

Paroxysm towards Nature in Rāmakathā

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ABSTRACT

The propagation of the culture of 'Rāmāyaṇa' has always been a favourite subject of the interpreters and promoters of Hindu religion, and it is rare to find such articles, books and poems in our literature, which do not praise Rāma, sing his divine character or depict him as a man of character and a transcendental personality. Speeches, articles etc. praising the moral ideals of 'Rāmāyaṇa' are also heard and seen every day. But in today's practical world, we have started taking more interest in the worldly evaluation of an era or a person; mere praise of someone does not arouse our inner interest.

Rāma-Rājya or 'Rāmāyaṇa' period was a golden age of ancient Bhāratiya society, but our curiosity is not satisfied by merely describing it in adjectives, by merely singing its praises. We want to know something that is relevant to our life in an acceptable way. What was the state of literature and science? What was the outlook of the people towards life and nature? If analysis of the ancient poems is done to solve these questions, then a completely new and interesting form of this ancient story will be presented.

Thus the proposed paper is a little endeavour towards it. It is intended to put emphasis on the characters, verses and literal stories which are having some message to love and preserve the Mother Nature in Rāmāyaṇa and the later scripts based on Rāmāyaṇa.

Key words :

Rāmāyaṇa, Vālmīki, Tulasīdāsa, Bhārata, Culture, Nature, Trees, Environment, Harmony.

Introduction

Rāmāyaṇa, one of the two great epics of Bhāratīya literature, is not only a tale of heroism, duty, and righteousness but also a profound exploration of the relationship between humans and nature. This epic, attributed to the sage Vālmīki, intricately weaves themes of love and reverence for the natural world throughout its narrative. The portrayal of nature in Rāmāyaṇa serves as both a backdrop and a vital character, influencing the actions and emotions of its protagonists.

Nature and environment have always been fundamental to our life. No matter what age or era it is. It is the basic need for every living being. Every creature show their gratitude and affection towards nature in their own style. Being able to express differently, literature is the effective one for humans. So it is normal to find immense examples in Bhāratīya literature where we can see nature as a character. Literary works are the product of the reflections of social life on the mind of man. So Environment has been closely related to literary creations. In fact, the environment itself serves as the background of Maḥarṣi Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa.

Rāmāyaṇa is an epic considered as the First literary work. The literary nature of Rāmāyaṇa is different from the literary nature of Vedas and Upaniṣads. Most of the Vedic chants consist of praise and prayer. The primary and main problem of the primitives was the provision of food, shelter and safety for a normal and safe life. This prayer and praise has been manifested in different forms at different times. Therefore, the sages of the Ṛgveda mantras were the candidates and the benefactors. In that sense the Rāmāyaṇa is not a collection of mantras, neither praise, nor plea for salvation. At that time, life of the Bhāratīyas became much smoother. Agriculture and animal husbandry brought prosperity and security to their lives. Life has become less uncertain, more stable. So freed from the immediate practical problems of food, shelter and living, they learned to think about the life-nature-environment around them, humility towards nature transformed into the bud of world-sense –

"सर्वभूतस्थमात्मानं सर्वभूतानि चात्मनि।¹".

The verses of Rāmāyaṇa are not intended to praise or worship the forces of nature out of fear. Rāmāyaṇa is an epic poem. Ādi Kavi launched the Ādi Śloka of classical Sanskrit literature into the beautiful core of nature. Influenced by the incident of two lovebirds, he did-

मा निषाद प्रतिष्ठां त्वमगमः शाश्वतीः समाः।

यत् क्रौञ्चमिथुनादेकमवधीः काममोहितम् ॥²

Nature in Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa

Maharṣi Vālmīki, The poet of Rāmāyaṇa was a forest dweller; So he describes the relation of nature with the civilization implicitly in the Rāmāyaṇa, The main plot of the story of Rāma has been the nature and the environment because the main characters of the epic Rāma and Sītā, spent the prime time of their lives in the Tapovanās.

Being close to nature, realizing the deep kinship of their own being with nature, the ṛṣis were able to say the divine words – इदं सर्वमसृजत। यदिदं किञ्च। तत् सृष्ट्वा तदेवानुप्राविशत्।³. - that means all these things are emanating from the supreme and vibrating within it. Nature provided them with shade, flowers, and all their daily activities, and they had a vital relationship with the nature.

They knew that all the bounties they had received through the universe, such as light, air, and water, were not of the earth, nor of the trees or sky, but the source of these is eternal. That is why they accepted breath, light, food and water with reverence and devotion. From this it can be understood how the forest has nurtured the heart of Bhārata in its deep shadow.

¹ गीता 6.29

² वा.रा. बाल.2.15

³ Taittirīyopaniṣad 6.1

In the Rāmāyaṇa, Rāma Sītā's exile was not of pain, but of joy. The poet of Rāmāyaṇa sings the joys of the forest with repetitions. The coolness of the forest, the innocence of animals gave joy to the heart. This joy is not the joy of dominion, but the joy of communion. How much Vālmīki, Rāma and Sītā were aware of nature can be seen when Princess Sītā is going to the forest. She started asking Rāma about all the unknown plants and flowering creepers that she had never seen before. At her request, Lakṣmaṇa began to bring her many trees full of flowers.

एकैकं पादपं गुल्मं लतां वा पुष्पशालिनीम्।
 अदृष्टरूपा पश्यन्ती रामं प्रपच्छ सा वला॥
 रमणीयान् बहुविधान् पादपान् कुसुमोत्कवान्।
 सीतावचनसंरध्व आनयामास लक्ष्मणः॥⁴

In Rāmāyaṇa, nature is often depicted as a living entity that interacts with the characters. The forests, mountains, rivers, and animals are not merely settings; they are integral to the story's progression. For instance, when Rāma, Sītā, and Lakṣmaṇa are exiled to the forest, the lush environment becomes a sanctuary where they find peace and solace. The beauty of the forest is celebrated, highlighting the couple's deep connection to the land.

The love for nature in Rāmāyaṇa is manifested through the character's interactions with the environment. This longing symbolizes a deeper appreciation for nature's splendour and fragility. Moreover, the epic emphasizes the sacredness of certain trees and plants, which are often revered in Hindu culture, further by highlighting the need for respect and protection of the natural world. We can see When Bhārata meets Rāma at Citrakūṭa he asks about the wellness of the Nature of Ayodhya –

कच्चिन्नागवनं गुप्तं कच्चित् ते सन्ति धेनुकाः ।
 कच्चिन्न गणिकाश्वानां कुन्जराणां च तृप्यसि ॥⁵

⁴ वा.रा. अयोध्या.55.30

Scenes of sympathy towards animals, birds and plants are found in the entire poem. Vālmīki's vivid descriptions of the flora and fauna create a vibrant tapestry that reflects the harmony between the characters and their surroundings⁶. Arriving at the āśrama of sage Bharadvāja with his entire family, Bharata first asked about the good health of him, then asked about the good news of the trees, leaves and deer-birds of the āśrama.

वसिष्ठो भरतश्चैनं पप्रच्छतुरनामयम् ।

शरीरेऽग्निषु शिष्येषु वृक्षेषु मृगपक्षिषु ॥⁷

Throughout Rāmāyaṇa, nature serves as a refuge and a source of guidance. When Rāma is in despair due to Sītā's abduction, he often seeks solace in the natural landscape. The mountains, rivers, and forests offer him not only physical shelter but also spiritual rejuvenation. The forest is portrayed as a space of spiritual significance, where ascetics and sages reside; emphasizing the idea that nature is a place for contemplation and growth. The character's journeys are often mirrored by their experiences in nature, reinforcing the belief that the natural world is a powerful ally in their quests.

In Rāmāyaṇa, nature plays a significant and symbolic role, reflecting the connection between the divine and the natural world. Several aspects highlight the Forests as Sacred Spaces: The forests, particularly Daṇḍakā and Citrakūṭa, are not just physical settings but are imbued with spiritual significance. They serve as places of asceticism, reflection, and divine interaction. for example when going to Citrakūṭa Bharata says Satrughna-

अतिमात्रमयं देशः मनोज्ञः प्रतिभाति मे

तापसानां निवासोऽयं व्यक्तं स्वर्गपथोऽनघ॥⁸

⁵ वा.रा. अयोध्या.100.50

⁶ ibid अरण्य 60.6

⁷ ibid अयोध्या.90.8

Rāma's exile to the forest symbolizes his detachment from material wealth and his return to a simpler, more spiritually focused life.

Rāmāyaṇa imparts moral lessons about the importance of living in harmony with nature. The interactions between characters and their environment often reflect a broader message about ecological balance and respect for all living beings. That is why Not just out of curiosity but the characters of the epic are deeply associated with the natural surroundings. For example- When Sītā was abducted by Rāvaṇa, she prayed to the trees of Pañcavaṭī for help. आमन्त्रये जनस्थानं कर्णिकारांश्च पुष्पितान्⁹ . Sītā requested to inform Rāma quickly that Rāvaṇa is abducting her. Rāma also questions the forests, plants like Kadamba, Bilva, Arjuna, Kurubaka, Bakula, Aśoka, Tāla etc. anxiously in the early stages of his search for Sītā.

वृक्षात्वृक्षं प्धावन् सा। गिरींश्चापि नदीनदम्॥

बभ्राम विलपन् रामः। शोकपङ्कार्णवप्लुतः॥¹⁰

Rāma, who loved the hills, took refuge in that valley of beautiful Citrakūṭa for a long time. He forgets all the pain and felt rejoice there and one day he showed Sītā the peak of Citrakūṭa and said:

न राज्याङ्गं शनं भद्रे न सुहृद्भिर्विनाभवः ।

मनो मे बाधते दृष्ट्वा रमणीयमिमं गिरिम् ॥¹¹

This epic has been given expansion from time to time. In this entire poem, while nature gives meaning to the expressed feelings and makes them effective, it also helps in making the creation intelligible and conveying the feelings. Ādikavi has

⁸ ibid अयोध्या 93.18

⁹ ibid. अरण्य 54.29

¹⁰ ibid अरण्य 60.11

¹¹ ibid अयोध्या.94.3

tried to ensure that for the sake of human development and conservation, 'तेन त्यक्तेन भुंजीथा'¹² is the basis of environmental balance.

Rāmāyaṇa often personifies natural elements, such as rivers and mountains, endowing them with divine attributes and reverence. For instance, the Ganges and other rivers are treated as sacred entities with their own stories and significance. So the interactions with nature often reflect the broader themes of dharma (duty/righteousness). Rāma's respectful treatment of the forest and its inhabitants, such as the wise sage Agastya and the hermit communities, illustrates the harmony between human actions and the natural order.

स्थलीप्रायवतोद्देशे पिप्पलीवनशोभिते।

बहुपुष्पफले रम्ये नानाविहगनादिते॥

पद्मिन्यो विविधास्तत्र प्रसन्नसलिलाश्रयाः।

हंसकारण्डवाकीर्णाश्चक्रवाकोपशोभिता॥¹³.

Rāmāyaṇa is a rich tapestry of love and reverence for nature, illustrating the profound bond between humans and the environment. Through its characters' experiences and interactions with the natural world, the epic conveys timeless messages about respect, protection, and the intricate balance of life. As modern society grapples with environmental challenges, the teachings of Rāmāyaṇa remain relevant, reminding us of the beauty and sanctity of nature and the importance of nurturing our relationship with it. In a world increasingly distanced from nature, Rāmāyaṇa serves as a beacon, encouraging us to embrace and cherish the natural world around us.

¹² ईश. उप. 1

¹³ वा. रा. अरण्य 11.38-39

Nature in Rāmacaritamānasa

So as the Rāmāyaṇa in the Rāmacaritamānasa, which is the poetic retelling of Rāmāyaṇa by Tulasīdāsa, the love and reverence for nature are evident and deeply woven into the narrative. The rivers like Ganga, Yamuna, Saryu and Godavari were considered the most sacred and even today the society worships them as goddesses. These rivers still remain the givers of salvation and destroyers of sins.

The āśramas of the sages and all the groves were the areas of penance and meditation at that time. So In the Rāmāyaṇa period, sages and saints used to live in groves. They used to bathe in the water reservoirs and used to drink the water of the same. They used to survive by eating fruits, flowers and tubers of the forests. From there they used to get samidha for sacrifice. That is why nature remained auspicious everywhere. Its description is available in Rāmacaritamānasa.

मंगलरूप भयउ बन तब ते। कीन्ह निवास रमापति जब ते॥

फटिक सिला अति सुभ्र सुहाई। सुख आसीन तहाँ द्वौ भाई॥¹⁴

Tulasīdāsa says - ever since Rāma went to him, Viśvāmitra's Tapovan was always filled with fruits and flowers. The trees provide shade under which the travellers sit to relieve their fatigue and get happiness. Rāma and experience immense happiness while sitting in the shade of the trees in the forest.

In the Rāmakathā, charming descriptions of forests, gardens and water reservoirs etc. are available. The mountains, forests, rivers and lakes are covered with beauty. Day by day, they become more beautiful. Birds and animals remain happy. The honey bees are humming sweetly.

खग मृग बृंद अनंदित रहहीं। मधुप मधुर गुंजत छबि लहहीं॥

सो बन बरनि न सक अहिराजा। जहाँ प्रगट रघुबीर बिराजा॥¹⁵

¹⁴ रा.च.मा. किष्किन्धाकाण्ड

Seeing the beauty of the gardens and lakes of Janakapurī, the mind of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa was also fascinated. A very attractive form of nature is available in this context.

नव पल्लव फल सुमन सुहाए। निज संपति सुर रूख लजाए॥
चातक कोकिल कीर चकोरा। कूजत बिहग नटत कल मोरा॥¹⁶

that means beautiful trees with new leaves, fruits and flowers are putting even the Kalpavṛkṣa to shame with their wealth. Birds like the cuckoo, parrot, Cukor etc. are speaking sweetly and peacocks are performing beautiful dances.

During the Rāmāyaṇa period, the atmosphere of Tapovans was peaceful and harmonious. Due to the influence of all this, inner happiness and beauty was present everywhere. The Rāmācaritamānasa often describes the beauty of the natural world, from lush forests and blooming gardens to serene rivers and majestic mountains. These descriptions not only set the scene but also reflect the spiritual beauty and harmony of the universe. Rāma's life in the forests during his exile is portrayed with a profound sense of respect for nature. Tulasīdāsa emphasizes the peaceful coexistence between Rāma and the natural world, highlighting how Rāma's virtuous behaviour extends to his interactions with flora and fauna.

Nature is depicted as a manifestation of divine will and a reflection of Rāma's virtues. The forests, rivers, and mountains are often described as being blessed by the divine presence, reinforcing the idea that nature and divinity are intertwined. The natural setting is used to convey moral and spiritual lessons. For example, the beauty of the forest and its creatures can symbolize the virtues of simplicity, purity, and devotion, which are central to the teachings of the Rāmācaritamānasa.

¹⁵ ibid. अरण्यकाण्ड

¹⁶ रा.च.मा. वालकाण्ड

In summary, the Rāmacaritamānasa reflects a deep appreciation for nature, using it to enhance the spiritual and moral dimensions of the story, and to illustrate the divine harmony that exists within the natural world.

Conclusion

The conclusions that will come out of this discussion are that - the true, auspicious and beautiful form of nature and environment is its complete form. That is why this form of nature and environment has been acceptable to all places and in all ages, because just as other dimensions of Rāmakathā awaken the noble feelings of the readers, similarly this form of nature is also educational and inspiring everywhere.

Whatever conditions are being created in the country and the world at present, all this is happening due to the exploitation of nature and environment. Human beings are not paying attention to nature due to their comfort and prosperity, the result of which is the current situation, whether it is an epidemic or any other type of disaster, it is the root cause of all these. Today we all need to unite at the global level, there is an extreme need to unite and save, promote and protect environment like our life, we should learn from our holy scriptures, follow them so that we get the elixir of life.

To understand the cultural traditions of India, it is necessary to be well acquainted with the cultural conditions described in scriptures like 'Rāmāyaṇa' and 'Mahābhārata', because on one hand their culture is reflected in our society even today in more or less form and secondly, the kind of lively description of our ancient civilization and culture, political and social life that is found is rare elsewhere. Vālmīki has given a very ancient and important description of Bhāratīya culture. So there is an extreme need to unite and save, promote and protect environment like our life, we should learn from our holy scriptures, follow them so that we get the elixir of life and our nation Bhārata can become Bhā-rata again.

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