

The Ramayana

The *Ramayana*, also known as **Valmiki Ramayana**, as traditionally attributed to Valmiki, is a smṛiti text (also described as an Sanskrit epic) from ancient India, one of the two important epics of Hinduism known as the *Itihasas*, the other being the *Mahabharata*.^[4] The epic narrates the life of Rama, a prince of Ayodhya in the kingdom of Kosala. The epic follows his fourteen-year exile to the forest urged by his father King Dasharatha, on the request of Rama's stepmother Kaikeyi; his travels across forests in the Indian subcontinent with his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana; the kidnapping of Sita by Ravana, the king of Lanka, that resulted in war; and Rama's eventual return to Ayodhya along with Sita to be crowned king amidst jubilation and celebration.

The scholars' estimates for the earliest stage of the text ranging from the 7th to 4th centuries BCE,^{[5][6]} and later stages extending up to the 3rd century CE,^[7] although original date of composition is unknown. It is one of the largest ancient epics in world literature and consists of nearly 24,000 verses (mostly set in the Shloka/Anuṣṭubh metre), divided into seven *kāṇḍa* (chapters). It belongs to the genre of *Itihasa*, narratives of past events (*purāṇa*), interspersed with teachings on the goals of human life.

There are many versions of the *Ramayana* in Indian languages, besides Buddhist, and Jain adaptations. There are also Cambodian (*Reamker*), Indonesian, Filipino, Thai (*Ramakien*), Lao, Burmese, Nepali, Maldivian, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Tibeto-Chinese, and Malay versions of the Ramayana.^{[note}

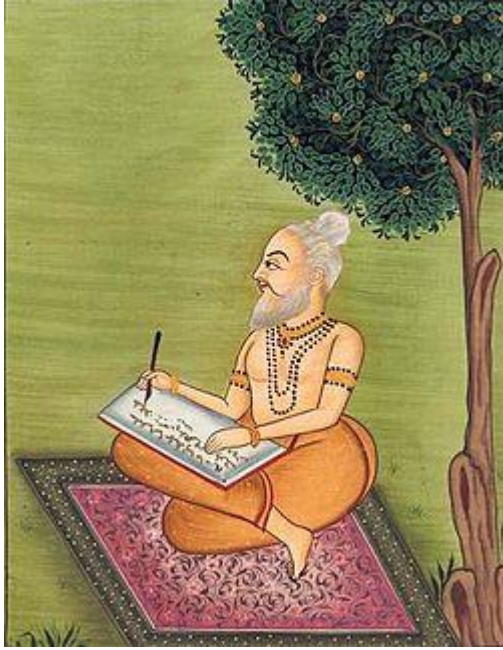
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The *Ramayana* was an important influence on later Sanskrit poetry and the Hindu life and culture, and its main figures were fundamental to the cultural consciousness of a number of nations, both Hindu and Buddhist. Its most important moral influence was the importance of virtue, in the life of a citizen and in the ideals of the formation of a state (from Sanskrit: रामराज्य, romanized: *Rāmarājya*, a utopian state where Rama is king) or of a functioning society.

Etymology

The name *Rāmāyaṇa* is composed of two words, *Rāma* and *ayaṇa*. *Rāma*, the name of the main figure of the epic, has two contextual meanings. In the Atharvaveda, it means 'dark, dark-coloured, black' and is related to the word *rātri* which means 'darkness or stillness of night'. The other meaning, which can be found in the *Mahabharata*, is 'pleasing, pleasant, charming, lovely, beautiful'. The word *ayana* means travel or journey.

Thus, *Rāmāyaṇa* means "Rama's journey", with *ayana* altered to *ayaṇa* due to the Sanskrit grammar rule of internal sandhi.



An artist's impression of sage Valmiki composing the *Ramayana*

Genre

The *Ramayana* belongs to the genre of *Itihasa*, narratives of past events (*purāṇa*), which includes the epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, and the Puranas. The genre also includes teachings on the goals of human life. It depicts the duties of relationships, portraying ideal characters like the ideal son, servant, brother, husband, wife, and king.^[17] Like the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* presents the teachings of ancient Hindu sages in the narrative allegory, interspersing philosophical and ethical elements.

Structure

In its extant form, Valmiki's *Ramayana* is an epic poem containing over 24,000 couplet verses, divided into seven *kāṇḍas* (Bālakāṇḍa, Ayodhyakāṇḍa, Aranyakāṇḍa, Kiṣkindakāṇḍa, Sundarākāṇḍa, Yuddhakāṇḍa, Uttarakāṇḍa), and about 500 sargas (chapters).^{[18][19]} It is regarded as one of the longest epic poems to be written in history.^[20]

Dating



Rama (left third from top) depicted in the Dashavatara, the ten avatars of Vishnu. Painting from Jaipur, now at the Victoria and Albert Museum

Scholarly estimates for the earliest stage of the available text range from the 7th to 4th centuries BCE,^{[21][6]} with later stages extending up to the 3rd century CE.^[7] According to Robert P. Goldman (1984), the oldest parts of the *Ramayana* date to the early 7th century BCE.^[22] The later parts cannot be composed later than the 6th or 5th century BCE, due to the narrative not mentioning Buddhism (founded in the 5th century BC) nor the prominence of Magadha (which rose to prominence in the 7th century BC). The text also mentions Ayodhya as the capital of Kosala, rather than its later name of Saketa or the successor capital of Shravasti.^[23] In terms of narrative time, the action of the *Ramayana* predates the *Mahabharata*. Goldman and Sutherland Goldman (2022) consider *Ramayana*'s oldest surviving version was composed around 500 BCE.^[24]

Books two to six are the oldest portion of the epic, while the first and last books (*Balakanda* and *Uttara Kanda*, respectively) seem to be later additions. Style differences and narrative contradictions between these two volumes and the rest of the epic have led scholars since Hermann Jacobi to the present toward this consensus.^[25]

Recensions

The *Ramayana* text has several regional renderings, recensions, and sub-recensions. Textual scholar Robert P. Goldman differentiates two major regional revisions: the northern (n) and the southern (s). Scholar Romesh Chunder Dutt writes that "the *Ramayana*, like the *Mahabharata*, is a growth of centuries, but the main story is more distinctly the creation of one mind."

There has been discussion as to whether the first and the last volumes (Bala Kanda and Uttara Kanda) of Valmiki's *Ramayana* were composed by the original author. The *uttarākāṇḍa*, the *bālakāṇḍa*, although frequently counted among the main ones, is not a part of the original epic. Though *Balakanda* is sometimes considered in the main epic, according to many *Uttarakanda* is certainly a later interpolation and thus is not attributed to the work of Valmiki.^[18] This fact is reaffirmed by the absence of these two *Kāṇḍas* in the oldest manuscript.^[26] Many Hindus don't believe they are integral parts of the scripture because of some style differences and narrative contradictions between these two volumes and the rest.^[27]

It is also thought that the *Uttara Kanda* is a direct contradiction in terms of how Rama and Dharma is portrayed in the rest of the epic. M. R. Parameswaran states that the adaptation in societal values such as the positions of women and Shudras in society shows that the *Uttara Kanda* is a later insertion rather than part of the original epic.

Since Rama was revered as a dharmatma, his ideas seen in the Ramayana proper cannot be replaced by new ideas as to what dharma is, except by claiming that he himself adopted those new ideas. That is what the U-K [Uttara Kanda] does. It embodies the new ideas in two stories that are usually referred to as Sita-parityaga, the abandonment of Sita (after Rama and Sita return to Ayodhya and Rama was consecrated as king) and Sambuka-vadha, the killing of the ascetic Sambuka. The U-K attributes both actions to Rama, whom people acknowledged to be righteous and as a model to follow. By masquerading as an additional kanda of the Ramayana composed by Valmiki himself, the U-K succeeded, to a considerable extent, in sabotaging the values presented in Valmiki's Ramayana.^[28]

Characters

Bāla Kāṇḍa



The marriage of the four sons of Dasharatha with the four daughters of Siradhvaja Janaka and Kushadhvaja. Rama and Sita, Lakshmana and Urmila, Bharata and Mandavi and Shatrughna with Shrutakirti. Folio from the Shnagri Ramayana, early 18th-century. National Museum, New Delhi

The epic begins with the sage Vālmīki asking Nārada if there is a righteous man still left in the world, to which Nārada replies that such a man is Rāma. After seeing two birds being shot, Vālmīki creates a new form of metre called *śloka*, and then is granted the ability to compose an epic poem about Rāma. He teaches his poem to the boys Lava and Kuśa, who recite it throughout the land and eventually at the court of king Rāma, which then begins the main narrative.^[29]

Daśaratha was the King of Ayodhyā. He had three wives: Kausalyā, Kaikeyī, and Sumitrā. He did not have a son and in the desire to have a legal heir performs a fire sacrifice known as Putrīyā Iṣṭi. Meanwhile, the gods are petitioning to Brahmā and Viṣṇu about Rāvaṇa, king of the rākṣasas who is terrorizing the universe.

Thus Viṣṇu had opted to be born into mortality to combat the demon Rāvaṇa. As a consequence, Rāma was first born to Kausalyā, Bharata was born to Kaikeyī, and Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna were born to Sumitrā.^[29]

When Rāma was 16 years old, the ṛṣi (sage) Viśvāmitra comes to the court of Daśaratha in search of help against demons who were disturbing sacrificial rites. He chooses Rāma, who is followed by Lakṣmaṇa, his constant companion throughout the story. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa receive instructions and supernatural weapons from Viśvāmitra and proceed to destroy Tāṭakā and many other demons. Viśvāmitra also recounts much lore of the landscape, his own ancestors, and the ancestors of the princes.^[29]

The party then decide to go to attend king Janaka's sacrifice in the kingdom of Mithilā, who has a bow that no one has been able to string. Janaka recounts the history of the famed bow, and informs them that whoever strings the bow will win the hand of his daughter Sītā, whom he had found in the earth when plowing a field. Rāma then proceeds to not only string the bow, but breaks it in the process. Rāma marries Sītā; the wedding is celebrated with great festivity in Mithilā and the marriage party returns to Ayodhyā.^[29]

Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa

After Rāma and Sītā have been married, an elderly Daśaratha expresses his desire to crown Rāma, to which the Kosala assembly and his subjects express their support. On the eve of the great event, Kaikeyī was happy about this, but was later on provoked by Mantharā, a wicked maidservant, to claim two boons that Daśaratha had long ago granted her. Kaikeyī demands Rāma to be exiled into the wilderness for fourteen years, while the succession passes to her son Bharata.

The grief-stricken king, bound by his word, accedes to Kaikeyī's demands. Rāma accepts his father's reluctant decree with absolute submission and calm self-control which characterizes him throughout the story. He asks Sītā to remain in Ayodhyā, but she convinces him to take her with him in exile. Lakṣmaṇa also resolves to follow his brother into the forest.

After Rāma's departure, King Daśaratha, unable to bear the grief, passes away. Meanwhile, Bharata, who was on a visit to his maternal uncle, learns about the events in Ayodhyā. He is shocked and refuses to profit from his mother's wicked scheming. He visits Rāma in the forest and implores him to return to Ayodhyā and claim the throne that is rightfully his. But Rāma, determined to carry out his father's orders to the letter, refuses to return before the period of exile. Bharata reluctantly returns to Ayodhyā and rules the kingdom on behalf of his brother.



Rama leaving for fourteen years of exile from Ayodhya.

Aranya Kāṇḍa

Main articles: Aranya Kanda and Exile of Lord Rama



Rāvaṇa fights Jatāyu as he carries off the kidnapped Sītā. Painting by Raja Ravi Varma .

In exile, Rāma, Sītā, and Lakṣmaṇa journey southward along the banks of the river Godāvāri, where they build cottages and live off the land. One day, in the Pāñcavati forest they are visited by a rākṣasī named Śurpaṇakhā, sister of Ravaṇa. She tries to seduce the brothers and, after failing, attempts to kill Sītā out of jealousy. Lakṣmaṇa stops her by cutting off her nose and ears. Hearing of this, her brothers Khara and Dushan organize an attack against the princes. Rama defeats Khara and his rakshasas.

When the news of these events reaches Rāvaṇa, he resolves to destroy Rāma by capturing Sītā with the aid of the *rakṣasa* Mārīca. Mārīca, assuming the form of a golden deer, captivates Sītā's attention. Entranced by the beauty of the deer, Sītā pleads with Rāma to capture it. Rāma, aware that this is the ploy of the demons, cannot dissuade Sītā from her desire and chases the deer into the forest, leaving Sītā under Lakṣmaṇa's guard.

After some time, Sītā hears Rāma calling out to her; afraid for his life, she insists that Lakṣmaṇa rush to his aid. Lakṣmaṇa tries to assure her that Rāma cannot be hurt that easily and that it is best if he continues to follow Rāma's orders to protect her. On the verge of hysterics, Sītā insists that it is not she but Rāma who needs Lakṣmaṇa's help. He obeys her wish but stipulates that she is not to leave the cottage or entertain any stranger. He then draws a line that no demon could cross and leaves to help Rāma. With the coast finally clear, Rāvaṇa appears in the guise of an ascetic requesting Sītā's hospitality. Unaware of her guest's plan, Sītā is tricked and is then forcibly carried away by Rāvaṇa.

Jatāyu, a vulture, tries to rescue Sītā but is mortally wounded. In Lankā, Sītā is kept under the guard of *rakṣasīs*. Ravaṇa asks Sītā to marry him, but she refuses, being totally devoted to Rāma. Meanwhile, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa learn about Sītā's abduction from Jatāyu and immediately set out to save her. During their search, they meet Kabandha and the ascetic Śabarī, who directs them towards Sugriva and Hanuman.

Kiṣkindhā Kāṇḍa



A stone bas-relief at Banteay Srei in Cambodia depicts the combat between Vali and Sugriva (middle). To the right, Rama fires his bow. To the left, Vali lies dying.

Citadel *Kishkindha Kanda* is set in the place of Vānaras (Vana-nara) – Forest dwelling humans.^[31] Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa meet Hanumān, the biggest devotee of Rāma, greatest of ape heroes, and an adherent of Sugriva, the banished pretender to the throne of Kiṣkindhā. Rāma befriends Sugriva and helps him by killing his elder brother Vāli thus regaining the kingdom of Kiṣkindhā, in exchange for helping Rāma to recover Sītā.

However, Sugriva soon forgets his promise and spends his time enjoying his newly gained power. The clever former ape queen Tārā, (wife of Vāli) calmly intervenes to prevent an enraged Lakṣmaṇa from destroying the ape citadel. She then eloquently convinces Sugriva to honor his pledge. Sugriva then sends search parties to the four corners of the earth, only to return without success from north, east, and west. The southern search party under the leadership of Aṅgada and Hanumān learns from a vulture named Sampātī the elder brother of Jatāyu, that Sītā was taken to Lankā.

Sundara Kaṇḍa

Main article: Sundara Kanda



Ravana is meeting Sita at Ashokavana. Hanuman is seen on the tree.

Sundara Kanda forms the heart of Valmiki's Ramayana and consists of a detailed, vivid account of Hanumān's heroics. After learning about Sītā, Hanumān assumes a gigantic form and makes a colossal leap across the sea to Lanka. On the way, he meets with many challenges like facing a Gandharva Kanyā who comes in the form of a demon to test his abilities. He encounters a mountain named Maināka who offers Hanuman assistance and offers him rest. Hanumān refuses because there is little time remaining to complete the search for Sītā.

After entering Lankā, he finds a demon, Lankini, who protects all of Lankā. Hanumān fights with her and subjugates her in order to get into Lankā. In the process, Lankini, who had an earlier vision/warning from the gods, therefore, knows that the end of Lankā nears if someone defeats Lankini. Here, Hanumān explores the demons' kingdom and spies on Rāvaṇa. He locates Sītā in Ashoka grove, where she is being wooed and threatened by Rāvaṇa and his rakshasis to marry Rāvaṇa.

Hanumān reassures Sītā, giving Rāma's signet ring as a sign that Rāma is still alive. He offers to carry Sītā back to Rāma; however, she refuses and says that it is not the dharma, stating that Ramāyaṇa will not have significance if Hanumān carries her to Rāma – "When Rāma was not there Rāvaṇa carried Sītā forcibly and when Rāvaṇa was not there, Hanumān carried Sītā back to Rāma." She says that Rāma himself must come and avenge the insult of her abduction. She gives Hanumān her comb as a token to prove that she is still alive.

Hanumān takes leave of Sītā. Before going back to Rāma and tell him of Sītā's location & desire to be rescued only by him, he decides to wreak havoc in Lankā by destroying trees in the Naulakha Bagh and buildings and killing Rāvaṇa's warriors. He allows himself to be captured and delivered to Rāvaṇa. He gives a bold lecture to Rāvaṇa to release Sītā. He is condemned and his tail is set on fire, but he escapes his bonds and leaps from roof to roof, sets fire to Rāvaṇa's citadel, and makes the giant leap back from the island. The joyous search party returns to Kiṣkindhā with the news.

Yuddha Kāṇḍa

Further information: Coronation of Rama and Sita



The Battle at Lanka, Ramayana by Sahibdin.

It depicts the vānara army of Rāma (top left) fighting Rāvaṇa the demon-king of Lankā to save Rāma's kidnapped wife, Sītā. The painting depicts multiple events in the battle against the three-headed demon general Triṣira, in the bottom left. Triṣira is beheaded by Hanumān, the vānara companion of Rāma.

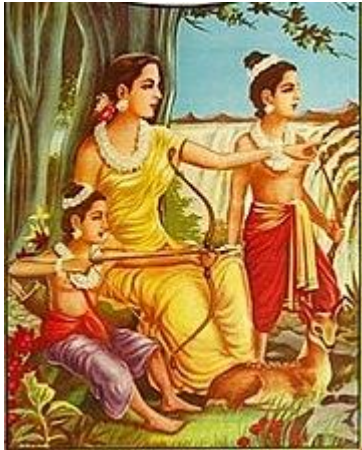
Also known as *Lankā Kāṇḍa*, this book describes the war between the army of Rāma and the army of Rāvaṇa. Having received Hanuman's report on Sītā, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa proceed with their allies towards the shore of the southern sea. There they are joined by Rāvaṇa's renegade brother Vibhiṣaṇa. The vānaras named Nala and Nīla construct the Rama Setu.^[32]

The princes and their army cross over to Lanka. A lengthy war ensues. During a battle, Ravana's son Meghanāda hurls a powerful weapon at Lakṣmaṇa and he gets mortally wounded. So Hanumān assumes his gigantic form and flies from Lankā to the Himalayas. Upon reaching Mount Sanjeevani, Hanumān is unable to identify the herb that will cure Lakṣmaṇa and so he decides to bring the entire mountain back to Lankā. Eventually, the war ends when Rāma kills Rāvaṇa. Rāma then installs Vibhishana on the throne of Lanka.

On meeting Sītā, Rāma says; "The dishonour meted out to him and the wrong done to her by Rāvaṇa have been wiped off, by his victory over the enemy with the assistance of Hanumān, Sugrīva and Vibhishana".^[33] However, upon criticism from people in his kingdom about the chastity of Sītā, Rāma gets extremely disheartened. So Sītā, in order to prove the citizens wrong and wipe the false blame on her, requests Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to prepare a pyre for her to enter. When Lakṣmaṇa prepares the pyre, Sītā prays to Agni and enters into it, in order to prove her conjugal fidelity. Agni appears in person from the burning pyre, carrying Sītā in his arms and restores her to Rāma, testifying to her purity.^[34] Rama later joyfully accepts her. The episode of *Agni Pariksha* varies in the versions of *Ramāyaṇa* by Valmiki and Tulsidas. In Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas*, Sītā was under the protection of Agni (see *Māyā Sītā*) so it was necessary to bring her out before reuniting with Rāma. The Gods led by Brahma arrives and glorifies Rama as the incarnation of Supreme God Narayana. Indra restores the dead Vanaras back to life.

After the exile, Rāma returns to Ayodhya and the people are so happy they celebrate it like a festival. Deepavali is the day considered that Rāma, Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa and Hanumān reached Ayodhyā after a period of 14 years in exile after Rāma's army of good defeated demon king Rāvaṇa's army of evil. The return of Rāma to Ayodhyā was celebrated with his coronation. It is called *Rāma patabhisheka*. There are mentions in *Rāmayaṇa* that Rama gave several donations to Sugriva, Jambavan, other Vanaras, and gave a pearl necklace to Sita telling her to give it to a great person. She gives it to Hanumān. Rāma was so thankful to Vibhishana and wanted to give him a great gift. Rāma gave his **Aradhana Devata** (Sri Ranganathaswamy) to Vibhishana as a gift.^[35] Rama's rule itself was *Rāma rājya* described to be a just and fair rule.^{[36][37]} It is believed by many that when Rama returned people celebrated their happiness with *diyas*, and the festival of Deepavali is connected with Rāma's return.^[38]

Uttara Kanda



Sita with Lava and Kusha

Scholars note "linguistic and rhetorical differences" between the Uttara Kanda and books 2 through 6 of the Ramayana, especially in stories such as Sita's exile and death of Shambuka, and together with Bala Kanda it is considered by some scholars to be an interpolation, and that "the 'original' poem ended with the Yuddhakanda."^{[39][40]}

This kanda narrates Rama's reign of Ayodhya, the birth of Lava and Kusha, the Ashvamedha yajna, and last days of Rama. At the expiration of his term of exile, Rama returns to Ayodhya with Sita, Lakshmana, and Hanuman, where the coronation is performed. On being asked to prove his devotion to Rama, Hanuman tears his chest open and to everyone's surprise, there is an image of Rama and Sita inside his chest. Rama rules Ayodhya and the reign is called *Rama-Rajya* (a place where the common folk is happy, fulfilled, and satisfied). Then Valmiki trained Lava and Kusha in archery and succeeded the throne after Rama.

The epic story of *Ramyaana* was adopted by several cultures across Asia. Shown here is a Thai historic artwork depicting the battle which took place between Rama and Ravana.



A relief with part of the Ramayana epic, shows Rama killed the golden deer that turn out to be the demon Maricha in disguise. Prambanan Trimurti temple near Yogyakarta, Java, Indonesia.

As in many oral epics, multiple versions of the *Ramayana* survive. In particular, the *Ramayana* related in north India differs in important respects from that preserved in south India and the rest of southeast Asia. There is an extensive tradition of oral storytelling based on *Ramayana* in Indonesia, Cambodia, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Laos, Vietnam and Maldives.

India

There are diverse regional versions of the *Ramayana* written by various authors in India. Some of them differ significantly from each other. A West Bengal manuscript from the 6th century presents the epic without two of its kandas.

During the 12th century, Kamban wrote Ramavataram, known popularly as Kambaramayanam in Tamil, but references to Ramayana story appear in Tamil literature as early as 3rd century CE. The Telugu rendition, Ranganatha Ramayanam, was written by Gona Budda Reddy in the 13th century and another of a purer Telugu rendition, called Molla Ramayanam written by Atukuri Molla in the 15th century.

The earliest translation to a regional Indo-Aryan language is the early 14th century Saptakanda Ramayana in Assamese by Madhava Kandali.

Valmiki's *Ramayana* inspired Sri Ramacharit Manas by Tulsidas in 1576, an epic in Awadhi Hindi with a slant more grounded in a different realm of Hindu literature, that of bhakti; it is an acknowledged masterpiece, popularly known as *Tulsi-krita Ramayana*. Gujarati poet Premanand wrote a version of the *Ramayana* in the 17th century.^[citation needed] Akbar, the third Mughal Emperor, commissioned a simplified text of the

Ramayana which he dedicated to his mother, Hamida Banu Begum. Created around 1594, the manuscript is illustrated with scenes from the narrative.

Other versions include Krittivasi Ramayan, a Bengali version by Krittibas Ojha in the 15th century; Vilanka Ramayana by 15th century poet Sarala Dasa^[43] and *Jagamohana Ramayana* (also known as *Dandi Ramayana*) by 16th century poet Balarama Dasa, both in Odia; a Torave Ramayana in Kannada by 16th-century poet Narahari; Adhyathmaramayanam, a Malayalam version by Thunchaththu Ramanujan Ezhuthachan in the 16th century; in Marathi by Sridhara in the 18th century; in Maithili by Chanda Jha in the 19th century; and in the 20th century, Rashtrakavi Kuvempu's Sri Ramayana Darshanam in Kannada and Srimadramayana Kalpavrukshamu in Telugu by Viswanatha Satyanarayana who received Jnanapeeth award for this work.

There is a sub-plot to the *Ramayana*, prevalent in some parts of India, relating the adventures of Ahiravan and Mahi Ravana, evil brother of Ravana, which enhances the role of Hanuman in the story. Hanuman rescues Rama and Lakshmana after they are kidnapped by the Ahi-Mahi Ravana at the behest of Ravana and held prisoner in a cave, to be sacrificed to the goddess Kali. Adbhuta Ramayana is a version that is obscure but also attributed to Valmiki – intended as a supplementary to the original Valmiki Ramayana. In this variant of the narrative, Sita is accorded far more prominence, such as elaboration of the events surrounding her birth – in this case to Ravana's wife, Mandodari as well as her conquest of Ravana's older brother in the Mahakali form.

The Gondi people have their own version of the Ramayana known as the *Gond Ramayani*, derived from oral folk legends. It consists of seven stories with Lakshmana as the protagonist, set after the main events of the Ramayana, where he finds a bride.^[44]

Early medieval recension from Bengal

Chance discovery of a 6th-century manuscript reveals insights into the evolution of the narrative. Importantly, the 'Daśagrīvā Rākṣasa Charitrām Vadham' (Slaying of the Ten-Headed Giant) manuscript contains only five kandas (chapters), and ends with the trio's triumphant return to Ayodhya.^{[45][46]}

Missing from this particular recension are the 'Balakanda' dealing with Rama's childhood, and the 'Uttarakanda' – which narrates (a) Rama's divinity as an avatar of Vishnu, (b) the events leading up to the exile of Sita, (c) the death of Rama's devoted brother, Lakshmana. These are also the only two books where the Sage Valmiki appears as a character.^[47]

The manuscript was discovered in 2015, from an archive compiled by the German Indologist Theodor Aufrecht.

Early references in Tamil literature

Main article: Ramayana in Tamil literature

Even before Kambar wrote the Ramavataram in Tamil in the 12th century AD, there are many ancient references to the story of Ramayana, implying that the story was familiar in the Tamil lands even before the Common Era. References to the story can be found in the Sangam literature of Akananūru (dated 1st century BCE)^[48] and Purananuru (dated 300 BC),^{[49][50]} the twin epics of Silappatikaram (dated 2nd century CE)^[51] and Manimekalai (cantos 5, 17 and 18),^{[52][53][54]} and the Alvar literature of Kulasekhara Alvar, Thirumangai Alvar, Andal and Nammalvar (dated between 5th and 10th centuries CE).^[55] Even the songs of the Nayanmars have references to Ravana and his devotion to Lord Siva.

The entire Ramayana was written as an Tamil Opera again in the 18th century CE by Arunachala Kavirayar in Srirangam. The Ramayana was named as *Rama Natakam* and was composed in Tamil Language. *Arunachala Kavi* was fascinated by the epic Ramayana so much that he wanted to impart the story and the good lessons preached by it to a large number of persons who could not obviously read the entire epic in original. He composed the entire Ramayana in the form of songs together as an opera so even normal people could understand his Ramayana.

Buddhist version

Main article: Dasaratha Jataka



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In the Buddhist variant of the *Ramayana* (Dasaratha Jataka), Dasharatha was king of Benares and not Ayodhya. Rama (called Rāmapaṇḍita in this version) was the son of Kaushalya, first wife of Dasharatha. Lakṣmaṇa (Lakkhaṇa) was a sibling of Rama and son of Sumitra, the second wife of Dasharatha. Sita was the wife of Rama.

To protect his children from his wife Kaikeyi, who wished to promote her son Bharata, Dasharatha sent the three to a hermitage in the Himalayas for a twelve-year exile.

After nine years, Dasharatha died and Lakkhaṇa and Sita returned. Rāmapaṇḍita, in deference to his father's wishes, remained in exile for a further two years. This version does not include the abduction of Sītā. There is no Ravana in this version, or the Rama-Ravana war.

However, Ravana appears in other Buddhist literature, the Lankavatara Sutra.

In the explanatory commentary on Jātaka, Rāmapaṇḍita is said to have been a previous birth of the Buddha, and Sita as previous birth of Yasodharā (Rahula-Mata).

Jain versions

Main articles: Rama in Jainism and Salakapurusa



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Jain versions of the *Ramayana* can be found in the various Jain agamas like Saṅghadāsagaṇī Vāchaka's *Vasudevahiṇḍī* (circa 4th century CE),^[58] Ravisena's Padmapurana (story of Padmaja and Rama, Padmaja being the name of Sita), Hemacandra's Trisastisalakapurusa charitra (hagiography of 63 illustrious persons), Sanghadasa's *Vasudevahindi* and *Uttarapurana* by Gunabhadara. According to Jain cosmology, every half time cycle has nine sets of Balarama, Vasudeva and prativasudeva.

Rama, Lakshmana and Ravana are the eighth Baldeva, Vasudeva and Prativasudeva respectively. Padmanabh Jaini notes that, unlike in the Hindu Puranas, the names Baladeva and Vasudeva are not restricted to Balarama and Krishna in Jain Puranas. Instead they serve as names of two distinct classes of mighty brothers, who appear nine times in each half time cycle and jointly rule half the earth as half-chakravartins. Jaini traces the origin of this list of brothers to the *jinacharitra* (lives of jinas) by Acharya Bhadrabahu (3d–4th century BCE).

In the Jain epic of *Ramayana*, it is not Rama who kills Ravana as told in the Hindu version. Perhaps this is because Rama, a liberated Jain Self in his last life, is unwilling to kill.^[59] Instead, it is Lakshmana who kills Ravana (as Vasudeva kills Prativasudeva).^[59] In the end, Rama, who led an upright life, renounces his kingdom, becomes a Jain monk and attains moksha. On the other hand, Lakshmana and Ravana go to Hell. However, it is predicted that ultimately they both will be reborn as upright persons and attain liberation in their future births. According to Jain texts, Ravana will be the future Tirthankara (omniscient teacher) of Jainism.

The Jain versions have some variations from Valmiki's *Ramayana*. Dasharatha, the king of Ayodhya had four queens: Aparajita, Sumitra, Suprabha and Kaikeyi. These four queens had four sons. Aparajita's son was Padma and he became known by the name of Rama. Sumitra's son was Narayana: he came to be known by another name, Lakshmana. Kaikeyi's son was Bharata and Suprabha's son was Shatrughna. Furthermore, not much was thought of Rama's fidelity to Sita. According to the Jain version, Rama had four chief queens: Maithili, Prabhavati, Ratnibha, and Sridama.

Furthermore, Sita takes renunciation as a Jain ascetic after Rama abandons her and is reborn in heaven as Indra. Rama, after Lakshman's death, also renounces his kingdom and becomes a Jain monk. Ultimately, he attains Kevala Jnana omniscience and finally liberation. Rama predicts that Ravana and Lakshmana, who were in the fourth hell, will attain liberation in their future births. Accordingly, Ravana is the future Tirthankara of the next half ascending time cycle and Sita will be his Ganadhara.

Learnings from Ramayana

1. Respect Towards Parents and Elders

In [_the Ramayana](#), Lord Rama sets a great example of honoring his parents. He shows tons of respect to his King Dad (Dasharatha) and Queen Mom (Kaushalya) throughout the story. Even though it seems unfair, Rama willingly goes into exile for 14 years to keep his dad's promise. This teaches us to be selfless, listen to our parents, and do what's right. It also shows how important it is to take care of our elders!

2. Honesty and Integrity

Telling the truth is important in [_the Ramayana](#). When Sita is suspected of wrongdoing, she walks through fire to prove she's honest. Rama is also always truthful and fair. This shows that being honest is the right thing to do, even if it's hard. [_The Ramayana](#) teaches kids that honesty is always noticed and respected, and it helps you become a strong person.

3. Committed to Dharma

Lord Rama always followed the good path (Dharma) throughout his life. This is a great lesson for everyone! Leaders who do the right thing gain trust and become successful in their life.

4. Building Strong Bonds

Rama had great friends like Lakshmana, Hanuman, and Sugriva by his side on his adventures. This shows us how important good friends are! When we work together with friends to reach a goal, we're more likely to succeed.

5. Accept life's challenges

Even though Prince Rama had to leave his home for 14 years, he stayed strong through this tough time. This teaches leaders that during challenges, it's important to stay focused and positive. Being emotionally strong helps you deal with the unknown and keeps everyone's spirits up.

6. Effective and empathetic communication

Lord Rama was a great leader as he always talked clearly and kindly to everyone. Talking clearly and nicely helps people understand each other and work together better. Being understanding, like Lord Rama, lets you connect with everyone.

7. Devotion and Love

Lord Rama's love for his wife Sita was super strong. He wouldn't give up on finding her, no matter how hard things got. This shows us that love can be really powerful and that we should always support the people we care about, no matter what.

8. Great learner

Lord Rama was always learning. He mastered many skills, like fighting and being a good person. He's a reminder that we should never stop learning new things throughout our lives.

Thank You