan) versions of the tale.

There are many festivals associated with characters and events of the Ramayana, such as Deepavali, Ramnavami, Dhantera, Ramleela, and Holi. These festivals are known by different names in different places, and are national holidays in many countries such as India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago, Surinam, Singapore, Fiji, and in south-east asia.

Purpose: This thematic exhibit via philatelic elements aims to preserve the oldest continuous tradition of storytelling in the world, and impart group learning skills, along with the moral, spiritual, and cultural dimensions of the epic Ramayana.

Scope: This exhibit traces stories on Ramayana via philatelic elements issued worldwide.

Rarity: Certain elements which are believed to be rare are shown in red border.

Conclusion: Ramayana has evolved from its origin through its adaptations by different cultures, and its storytelling is known of since ancient times. The story of Ramayana has been used as a theme in storytelling through a mix of oral rendition, paintings with scrolls, songs, dance, masks, and puppets. Although storytelling Ramayana has for ages served as an influential method to teach moral values, it has witnessed a decline in participation since the advent of the digital age. Keeping in view its universality to adapt across ages, linguistics, and cultures, storytelling Ramayana through philately is aimed at preserving the tradition of storytelling, along with the moral, spiritual, and cultural dimensions of Ramayana.

Total number of countries represented through stamps	20
Total number of continents represented through stamps	6

Exhibit Plan

1. History of Ramayana
2. Main characters in Ramayana
3. Festivals related to Ramayana
4. Art and Architectures related to Ramayana
5. Paintings related to Ramayana
6. Cities named after Ramayana characters
7. Technologies related to Ramayana
8. Emblems, flags, and coat-of-arms based on Ramayana characters

1. History of Ramayana



(Left) India 1970. Sage **Valmiki**, the author of Ramayana



(Right) Mauritius 1976, 2nd World Hindi Convention, S.G. 509. Ramayana was written in **Sanskrit** which influenced many languages like Hindi. Both are written in Devanagari script.



(Left) Cambodia 1961. **Krishna**, the eighth incarnation of Hindu god **Vishnu**. Rama is believed to be an avatar of Vishnu

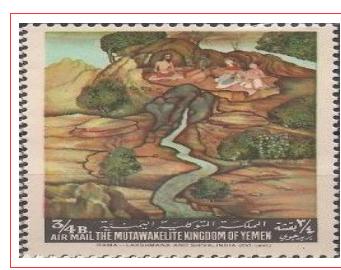


(Right) French India 1948 depicting Vishnu.

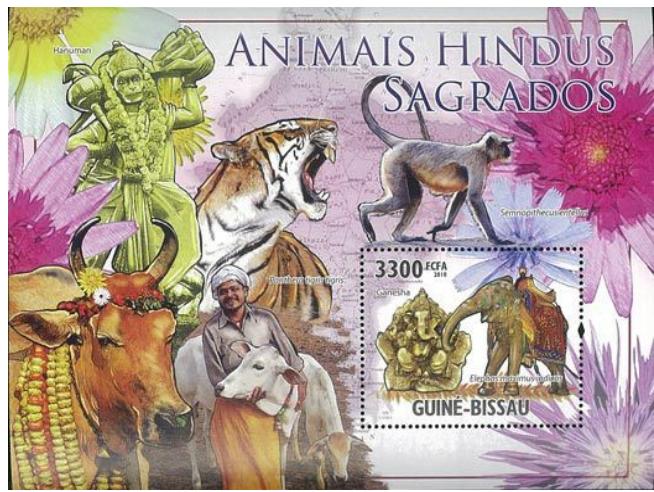
2. Main characters in Ramayana



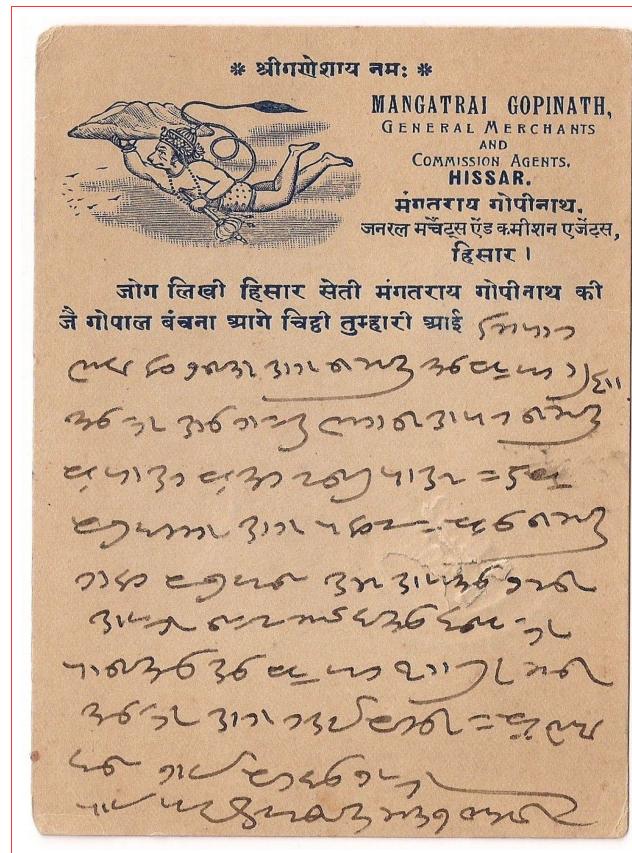
(Left) Indonesia 1971 photogravure print. **Rama** was the king of Ayodhya and **Sita** was his wife. **Ravana** was the king of Lanka who wanted to destroy Rama by capturing Sita. Ravana took the aid of the demon Maricha who assumed the form of a **golden deer** to attract Sita. Sita got attracted and asked Rama to go behind it, paving the way for Ravana to abduct her. This depicts the moral of the futility of getting swayed by dubious attractions.



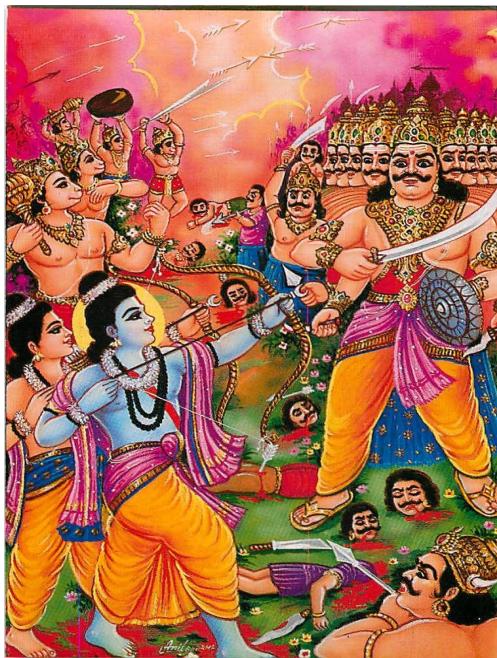
(Right) Yemen 1967 (Catalogue Michel: 355A-364A) Mughal painting depicting **Rama**, **Lakshmana**, and **Shiva**.



Guinea Bissau 2010. **Hanuman** is a monkey belonging to the kingdom of Kishkindha (India), and a disciple of Rama. In the ensuing battle between Rama and Ravana, **Lakshmana** who was the younger brother of Rama got injured, and to revive him Rama sent Hanuman to fetch a life-restoring herb Sanjivani from Dronagiri mountain in the Himalayas. Hanuman, unable to identify which herb it is, lifts the entire mountain and brings it to Rama.



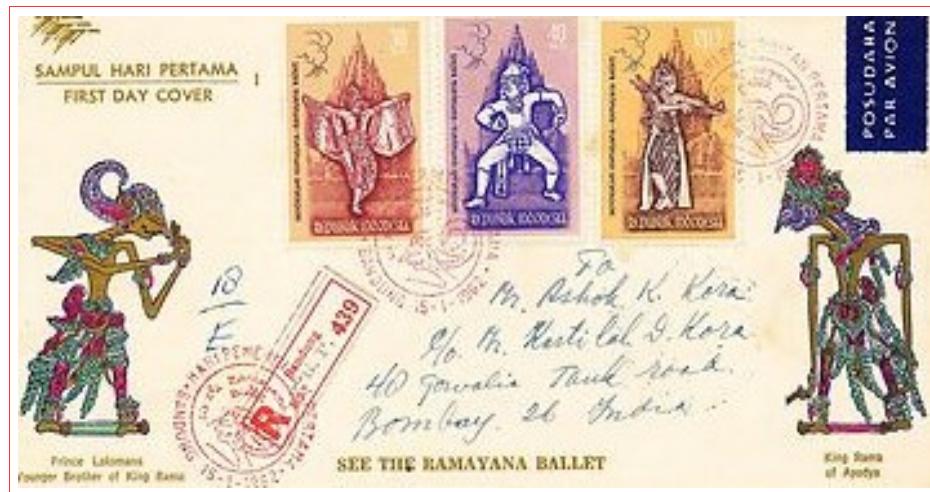
India 1932. A postcard picture showing Hanuman carrying the **Dronagiri mountain**



(Left) Rama with Lakshmana and monkey army fight demon king Ravana. Ravana is the ten-headed demon king of Lanka. It is believed that the **ten heads symbolize** ten human egos - attachment, passion, pride, anger, greed, infatuation, lust, hatred, jealousy, and selfishness. It is also argued that the ten heads represents his knowledge of the six shastras and the four Vedas.



(Right) India 1974. Ten-headed demon king Ravana mask



Indonesia 1962 **photogravure** print. Ramayana **puppets** and **ballet**. The cover portrays among others, Lakshmana (Left) and Rama (Right). Lakshmana was the younger brother of Rama who chose to go into exile with him. He spends his time protecting Sita and Rama during which he fought the demoness sister of Ravana called Surpanakha. On being deceived by demon **Maricha** into believing that Rama was in trouble, Lakshmana left Sita alone to rescue Rama when Ravana

abducted her.



Indonesia 1962 photogravure print. Ramayana puppets and ballet. **Kumbhakarna** was the brother of Ravana. The character of Kumbhakarna is a complex one, having a mix of virtue and vice. When he realized the mistakes and wrongdoings of Ravana, he tried to persuade him. After Kumbhakarna was defeated by Rama, he annihilated in Rama and got salvation. The battle between Kumbhakarna and Rama is prominently featured in the Balinese **Kecak** dance.

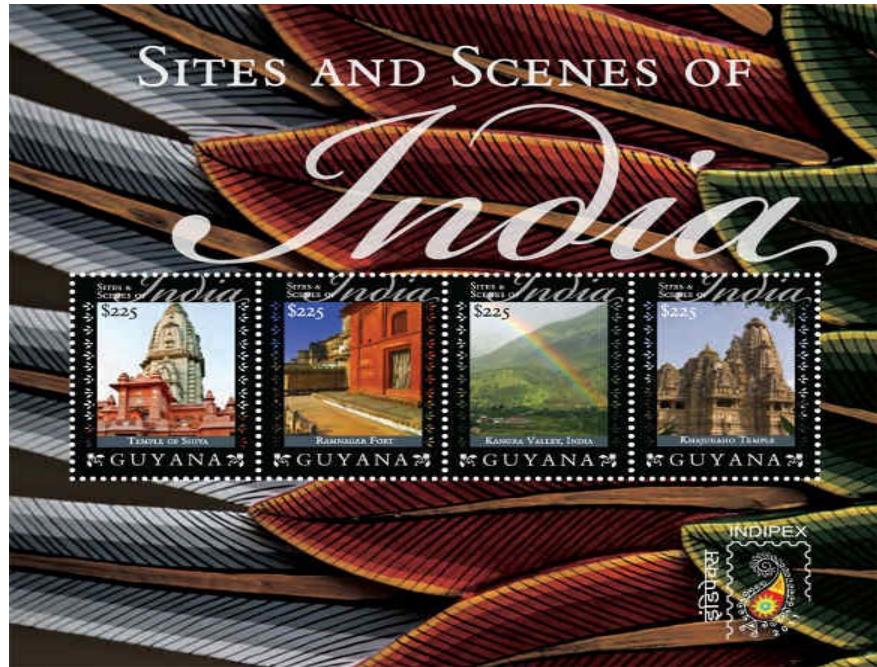
3. Festivals related to Ramayana



(Left) Nepal 1967. **Ram Navami** is a festival celebrating the birth of Rama to King Dasharatha and Queen Kausalya of Ayodhya.



(Right) Nepal 1977. **Dhanvantari**, an Avatar of god Vishnu, is believed to be the god of **Ayurvedic** medicine, who was the physician of the gods (Devas) according to the Vedas and Puranas. He is attributed to discover many herbal based cures and was credited with the discovery of the antiseptic properties of turmeric and the preservative properties of salt. The practitioners of Ayurveda celebrates his birthday on **Dhanteras**, which is the first day of Diwali.



Guyana 2011. Ramnagar fort (India) (second from left) where dramatic enactments of the story of Ramayana known as **Ramleela** takes place every year, burning the effigy of the ten-headed Ravana. Its believed that vanquishing the ten heads of Ravana signify vanquishing ten egos - attachment, passion, pride, anger, greed, infatuation, lust, hatred, jealousy, and selfishness. UNESCO proclaimed the tradition of Ramlila a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2005.



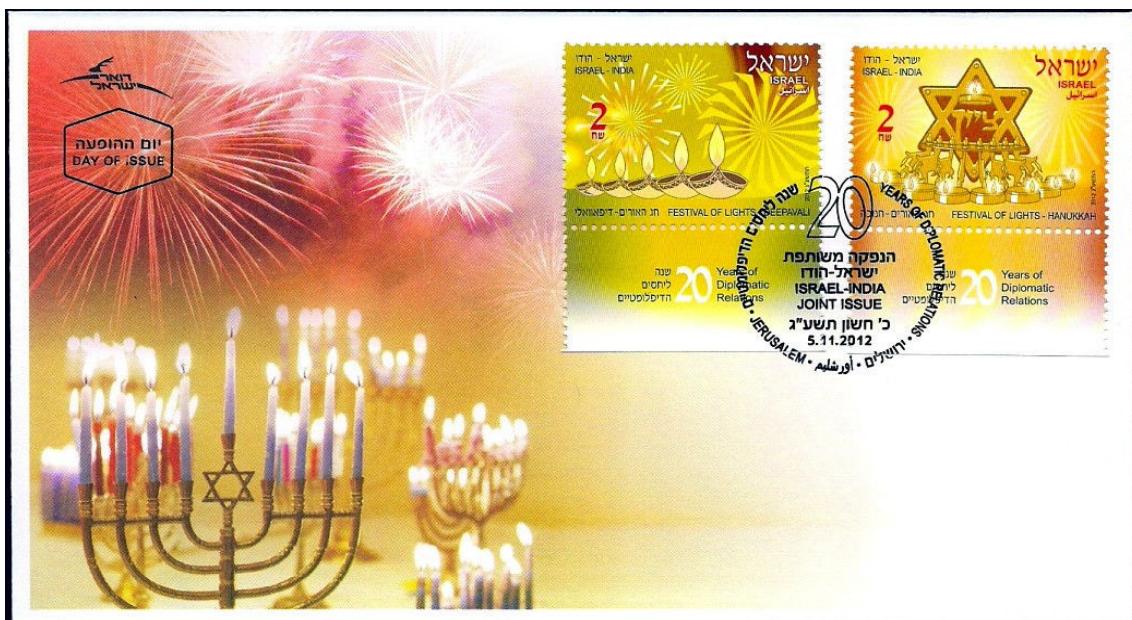
India 2008. The top two stamps depict the **Dussehra** festivities in Kolkata & Mysore, whereas the third stamp depicts illuminations on **Deepavali**



Guyana 1976. Malaysia 2006. Deepavali.



Trinidad and Tobago 2010, Srilanka 2003, Canada 2011, Fiji 1973, Singapore 2002. Deepavali



Israel 2012. **Hanukkah** is an eight day Jewish festival commemorating the re-dedication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem in the 2nd century BC. Hanukkah, like Deepavali, celebrates the triumph of good over evil and the victory of justice over injustice.



Guyana 1969. The word **Holi** originated from demoness Holika, the sister of a tyrannical King Hiranyakaship, whose son Prahlada was a devotee of Vishnu. Hiranyakashipu had earned a boon that made him virtually indestructible, which made him arrogant and demanded that everyone worship only him. But his son Prahlada remained devoted to Vishnu. Infuriated, he tricked Prahlada into sitting on a pyre with his sister Holika, when Holika burned and Prahlada survived, and Vishnu appeared and killed Hiranyakashipu. The burning of demoness Holika and the salvation of Prahlada is celebrated as the festival Holi and Phugwah. It is celebrated with folk singing and dancing incorporating the use of colour dye called Abir welcoming spring.

4. Art and Architectures related to Ramayana



(Left) Thailand 2005. Angkor Wat temple is the largest religious monument in the world, where scenes from the Reamker (Cambodian version of Ramayana) are carved into the walls. UNESCO has set up a wide-ranging programme to safeguard this symbolic site and its surroundings. Thai **dramatic** retelling of the Ramayana in its popular national epic **Ramakien**. Sculptures of Ramakien are seen in Angkor Wat, an **UNESCO** world heritage site.



(Right) France Indo-China 1941 depicting the Angkor Wat temple.



Thailand 2013 **Khon Masks** of 8 Hindu Gods



Laos 1997. Ramayana **ballet** masks used in Laos theatres.



(Left) Indonesia 1962. Ballets and **puppet** shows based on Ramayana are popular in Indonesia. UNESCO designated Wayang Kulit, a shadow puppet theatre based on the story of Ramayana, as a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2003.

(Right) Laos 1969. Laotian version of Ramayana is known as **Palak Palang** and is a favourite theme for ballet dancers.



India 2002. Visual cultures of the Ramayana emerged in the form of classical sanskrit plays and **dance drama** forms such as **Kathakali**. The Ramayana is also presented in Kathakali Dance Drama enacting Ravanodbhava, Ravana Vijaya, Bali Vijaya, Sita Swayamvara, Bali Vadha, Torana Yudha, Pabbhisheka, and Lavanasa Vadha.

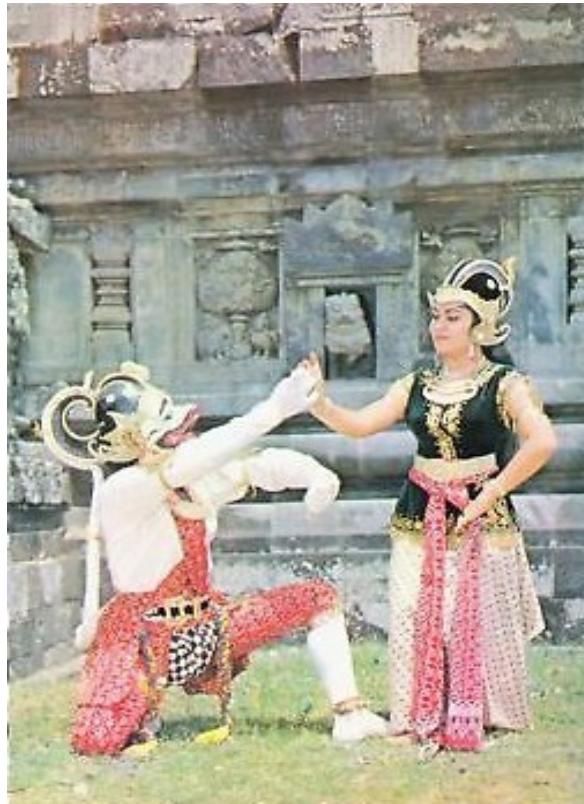


(Left) Cambodia 1964 Tokyo Summer Olympics, depicting monkey king Hanuman. The Cambodian version of Ramayana is known as the Reamker, which is used in paintings. Cambodia is also famous for the **Sbek Thom Khmer shadow theatre** based on Reamker, the Khmer version of the Ramayana featuring puppets, which is proclaimed as a masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2005.

(Right) Thailand 2009 Lenticular **3D Motion Stamps**. **Hun Lakorn Lek** is a traditional Thai puppetry developed on the model of the Ramayana.



Candi **Prambanan** or Candi Rara Jonggrang is the largest Hindu temple site in Indonesia, dedicated to the Trimurti - the Creator (Brahma), the Preserver (Vishnu) and the Destroyer (Shiva). The temple is decorated with panels of narrative bas-reliefs telling the story of Ramayana. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Classical Javanese **dance Wayang Orang** depicting themes from Ramayana with Hanoman and Shinta (Sita) in the backdrop of Candi Prambanan temple, which is the largest Hindu temple site in Indonesia

5. Paintings related to Ramayana



(Left) India 2000. **Madhubani painting** depicting duel of Bali and Sugriv. Mithila is the kingdom of King Janaka, the father of Sita. The origin of Madhubani-Mithila genre of painting goes back to the the mythology that Janaka commissioned painters to paint the city for the wedding of Sita.

(Center) Laos 1971 depicting Hanuman & Nang Matsa found in Laotian mythology.

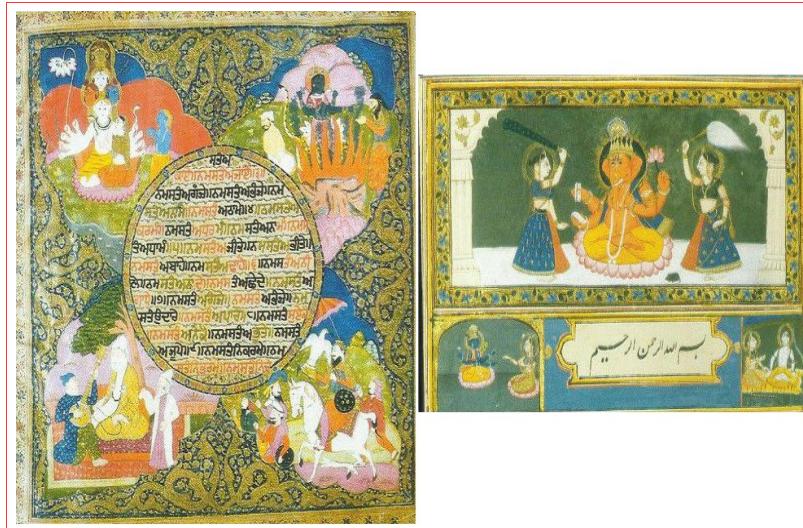
(Right) India Old Postcard depicting Rama kills Ravana.



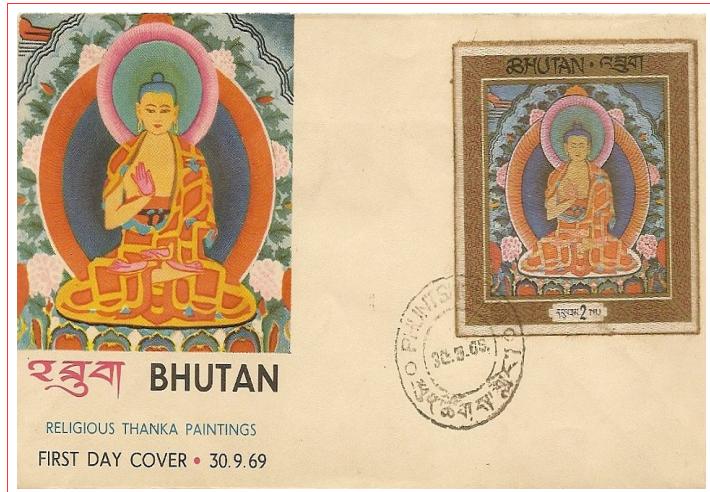
(Left) India postcard. Traditional **hand painting** of Hanuman on a post card. Ramayana has been a popular theme in Indian paintings since ancient time. It is seen in paintings such as **Madhubani, Warli, Thanka, Pattachitra**, to name a few. Patachitra, whose style of painting is similar to the cave paintings of Mohenjodaro, Harappa and Ajanta, has been mentioned in ancient Indian literatures such as Puranas.



(Right Top) Ceylon 1938-1952 Scott 281A61 10c Blue & Black **Sigiriya** (Lion Rock). Sigiriya is believed to be one of the abode of Ravana where Sita was held in captivity. (Right Bottom) Ceylon 1958 SG 455 Sigiriya Fresco 25 Cents Violet Blue Blue and Brown Orange White Granite Perforated photogravure printing.



India National Museum postcards on Persian Ramayana.



(Left) Bhutan 1969. **Thangka painting** on silk with embroidery is used to depict Buddha, an avatar of **Vishnu**, serving as a teaching tool to depict His life, and also providing a meditation tool to help bring one further down the path to enlightenment. In 2003, UNESCO created a programme called 'Safeguarding of Monastic Heritage in the Himalayan Region' to conserve thangkas.



(Right) China 2014 Thangka Tibetan Buddhism scroll painting. Rama and Buddha are believed to be avatars of Vishnu.

6. Cities named after Ramayana characters



(Left) India 1989. The modern city of **Lucknow** derives its name from Lakshman, who set-up his capital at Lakshaman Tila, which later came to be known as Lakshamanpur, Lakanmau, Lakhnau, and the British anglicised it to Lucknow.



(Right) Thailand - 1994 Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya park. The Thailand city named Ayutthaya is derived from Ramayana's Ayodhya.

7. Technologies related to Ramayana



(Left) India 1979, Michel 806. Hindustan **Pushpak Plane**, Rohini Glider. Pushpaka Vimana is the name of a flying chariot in Ramayana.



(Right) Indonesia 1965 Garuda Airways. Garuda is a bird-like creature who tried to rescue Sita from Ravana when Ravana is on his way to Lanka after kidnapping Sita.

8. Ramayana in emblems, flags, and coat-of-arms



(Left) Mongolia 2012 khan garuda. **Symbol of Ulaanbaatar**. **Garuda** is a Hindu mythological figure, is present in the coats of arms of Indonesia, Thailand and Ulan Bator, a mythical bird in both Buddhist and Hindu scriptures such as Ramayana, called Khan Garuda by Mongols. In its right hand is a key, a symbol of prosperity and openness, and in its left is a lotus flower, a symbol of peace, equality, and purity.



(Right) Thailand 2013, Michel number. 3327C, Garuda at the portal of the main post office.