



Dasrath Jatak, Valmiki Ramayana And Ramacharit Manas ; A Comparative Study To Evaluate Rama's Character

Dr Anshul Bajpai

Ex-senior Lecturer, YSY, Nigeria

Senior Faculty , T.S.C.S, Guwahati

Abstract

Ram is a national hero. He is regarded as the God among Hindus. He is the incarnation of the Vishnu. Many texts are written describing Rama. Among that text, Valmiki Ramayana, Dasrath Jataka and Ramcharit Manas of Tulsidas are important sources. Ram is described as the ideal king in all texts however the stories may be different in every text. In Dasrath Jatak , Ram is told the king for Varanasi . There are various historical implications based on these texts may also be attributed. In this article, I tried to evaluate the character of Ram described in various text. In Buddhist text, Ram is described as a bodhisattva who paved the way for salvation of the other while in Hindu text, Ram is portrayed as the Maryada Purushottam, who always showed the highest ethical values.

Key Words : Dasrath Jatak, Bodhisattva , Ramacharit Manas , Valmiki Ramayan, Murder of Sambuk, Agni Parkisha , Jamvanta

Introduction

Ram, the hero of the Valmiki Ramayana, is one of the most worshiped God among Hindus in all over the world . There are various texts describing the character of Ram. In every text Ram is portrayed as the **Maryada Purushottam** (The Man who knows his political religious and social limits and never crosses those limits). In every text it is described that Ram strictly followed the instructions of his father and spent 14 years of exile in the forest. During the period of the exile of Rama, Rama had to conflict with the people of distinct races, Ram either defeated them or assimilated them with his culture. The migration of the Rama showed towards the southern India where Rama fought against Ravana and killed Ravana

Some Buddhist texts, such as the Particularly Dasrath Jataka, also describe Rama, but with different stories. According to that story, Ram is described as Rama Pandit (a Bodhisattva) who lived in the forest for 12 years after his father Dasrath, a righteous king of Varanasi, ordered him to exile.

However, the story of the Rama in Buddhist text and Brahmanical text is different but both the text portrayed Rama as an ideal son, king, brother, and husband . In Buddhist text, the description of the

murder of a Sudra (Shambuk) because of the violation of Varnashrama system¹, killing of Ravana and Agni Parkisha of Sita, exile of Sita are absent. The reason behind these missing stories may have been that the writer did not want to show any values of Rama which are against the Buddhist values.

Date and Authors of Compilation of these three text

The Dasaratha-Jataka: Being the Buddhist Story of King Rama was first published in 1871 by V. Fausboll. The book is a retelling of the Buddhist story of King Rama, which is also known as the Dasaratha-Jataka.²

The Dasaratha-Jataka is a Jataka tale, which is a story in Buddhist literature about a previous life of the Gautama Buddha. The Jataka tales are a large body of literature that are dated between 300 BC and 400 AD. The stories are thought to have been composed by ordinary people and then written down and preserved by Buddhist monks.³

The Dasaratha-Jataka is based on the ancient Indian epic, the Ramayana. The story follows King Rama as he tries to overcome obstacles to become a just ruler. He is helped by his wife Sita, his brother Lakshmana, and the monkey god Hanuman.

The Ramayana is one of the great epics of Sanskrit literature and is considered a treatise of Dharma. It is a treasure house of knowledge and has been translated into many languages, including English, and adopted into the music, dance, ballet, art, and architecture of many South and Southeast Asian countries.

The Ramayana by Valmiki is generally believed to have been composed around 200 BCE or earlier. However, scholarly estimates for the earliest parts of the text range from the 7th to 5th centuries BCE, with later parts extending up to the 3rd century CE.

It is believed that Valmiki Ramayana was put to writing around 500 AD. It was told and retold since several centuries orally in and around India. Maharshi Valmiki is confident of its circulation among people until mountains stay erect on the earth.

Rama as per the story of Valmiki Ramayana

Ramayana is known as a treatise of Dharma. The four Purusharthas –values of life, viz., Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha are dealt here with utmost care. Kalidas the famous Sanskrit poet summarizes the values of life upheld by the kings of Ikshvaku dynasty as narrated by Valmiki. The Ramayana epic is strewn with exposition of values of life from great sages. The concept of Dharma is depicted well through the conduct of various characters and more so by Rama. He deals with difficult situations with the ardent devotion to Dharma. It gives a clear message that Dharma will be victorious in the end. But those who want to stand by Dharma may have to pay the price in order to achieve benefit for the entire society. The path of Dharma is open for fearless and noble people.

Considering the importance of highlighting the philosophical thoughts, values and social ideals internalized in the commentaries of Ramayana, it is also attempted to translate selected commentaries into English (though there are some more important commentaries). Several authors have written commentaries on Valmiki Ramayana which are difficult to understand for all. The authors represent different Schools of Philosophy. These commentaries enriched Indian philosophy. The commentaries selected for translation for the present are Amrithakataka, Dhramakutam, Tattvadipika Tilaka and Siromani. The English translation of commentaries has been given for important subjects on which commentary is given.

¹ Book 7, the Uttarakanda, in chapter 76,

² Edited and translated by V. Fausbøl, *The Dasaratha Jātaka*, Copenhagen, 1871. The story is like that of the Rāmāyana, except that here Sītā is the hero's sister, not his wife.

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dasaratha_Jataka

Indian literary tradition holds Valmiki as the first poet (Adikavi) and Ramayana as the first epic, Adikavya. Valmiki is the first path maker for the sweet expressions of poetry. He provided inspiration for all classical poets and his influence is seen in Sanskrit literature in Poems Plays and Kavyas. Even though Valmiki Ramayana has been composed in classical Sanskrit and not intelligible to the unlettered yet due to the efforts made by oral expounders it was made understandable to the masses in rural India. Lava and Kusa are the first expounders of Ramayana and great Valmiki himself trained them.⁴

[Saint Narada visits hermitage of Valmiki -- Valmiki queries about a single perfect individual bestowed with all good qualities enumerated by him -- Narada, knower of past, present and future, identifies such a man -- describes virtues, qualities of Sri Rama -- narrates briefly the story of his life.]

तपस्वाध्यायनिरतं तपस्वी वाग्विदां वरम् ।

नारदं परिपप्रच्छ वाल्मीकिमुनिपुङ्गवम् ॥1.1.1॥⁵

In Valmiki Rama is portrayed as Kshatriya who had been the protector of the Varnashrama system , where the death sentence for the Brahmans was prohibited but Ravana was killed by Ram and even Ravana is described as the lineage of a sage Pulashti . In fact author wanted to show about the racial-cultural conflict and other message is tried to convey that if a Brahman does bad deeds, could be killed . Since the abduction of Sita was considered as the evil in sight of Rama hence , Ravana, being Brahman may be killed .

One other important fact needs to be analysed. When Rama invaded Ravana, sage Agasta blessed Ram. The sage Agasta is related to the Tamil text, where he presided over the Sangams held during the 1st-2nd century AD. Hence, it is quite possible that the story of the Ramayana may reflect the assimilation of two cultures, and during the process of Assimilation, some non-Aryans were killed or defeated.

The process of Aryanisation is highly or overwhelmingly accepted by the scholars . In Rigved's Purush Sukta , when the term Sudra was described and in later text Sudra has become an integral part of Varna system and could not be slave or untouchable . It expressed the gradual process of aryanisation . It is also acceptable fact that the knowledge of political institutions and the ideas in Southern India , described in Tamil text are influence with the Aryan/ Northern political institutions and ideas. The Varnashrama system in southern India came from Northern India . Since , the urbanisation is absent in southern India before the origin of monarchy, definitely , it is said that the political institutions in southern India are borrowed from northern India .

Cooperation of Jatayu, Sugreev, Jamavanta and the Hanuman through the light on the assimilation of non Aryan culture . Ram believed in highest values of Ethics . Rama did not want to kill Ravan at any condition . He gave him all the opportunities to apologise but he did not do. Rama supported only those persons who were either deprived. He supported Sugreev instead of Bali, he supported Vibhishana who was expelled by Ravana .

In fact the story of Ramayana reflect the highest ethical values of a Brahmanical society of the contemporary period

⁴ <https://www.valmiki.iitk.ac.in/introduction>

⁵ तपस्वी ascetic, वाल्मीकिः Valmiki, तपः स्वाध्यायनिरतम् highly delighted in the practice of religious austerities and study of vedas, वाग्विदां वरम् eloquent among the knowledgeable, मुनिपुङ्गवम् preeminent among sages, नारदम् Narada, परिपप्रच्छ enquired.

Ascetic Valmiki enquired of Narada, preeminent among the sages ever engaged in the practice of religious austerities or study of the Vedas and best among the eloquent.

Rama as per the Story of Dashrath Jataka

Once upon a time, at Benares, a great king named Dasaratha renounced the ways of evil, and reigned in righteousness. Of his sixteen thousand wives, the eldest and queen consort bore him two sons and a daughter; the elder son was named Rama pandita, or Rama the wise, the second was named Prince Lakkhana or Lucky, and the daughter's name was the Lady Sita (meaning "cool").⁶

Dasratha's wife wanted to make her son Bharat as king, she demanded for two boons. The king would not give her this gift. He thought within himself: "Women are ungrateful and treacherous. This woman might use a forged letter or a treacherous bribe to get my sons murdered." So he sent for his sons, and told them all about it, saying: "My sons, if you live here some mischief may befall you. Go to some neighboring kingdom, or to the woodland, and when my body is burnt, then return and inherit the kingdom which belongs to your family." Then he summoned soothsayers, and asked them the limits of his own life. They told him he would live yet twelve years longer. Then he said, "Now, my sons, after twelve years you must return, and uplift the umbrella of royalty." They promised, and after taking leave of their father, went forth from the palace weeping. The Lady Sita said, "I too will go with my brothers:" she bade her father farewell, and went forth weeping.⁷

they lived there, feeding upon the wild fruit; but King Dasaratha pined after his sons, and died in the ninth year. When his obsequies were performed, the queen gave orders that the umbrella should be raised over her son, Prince Bharata. But the courtiers said, "The lords of the umbrella are dwelling in the forest, " and they would not allow it. Said Prince Bharata, "I will fetch back my brother Rama pandita from the forest, and raise the royal umbrella over him"⁸

" Taking the five emblems of royalty(Sword, umbrella, diadem, slippers and fan), he proceeded with a complete host of the four arms (elephants, cavalry, chariots, infantry) to their dwelling place. Not far away he caused camp to be pitched, and then with a few courtiers he visited the hermitage, at the time Lakkhana pandita and Sita were away in the woods."⁹

After hearing the news of his father demise, Ram explained about the philosophy of impermanence. and refused to return back .

When the three years were over, the wise man came out of the forest, came to Benares, and entered the park. The princes hearing of his arrival proceeded with a great company to the park, and making Sita the queen consort, gave to them both the ceremonial sprinkling. The sprinkling thus performed, the Great Being standing in a magnificent chariot, and surrounded by a vast company, entered the city, making a solemn circuit right-wise; then mounting to the great terrace of his splendid palace Sucandaka, he reigned there in righteousness for sixteen thousand years, and then went to swell the hosts of heaven.¹⁰

The Master having ended this discourse, declared the Truths, and identified the Birth: (now at the conclusion of the Truths, the land-owner was established in the fruit of the First Path:) "At that time the king Suddhodana was king Dasaratha, Mahamaya was the mother, Rahula's mother was Sita, Ananda was Bharata, and I myself was Rama pandita."¹¹

Rama as per the story of Ram Charit Manas

Ramcharit Manas is a text of the translation of Valmiki Ramayan in Awadhi, a dialect of Hindi. Author of Ram Charit Manas is Tulsidas and it is authored during mid of sixteenth century AD. In Ramcharit Manas, Tulasidas just praised the Ram, since Tulsidas was the devotee of Rama so he portrayed Ram as the God who incarnated in human form. Since Tulsi das had been a victim of the scold of his own

⁶ DA8ARATHA- JATAKA, BEING THE BUDDHIST STORY OF KING RAMA. THE ORIGINAL PALI TEXT WITH A TRANSLATION AND NOTES BY V. FAUSBOLL. PRINTED BY LOUIS KLEIN. 1871. Page 1-

⁷ Ibid page 2

⁸ Ibid Page 3

⁹ Ibid page 4

¹⁰ Ibid page 8-9

¹¹ Ibid Page 12

wife therefore he portrayed the image of a woman as wicket, jealous and beatable .¹² In Fact, Tulsidas showed Rama as a kind hearted, humble and ethical person . Tulsidas showed that Rama does not discriminate among the people on the bases of caste, creed and the race. Rama is showed as a person who believed in communal harmony . The concept of Ramrajya as described by Tulsidas is similar to the ideal state as described by Arthashastra of Kautilya¹³. The parameter of the Ram Rajya is Happiness index¹⁴. Tulsidas portrayed that a king must work for the well being of his subjects otherwise that king would be punished by the God¹⁵. Tulsidas portrayed Ram as an ideal king .

Ram's Character reflects the values of Buddhism and Brahmanism and contemporary society of 16th century

Various texts were compiled on Rama and every author described Rama as per the need of contemporary society and their own beliefs. Buddhist text described Rama as Boddhisatva who took birth to remove his worshippers' sorrow. Bodhisattvas came on earth not for the salvation, but they paved the way for salvation. In Dashrath Jataka, it is shown that Ram was pathfinder for the Buddhist philosophy when he described about sorrow and grief and refused to return back to the palace

The Valmiki Ramayan and Ramcharit Manas described almost the same stories but some incidents which are absent in Ramcharit Manas and described in Valmiki such as the killing of Sambook . It is absent in Manas. In Valmiki Ramayan, the woman is portrayed in good condition and sowed extremely loyal towards husband while , by Tulsidas everywhere woman was portrayed as suspicious . He stated that the wife could be examined at the time of emergency¹⁶Justification of the expulsion of Sita on the ground of Rajdharma is another example .

In Ramcharan Manas, Ram is described as the symbol of humanity who provided shelter to Vibhishana. Rama disliked those people who were cruel, treacherous, cunning, etc. In this way, Ramcharit Mans described the good qualities of the King

Rama: A real hero of the Nation and Pathfinder of the world's Political System

Ram is not only the hero of the Hindu believers but also he may be regarded as the pathfinder of the political system of the world. Ram was a king who established the highest ethical values for a king. Rama expelled his beloved wife just because of the discontent of the public against the appointment of Sita on the post of Chief Queen (In those days, the Patrani/ Chief Queen was a constitutional post). Being a king, he always ensured about the maximum welfare of his subject. The consent of the subjects was considered in any decision related to the state . Ram did not arbitrarily take any decision without the proper consent with subjects and his ministers.

He protected the democratic and secular values of the state. During his reign, subject had right to criticise the king. Once a washerman alleged the character of Ram's wife Sita, Rama did not punish that person. A state where the subjects enjoyed the right to speech and expressions in those days, definitely that state may be regarded as the ideal state for the modern state.

In Ram Rajya, socio-economic equality and equity were also considered up to a maximum extent. In Valmiki Ramayan, the story of a Dog seeking justice from Ram is described. It implies that all the subjects, without any discrimination, were entitled to justice.¹⁷ Through this story , it is also concluded that power generates corruption and greed. Hence it is not very easy to work honestly while a person is in power. As per the story of a dog, when Rama agreed to punish the priest who wounded the dog, Ram asked for appropriate punishment from the dog. The dog said that the priest should be

¹² Sundar Kand , Doha 59 , Ramcharit Manas

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¹⁷ Valmiki Ramayan translated by Hari Prasad Shastri , Chapter 59c, Book 7 Uttar kand

promoted to the head priest. Once a priest acquired power, the priest would be corrupt and in the next birth, the priest would be a dog.¹⁸

Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, it may be concluded that the Ram is not only God based on the mythological texts Ramcharit Manas/ Valmiki Ramayana and Dasrath Jatak but also an ideal king whose political values must be followed by every ruler of the world. If the values of Ram were followed in any country, the country would be a democratic country and a welfare country. Ram represents the highest values of ethical monarchy. However, the description of Rama may be different in Brahmanical text and Buddhist texts because of the certain objectives of the authors of the text but as a whole Rama is shown as the pathfinder for the world's political system

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¹⁸ Ibid