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## A study of social issues in the Ramayana in the context of subcommentaries

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### Introduction

Valmiki Ramayana is a social epic in India. And its extension can be witnessed even beyond the political boundaries in India. It has been argued that Ramayana is a proto epic of the whole Asia (in lokesh Chandra *Ramayana* the epic of Asia). In Indonesia (Prabanan Temple of Indonesia) *Ramayana* is out of wall and *Ramayana* drama is the part of culture. The whole *Ramayana* is drawn on the wall which represents the *Ramayana* culture within the society. It is believed that mostly characters participate role in *Ramayana* came from other community. So *Ramayana* is mere not an epic but also it has so many values and cultural things which leads to modern living prospects.

*Ramayana* is the most ancient epic in Indian Sanskrit literary history. It is to be accepted by the ancient and modern scholar Adi-Kavya written by the hand of famous poet Valmiki who by his excellent writing skill and sharpened by power of penance, surpassed even the preceptor of gods, Brihaspati. It contains the life history of King Rama from his birth to his final conquest of Lanka and his coronation on his return to Ayodhya.

In the discussion of socio condition of *Ramayana* we have also put some another scenario of *Ramayana* which is related to the epic by poetic form. Valmiki recognised himself first Adikavi among ancient Sanskrit poets and there is no doubt about his poetic claim. Though he is an elegant and simple style he is equally a great artist and to heighten the effect of a very tragic event his first portrays the joyful background. In the social prospect of Valmiki Ramayana social and political condition also lies in this epic. This represents that time era society and its function. My research work is to be highlighting the sociological issues in the Valmiki Ramayana through selected commentaries. Where what was the social structure of that time and what was the impact of social life? In this Topic I will try to find out some social issues which is directly mentioned by the poet in this great Hindu Epic. In actually, inequality, discrimination, dowry, patriotism, class struggle and power distribution, and rules and regulation which is always discussing in every sphere of the society. So that in Valmiki Ramayana these kinds of issues are lies in what form? There is need to understand the Inequality, Discrimination, Class hierarchy, Dowry, Women status and role of saints in making rules the society of *Ramayana*. My research work will also consider the commentaries written on Valmiki Ramayana in different time of gap. And in these commentaries what kind of explanation generated by the commentator? Is there is new aspect came to know in the front of society to understand the Valmiki Ramayana?

The poet has very graphically exposed to the public the very evil effects of polygamy but could not change the law as it was a function regarded within the jurisdiction of the Dharmasastra.<sup>1</sup> Ramais very generous and sympathetic towards the original inhabitant of this land. The mere example of Jatayus where Rama regarded him as associates and shows his kindful behaviour and sympathetic nature.<sup>2</sup> Altekar indicate in his book there was originally no 'Vanras' or classes in the society of Vedic Aryan. And also he mentioned that this hymn belonged to a period when any one of three Vanras could be a leader of the people and could claim to lead any way of life specially reserved in later times for one particular Vanras only.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Altekar, G.S., Studies on Valmiki Ramayana, Page, 343.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, Page, 346.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, page, 347.

From the narrations in Yuddha Kanda of *Ramayana*, we learn that the terrain in which Rama fought with Ravana, in most part, was indeed such a mountainous terrain covered in forests. City of Lanka was not situated in a plain but on top of an elevated plateau on the top of a mountain (Triakuta mountain i.e. Adams peak, Sri Lanka). Only the last battle between Rama and Ravana is mentioned as being taking place in a plain. It is only then did Rama use a chariot in the battle. Chariot is not mentioned in any of the previous battles, in Rama's side of the army. Rama is often mentioned as fighting from the back of some Vanara or from the rock-tops. This adeptness in fighting from the top of trees, rocks, hills and mountain tops using tree trunk, stones and rocks might have given Vanara army an advantage over the Rakshasa army, which is mentioned as having all the four divisions (elephant-army, chariots, cavalry and infantry). Ravana's army was thus very powerful but more effective to fight in a plain terrain, not in the hilly terrain that surrounded the Lanka city.

*Ramayana* is divided into seven Cantos in which is known as *Balkanda*, *Ayodhyakanda*, *Aranyakanda*, *Kiskindhakanda*, *Yudhakanda* and *Uttarakanda*. Many poets influenced by Valmiki *Ramayana* and create new poem or poetic. *Ramayana* is totally based on the king Rama's life and poet Valmiki chosen the right title of the epic which is relevant according to the story. Jacobi expressly states that the hermitage of Vālmiki was near the bank of the Tamasā and the Gangā rivers and that he lived there during the supremacy of the Ikshvaku princes when their glory was quite fresh in the minds of the people<sup>4</sup>. The *Rāmāyana* is a not a mere poetic creation of Vālmiki's extraordinary imagination. The ancient ruler in this country had family-bards who used to compose and sing the glories of their patrons in lyrical ballads called *Ākhyanas*.....Rāma's family were as important source for the world, in the form of famous epic of this first poet of the Sanskrit literature. This is itself evinces that the *Rāmāyana* is a story of historic events.<sup>5</sup> The *Ramayana* had existed in oral tradition for a long time for a long time before it was recorded in writing. Valmiki, the author of the present *Ramayana*, composed his work on basis of the ancient stories current in the society. If Valmiki was contemporary of Rama, as goes the Indian tradition, the oldest *Ramayana* was sung in the Vedic dialect for Rama belonged to the Vedic age; and the present *Ramayana* is a Sanskrit redaction of *Ramayana*. *Ramayana* was an illustrious descendant of the Ikshvaku dynasty with its capital at Ayodhya.<sup>6</sup> For this statement though there is no contemporary (historical) record, still this fact is vouchsafed by all the Puranas and early Jain and Buddhist tradition, which are not later than the third century B.C. The names of Rama and his father Dasratha occur in the list of ancient Indian historical kings. One of their important contemporary Vedic king was Atithigya Divodasa of Panchala whose sister; Ahilya married to Rishi Gautama.<sup>7</sup>

**Commentaries on *Ramayana*:** Dr. Ofrect accepts that there is thirty kind of Commentaries based on Valmiki *Ramayana*<sup>8</sup>. And its time period to be accepted near to fourteen, fifteen, sixteen and seventeenth century. Several commentaries on the Valmiki *Ramayana* which are available on the work speak of

its popularity during that era. But most of them are very recent.

1. *Ramayana-Tattava-dipika* by Mahesvara-Tirtha.
2. *Tilaka* by Rama
3. *Amrta-kataka* by Srirama
4. *Bhushana* by Govindraja
5. *Valmiki-hrdaya* by Ahobala
6. *Ramanujiye* by kaudande
7. *Manohara* by Loknath Chakrabarty
8. *Shiromani* by Vanshidhara and Shiv Sahay

Apaya –Diksita has commented on the *Ramayana* in his *Ramayana Tatparya-Sangraha* and *Trayambka-makhina* has done so in his *Dhum-Kuta*.<sup>9</sup> Recently Venkateshwar Press Bombay published a new verses of *Ramayana* in which consist the four commentaries. The first is *Bhusana* which is written by Govindaraja. And the second commentary is written by *Ramanujiya* entitled by Ramanuja. Third commentary is written by Ahobala named *Tani-Sloki* and fourth one is *Ramanyana-Tattva-Dipika* by Mahesvara-Tirtha.<sup>10</sup> Govindraja is known as finest commentator on Valmiki *Ramayana* and most popular in South-Indian commentators. It is accepted that Govindaraja was the follower of Sri-Vaisnavism. And Govindaraja's commentary on Valmiki *Ramayana* namely *Bhusana* thoroughly covers the entire text. And his harmony belong to *doctrine of Srivaisnavism* specially *prapatti*. His approach leads to how he was acquainted with Vedic ritualism not merely with the theory but also with practical aspects. Govindraja's pointed out the peculiarities of the language and the epic and the literary merits of the composition on which he comments. Thus the commentary is accepted highly valuable from religious, philosophical, literary and linguistic points of view. Second commentary is *Ramayana-Tattava-Dipika* of the Maheshwertiratha. Maheshwertiratha was the son of Sri Narayanatirtha. In his commentary he admitted that his work is based on the opinion of others commentators expressed on their various work. For example he quoted profusely from *Nighantu* of Yaska while explaining the meaning of words and verses. This is very much helpful and covers the entire work of *Ramayana*. Through this commentary proper understanding of language and it make very clear and vivid.

The third commentary is *Ramanujam* written by the great philosopher Ramanuja. This commentary work totally lies on *Ramayana* in the vedantic point of view. Since the meanings and explanations are included in the *Bhusana* commentary of the Govindraja. So it is not given separately in the present edition of the *Ramayana*, but its inclusion in the *Bhusana* proves that it was an important commentary.

Last and the utmost commentary which goes by the name of *Tanisloki* were composed by Ahobalacharya. This contains the translation of *Ramayana* and is available on the whole works. In this commentary the slokas of the *Ramayana* which were explained by the Dravida language are being explained by in the divine language i.e. Sanskrit. Ahobala follow those explanations mentioned in the Dravida literature. He also pointed out that explanation given by Ramanuja and Govinda Raja not mention in his commentary. It is believed that this commentary is very explanatory and reveals the correct meaning of the epic and also worth studying from literary point.

<sup>4</sup> Altekar, G.S., Studies on Valmiki *Ramayana*, Page, 11.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, Page, 328.

<sup>6</sup> Saklani, D., Questioning of *Ramayana* in the Historical context, online journal linked: [http://www.indologica.com/volumes/vol31/09\\_Saklani.pdf](http://www.indologica.com/volumes/vol31/09_Saklani.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, Questioning of *Ramayana* in the Historical context, online journal linked: [http://www.indologica.com/volumes/vol31/09\\_Saklani.pdf](http://www.indologica.com/volumes/vol31/09_Saklani.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Altekar, G.S., Studies on Valmiki *Ramayana*, page, 329.

<sup>9</sup> Altekar, G.S., Studies on Valmiki *Ramayana*, page, 330.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, page, 330.

**The Tikakara: MadhavaYogi**

Govindaraja mentions Mahesvara Tirtha in his commentary. Mahesvara Tirtha begins his work by bowing to Narayana Tirtha who was either his father or teacher. Narayana has explained Siddhanta Bindu by Madhusudan Sarasvati. Thus Madhusudan Sarasvati (1540-1623) followed by Narayana Tirtha (last part of the 16th - beginning of 17th century) and Mahesvara Tirtha (half of the 17th century), Govindaraja (later half of the 17th century) and Madhava Yogi (17th century)<sup>11</sup>. The writer of the Tilaka commentary often quotes Kataka who might be Nagesa Bhatta because Siromani relates Tilaka Tika to Bhatta Patha. But Tilaka never mentions Nagesa or Bhatta, except at the end of the Yudhakanda. Further probe reveals that Nagesa Bhatta was the teacher of the ruler of Srngaverapura, Ramavarma who also wrote a Tika on Adhyatma Ramayana. Whether Nagesa wrote Tilaka or not, it was written in his time, i.e. towards the end of the 18th century (1730-1810). Therefore, Madhava Yogi wrote sometime between these two denote dates, 1675 and 1750 as ascertained by Varadacharya. Madhava Yogi seems to belong to South India. In the beginning of his Tika he mentions three deities: Lord of Kalahasti, Ekamranatha of Kanchi and Vedagirisvara of Tirukkalu Kunuram in the valedictory shloka<sup>12</sup>.

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