



RAMAYANA **The Poisonous Tree**

[Stories, Essays and Foot-Notes]

Ranganayakamma

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THE POISONOUS TREE
[Stories, Essays and Foot-Notes]

Telugu Original
RANGANAYAKAMMA

English Translation

B. R. Bapuji

Professor, Centre for Applied Linguistics & Translation Studies,
University of Hyderabad

R. Venkateswara Rao

Formerly Lecturer in English, Andhra Pradesh

Ari Sitaramayya

Professor, Biomedical Sciences, Oakland University, USA

C. Padmaja

Associate Professor, Department of Journalism & Communication,
Osmania University

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A Note on Translation

This translation is based on the Telugu original '*Ramayana Vishavruksham*' (*Ramayana, the Poisonous Tree*), which appeared in three volumes in three consecutive years: 1974, 1975 and 1976. Since then all the three volumes have undergone several reprints: the first volume seven times, the second one for six times and the third four times. Recently, the writer has revised all the three volumes with a view to publishing them in a single volume. She has made some additions, deletions and alterations to the earlier editions. This translation, therefore, is based on the forthcoming/latest Telugu edition.

A note on this translation is necessary since the source language (Telugu) and the receptor language (English) are 'genetically' as well as 'culturally' unrelated and 'structurally' different.

The differences in syntax (grammar) and semantics (vocabulary including culture-specific words) of these two languages pose certain problems to the translators.

The grammatical features that pose problems are: articles, prepositions, auxiliaries, tense and aspect, voice, tag questions, conjunctions, word order, sentence length and sentence types.

One specific feature of the original is that it does not contain even a single passive-voice sentence whereas the translation, at some places, is not free from the passive voice.

The problems usually faced in the sphere of vocabulary are: Collocations, figurative expressions such as irony, idioms, metaphors and proverbs, forms of address, abuses, onomatopoeic words, reduplication words, religious and mythological terms, use of adjectives and adverbs, units of measurements and weights, the numbers and numerals, proper names, flora and fauna, birds and animals, and such other culture specific words.

Figurative expressions posed major problem. Wherever we have equivalents, direct or indirect, in English, we used them. Whenever we

could not find equivalents, we have resorted to literal translations of some peculiar, language-specific expressions, with a view that the conceptual world of speakers of different languages overlap at least in certain areas and hence the literally translated source language expressions will be comprehensible to a reasonable extent. Yet, in some 'difficult' situations, we substituted the figurative expressions of the Source language by non-figurative expressions of the Receptor language. In the case of plant and animal worlds, which frequently appear in the original text, we have introduced the source language names since Botanical and Zoological terminology may not be intelligible to non-specialist readers. In such cases and in the specific cultural contexts we have reproduced the source language words in italics.

One extremely serious problem that we have faced was translating various elements of Humour: irony, ridicule, sarcasm, and wit, which the original text contains in abundance. The loss of these features of the original in the translation is obvious to those who read both the Telugu and English versions. Also there has been a considerable 'loss' when we could not translate the dialect of the illiterate characters.

The English translation of Sanskrit slokas is based on the Telugu translation as found in the Telugu original. Therefore, readers who have access to English translations of Valmiki's '*Ramayana*' may find differences in translation, *sarga* (chapter) numbers and even *sloka* (poem) numbers. The Telugu original is based on the Telugu translation of Valmiki's *Ramayana*, which two important traditional scholars published in the late 1800s and early 1900s. They are: Mr. Chadaluvada Sundara Rama Sastrulu and Mr. Gattupalli Sessa Charyulu.

Four persons (including me) have translated this work. The names of the translators appear in the inner title page in accordance with the quantity (not necessarily quality) of the work, which they have done. Apart from the inner title page, their names appear also at the end of the stories or links, which they have translated.

Once the translation of an item (a story or link) was over, I compared the translation with the Telugu original sentence by sentence and

made modifications wherever I felt necessary, after discussing with the writer. **Our main concern and priority have been not merely reproducing the essential meaning of the original text but also the individual style of the original writer.** (*By style, we mean the specific manner in which the writer presents her ideas, intentions, attitudes and so on.*) In this process, there might have occurred some changes, which may not retain or present the scholarship and the translation ability of the respective translators fully. However, before beginning the translation, they had kindly agreed to tolerate my interference. I justify my interference with the help of the concept of 'World Englishes', which imply that one can allow the influence of the First or the Source language substratum including the nature of the style of the writer while translating.

After my comparison and the necessary modifications, I presented each draft of the translation of each item to Ms. **Meera Marathe**, an English language teacher in Hyderabad.

Ms. **Meera** read the translation of the major portions of the text (parts 1 & 2) with great care and patience and made useful corrections and suggestions to improve the quality of the translation. I have carried out those corrections and suggestions after discussing with the writer. I carried out almost all the grammatical corrections. However, it was not possible to carry out some corrections concerning the style where the writer or I felt such corrections might not convey the style of the original.

Mr. **R. Venkateswara Rao**, one of the translators, went through my translation of parts 3 & 4 and made corrections and suggestions.

Despite useful suggestions of the English language experts, the present translation may still have shortcomings due to either my oversight or my personal choice with regard to the suggestions made. Hence, I am responsible, not the language experts or the other translators, for the shortcomings that remain.

B.R. Bapuji

“Just as to the bourgeois, the disappearance of class property is the disappearance of production itself, so the disappearance of class culture is to him identical with the disappearance of all culture. That culture, the loss of which he laments, is, for the enormous majority, a mere training to act as a machine.”

“The ruling ideas of each age have been the ideas of the ruling class.”

Marx & Engels
(‘Manifesto of the Communist Party’)

The Vedantists say,

“Know Yourself!”

Marxists also say so,

“Know Yourself!

Know What Your Class is!!”

-A Marxist

PART 1

Preface

After looking at this book or after reading a couple of words, virtuous people may feel like striking a match and burning it. If they burn it, it is the pages which will burn not thoughts. Thoughts are born and grow naturally out of experiences in the course of history. It is no use ignoring this fact.

If the title '*Ramayana, the poisonous tree*' makes even rationalists hesitant, it is the fault of the *Ramayana* not mine. If we understand clearly the seed out of which this poisonous tree grew and to which poisonous snakes it has been giving shelter so far, it becomes clear how suitable this title is.

This book is not meant for dogmatic pundits; devotees obsessed with temples; devotees who wear suits and those who are gems among the stupid women that arrogantly think that changing dresses, wearing make-up and hairstyle is 'progress'. This is meant for those children — into whose minds selfishness and dogma have not yet entered and who keep their minds open to self-evident facts and thoughts without any foulness and with awareness; for those young women and men who are not acquainted with any other thoughts or knowledge except weekly magazines and ordinary novels. It is my hope that this will serve the interests of the majority of the people who have been subjected for generations

to political and economic exploitation and leading degraded, pathetic and oppressive lives without any hope for emancipation.

“Some people consider rejecting all that is old a progress”—This is one kind of criticism we hear against the new ways of thinking. But this is not an 'old' thing. It has not become 'old'. Values and culture, which the *Ramayana* propagates, are still reflected in daily life even today. To decide that it has not become old, it is enough to cite any incident that suggests the 'recitation of Rama's name' as a solution for the present-day problems.

Moreover, this attempt does not mean rejecting all that is old. All that is old is also human history. The objective of this attempt is to expose the origin and development of the *Ramayana* in the course of the evolution of history; its nature and content; and the real face of the social set-up, which it propagates daily.

“Many poets have written the *Ramayana* in different ways. Different stories have been composed based on *Valmiki's Ramayana* alone. Which do we consider as the basis?” — this is a question. Whichever we consider as the basis, all versions have the same aim. We will see this point in detail as we proceed further in the preface.

“Did *Ramayana* really happen or not? If it did, all the persons in it passed away in the remote past, didn't they? Then what

is the use in debating about those people now? If it 'did not happen', what is the use in thinking so much about a fictitious story?" —These are also very important questions. But whether *Ramayana* did take place or not, what we are concerned with is its 'contents'. It's all the same whether Rama was a person who lived in the past for some time or he is a character, which a poet created.

What becomes evident to us from this story is the following:

- Society was already split into rich and poor classes.
- Kings like Dasaratha, Rama and Ravana ruled their kingdoms despotically in the interests of the rich class as the representatives of that class. In fact, they themselves possessed lands and wealth.
- Women led a life without indepen-

dence, individuality and in the darkness of male domination.

- Ordinary people sank a thousand times deep into poverty, caste differences, beggary, prostitution, religious dogma and the wars between one race and another and between one class and another.

- The exploitative literature and culture of the ruling class infected the bones as well as souls of the population like bacteria.

Thus, we find in the *Ramayana* the economic, political and social conditions, principles and morals of that time. Some of them are still in currency even today in the same old form as well as with some modifications. This is important for us. Occurrence or non-occurrence of the *Ramayana* will not affect these facts.

The Story of Rama

Let us see about the *Ramayana* in brief.

Millions of people have shown a lot of devotion and respect for the story of Rama. As soon as they hear the word 'Rama', they go into ecstasies and fold their hands in reverence. The reason for this is a lot of respect and belief of the people in this character. Is Rama eligible for such belief and reverence? Such a question may appear extremely sinful.

The story which people commonly know about the *Ramayana* is that — Rama's father did not give Rama the legitimate right to rule the kingdom but sent him to the forest. While Rama faced

many hardships along with his wife in the forest, a wicked person abducted Sita, denying peace to Rama even in his life in the forest. Rama sinks in the sea of sorrow, wages a battle with his valour, kills that wicked person and gets back his wife; Rama returns to the kingdom, rules over people happily but once again the wife and husband had to separate from one another! Thus, from the beginning to the end of the story, people feel sorrow! Sorrow! Sorrow! Sorrow! Each person sheds tears that flow from his melted heart!

If the story had really happened like this, it is certainly heart breaking for every one. But, is this the story of the

Ramayana? Is truth this much? Even if we see it according to Valmiki's story, does Rama really have a right over his father's kingdom? Was he sent to forest unjustly? Did Rama really spend the life of a sage away from politics in the forest? Did he really have respect for his father? Was he really a valorous person? Did he wage war against Ravana, only for the sake of his wife? Did he, subsequently, rule people so that they lived in abundance. Among the millions who worship Rama, how many people know these kinds of facts and myths? Did any divine-story teller or a scholar tell these things without concealing facts? Do they, in fact, know all these things?

In fact, the literate among the common people are few. Even among the literates, those who read epics and mythologies are still fewer. Anyway, all people hear Divine-stories (*Harikathas*), Folk-stories (*Jamukulakathas*), folk songs or mythology pundits. Except these mythology pundits, none might have read the actual story. Jamukula story tellers, folk singers and those who tell *Harikathas* merely learn only those songs and stories that have been transmitted from one generation to the other and narrate the same to people and eke out a living. Even these persons do not know the actual story.

The only people who know the story are pundits. But they don't tell things as they are. This does not mean that Valmiki wrote very sincerely and pundits alone are not telling truth to people.

The story of *Ramayana* must have been in vogue among people even be-

fore Valmiki. That poet turned such story into his poetry and slokas. While telling the story he presented it with many myths. However mythically he told the story, it was imperative on his part to speak some truths at least on some occasions. But these pundits do not allow people to know even those truths, which the poet mentioned. All these things will become clear while we read the stories in this book.

No story reaches people truthfully and clearly without any myth or mask. For example, Rama, although the eldest son, did not have the right over the kingdom of his father. The kingdom belonged to Bharata! Because, while marrying Kaikeyi, Dasaratha promised that he would give the kingdom to her son. This is what Valmiki, himself wrote. This is so important a fact that the entire *Ramayana* is based on it. The poet pushed such an important fact as a trivial point to a corner and mentioned it after a long while. He mentioned it while Rama was in the forests! The fact came out only then! Moreover, through the mouth of Rama himself! This means Rama too knew this fact right from the beginning! It would not have been Rama's fault if he was prepared for coronation as he was not aware of Bharata's right.

Is it not hypocrisy on the part of Rama to be ready for coronation even after knowing the fact? Why did the poet write as if Rama too knew about Bharata's right? The poet could have lead the story as if 'Rama agreed for coronation' because he was unaware of

the fact. Why didn't the poet do so? — We get many such doubts as these. For some doubts, we don't even get answers.

The poet had so crazy a devotion for the character of Rama that whatever that character did was right for him. If Rama got ready for coronation with the full knowledge that it was Bharata's right to be crowned a king, he thinks it is right because it was Rama who got ready for such an act! The poet is blinded by his devotion that he wonders, "Can we find fault in Lord Rama?" What care does such a poet take in portraying that character? In fact it is not that the poet portrays the character of Lord Rama, it is the character of Rama that leads the poet. The poet unfolds the story by worshipping that character. It is the duty of the poet to flatter that character. If that is the case, where is the need for the poet to take care while depicting that character?

When the truth of 'Bharata's right over the kingdom' is present in the story itself, concealing it and driving the story along another path; attempting to make people believe that some injustice had been done to Rama and people believing it to be true — how ridiculous these things are! How deceptive these things are!

What remains in the story if Rama does not have the right over the kingdom? What injustice has been done to Rama? Is there any meaning in the lamentation of people that Rama could not get the kingdom? If Bharata's right was true, Rama's right would become false. The story of *Ramayana* itself, its very

greatness would become false.

The poet mentioned about Bharata's right not because he thought, "Let me speak the truth without concealing it". He mentioned it because it was unavoidable to mention it according to that story.

Suppose a person talks about some issues. While talking, he tries to conceal certain things which he does not want to tell us. But either due to his negligence or stupidity, certain things, which he wanted to conceal, will come out in his own words. He won't recognize this fact. Thus those truths which he does not tell us willingly will also come out. Those truths will be contradictory to what he outwardly says. We came to know these truths only through him and not that we gathered them from elsewhere or concocted them. This is what the poet has done in many contexts in the *Ramayana*. Concealing of truth and glorification of untruth by raising it to the skies! At every step we find the poet over anxious to conceal things.

The stories in this volume will appear unbelievable because we do not know the actual facts very clearly.

Some incidents and dialogues of these stories are absent in the original. But they are not contrary to the original. This means, even if I depict a new incident, it has its basis in the original. Characters and their nature too are in accordance with the original story. The basis for dialogues and criticism is Valmiki's original story. Here a question arises, 'What, then, is new that this book says?' The aim of this book is to make

explicit many important issues that are concealed and try to explain their social meaning.

There are mainly four aspects in these stories: (1) Those, which are not told, even though the poet ought to have told them. (2) Those which the poet did not at all like to tell. (3) Those which he told but with outrageous distortions. (4) Those which he told very explicitly. Here, let us see a couple of examples for each point.

1. Those things which are not told even though the poet ought to have told

The poet, who depicted even cattle for several pages, did not mention 'Urmila'. Is it not necessary to utter a single word about this character? If Sita is a devoted wife because she accompanied her husband in the forest, Urmila is not a devoted wife because she did not go to the forest along with her husband. Hence based on this fact, if I write that Urmila was uninterested in her husband and she is not as devoted a wife as Sita, will it be my creation? Is it possible to tell this incident, which I have written about, as contrary to the original since it is not found in the original?

Another point which the poet did not mention is this: Dasaratha gives Sita sarees that are enough for 14 years, ornaments, perfumes; armaments, shields and weapons for his sons; a basket, crow-bar to dig and other implements. All these things were carried up to Guha's kingdom in a chariot. There, Guha's servants took them in a boat and

crossed the river Ganga. The poet talked about those articles upto that place. Thereafter he has not mentioned them. How did those things move from there? Did they fly? Did servants carry them? How did all this reach the forest? The poet did not talk about this. Even if he did not talk about it, will it amount to betraying the original if I say who carried the entire luggage?

2. Those things which the poet didn't like to mention

Rama, Lakshmana and Sita occasionally walk along forests and villages. They come across only 'sages' and none else, why? Aren't there ordinary people in villages? Why not? They must have been there. But the poet does not like to mention them. He always would like to tell about sages alone! The beauty of the epic poem would not be affected if he had written that either tribals or wood-cutters were seen in the forest. Yet the poet did not mention them. I have mentioned them. Will it be contrary to the original story if I wrote that Rama, Lakshmana and Sita came across some peasants, wood-cutters, a washerman, a beggar, folk singers and other travellers? Is it possible to argue, "No, it can't happen. It is impossible to come across people like that?"

The poet simply narrates the utterances of the characters but never mentions their inner thoughts—except that the young Rama argues with his own inner-self for a while before killing Tataka. The poet, here and there, used expressions like "mind, speech and deed", implying that 'his

End of Preview.

Rest of the book can be read @
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