



Rama's Exile: The Enchanted Forest Expedition in Valmiki's Ramayana

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ABSTRACT –

The Aranyakanda of vālmiki's Rāmāyaṇa recounts the pivotal stage of Rama's exile to the forest along with Sita and Lakshmana. As they traverse the wilderness, they confront various challenges, encounters with sages, and clashes with demons. The narrative intensifies the abduction of Sita by Ravana, sparking Rama's quest for rescue. This article elaborates and weaves themes of duty, loyalty and the eternal struggle between good and evil, offering timeless insights into human virtues and adversities.

Keywords: Aranyakanda, Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Exile, forest, challenges, demons, abduction, Ravana, rescue, quest, duty, loyalty, Good vs Evil, Virtue, adversity.

The Rāmāyaṇa of vālmiki - The kingdom and Exile, therefore as themes, appear to be the two main pivots of the story. The fundamental structure of the story (Rāmāyaṇa) juxtaposes two kinds of society that of the kingdom and that of the exile. In the vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa; the kingdom and the forest are depicted in the vivid contrast - the kingdom (Ayodhyā) and the exile (Forest). The people of Ayodhyā are described as citizens of a flourishing city. On Ayodhyā - The Rāmāyaṇa therefore presents a rather orthodox picture of political legitimacy, reflecting firm faith in Monarchy as the only acceptable system. An Established Monarchical system must have an equally established system of succession. The location of Rāma's exile is invariably the forest and this symbolizes a completely different way of life. The forest in the Rāmāyaṇa is one of the central environment of the epic, where in most its action take place and the place for adventures. Forest viewed in a great opposition to the town or city. Lives in the forest totally different from the Ayodhyā. About Kingship - in Ayodhyā it alone is legitimate and its absence is anarchy which seen in forest, where in Ayodhyā they followed a tradition and rules or dharma (righteousness) which was not seen in the peoples who lived in the forest. The rules were there but which were self imposed, this is mainly related to sages. In Ayodhyā, everyone follows the same rule and controlled or ruled by the king, it means everything comes under one roof but in forest it totally different from that, here taking in the case of demons and sages, in which they were in different characters and they lead different lives and also in the forest Rākṣasa's and Vanaras represents the opposite pole.

The forest dwellers, renouncer, the ascetic, seer, animals, myth creatures, and all that human is not can be found - monstrous sub-human creatures as well as beings of an almost superhuman spirituality, it is a place where demons, men, demigods, and gods all mingle seen mainly in forest and The forest was also the habitat of the rsis, the vanaprasthas and the sanyasins who on many occasions acted as the frontiersmen establishing their hermitages in forest. and the place also for eminent sages, who are in penance. and for those who are forced out of collective existence, exiles like Rama himself. In the structure of power, the king in his kingdom and the ascetic in his exile became counter weights, one embedded in duties, obligations and rights and the other emancipated from these.

Rāma, sītā, Lakṣmaṇa soon after entering the vast wilderness, the wilderness of Daṇḍaka. When the rākṣasa, viradha attacked them Rāma stretched his great bow - it shows that Rāma doesn't entirely lay aside his weapon, as is customary on entering an ashram. Rāma killed Viradha, Who harming the sages also. after viradha killed by Rāma, he recovers his form and go to heaven - it means Rāma punishment removed the curse of viradha and In the sarga also meant to demonstrate the abilities Rāma possesses that qualify him as a place of secure refuge¹. The sages facing a threat from the rākṣasas. here in the sarga, we can see the host of sages telling to Rāma, " come see the bodies of the many purified sages slain in a very imaginable way by dreaded rākṣasas in the forest"². it means the terrible outrages that ferocious rākṣasas are committing against the ascetics in the forest. so they came to ask the protection from the terrible rākṣasas. Because Rāma (the king) - guardian of righteousness and glorious refuge of the people. and Rāma said that I am

¹ Notes on Rāmāyaṇa vol III, 1,1-9

² Rāmāyaṇa vol III Aranyakāṇḍa, 5,15

ready to slay in the battle of rākṣasas, the enemies of ascetics³. here we can see the similarity, Rāma protecting his subjects (sages) in the forest like king protects his subjects in the kingdom. W.H Auden speaks of the forest as “ the place where there is no community. therefore the individual in (wilderness) is free from both the evils and the responsibilities of communal life “. But it diverse the view that, the ancient Indian king whether he is on throne or in exile, there is no freedom from from the “ the responsibilities of communal life “⁴.

After they had killed viradha, the rākṣasa and recovered maithilī. they set out for śarabhanga ashram. after they reached to the place. śarabhanga addressed them that go to the sacred region where the ascetic suṭīksna lives. and after encounter with Rāma, śarabhanga commit ritual suicide.

Twice born Men set out to visit suṭīksna and asks the sage to show a place to dwell⁵. here mentioned that twice born men (Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa) - Kshatriya's or Warriors. and they having the arms - it all tells the king characterization. they stayed during the time, they worshipped the fire and the gods in the forest, the refuge of ascetics before the sun rise. In this sarga, suṭīksna mentioning that the tame animals that visit the ashram is unremarkable, a common place which for all refuges and suṭīksna also explains the concern about the forests, which are natural gifts to human kind and mainly with respect of hermits and implicitly suggests to Rāma, to somehow safeguard them from the demons of Daṇḍaka Aranya, by whom these forests are rendered into graveyards.

Next, they decided to visit all the ashrams belonging to the holy seers who live in Daṇḍaka wilderness. while leaving, sītā gave them a splendid pairs of quivers, their bows, and gleaming swords⁶. here in the verse tells the importance of those arms given by sītā, that Rāma promised to slay the rākṣasas in combat, in order to protect the seers who live in Daṇḍaka wilderness⁷. and also she foresees the danger in Rama's decision to eliminate the demons in the Daṇḍaka aranya, without any provocation from their side, at the request of same sages. it is like telling them “ might you not mistakenly slay some innocent forest dweller “ that is, perhaps, “ as your father once did “⁸. She explained the story about a sage who is in possession of a weapon became violent and cruel. it all says that mighty kshatriyas, finding themselves in the forests inhabited by men who practices self -restraint, needs bows only for protecting those in “ distress”. here we can see the weapons and the forest, the kshatriya order and the practise of asceticism - it is all so at odds.

During visiting the ashrams of holy ones Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa moved along with other sages who shows him a way. and they also visited the Agastya ashram. during their visit the magical weapons gifted to the Rāma by Agastya, stopper of the mountain. the bow and arrow Agastya gives him, will be used to kill khara and Rāvaṇa.⁹ and all the story tells us the Rāma - expert in great weapons wherever he visited the sages hermits, they treated him like a glorious prince (king).

While travelling to pañcavatī, Rāma encountered on the way a huge vulture of awesome strength. when he asked about jatāyu, he replied that he was his father's friend. he also said “ I will live with you, if you wish and keep watch over sītā whenever you and Lakṣmaṇa are away “and so he went with them to pañcavatī for the protection and like ready to destroy his enemies as a flame destroys moths¹⁰. after when they reached pañcavatī, while the three are dwelling peacefully in the lovely woodlands of pañcavatī. they are visited by rākṣasa woman, sūrpaṇakhā, the sister of Rāvaṇa. and the slayer of enemies questioned by sūrpaṇakhā “ your hair is matted in the manner of ascetics, yet you have a wife with you and bear bow and arrows. how is it you have come in this region, the haunt of rākṣasas ?¹¹. here we can see the description about the way Rāma look. and she attempts to seduce the brothers and failing in this, tries to kill sītā. she is stopped by Lakṣmaṇa, who mutilates her. she runs shrieking to her brother, the demon khara.

When sūrpaṇakhā told her incident to khara, the demon, he sends fourteen rākṣasas to kill Rāma. but Rāma killed fourteen rākṣasas with his bow and arrow - “ they were gold feathered and razor sharp, adorned with gleaming gold, and they shed light like huge comets as they flew through the sky “ which it pierced the chest of rākṣasas. and also Rāghava, who cherished righteousness, killed khara with a fiery arrow that the practice was known in ancient India of using arrows with flammable materials in the tip. it was the arrow given by the wise king of gods. Indra the munificent. the righteous prince fixed and shot it at khara.¹² and after the death of khara, all the royal seers and supreme seers then assembled and spoke that the great seers contrived a means - śarabhanga instructed Rāma to go to suṭīksna, suṭīksna sent him to Agastya,

Agastya gave Rāma the divine weapons and instructed him to go to pañcavatī¹³ and all this tells the purpose of bringing him to this place to slay these savage, evil rākṣasas. he had killed the enemy and brought peace to that seers. so now they can follow the ways of righteousness at peace in Daṇḍaka because the forest freed from the cursed khara, Dushana and the other rākṣasas.

After seeing the incident with rage, sūrpaṇakhā went to tell Rāvaṇa, a lord of demons. when the raging sūrpaṇakhā had finished her harsh speech, Rāvaṇa questioned her, about Rāma. she replied that Rāma is the son of Daśaratha. he has long arms and large eyes and resembles kandarpa, a god of love, though

³ Rāmāyaṇa vol III, 5, 20

⁴ Introduction on Rāmāyaṇa vol III, P. 13

⁵ Rāmāyaṇa vol. III, 6, 1

⁶ Rāmāyaṇa vol. III, 7, 18

⁷ Rāmāyaṇa vol. III, 8, 7

⁸ Notes on Rāmāyaṇa vol. III, 8, 11-14, P. 258

⁹ Notes on Rāmāyaṇa vol III, 11, 29- 30

¹⁰ Rāmāyaṇa vol. III, 13, 34-36

¹¹ Rāmāyaṇa vol. III, 16, 11

¹² Rāmāyaṇa vol. III, 29, 25

¹³ Notes on Rāmāyaṇa vol. III, 29 p. 288

clad in bark cloth and black hides. he has a bow like sakra's banded with gold, and drawing it to its fullest he shoots flaming iron shafts that, like snakes, carry deadly poison¹⁴. in the description we can see the power of his weapons. Rāvaṇa resolves to destroy Rāma by carrying off sītā.

Rāvaṇa mean to abduct sītā by force from janasthāna, he enlisting the aid of the rākṣasa Mārīca to help him after that Mārīca replied to the lord of rākṣasa, because of knowing Rāma's prowess, having encountered the danger once before, explained him about his prowess and greatness. but rāvaṇa ignored his words and later Mārīca accepted to do. After hearing Rāvaṇa's words, the rākṣasa Mārīca turned himself into deer and began to graze near the entrance to Rāma's ashram. On spotting the deer sītā calls Rāma and to Lakṣmaṇa to have a sight of it. seeing him Lakṣmaṇa, at once become suspicious and said to Rama, ' I am sure that deer is none other than the rākṣasa, Mārīca'¹⁵. after said to Lakṣmaṇa, " both for meat and sport, Lakṣmaṇa, kings armed with bow go hunting and kill animals in the deep forest "¹⁶. here we can see the kingly activity, of hunting animals. both out of necessity and in sport king kills animals.¹⁷ and also said that if it turns out to be 'the magic of that rākṣasa,' as you tell me, Lakṣmaṇa then it is my duty to slay him. for the savage, impious Mārīca used to roam the forests injuring the bulls among sages. he has killed many a king and expert bowman out hunting and so this deer, if it be he, must be slain¹⁸. here the duty of Rāma (the king) to slay the rākṣasas, who harming the sages. after instructing Lakṣmaṇa, to stay in the ashram with sītā, Rama had gone to hunt the magic deer. and in the deep forest he killed the rākṣasa (Mārīca) and he killed the dappled deer and taking the meet hurriedly retracted his steps to janasthāna¹⁹. here the haunting activities of twice born clearly described. he killed another dappled deer, why because if we see in the later sargas that sītā informs rāvaṇa that her husband will come soon " bringing an abundance of food from the forest"²⁰

When Rāma went for hunting of deer and Lakṣmaṇa search for Rāma, Rāvaṇa, a lord of demons carried off sītā in his arms. and the great prince Rama, filled with dread he made his way back to janasthāna. in his way, after seeing these most terrible portents Rāghava caught sight of Lakṣmaṇa gloomily coming his way. Rāma rebuke Lakṣmaṇa for coming and leaving sītā alone in the desolate, rākṣasas haunted forest.²¹ and they had arrived to the ashram. the sons of Daśaratha looked everywhere for sītā, thoroughly searching the forests and mountains, the rivers and lakes, the slopes of the mountains, its caves and peaks. but for all their thorough searching they could not find her²². Rāma searched through the forest tirelessly but could not find his beloved. grief turned his eyes blood red, grief gave him the look of madman²³. and he implicitly rejects the principal duty incumbent upon him as king, at the same time crying out in maniacal fury and threatening cosmic destruction. not only does he seek to slay the rākṣasas but he is prepared to slay " all living things " from serpents to gods, including men; the whole cosmos is threatened with annihilation. the devastation caused by my iron shafts, the birds and beasts driven wild and ravaged, the world plunged into chaos, from one end to the other²⁴.

He raging like a Rudra who ready to destroy the world, when he is in anger. here the unrighteousness in righteousness Rāma clearly seen. King is supposed to be a guardian of righteousness and glorious refuge of his people, " the protector of his subjects ". and after that Lakṣmaṇa addressed him, that you have always been mild in the past, self- restrained; and dead dedicated to the welfare of all creatures. do not abandon your true nature, yielding to rage. and you must not destroy the worlds because of one single being. lord of earth must be gentle and cool - headed, and must mete out just punishment²⁵. and after that Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa set out to traverse the entire forest and then he saw the bird huge as mountain peak, illustrious jatāyus -The vulture attempts to save sītā but it failed after a fierce battle, he falls mortally wounded, where he slay fallen on the ground drenched with the blood of his wounds. and after that they reached to the bird, he explained clearly about what happened in the place when their absence, and he left the breath and passed into the sky. and after they placed a body of jatāyus on the pyre and cremated, then, they went down to the Godavari river and poured the funeral libation for the king of vultures.

After the funeral libation of jatāyus, they went westwards for the search. and then they came upon a mammoth, huge chested rākṣasa in a thicket. the two of them drew near and there, facing them; stood the giant kabandha, a creature without head or neck, his face set in his belly. he stood there blocking the path the two brothers were taking²⁶. aware of what the time and place required the rāghavas took their swords and cut off his horribly bristling arms at the shoulder. and rākṣasa collapsed roaring like a thunderbolt. and he asked "whoever can you be ?", after that Lakṣmaṇa told him about kakustha " this is the heir of Ikṣvāku dynasty. his name is Rāma, and all the people have heard of him. as for me, know that I am Lakṣmaṇa, his younger brother. 'my brother who has the powers of a god, was living in the desolate forest when a rākṣasa carried off his wife. it is in search of her that we have come this way'²⁷.

And after that kabandha told them, remembering what Indra said and he explained them a act how he came to suffer such deformity. and he told what Indra said," when Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa cut off your arms in combat, then you shall go to heaven ". and he overjoyed because they purified him with fire

¹⁴ Rāmāyaṇa vol.III, 32, 5-6

¹⁵ Rāmāyaṇa vol.III, 41, 4

¹⁶ Rāmāyaṇa vol. III, 41, 29

¹⁷ Notes on Rāmāyaṇa vol.III, 41, 29-32, p. 305

¹⁸ Rāmāyaṇa vol.III, 41,36-38

¹⁹ Rāmāyaṇa vol.III, 42,21

²⁰ Notes on Rāmāyaṇa vol. III, 42,21,P.308

²¹ Rāmāyaṇa vol.III, 55, 14

²² Rāmāyaṇa vol.III, 59,18-19

²³ Rāmāyaṇa vol.III, 58,10

²⁴ Rāmāyaṇa vol.III, 60,46

²⁵ Rāmāyaṇa vol.III, 61,4-9

²⁶ Rāmāyaṇa vol.III, 65,15

²⁷ Rāmāyaṇa vol.III, 66,10-11

so he recovered his form. and after that he suggested them for how to recover sītā for that he said to make an ally with sugrīva, very powerful and can take on any form at will. At Ṛṣyamuka, where the forest dweller residing. he is telling them that “ secure that alliance “ (urge his help) to recover sītā. why because, the clever monkey chief has discovered every single hiding place in the world of those creatures that feed upon the flesh of men. and he will dispatch giant monkeys, in every direction to hunt for sītā²⁸. and he also said about an ascetic named śabarī. after that they called out a farewell to kabandha and they left.

Heading west they set out to go to lake pampā. and they saw near by pleasant ashram of śabarī. they reached the place. she met the princes with delight. śabarī has been waiting for Rama, having been told by her gurus, “ one day Rama shall come to this holy ashram of yours. you are to receive him. once you have beheld him you shall go to the highest imperishable worlds “. after with Rāma’s leave she immolated herself in fire, and looking like a blazing fire herself, she went straight to heaven. and after Rama and Lakṣmaṇa, left to mount Ṛṣyamuka, for righteous sugrīva, offspring of the beaming sun, has been living with four other monkeys in constant fear of vālin.

After they reached Ṛṣyamuka and met sugrīva. the sugrīva tells Rāma a curious tale of his rivalry and conflict with his brother, the monkey king Vālin. the friendship between Rāma and sugrīva was contracted and the two conclude a pact. Rāma is to help sugrīva kill vālin and take both his throne and his queen. in return for this, sugrīva is to aid in the search for the lost sītā. and the sugrīva and Rāma reached kiṣkindhā, sugrīva called vāli, they involved in the fight. the grim fight went on for quite some time, but gradually sugrīva began to lose ground before his brother’s superior prowess and stamina. Rama saw it and finding his friend in sore distress and he fixed and stretched on his bow an arrow resembling a serpent, having the destruction of vāli in view.

Being wounded by Rāma’s shaft that highly powerful chief of monkeys, gifted with prowess fell down on the earth. and paying respects to that hero falling on the earth like to a flame less fire and eyeing him again and again those two highly powerful brothers, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa neared him. and beholding that highly powerful Rāghava and Lakṣmaṇa, vāli addressed them. “ what merits have you reaped by destroying me, who was not engaged in fight with you ? I was exercised with ire, being engaged in conflict (with another person) and for you I have met with destruction.” and he also addressed “ I have not done you any wrong either in your kingdom or in your city. nor I have passed by you. why have you then destroyed me, who am a monkey ranging always in the woods, living on fruits and roots and who have come here to fight with another person ? “ “why did you commit such an unrighteous act ? “²⁹ and after the end of the vāli words, Rāma spoke to the lord of monkeys, vāli. “ Do you consider why I have killed you - you had ravished your brother’s wife renouncing that ever - existing virtue. you had thus violated the path of virtue. and thus I have punished you who have ravished your elder brother’s spouse “. I find no other alternative than to punish him who act against humanity and violates the sacred sanctions of custom “. and he also told him that “I am kshatriya coming of high pedigree. I cannot put up with your immoral conduct”³⁰. he destructed him because he spoliated virtue and morality. and after that Vāli finally concludes that there is someone superior to him and thus seeks refuge in him.

In Aranyakāṇḍa- the episodes at the beginning and end of the volume Rāma encounters two people of extraordinary holiness. both śarabhaṅga the ascetic and the mendicant woman śabarī commit ritual suicide after encounter with Rāma. and Rāma also encounters With two evil monsters imprisoned in horrific forms as a result of curses. the king slays the monsters, there by releasing them from their state of confined and allowing them to recover their proper place in heaven. which it can seen in Viradha episode, Rāma slays viradha, a demon and then he recovers his true form and go to heaven. it means Rāma punishment removed the curse of Viradha. and same as in kabandha episode. they both cleansed by Rāma’s punishment and recovered their own forms and reached to heaven. here tells the liberating power of the King. and Rāma slays Mārīca, a demon also. all these rākṣasas killed by Rāma in combat. or for protection of sages from them. but in Bāli’s episode it totally different. Bali he was not against the Rama or he didn’t do any harm to Rāma. but Rāma stretched an arrow towards him, which it pierced the Bāli’s chest and he fell down on earth. here he behaved like a king. this chapter tells the view point of scripture that lay down principle of sanatana dharma, eternal tradition, as well as Rajadharmā, king’s duty.

Rāma, though he may be living as an ascetic, Rāma remains a kshatriya and so still has the authority to protect those who take refuge with him. the authority to protect belongs to the kshatriya caste as a whole, not just to him on the throne. on these grounds that Rāma is justified in slaying the rākṣasas, who harming the sages. and it also justified in slaying vālin (in kiṣkindākāṇḍa). but in this context that Rama is considered as a virtual king.

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²⁸ Rāmāyana vol. III, 69, 18-21

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