

The Ramayana (Rama's Journey), by Valmiki, Sanskrit, 4th century B.C.

In 7 books, the first, *Bala Kanda* describes the birth of Rama, his childhood and marriage to Sita. The *Ayodhya Kanda* describes the preparations for Rama's coronation and his exile into the forest. The third part, *Aranya Kanda*, describes the forest life of Rama and the kidnapping of Sita by the demon king Ravana. The fourth book, *Kishkinda Kanda*, describes the meeting of Hanuman with Rama, the destruction of the vanara king Vali and the coronation of his younger brother Sugriva to the throne of the kingdom of Kishkindha. The fifth book is *Sundara Kanda*, which narrates the heroism of Hanuman, his flight to Lanka and meeting with Sita. The sixth book, *Yuddha Kanda*, describes the battle between Rama's and Ravana's armies. The last book, *Uttara Kanda*, describes the birth of Lava and Kusha to Sita, their coronation to the throne of Ayodhya, and Rama's final departure from the world.

Book 1: The Epic relates to the ancient traditions of two powerful races, the Kosalas and the Videhas, who lived in Northern India between the twelfth and tenth centuries before Christ. The names Kosala and Videha in the singular number indicate the kingdoms,--Oudh and North Behar,--and in the plural number they mean the ancient races which inhabited those two countries.

According to the Epic, Dasa-ratha king of the Kosalas had four sons, the eldest of whom was Rama the hero of the poem. And Janak king of the Videhas had a daughter named Sita, who was miraculously born of a field furrow, and who is the heroine of the Epic.

Janak ordained a severe test for the hand of his daughter, and many a prince and warrior came and went away disappointed. Rama succeeded, and won Sita. The story of Rama's winning his bride, and of the marriage of his three brothers with the sister and cousins of Sita, forms the subject of this Book.

Book 2: The events narrated in this Book occupy scarcely two days. The description of Rama's princely virtues and the rejoicings at his proposed coronation, with which the Book begins, contrast with much dramatic force and effect with the dark intrigues which follow, and which end in his cruel banishment for fourteen years.

The first six days of Rama's wanderings are narrated. Sita and the faithful Lakshman accompanied Rama in his exile, and the loyal people of Ayodhya followed their exiled prince as far as the banks of the Tamasa river, where they halted on the first night. Rama had to steal away at night to escape the citizens, and his wanderings during the following days give us beautiful glimpses of forest life in holy hermitages. Thirty centuries have passed since the age of the Kosalas and Videhas, but every step of the supposed journey of Rama is well known in India to this day, and is annually traversed by thousands of devoted pilgrims. The past is not dead and buried in India, it lives in the hearts of millions of faithful men and faithful women, and shall live for ever.

On the third day of their exile, Rama and his wife and brother crossed the Ganges; on the fourth day they came to the hermitage of Bharad-vaja, which stood where Allahabad now stands, on the confluence of the Ganges and the Jumna; on the fifth day they crossed the Jumna, the southern shores of which were then covered with woods; and on the sixth day they came to the hill of Chitra kuta, where they met the saint Valmiki, the reputed author of this Epic.

From Book 2: CROSSING THE TAMASA: THE CITIZENS' RETURN

Evening's thickening shades descended on Tamasa's distant shore,
Rama rested by the river, day of toilsome journey o'er,
And Ayodhya's loving people by the limpid river lay,
Sad and sorrowing they had followed Rama's chariot through the day,
"Soft-eyed Sita, faithful Lakshman," thus the gentle Rama said,
"Hail the first night of our exile mantling us in welcome shade,
Weeps the lone and voiceless forest, and in darksome lair and nest,
Feathered bird and forest creature seek their midnight's wonted rest,
Weeps methinks our fair Ayodhya to her Rama ever dear,
And perchance her men and women shed for us a silent tear,
Loyal men and faithful women, they have loved their ancient king,
And his anguish and our exile will their gentle bosoms wring!
Most I sorrow for my father and my mother loved and lost,
Stricken by untimely anguish, by a cruel fortune crost,

But the good and righteous Bharat gently will my parents tend,
 And with fond and filial duty tender consolation lend,
 Well I know his stainless bosom and his virtues rare and high,
 He will soothe our parents' sorrow and their trickling tear will dry!
 Faithful Lakshman, thou hast nobly stood by us when sorrows fell,
 Guard my Sits, by thy valour, by thy virtues tend her well,
 Wait on her while from this river Rama seeks his thirst to slake,
 On this first night of his exile food nor fruit shall Rama take,
 Thou Sumantra, tend the horses, darkness comes with close of day,
 Weary was the endless journey, weary is our onward way!"
 Store of grass and welcome fodder to the steeds the driver gave,
 Gave them rest and gave them water from Tamasa's limpid wave,
 And performing night's devotions, for the princes made their bed,
 By the softly rippling river 'neath the tree's umbrageous shade.
 On a bed of leaf and verdure Rama and his Sita slept,
 Faithful Lakshman with Sumantra nightly watch and vigils kept,
 And the stars their silent lustre on the weary exiles shed,
 And on wood and rolling river night her darksome mantle spread.
 Early woke the righteous Rama and to watchful Lakshman spake:
 Mark the slumb'ring city people, still their nightly rest they take,
 They have left their homes and children, followed us with loyal heart,
 They would take us to Ayodhya, from their princes loth to part!
 Speed, my brother, for the people wake not till the morning's star,
 Speed by night the silent chariot, we may travel fast and far,
 So my true and loving people see us not by dawn of day,
 Follow not through wood and jungle Rama in his onward way,
 For a monarch meek in suffering should his burden bravely bear,
 And his true and faithful people may not ask his woe to share!"
 Lakshman heard the gentle mandate, and Sumantra yoked the steed,
 Fresh with rest and grateful fodder, matchless in their wondrous speed,
 Rama with his gentle consort and with Lakshman true and brave,
 Crossed beneath the silent starlight dark Tamasa's limpid wave.
 On the farther bank a pathway, fair to view and far and wide,
 Stretching onwards to the forests spanned the spacious country-side,
 "Leave the broad and open pathway," so the gentle Rama said,
 "Follow yet a track diverging, so the people be misled.
 Then returning to the pathway we shall march ere break of day,
 So our true and faithful people shall not know our southward way."
 Wise Sumantra hastened northward, then returning to the road,
 By his master and his consort and the valiant Lakshman stood,
 Raghu's sons and gentle Sita mounted on the stately car,
 And Sumantra drove the coursers travelling fast and travelling far.
 Morning dawned, the waking people by Tamasa's limpid wave,
 Saw not Rama and his consort, saw not Lakshman young and brave,
 And the tear suffused their faces and their hearts with anguish burned,
 Sorrow-laden and lamenting to their cheerless homes returned.

CROSSING THE GANGES. BHARAD-VAJA'S HERMITAGE

Morning dawned, and far they wandered, by their people loved and lost,
 Drove through grove and flowering woodland, rippling rill and river crost,
 Crossed the sacred Vedasruti on their still unending way,
 Crossed the deep and rapid Gumti where the herds of cattle stray,
 All the toilsome day they travelled, evening fell o'er wood and lea,
 And they came where sea-like Ganga rolls in regal majesty,
 'Neath a fall Ingudi's shadow by the river's zephyrs blest,
 Second night of Rama's exile passed in sleep and gentle rest.

Morning dawned, the royal chariot Rama would no further own,
 Sent Sumantra and the coursers back to fair Ayodhya's town,
 Doffing then their royal garments Rama and his brother bold
 Coats of bark and matted tresses wore like anchorites of old.
 Guha, chief of wild Nishadas, boat and needed succour gave,
 And the princes and fair Sita ventured on the sacred wave.
 And by royal Rama bidden strong Nishadas plied the oar,
 And the strong boat quickly bounding left fair Ganga's northern shore.
 "Goddess of the mighty Ganga!" so the pious Sits, prayed,
 "Exiled by his father's mandate, Rama seeks the forest shade,
 Ganga! o'er the three worlds rolling, bride and empress of the sea,
 And from BRAHMA'S sphere descended! banished Sita bows to thee.
 May my lord return in safety, and a thousand fattened kine,
 Gold and gifts and gorgeous garments, pure libations shall be thine,
 And with flesh and corn I worship unseen dwellers on thy shore,
 May my lord return in safety, fourteen years of exile o'er!",
 On the southern shore they journeyed through the long and weary day,
 Still through grove and flowering woodland held their long and weary way,
 And they slayed the deer of jungle and they spread their rich repast,
 Third night of the princes' exile underneath a tree was past.
 Morning dawned, the soft-eyed Sits, wandered with the princes brave,
 To the spot where ruddy Gangs, mingles with dark Jumna's wave,
 And they crost the shady woodland, verdant lawn and grassy mead,
 Till the sun was in its zenith, Rama then to Lakshman said:
 "Yonder mark the famed Prayaga, spot revered from age to age,
 And the line of smoke ascending speaks some *rishi's* hermitage,
 There the waves of ruddy Gangs with the dark blue Jumna meet,
 And my ear the sea-like voices of the mingling waters greet.
 Mark the monarchs of the forest severed by the hermit's might,
 And the logs of wood and fuel for the sacrificial rite,
 Mark the tall trees in their blossom and the peaceful shady grove,
 There the sages make their dwelling, thither, Lakshman, let us rove."
 Slowly came the exile-wand'ers, when the sun withdrew his rays,
 Where the vast and sea-like rivers met in sisters' sweet embrace,
 And the *asram's* peaceful dwellers, bird of song and spotted deer,
 Quaked to see the princely strangers in their warlike garb appear!
 Rama stepped with valiant Lakshman, gentle Sits followed close,
 Till behind the screening foliage hermits' peaceful dwellings rose,
 And they came to Bharad-vaja, anchorite and holy saint,
 Girt by true and faithful pupils on his sacred duty bent.
 Famed for rites and lofty penance was the anchorite of yore,
 Blest with more than mortal vision, deep in more than mortal tore,
 And he sat beside the altar for the *agni-hotra* rite,
 Rama spake in humble accents to the man of holy might:
 "We are sons of Dasa-ratha and to thee our homage bring,
 With my wife, the saintly Sita, daughter of Videha's king,
 Exiled by my royal father in the wilderness I roam,
 And my wife and faithful brother make the pathless woods their home,
 We would through these years of exile in some holy asram dwell.
 And our food shall be the wild fruit and our drink from crystal well,
 We would practise pious penance still on sacred rites intent,
 Till our souls be filled with wisdom and our years of exile spent!"
 Pleased the ancient Bharad-vaja heard the prince's humble tale.
 And with kind and courteous welcome royal strangers greeted well,
 And he brought the milk and *argya* where the guests observant stood,
 Crystal water from the fountain, berries from the darksome wood,

And a low and leafy cottage for their dwelling-place assigned,
 As a host receives a stranger, welcomed them with offerings kind.
 In the *asram*'s peaceful courtyard fearless browsed the jungle deer,
 All unharmed the bird of forest; pecked the grain collected near,
 And by holy men surrounded 'neath the trees' umbrageous shade,
 In his pure and peaceful accents *rishi* Bharad-vaja said:
 Not unknown or unexpected, princely strangers, have ye come,
 I have heard of sinless Rama's causeless banishment from home,
 Welcome to a hermit's forest, be this spot your place of rest,
 Where the meeting of the rivers, makes our sacred *asram* blest,
 Live amidst these peaceful woodlands, still on sacred rites intent
 Till your souls be filled with wisdom and your years of exile spent!"
 "Gracious are thy accents, *rishi*," Rama answered thus the sage.
 "But fair towns and peopled hamlets border on this hermitage,
 And to see the banished Sita and to see us, much I fear,
 Crowds of rustics oft will trespass on thy calm devotions here,
 Far from towns and peopled hamlets, grant us, *rishi*, in thy grace,
 Some wild spot where hid in jungle we may pass these years in peace."
 "Twenty miles from this Prayagya," spake the *rishi* pond'ring well,
 "Is a lonely hill and jungle where some ancient hermits dwell,
 Chitra-kuta, Peak of Beauty, where the forest creatures stray,
 And in every bush and thicket herds of lightsome monkeys play,
 Men who view its towering summit are on lofty thoughts inclined.
 Earthly pride nor earthly passions cloud their pure and peaceful mind,
 Hoary-headed ancient hermits, hundred autumns who have done,
 By their faith and lofty penance heaven's eternal bliss have won,
 Holy is the fair seclusion for thy purpose suited well,
 Or if still thy heart inclineth, here in peace and comfort dwell!"
 Spake the *rishi* Bharad-vaja, and with every courteous rite,
 Cheered his guests with varied converse till the silent hours of night,
 Fourth night of the princes' exile in Prayaga's hermitage,
 Passed the brothers and fair Sita honoured by Prayaga's Sacre.

CROSSING THE JUMNA--VALMIKI'S HERMITAGE

Morning dawned, and faithful Sita with the brothers held her way,
 Where the dark and eddying, waters of the sacred Jumna stray,
 Pondering by the rapid river long the thoughtful brothers stood,
 Then with stalwart arms and axes felled the sturdy jungle wood,
Usira of strongest fibre, slender bamboo smooth and plain,
Jambu branches intertwining, with the bent and twisting cane,
 And a mighty raft constructed, and with creepers scented sweet,
 Lakshman for the gentle Sita made a soft and pleasant seat.
 Then the rustic bark was floated, framed with skill of woodman's craft,
 By her loving lord supported Sita stepped upon the raft,
 And her raiments and apparel Rama by his consort laid,
 And the axes and the deerskins, bow and dart and shining blade.
 Then with stalwart arms the brothers plied the bending bamboo oar,
 And the strong raft gaily bounding left for Jumna's southern shore.
 "Goddess of the glorious Jumna!" so the pious Sita prayed,
 "Peaceful be my husband's exile in the forest's darksome shade,
 May he safely reach Ayodhya, and a thousand fattened kine,
 Hundred jars of sweet libation, mighty Jumna, shall be thine,
 Grant that from the woods returning he may see his home again,
 Grant that honoured by his kinsmen he may rule his loving men!
 On her breast her arms she folded while the princes plied the oar,
 And the bright bark bravely bounding reached the wooded southern shore.

And the wanderers from Ayodhya on the river's margin stood,
 Where the unknown realm extended mantled by unending wood,
 Gallant Lakshman with his weapons went before the path to clear,
 Soft-eyed Sita followed gently, Rama followed in the rear.
 Oft from tree and darksome jungle, Lakshman ever true and brave,
 Plucked the fruit or smiling blossom and to gentle Sita gave,
 Oft to Rama turned his consort, pleased and curious evermore,
 Asked the name of tree or creeper, fruit or flower unseen before.
 Still with brotherly affection Lakshman brought each dewy spray,
 Bud or blossom of wild beauty from the woodland bright and gay,
 Still with eager joy and pleasure Sita turned her eye once more,
 Where the tuneful swans and *saras* flocked on Jumna's sandy shore.
 Two miles thus they walked and wandered and the belt of forest passed,
 Slew the wild deer of the jungle, spread on leaves their rich repast,
 Peacocks flew around them gaily, monkeys leaped on branches bent,
 Fifth night of their endless wanderings in the forest thus they spent.
 "Wake, my love, and list the warblings and the voices of the wood,"
 Thus spake Rama when the morning on the eastern mountains stood,
 Sita woke and gallant Lakshman, and they sipped the sacred wave,
 To the hill of Chitra-kuta held their way serene and brave.
 "Mark, my love," so Rama uttered, "every bush and tree and flower,
 Tinged by radiant light of morning sparkles in a golden shower,
 Mark the flaming flower of *Kinsuk* and the *Vilwa* in its pride,
 Luscious fruits in wild profusion ample store of food provide,
 Mark the honeycombs suspended from each tall and stately tree,
 How from every virgin blossom steals her store the faithless bee!
 Oft the lone and startled wild cock sounds its clarion full and clear,
 And from flowering fragrant forests peacocks send the answering cheer,
 Oft the elephant of jungle ranges in this darksome wood,
 For yon peak is Chitra-kuta loved by saints and hermits good,
 Oft the chanted songs of hermits echo through its sacred grove,
 Peaceful on its shady uplands, Sita, we shall live and rove!"
 Gently thus the princes wandered through the fair and woodland scene,
 Fruits and blossoms lit the branches, feathered songsters filled the green,
 Anchorites and ancient hermits lived in every sylvan grove,
 And a sweet and sacred stillness filled the woods with peace and love!
 Gently thus the princes wandered to the holy hermitage,
 Where in lofty contemplation lived the mighty Saint and Sage,
 Heaven inspired thy song, Valmiki! Ancient Bard of ancient day,
 Deeds of virtue and of valour live in thy madying lay!
 And the Bard received the princes with a father's greetings kind,
 Bade them live in Chitra-kuta with a pure and peaceful mind,
 To the true and faithful Lakshman, Rama then his purpose said,
 And of leaf and forest timber Lakshman soon a cottage made.
 "So our sacred *Sastras* sanction," thus the righteous Rama spake,
 "Holy offering we should render when our dwelling-home we make,
 Slay the black buck, gallant Lakshman, and a sacrifice prepare,
 For the moment is auspicious and the day is bright and fair."
 Lakshman slew a mighty black-buck, with the antlered trophy came,
 Placed the carcass consecrated by the altar's blazing flame,
 Radiant round the mighty offering tongues of red fire curling shone,
 And the buck was duly roasted and the tender meat was done.
 Pure from bath, with sacred *mantra* Rama did the holy rite,
 And invoked the bright Immortals for to bless the dwelling site,
 To the kindly VISWA-DEVAS, and to RUDRA fierce and strong,
 And to VISHNU Lord of Creatures, Rama raised the sacred song.

Righteous rite was duly rendered for the forest-dwelling made,
And with true and deep devotion was the sacred *mantra* prayed,
And the worship of the Bright Ones purified each earthly stain,
Pure-souled Rama raised the altar and the *chaitya's* sacred fane.
Evening spread its holy stillness, bush and tree its magic felt,
As the Gods in BRAHMA'S mansions, exiles in their cottage dwelt,
In the woods of Chitra-kuta where the Malyavati flows,
Sixth day of their weary wand'rings ended in a sweet repose.

Book 3: The love of a Raksha princess for Rama and for Lakshman is rejected with scorn, and smarting under insult and punishment she fires her brother Ravan, the king of Ceylon, with a thirst for vengeance. The dwellers of Ceylon are described in the Epic as monsters of various forms, and able to assume different shapes at will. Ravan sends Maricha in the shape of a beautiful deer to tempt away Rama and Lakshman from the cottage, and then finds his chance for stealing away the unprotected Sita.

The misfortunes of our lives, according to Indian thinkers, are but the results of our misdeeds; calamities are brought about by our sins. And thus we find in the Indian Epic, that a dark and foul suspicion against Lakshman crossed the stainless mind of Sita, and words of unmerited insult fell from her gentle lips, on the eve of the great calamity which clouded her life ever after. It was the only occasion on which the ideal woman of the Epic harboured an unjust thought or spoke an angry word; and it was followed by a tragic fate which few women on earth have suffered. To the millions of men and women in India, Sita remains to this day the ideal of female love and female devotion; her dark suspicions against Lakshman sprang out of an excess of her affection for her husband and her tragic fate and long trial proved that undying love.

Book 4: Rama's wanderings in the Nilgiri mountains, and his alliance with Sugriva the chief of these regions, form the subject of the Book.

Book 5: The *Sundara Kanda* forms the heart of Valmiki's *Ramayana* and consists of a detailed, vivid account of Hanuman's journeys and adventures. After learning about Sita, Hanuman (a monkey-like figure) assumes a gargantuan form and makes a colossal leap across the ocean to Lanka. Here, Hanuman explores the demon's city and spies on Ravana. He locates Sita in Ashoka grove, who is wooed and threatened by Ravana and his *rakshasis* to marry Ravana. He reassures her, giving Rama's signet ring as a sign of good faith. He offers to carry Sita back to Rama, however she refuses, reluctant to allow herself to be touched by a male other than her husband. She says that Rama himself must come and avenge the insult of her abduction. Hanuman then wreaks havoc in Lanka by destroying trees and buildings, and killing Ravana's warriors. He allows himself to be captured and produced before Ravana. He gives a bold lecture to Ravana to release Sita. He is condemned and his tail is set on fire, but he escapes his bonds and, leaping from roof to roof, sets fire to Ravana's citadel and makes the giant leap back from the island. The joyous search party returns to Kishkindha with the news.

From Book 6: SITA IN THE ASOKA GARDEN

Crossed the ocean's boundless waters, Hanuman in duty brave,
Lighted on the emerald island girded by the sapphire wave,
And in tireless quest of Sita searched the margin of the sea,
In a dark Asoka garden hid himself within a tree.
Creepers threw their clasping tendrils round the trees of ample height,
Stately palm and feathered cocoa, fruit and blossom pleased the sight,
Herds of tame and gentle creatures in the grassy meadow strayed,
Kokils sang in leafy thicket, birds of plumage lit the shade,
Limpid lakes of scented lotus with their fragrance filled the air,
Homes and huts of rustic beauty peeped through bushes green and fair,
Blossoms rich in tint and fragrance in the checkered shadow gleamed,
Clustering fruits of golden beauty in the yellow sunlight beamed!
Brightly shone the red *Asoka* with the morning's golden ray,
Karnikara and *Kinsuka* dazzling as the light of day,
Brightly grew the flower of *Champak* in the vale and on the reef,
Punnaga and *Saptaparna* with its seven-fold scented leaf,

Rich in blossoms many tinted, grateful to the ravished eye,
 Gay and green and glorious Kanka was like garden of the sky,
 Rich in fruit and laden creeper and in beauteous bush and trep.
 Flower-bespangled golden Lanka was like gem-bespangled sea!
 Rose a palace in the woodlands girt by pillars strong and high.
 Snowy-white like fair Kailasa cleaving through the azure sky,
 And its steps were ocean coral and its pavement yellow gold.
 White and gay and heaven-aspiring rose the structure high and bold!
 By the rich and royal mansion Hanuman his eyes did rest,
 On a woman sad and sorrowing in her sylvan garments drest,
 Like the moon obscured and clouded, dim with shadows deep and dark,
 Like the smoke-enshrouded red fire, dying with a feeble spark,
 Like the tempest-pelted lotus by the wind and torrent shaken,
 Like the beauteous star Rohini by a *graha* overtaken!
 Fasts and vigils paled her beauty, tears bedimmed her tender grace,
 Anguish dwelt within her bosom, sorrow darkened on her face,
 And she lived by Rakshas guarded, as a faint and timid deer,
 Severed from her herd and kindred when the prowling wolves are near,
 And her raven locks ungathered hung behind in single braid,
 And her gentle eye was lightless, and her brow was hid in shade!
 "This is she! the peerless princess, Rama's consort loved and lost,
 This is she! the saintly Sita, by a cruel fortune crost,"
 Hanuman thus thought and pondered: "On her graceful form I spy,
 Gems and gold by sorrowing Rama oft depicted with it sigh,
 On her ears the golden pendants and the tiger's sharpened tooth,
 On her arms the jewelled bracelets, tokens of unchanging truth,
 On her pallid brow and bosom still the radiant jewels shine,
 Rama with a sweet affection did in early days entwine!
 Hermit's garments clothe her person, braided is her raven hair,
 Matted bark of trees of forest drape her neck and bosom fair,
 And a dower of dazzling beauty still bedecks her peerless face.
 Though the shadowing tinge of sorrow darkens all her earlier grace!
 This is she! the soft-eyed Sita, wept with unavailing tear,
 This is she! the faithful consort, unto Rama ever dear,
 Unforgetting and unchanging, truthful still in deed and word,
 Sita, in her silent suffering sorrows for her absent lord,
 Still for Rama lost but cherished, Sita heaves the choking sigh,
 Sita lives for righteous Rama, for her Rama she would die!"

THE VOICE OF HOPE

Hanuman from leafy shelters lifts his voice in sacred song,
 Till the tale of Rama's glory Lanka's woods and vales prolong:
 "Listen, Lady, to my story;--Dasa-ratha famed in war,
 Rich in steeds and royal tuskers, armed men and battle car,
 Ruled his realm in truth and virtue, in his bounty ever free,
 Of the mighty race of Raghu mightiest king and monarch he,
 Robed in every royal virtue, great in peace in battle brave,
 Blest in bliss of grateful nations, blest in blessings which he gave
 And his eldest-born and dearest, Rama soul of righteous might,
 Shone, as mid the stars resplendent shines the radiant Lord of Night,
 True unto his sacred duty, true unto his kith and kin,
 Friend of piety and virtue, punisher of crime and sin,
 Loved in all his spacious empire, peopled mart and hermit's den,
 With a truer deeper kindness Rama loved his subject men!
 Dasa-ratha, promise-fettered, then his cruel mandate gave,
 Rama with his wife and brother lived in woods and rocky cave,

And he slayed the deer of jungle and he slept in leafy shade,
 Stem destroyer of the Rakshas in the pathless forests strayed,
 Till the monarch of the Rakshas, -fraudful is his impious life,
 Cheated Rama in the jungle, from his cottage stole his wife
 Long lamenting lone and weary Rama wandered in the wood,
 Searched for Sita, in the jungle where his humble cottage stood,
 Godavari's gloomy gorges, Krishna's dark and wooded shore,
 And the ravine, rock and valley, and the cloud-capped mountain hoar!
 Then he met the sad Sugriva in wild Malya's dark retreat,
 Won for him his father's empire and his father's royal seat,
 Now Sagriva's countless forces wander far and wander near,
 In the search of stolen Sita still unto his Rama dear!
 I am henchman of Sugriva and the mighty sea have crost,
 In the quest of hidden Sita, Rama's consort loved and lost,
 And methinks that form of beauty, peerless shape of woman's grace,
 Is my Rama's dear-loved consort, Rama's dear-remembered face!"
 Hushed the voice: the ravished Sita cast her wond'ring eyes around,
 Whence that song of sudden gladness, whence that soul-entrancing sound?
 Dawning hope and rising rapture overflowed her widowed heart,
 Is it dream's deceitful whisper which the cruel Fates impart?

RAMA'S TOKEN

"'Tis no dream's deceitful whisper!" Hantiman spake to the dame,
 As from darksome leafy shelter he to Rama's consort came,
 "Rama's messenger and vassal, token from thy lord I bring,
 Mark this bright ring, jewel-lettered with the dear name of thy king,
 For the loved and cherished Sita, is to Rama ever dear,
 And he sends his loving message and his force is drawing near!
 Sita, held that tender token from her loved and cherished lord,
 And once more herself she fancied to his loving arms restored,
 And her pallid face was lighted and her soft eve sent a spark,
 As the Moon regains her lustre freed from *Rahu's* shadows dark!
 And with voice of deep emotion in each softly whispered word,
 Spake her thoughts in gentle accents of her consort and her lord:
 "Messenger of love of Rama! Dauntless is thy deed and bold,
 Thou hast crossed the boundless ocean to the Raksha's castled hold,
 Thou hast crossed the angry billows which confess no monarch's sway,
 O'er the face of rolling waters found thy unresisted way,
 Thou hast done what living mortal never sought to do before,
 Dared the Raksha in his island, Ravan in his sea-girt shore!
 Speak, if Rama lives in safety in the woods or by the hill,
 And if young and gallant Lakshman faithful serves his brother still,
 Speak, if Rama in his anger and his unforgiving ire,
 Hurls destruction on my captor like the world-consuming fire,
 Speak, if Rama in his sorrow wets his pale and drooping eye,
 If the thought of absent Sita wakes within his heart a sigh!
 Doth my husband seek alliance with each wild and warlike chief,
 Striving for a speedy vengeance and for Sita's quick relief,
 Doth he stir the warlike races to a fierce and veng-eful strife,
 Dealing death to ruthless Rakshas for this insult on his wife,
 Doth he still in fond remembrance cherish Sita loved of yore,
 Nursing in his hero-bosom tender sorrows evermore!
 Didst thou hear from far Ayodhya, from Kausalya royal dame,
 From the true and tender Bharat prince of proud and peerless fame,
 Didst thou hear if royal Bharat leads his forces to the fight,
 Conquering Ravan's scattered army in his all-resistless might,

Didst thou hear if brave Sugriva marshals Vanars in his wrath
 And the young and gallant Lakshman seeks to cross the ocean path?"
 Hanuman with due obeisance placed his hand upon his head,
 Bowed unto the queenly Sita and in gentle accents said:
 "Trust me, Lady, valiant Rama soon will greet his saintly wife,
 E'en as INDRA greets his goddess, SACHI dearer than his life,
 Trust me, Sita, conquering Rama comes with panoply of war,
 Shaking Lanka's sea-girt mountains . slaying Rakshas near and far!
 He shall cross the boundless ocean with the battle's dread array,
 He shall smite the impious Ravan and the cruel Rakshas slay,
 Mighty Gods and strong Asuras shall not hinder Rama's path,
 When at Lanka's gates he thunders with his more than godlike wrath,
 Deadly YAMA, all-destroying, pales before his peerless might
 When his red right arm of vengeance wrathful Rama lifts to smite!
 By the lofty Mandar mountains, by the fruit and root I seek,
 By the cloud-obstructing Vindhya, and by Malya's towering peak,
 I will swear, my gentle Lady, Rama's vengeance draweth nigh,
 Thou shalt see his beaming visage like the Lord of Midnight Sky,
 Firm in purpose Rama waiteth on the Prasra-vana hill,
 As upon the huge Airavat, INDRA, motionless and still!
*Flesh of deer nor forest honey tasteth Rama true and bold,
 Till he rescues cherished Sita from the Raksha's castled hold,
 Thoughts of Sita leave not Rama dreary day or darksome night,
 Till his vengeance deep and dreadful crushes Ravan in his might,
 Forest flower nor scented creeper pleases Rama's anguished heart,
 Till he, wins his wedded consort by his death-compelling dart!"*

SITA'S TOKEN

Token from her raven tresses Sita to the Vanar gave,
 Hanuman with dauntless valour crossed once more the ocean wave,
 Where in Prasra-vana's mountain Rama with his brother stayed,
 Jewel from the brow of Sita by her sorrowing consort laid,
 Spake of Ravan's foul endearment and his loathsome loving word,
 Spake of Sita's scorn and anger and her truth unto her lord,
 Tears of sorrow and affection from the warrior's eyelids start,
 As his consort's loving token Rama presses to his heart!
 "As the mother-cow, Sugriva, yields her milk beside her young,
 Welling tears upon this token yields my heart by anguish wrung,
 Well I know this dear-loved jewel sparkling with the ray of heaven,
 Born in sea, by mighty INDRA to my Sita's father given,
 Well I know this tender token, Janak placed it on her hair,
 When she came my bride and consort decked in beauty rich and rare,
 Well I know this sweet memorial, Sita wore it on her head,
 And her proud and peerless beauty on the gem a lustre shed!
 Ah, methink the gracious Janak stands again before my eye,
 With a father's fond affection, with a monarch's stature high,
 Ah, methinks my bride and consort, she who wore it on her brow,
 Stands again before the altar, speaks again her loving row,
 Ah, the sad, the sweet remembrance! ah, the happy days gone by,
 Once again, O loving vision, wilt thou gladden Rama's eye!
 Speak again, my faithful vassal, how my Sita wept and prayed,
 Like the water to the thirsty, dear to me what Sita said,
 Did she send this sweet remembrance as a blessing from above,
 As a true and tender token of a woman's changeless love,
 Did she waft her heart's affection o'er the billows of the sea,
 Wherefore came she not in person from her foes and fetters free?

Hanuman, my friend and comrade, lead me to the distant isle,
 Where my soft-eyed Sita lingers midst the Rakshas dark and vile,
 Where my true and tender consort like a lone and stricken deer,
 Girt by Rakshas stern and ruthless sheds the unavailing tear,
 Where she weeps in ceaseless anguish, sorrow-stricken, sad and pale,
 Like the Moon by dark clouds shrouded then her light and lustre fail!
 Speak again, my faithful henchman, loving message of my wife,
 Like some potent drug her accents renovate my fainting life,
 Arm thy forces, friend Sugriva, Rama shall not brook delay,
 While in distant Lanka's confines Sita weeps the livelong day,
 Marshal forth thy bannered forces, cross the ocean in thy might
 Rama speeds on wings of vengeance Lanka's impious lord to smite!"

Book 6: Ravan was thoroughly frightened by the deeds of Hanuman. For Hanuman had not only penetrated into his island and discovered Sita in her imprisonment, but had also managed to burn down a great portion of the city before he left the island. Ravan called a Council of War, and as might be expected, all the advisers heedlessly advised war. All but Bibhishan. He was the youngest brother of Ravan, and condemned the folly and the crime by which Ravan was seeking a war with the righteous and unoffending Rama. He advised that Sita should be restored to her lord and peace made with Rama. His voice was drowned in the cries of more violent advisers. Bibhishan was driven from the court with indignity, and joined the forces of Rama, to whom he gave much valuable information about Lanka and its warriors. Rama crossed over with his army from India to Ceylon. There is a chain of islands across the strait, and the Indian poet supposes them to be the remains of a vast causeway which Rama built to cross over with his army. The town of Lanka, the capital of Ceylon, was invested, and the war which followed was a succession of sallies by the great leaders and princes of Lanka. But almost every sally was repulsed, every chief was killed, and at last Ravan himself who made the last sally was slain and the war ended.

The real Epic ends with the war, and with Rama's happy return to Ayodhya. Sita proves her stainless virtue by an Ordeal of Fire, and returns with her lord and with Lakshman in an aerial car, which Ravan had won from the Gods, and which Bibhishan made over to Rama. Indian poets are never tired of descriptions of nature, and the poet of the Ramayana takes advantage of Rama's journey from Ceylon to Oudh to give us a bird's-eye view of the whole continent of India, as well as to recapitulate the principal incidents of his great Epic.

The gathering of men at Ayodhya, the greetings to Rama, and his consecration by the Vedic bard Vasishtha, are among the most pleasing passages in the whole poem. And the happiness enjoyed by men during the reign of Rama--described in the last few couplets of this Book--is an article of belief and a living tradition in India to this day.

ORDEAL BY FIRE

For she dwelt in Ravan's dwelling--rumour clouds a woman's fame--
 Righteous Rama's brow was clouded, saintly Sita, spake in shame:
 "Wherefore spake ye not, my Rama, if your bosom doubts my faith,
 Dearer than a dark suspicion to a woman were her death!
 Wherefore, Rama, with your token came your vassal o'er the wave,
 To assist a fallen woman and a tainted wife to save,
 Wherefore with your mighty forces crossed the ocean in your pride,
 Risked your life in endless combats for a sin-polluted bride?
 Hast thou, Rama, all forgotten?--Saintly Janak saw my birth,
 Child of harvest-bearing furrow, Sita sprang from Mother Earth,
 As a maiden true and stainless unto thee I gave my hand,
 As a consort fond and faithful roved with thee from land to land!
 But a woman pleadeth vainly when suspicion clouds her name,
 Lakshman, if thou lov'st thy sister, light for me the funeral flame,
 When the shadow of dishonour darkens o'er a woman's life,
 Death alone is friend and refuge of a true and trustful wife,
 When a righteous lord and husband turns his cold averted eyes,
 Funeral flame dispels suspicion, honour lives when woman dies!"

Dark was Rama's gloomy visage and his lips were firmly sealed,
 And his eye betrayed no weakness, word disclosed no thought concealed,
 Silent heaved his heart in anguish, silent drooped his tortured head,
 Lakshman with a throbbing bosom funeral pyre for Sita made,
 And Videha's sinless daughter prayed unto the Gods above,
 On her lord and wedded consort cast her dying looks of love!
*"If in act and thought," she uttered, " I am true unto my name,
 Witness of our sins and virtues, may this Fire protect my fame!
 If a false and lying scandal brings a faithful woman shame,
 Witness of our sins and virtues, may this Fire protect my fame!
 If in lifelong loving duty I am free from sin and blame,
 Witness of our sins and virtues, may this Fire protect my fame!"*
 Fearless in her faith and valour Sita stepped upon the pyre,
 And her form of beauty vanished circled by the claspings fire,
 And an anguish shook the people like the ocean tempest-tost,
 Old and young and maid and matron wept for Sita true and lost,
 For bedecked in golden splendour and in gems and rich attire,
 Sita vanished in the red fire of the newly lighted pyre!
 Rishis and the great Gandharvas, Gods who know each secret deed,
 Witnessed Sita's high devotion and a woman's lofty creed,
 And the earth by ocean girdled with its wealth of teeming life,
 Witnessed deed of dauntless duty of a true and stainless wife!

WOMAN'S TRUTH VINDICATED

Slow the red flames rolled asunder, God of Fire incarnate came,
 Holding in his radiant bosom fair Videha's sinless dame,
 Not a curl upon her tresses, not a blossom on her brow,
 Not a fibre of her mantle did with tarnished lustre glow!
 Witness of our sins and virtues, God of Fire incarnate spake,
 Bade the sorrow-stricken Rama back his sinless wife to take:
*"Ravan in his impious folly forced from thee thy faithful dame,
 Guarded by her changeless virtue, Sita still remains the same,
 Tempted oft by female Rakshas in the dark and dismal wood,
 In her woe and in her sadness true to thee hath Sita stood,
 Courted oft by royal Ravan in the forest far and lone,
 True to wedded troth and virtue Sita thought of thee alone,
 Pure is she in thought and action, pure and stainless, true and meek,
 I, the witness of all actions, thus my sacred mandate speak!"*
 Rama's forehead was unclouded and a radiance lit his eye,
 And his bosom heaved in gladness as he spake in accents high:
 Never from the time I saw her in her maiden days of youth,
 Have I doubted Sita's virtue, Sita's fixed and changeless truth,
 I have known her ever sinless,--let the world her virtue know,
 For the God of Fire is witness to her truth and changeless vow!
 Ravan in his pride and passion conquered not a woman's love,
 For the virtuous like the bright fire in their native radiance move,
 Ravan in his rage and folly conquered not a faithful wife,
 For like ray of sun unsullied is a righteous woman's life,
 Be the wide world now a witness,-pure and stainless is my dame,
 Rama shall not leave his consort till he leaves his righteous fame!"
 In his tears the contrite Rama clasped her in a soft embrace,
 And the fond forgiving Sita in his bosom hid her face!

RETURN HOME BY THE AËRIAL CAR

"Mark my love," so Rama uttered, as on flying Pushpa car,
 Borne by swans, the home-returning exiles left the field of war,

"Lanka's proud and castled city on Trikuta's triple crest,
 As on peaks of bold Kailasa mansions of Immortals rest!
 Mark the gory fields surrounding where the Vanars in their might,
 Faced and fought the charging Rakshas in the long and deathful fight,
 Indrajit and Kumbha-kama, Ravan and his chieftains slain,
 Fell upon the field of battle and their red blood soaks the plain.
 Mark where dark-eyed Mandodari, Ravan's slender-waisted wife,
 Wept her widow's tears of anguish when her monarch lost his life,
 She hath dried her tears of sorrow and bestowed her heart and hand,
 On Bibhisban good and faithful, crowned king of Lanka's land.
 See my love, round Ceylon's island how the ocean billows roar.
 Hiding pearls in eaves of corals, strewing shells upon the shore,
 And the causeway far-extending,--monument of Rama's fame,--
 'Rama's Bridge' to distant ages shall our deathless deeds proclaim!
 See the rock-bound fair Kishkindha and her mountain-girdled town,
 Where I slayed the warrior Bali, placed Sugriva on the throne,
 And the hill of Rishyamuka where Sugriva first I met,
 Gave him word,--he would be monarch ere the evening's Sun had set.
 See the sacred lake of Pampa by whose wild and echoing shore,
 Rama poured his lamentations when he saw his wife no more,
 And the woods of Janasthana where Jatayu fought and bled,
 When the deep deceitful Ravan with my trusting Sita fled.
 Dost thou mark, my soft-eyed Sita, cottage on the river's shore,
 Where in righteous peace and penance Sita, lived in days of yore,
 And by gloomy Godavari, Saint Agastya's home of love,
 Holy men by holy duties sanctify the sacred grove!
 Dost thou, o'er the Dandak forest, view the Chitrakuta hill.
 Deathless bard the Saint Valmiki haunts its shade and crystal rill,
 Thither came the righteous Bharat and my loving mother came,
 Longing in their hearts to take us to Ayodhya's town of fame,
 Dost thou, dear devoted Sita, see the Jumna in her might '
 Where in Bharad-waja's *asram* passed we, love, a happy, night,
 And the broad and ruddy Ganga sweeping in her regal pride,
 Forest-dweller faithful Guha crossed us to the southern side.
 Joy! joy! my gentle Sita,! Fair Ayodhya looms above,
 Ancient seat of Raghu's empire, nest of Rama's hope and love,
 Bow, bow, to bright Ayodhya! Darksome did the exiles roam,
 Now their weary toil is ended in their father's ancient home!

THE CONSECRATION

Joy! joy in bright Ayodhya gladness filled the hearts of all,
 Joy! joy a lofty music sounded in the royal hall,
 Fourteen years of woe were ended, Rama now assumed his own,
 And they placed the weary wand'rer on his father's ancient throne,
 And they brought the sacred water from each distant stream and hill,
 From the vast and boundless ocean, from each far and sacred rill.
 Vasishtha, the Bard of Vedas with auspicious rites and meet
 Placed the monarch and his consort on the gemmed and jewelled seat,
 Gautama. and Katyayana, Vamadeva priest of yore,
 Jabali and wise Vijaya verged in holy ancient lore,
 Poured the fresh and fraurant water on the consecrated kine,
 As the Gods anointed INDRA from the pure ethereal spring!
 Vedic priests with sacred mantra, dark-eyed virgins with their song,
 Warriors girt in arms and weapons round the crownéd monarch throng,
 Juices from each fragrant creeper on his royal brow they place,
 And his father's crown and jewels Rama's ample forehead grace,

And as Manu, first of monarchs, was enthroned in days of yore,
So was Rama consecrated by the priests of Vedic lore!
Brave Satrughna on his brother cast the white umbrella's shade
Bold Sugriva and Bibhishan waved the *chowri* gem-inlaid,
VAYU, God of gentle zephyrs, gift of golden garland lent,
INDRA, God of rain and sunshine, wreath of pearls to Rama sent,
Gay *Gandharvas* raised the music, fair *Apsaras* formed the ring,
Men in nations hailed their Rama as their lord and righteous king!
And tis told by ancient sages, during Rama's happy reign,
Death untimely, dire diseases came not to his subject men,
Widows wept not in their sorrow for their lords untimely lost,
Mothers wailed not in their anguish for their babes by YAMA crost,
Robbers, cheats, and gay deceivers tempted not with lying word,
Neighbour loved his righteous neighbour and the people loved their lord!
Trees their ample produce yielded as returning seasons went,
And the earth in grateful gladness never failing harvest lent,
Rains descended in their season, never came the blighting gale,
Rich in crop and rich in pasture was each soft and smiling vale,
Loom and anvil gave their produce and the tilled and fertile soil,
And the nation lived rejoicing in their old ancestral.

Book 7: A dark cloud of suspicion still hung on the fame of Sita, and the people of Ayodhya made reflections on the conduct of their king, who had taken back into his house a woman who had lived in the palace of Ravan. Rama gave way to the opinion of his people, and he sent away his loving and faithful Sita to live in forests once more.

Sita found an asylum in the hermitage of Valmiki, the reputed author of this Epic, and there gave birth to twins, Lava and Kusa. Years passed on, and Lava and Kusa grew up as hermit boys, and as pupils of Valmiki. After years had passed, Rama performed a great Horse-sacrifice. Kings and princes were invited from neighbouring countries, and a great feast was held. Valmiki came to the sacrifice, and his pupils, Lava and Kusa, chanted there the great Epic, the Ramayana, describing the deeds of Rama. In this interesting portion of the poem we find how songs and poetry were handed down in ancient India by memory. The boys had learnt the whole of the Epic by heart, and chanted portions of it, day after day, till the recital was completed. Rama recognised his sons in the boy-minstrels, and his heart yearned once more for Sita, whom he had banished but never forgotten. He asked the Poet Valmiki to restore his wife to him, and he desired that Sita might once more prove her purity in the great assembly, so that he might take her back with the approval of his people. Sita came. But her life had been darkened by an unjust suspicion, her heart was broken, and she invoked the Earth to take her back. And the Earth, which had given Sita birth, yawned and took back her suffering child into her bosom. Finally, Rama also dies.