

EFFECT OF RAMAYANA ON VARIOUS CULTURES AND CIVILISATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Ramayana is the fountain source of a great tradition of literature, culture, religion; not only in India, but in the islands, regions and countries as far as in Pacific ocean as well. There are two main streams which flowed from India, the birth place of the Ramayana; one to the South East Asia (SEA) and the other to the western countries, representing the cultural and literary aspects respectively. This paper aims to highlight the cultural influence mainly and as such the SEA would be the chief point.

"Few works of literature produced in any place at any time have been as popular, influential, imitated and successful as the great and ancient Sanskrit epic poem, the Ramayana", says Robert Goldman.¹ Though India is the home land of the Ramayana, it now belongs to the entire world and is a unique, social, cultural, spiritual, philosophical and literary treasure of the mankind. Differences in the ideological, political and religious setup of the countries influenced by the Ramayana, have never been a hindrance in the progress and popularity of the epic. The regions that have come under the sway of this epic constitute mainly the SEA countries like Cambodia, Indonesia, Java, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. The effect is of two types: (a) Language and literature, (b) Art and Architecture.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

An exhaustive list of the translations of the Ramayana in various languages, from Arabic to Uzbek, and papers, research work done on Ramayana, that is readily available to us,² is truly amazing. The travel of Rama's story to the far east islands, is worth noting. Principle carriers of this valued treasure, might have been the traders, pilgrims and the ambassadors. It was probably gold that initially attracted Indian merchants to SEA, broadly known as *Suvarnabhumi*, the land of gold. The Chinese too called it Kin-Lin; Kin meaning gold. There is one more theory of this spread. According to the Hindu *Dharmasastra* the eldest prince was the heir to the throne in India. Other sons of the king, in spite of their valour and intelligence, had no political future. They, therefore, might have started conquering the scattered islands, away from their homeland. In this way colonial rule got established in these islands in the beginning of the Christian era. One such prince *Kaundinya* came to *Kambuja* i.e. Cambodia and settled there. Thereafter *Kaundinya* dynasty ruled there for many years.³ Similarly we have the *Srimara* dynasty in Campa (Vietnam), *Srivijaya* dynasty in Sumatra and *Sailendra* dynasty in Java and Bali. The accounts of the rulers of these dynasties are found in the SEA countries during 5th century A.D. to 17th century A.D.

EPIGRAPHIC EVIDENCES

Old Campa has most ancient epigraphic references and archaeological evidences in the Khmer monuments. Prof. Filliozat has extensively dealt with the inscriptions dating from 3rd century onwards.⁴ During king *Prakasadharmān*, an inscription gives glowing tribute to sage *Valmiki*, whose sorrow was the origin of poetry. The intimate knowledge of the text and the veneration in which the sage was held even outside India are both remarkable.

In Cambodia numerous inscriptions have been traced which establish how during the medieval period, king *Yasovarman* was associated with Rama. One inscription reads that the king ruled Kambupuri as Rama ruled Ayodhya.⁵ In a similar inscription of 967A.D. king *Rajendravarman* is compared to Rama and his enemy to Marica.

SOUTH EAST ASIAN RAMAYANAS

The Malaysian version of the Ramayana, known as *Hikayat Seri Rama* (HSR), offers fascinating material for a study of acculturation. Here, *Dasaratha* is said to be the great grand son of Prophet Adam. Ravana is shown having boons from Allah instead of Brahma.⁶ Thus we find that advent of Islam did not make any difference, on the contrary, fresh vitality was conferred on the original by proper adaptation, assimilation and integration.

First version of Ramayana in old Javanese is by *Yogesvara* in 9th century A.D., a work of 2774 stanzas in *manipravala* style i.e. mixture of Sanskrit and Kawi language. *Ravanavadham* of Bhatti, popularly known as *Bhattikavya* has greatly influenced Indonesian and Javanese Ramayanas.

In Bali a *Ramakavaca* of 22 stanzas in Sanskrit is found. Some of the verses of this are identical with the *Valmiki* Ramayana.⁷

Ramakien or *Ramakirti* (Rk), the Thai version of the Ramayana is the most popular story of Rama in SEA. In Rk, Sita is the daughter of Ravana and Mandodari (T'os'akanth and Mont'o). Bibhisana (P'ip'ek), the astrologer brother of Ravana, predicts calamity from the horoscope of Sita. So Ravana has her thrown into the waters, who, later, is picked by Janaka (Janok). The rest of the story is similar to the Ramayana. However, some folk elements have crept in the HSR and Rk.

After her return to Ayodhya, Sita draws a picture of Ravana. When Rama sees it, he is furious, jealous and accusing Sita, he banishes her. In Rk, a maid servant, possessed by an evil spirit, asks Sita to draw the picture; whereas in HSR, queen *Kaikeyi* (*Kikewi Dewi*) does this. It is interesting to note that in a Bengali version, it is Kaikeyi's daughter *Kukua* instigating Sita to draw the picture of the demon king and then arousing the jealousy of Rama.⁸

The interaction of the spiritual version of the Ramayana with the local or regional folk traditions is very interesting. The episode of Ahi (Ayi/Ai) Ravana and Mahi (Mayi/Mai) Ravana, common to HSR, Rk, *Phra Lak Phra Lam* (Laotian Ramayana) and some regional Ramayanas in India, highlights the importance of Hanuman

It is Hanuman who kills Ahi Ravana and Mahi Ravana and rescues Rama and Laksmana whom the demons wanted to sacrifice to goddess Kali. *Hanumadvijaya*, a Sanskrit text also has this episode. This is a deliberate attempt to glorify Hanuman. Alu Kurumbas, a small hunter tribe around Nilgiri hills of South India, have finely amalgamated the folk element in the original.⁹

In Laos, Ramayana is mixed with the didactic story literature Pancatantra (Nithan Nang Tantai). In a story of the frogs and a serpent, the serpent seeks shelter in the pond of the frogs. Frogs are not ready to admit the snake in the pond. That time the snake tells the story of Rama to the frog king, saying that Rama gave shelter to Bibhisana though he was the brother of his enemy. So, one should not deny help to other seeking refuge. Similarly the episode of the squirrels helping Rama build the bridge across the ocean, is cleverly used in Lao Pancatantra to stress the point that even the small and weak ones can accomplish a hard work. The writer of the fables certainly knew that his readers were familiar with the characters and events in the story of Rama; therefore he deliberately inserted them for both the instructive and entertaining purposes.¹⁰

In Rk, Ravana was blessed that none of his ten heads would be reduced, even if they are cut several times. Rama had a problem, how to kill Ravana. Fortunately, he came to know that the soul of Ravana was kept separately in an aviary which was deposited with the teacher of Ravana called Goputra. Hanuman and Angada strategically brought it and then only Rama could kill the demon. This is a typical fairy tale point. It seems that the skeletal Rama story afforded a structure around which poets built new tellings.

In Rk, Sita delivers a son in the forest. Once she goes out for something and leaves the child to the care of her hermit father. Later she returns and fetches her child. The hermit does not notice her returning. When he opens his eyes, the baby is missing. He, therefore, creates another child with the help of a blade of grass. Sita is glad to have the twins. This account is found in HSR as well as the oral folk tradition of Maharashtra. A table below, represents Ramayana's influence on SEA countries, as regards the versions of the epic as well as the names of the dynasties.

Cambodia	Java	Laos	Malaysia	Phillippines	Sumatra	Thailand
	Kakawin Ramayan	Phra Lak Phra Lam	Hikayat Seri Rama	Maradia Lawana		Ramakien
			Hikayat Maharaja Ravana			Ramakirti
Kaundinya dynasty	Sailendra dynasty	Srimara dynasty			Srivijaya dynasty	Chakri dynasty
	Isana dynasty					37 rulers
						Names-Rama I,II...

There are some common motifs in all these Ramayanas.

- Rama Sita spending days in exile.
- Golden deer/golden goat or golden/silver fawn to lure Rama.
- Protective magic circle/line drawn by Laksmana.
- Abduction of Sita by Ravana in beggar's form.
- Monkey helping Rama to find Sita. It may be Hanuman, Valin or Laksmana (In *Maharadia Lawana*, Laksmana, son of Rama is Hanuman) or Shah Numan as in the fairy tale of Phillipines.
- A causeway built across the ocean.
- Destruction of Ravana's garden, burning the tail of the monkey, resulting into the city (Lanka), set on fire.
- Rama Sita returning in an aerial car/flying chariot (Pushpaka Vimana).

In many Ramayanas Rama Sita are said to be brother and sister.

In HSR 40 days mourning is said to be observed after the death of Kumbhakarna. This indicates to a royal custom in Malay territory of observing 40 days mourning after the death of a prince who is heir apparent to the throne.¹¹

LANGUAGE

Words of Indic origin are very common in spoken Thai and Indonesian languages. The Kawi language of Java is a mixture of Sanskrit and indigenous Javenese, also called Old Javenese. New Javenese, however, is mixed with Arabic and Persian words; a veritable proof of the Islamic rule there. In Phillipines, too, many Sanskritised words are found.

Though the Islamisation of this land and the adjoining area like Malaysia and Indonesia, caused insertion of Islamic religious aspects; such as, angel Gabriel, terms like Sultan, Shah, Haji Imam etc. the Sanskrit terms are abundant. Sanskrit *putri* became *potre*, *manusya* became *manosia*, *raja* became *radia* and so on and so forth.

The geographical names in many of the territories of SEA where Indian culture spread, exhibit Indian influence very considerably. A short list of some similar names, related to education, is given below.

Sanskrit	Thai language
Vidyalaya (maha)	Vitthayalaya
Prathama (primary school)	Prathom
Madhyama (secondary school)	matthayom
Siksadhikara	Siksadhikan
Ganapati (leader or dean)	Khanabody
Adhikarapati (vice chancellor)	Adhikanbody
Pandit (graduate) (maha)	Bandit
Tusti pandit (Ph.D.)	Dussadi bandit
Vichaya (collection, research)	vica

ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Ramayana is a living tradition in SEA countries. Dance, drama, puppet shows, shadow plays, mask dances, street shows, etc. are the popular mass media in these countries and the favourite themes are based on the Ramayana.

"It is not merely coincidence that the Ramayana scenes are depicted in one form or the other in countries as far as Indonesia and as near as Burma, not to speak of Cambodia, Thailand etc."¹²

PERFORMING ARTS

Country	Ramayana	Art
Java, Bali, Indonesia	Ramakien/Kakawin Ramayana	Wayang Wong, theatrical presentations of Ramayana, Ramayana recitals: beachan, mochopat
Indonesia	Ramakien	Mask dance called Khon
Malaysia	Hikayat Seri Rama	Wayang Kulit/Shadow puppet play

"In few countries in the world, theatre is as popular a mass media as in Malaysia and Indonesia"¹³ Wayang Wong is the theatrical live show of the Ramayana; whereas Wayang Kulit is shadow puppet show. SEA is rich in puppet theatre; leather puppet, dolls, rod, shadow etc. Every form has thrived from Ramayana themes. The *dalang* i.e. puppeteer displays great skill and versatility while narrating the story and linking contemporary topics with events that belong to Ramayana. In Kerala, India puppet shows based on Kamban Ramayana are performed and in Andhra Pradesh, leather puppet shows based on Ranganatha Ramayanamu are performed. These shows are mixed with contemporary political topics and events.

Wayang derives from a root meaning shadow. In this sense the origin of the theatre can be seen in ancestral worship, where the *dalang* brings to life the shadows of the past and reaffirms their relevance to the present.¹⁴ The *dalang* undergoes a rigorous training

on the religious and philosophical symbolism of the Wayang and its literary and oral sources and then only he studies puppet manipulation. The entire performance symbolically represents the micro-macrocosmic relationship. The oil lamp suspended overhead for illumination, represents the sun, the banana log at the bottom serving as stage for the stationary puppets, is the earth, the screen is the cosmic order, the pole as the bone, the rope as the muscle and so on and so forth.¹⁵

Before starting the performance, the *dalang* sits cross legged in front of the screen and recites some holy *suluka (slokas)* from the Ramayan. The first records found in connection with the existence of the wayang puppet shadow play dates back to 840 A.D., when an ancient inscription has mentioned the word '*Laringgit*' which means shadow play. Surprisingly, even today wayang shows in West, Central, East Java and Bali, are referred to as '*Ringgit*' shows by the villagers.¹⁶ In the jargon of the modern science or mass communications, the wayang shows would have been called the visual aids of a communicator. These shows are organised on auspicious and religious occasions in many parts of SEA.

When a child is born, *mochopat*, a traditional religious ceremony is performed. It is reading of the stanzas of the Ramayana in Kawi language. At the end of every chapter, the reader provokes some comments, which are followed by discussions on the philosophical significance of the chapter. *Bebachan* is another form of disseminating the Ramayana, where an expert recites the verses of The Ramayana in Kawi language and another person translates those in the local language. Both recitals of Ramayana resemble the *patha* of *Ramacaritmanas* of Tulsidas in northern India.

In Bali a modern dance drama is performed without any dialogue. Parts of Ramayana, such as death of Kumbhakarna, fight of Jatayu and Ravana, Ravana kidnapping Sita, Angada as an ambassador, destruction of Lanka by Hanuman etc. are performed with elaborate choreography. Pantomime is emphasised. Another type of dance is a trance dance of Bali called '*cak*' dance or monkey dance. A small number of artisans perform the dance with simple costumes. This is like '*terukootu*', street show based on the Ramayana, performed in South India and also a ritual dance drama based on '*kohomba yakkama*' of Srilanka. In '*khon*', the mask dance of Thailand, the character of Rama always wears a green costume, because in the Rk, Rama's skin is said to be green.¹⁷ In regard to stylisation, *Kathakali* of India and *Khon* of Thailand, share many things; masks, movements, music and emphasis on battle scenes and the heroic sentiment. The only difference is that in *khon*, gods and humans do not wear masks; while in *kathakali*, even gods wear masks.¹⁸

TEMPLE ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Prambanan, Siva temple in Central Java, built in 9th century A.D. during the Sailendra kings, has 42 panels of Ramayana, covering the story from the beginning to the monkeys reaching Lanka. It is evident that Ramayana was not only regarded as a vehicle to popularise the teachings of Vaisnava sect (Rama is an incarnation of Visnu), but also of Saiva sect. This Pallava style of physiognomy is an eloquent proof of the hold of Ramayana.¹⁹ Another temple built in Eastern Java during 14th century, however, represents Javenese physiognomy. Though the theme is from the Hindu epic, the characters, settings, techniques all change according to the territory. In Bangkok, for example, on the walls of the temple of Emerald Buddha, entire Rk is covered in 178 sections of mural paintings; but all are Thai in character, The paintings are enriched by poems composed by king Rama V.

In Cambodia, Angkor Wat, the shrine of Visnu, erected by king *Suryavarman* in 12th century A.D., depicts Ramayana, the battle scenes of which are considered to be marvel

of workmanship by scholars, The most impressive reliefs are Sita's fire ordeal, Rama's return to Lanka, killing of Kabandha, Valin, Viradha etc.

Temple of Bimay in Thailand has a lintel representing Rama and Laksmana tied with magical snakes by Indrajit.

In Campa, South Cambodia, an image of a standing archer is found, dating 7th century A.D. From its posture it is guessed of Rama. In the 10th century, on the temple of Bantai Srei, a bas relief representing Rama shooting at Valin during his fight with Sugriva, is found. Sometimes an isolated subject is used for decoration. Viradha carrying Sita, is depicted on a lintel.²⁰ These sculptures appear in bas reliefs on walls of the temples or wooden or stone lintels on the doors of the temples. Ravana carrying Sita, Hanuman burning Lanka are the favourite themes. In fact Hanuman is the most popular character in Bali and he is associated with Bhima, the middle Pandava, as both are the sons of wind god.

Innumerable artisans have carried the tradition of Ramayana; the makers of dolls, painters, puppeteers, sculptors, actors and performing artists.

EFFECT OF RAMAYANA ON COUNTRIES OTHER THAN SEA

Nepal, a close neighbour of India and the only Hindu nation reflects the influence of Ramayana to a great extent. A sculpture of Rama with a bow in one hand and *varada mudra* with the other, is found to the east of the famous Pasupati temple, dating 7th century A.D.²¹ One more sculpture of 8th century depicts Rama with Sita and Laksmana and a woman clinging to his feet. This might be Ahalya. Hanuman cult, too, is very popular in Nepal. An image of Valmiki is found on the banks of river Tamasa.

The other neighbouring countries of India reflect dual influence; that of the Hindu culture, as well as the Buddhist culture. In China and Japan the story of Rama is found through the episodes derived from the Syama Jataka and Dasaratha Jataka in Pali. In Tibet and Mongolia, Rama story comes as the story of Jiwaka.

Rama Sita episode, though very popular in the socio-cultural life of the Srilanka, Sinhalese have made Ravana, a hero. He is a physician and supposed to be the author of 'Kumara tantra', a treatise on the treatment of children²²

There were trade relations between India and western Asia from ancient times. Trade relations presuppose cultural relations. Arabs, however, were more interested in medicine, astronomy and mathematics than in cultural and religious treatises.

Imprints of Ramayana have been noticed in the poetry of Peru. Diffusion of Hindu thoughts, myths and practices to ancient America might have taken place through SEA.²³ Tales of Hindu Buddhist influence in Mexico and among the Maya correspond to those cultural elements, which in SEA were introduced by Hindu Buddhist monks.

According to Will Durant, eminent American historian, India is the most ancient civilisation in the world to have exerted her influence throughout the world, and that Indians were exploring sea routes, reaching out and extending their cultural influence on Mesopotamia, Arabia and Egypt, as early as the 9th century B.C.

Ramayana has reached as far as the freezing Siberia.²⁴ Siberia is a land where monasteries had the academic traditions of Nalanda, where, the holy Ganga is revered, where Sanskrit names are still prevalent, where mantras ring forth in the immensities of space and silence, where Panini is the model for their linguistic development and where Meghaduta is their first lyric.²⁵

Truly, "Ramayana tradition is a multivoiced entity, encompassing tellings of the Rama story that vary according to historical period, regional, literary tradition, religious affiliation, intended audience, social location and political context,"²⁶

FINDINGS

- Sanskrit had been, for centuries, the only link language, well fixed by a regular grammatical teaching available throughout India and Eastern Asia, which enabled the propagation and popularisation of the Ramayana.
- Ramayana stands more for an ideal than for a form; more for precepts than for a ritualistic complex. It allows great flexibility and catholicity in its treatment as well as mannerisms as seen in the paper so far.
- Message of Ramayana is of universal brotherhood and unity among people of the world. Malaysia might be Islamic, Thailand Buddhist and South America Christian, the message of Ramayana is known and respected by one and all.
- Ramayana is valued more for its ideals. Ideal father, ideal son, ideal husband, ideal ruler, all male ideals are equated with Rama. At the same time, Sita is held an epitome of all ideals of womanhood. Hanuman is a loyal servant, Laksmana and Bharata are ideal brothers and so on.
- Ramayana regards *dharma*, one's duty as more important than one's emotions. It is the best book on psychology and human behaviour. It is a mirror that tells us whether our own behaviour is in keeping with *dharma* or not.
- It is the greatest teacher, which teaches us to lead a morally and spiritually enriched life in this highly materialistic world.
- In this dark age, there is no other guide, no yoga, or sacrifice, no mantra or austerity, no regimen or ritual ; but to remember Rama, to sing the glory of Rama and ever listen to Rama's countless virtues.

¹ Goldman, Robert P. The Ramayana of Valmiki, Vol.I, Princeton University Press,1984,p.x

² Krishnamoorthy, K.,ed., A Critical Inventory of Ramayana Studies in the World (CIRSW),Sahitya Akademi, Delhi, Vol. I, 1991, Vol. II, 1993.

³ Mishra, Rajendra, "Sanskrit Studies in Indonesia", article in Sanskrit Studies Outside India (SSOI),ed., Mishra, K.K., Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, Delhi, 1997, p.45.

⁴ Filliozat, Jean, "The Ramayana in South East Asian Epigraphy and Iconography", article in CIRSW, p.lviii-lxxii.

⁵ Srinivasan, K.S., "Ramayana Traditions in South East Asia", article in CIRSW,p.xxxvi

⁶ Op.Cit., p.xxx

⁷ Goudriaan, T., "Sanskrit Texts and Indian Religion in Bali", article in India's Contribution to World Thought and Culture, Vivekananda Commemoration Volume (V.C.V.), Madras, 1970,p.562

⁸ Sen. D., The Bengali Ramayana, Calcutta, 1920, p.196-200.

⁹ Dieter B.Kapp,"The Episode of Ayi and Mayi Ravana in the Oral Ramayana version of the Alu Kurums",article in Ramayana and Ramayanas ed., Monika Thiel-Horstmann, Wiesbaden, 1991,p.102-114.

¹⁰ Rakasmani, Kusuma,"The Story of Rama in Lao Folktales", article in Ramayana Its Universal Appeal and Global Role (RUAGR), ed., Vyas, L.P., Delhi,1992,p.72.

¹¹ Singaravelu,S., "The Literary Version of Rama story in Malay", article in CIRSW, p.xciii, foot note. 51

¹² Chaturvedi, Harish Kumar, "Ramayana in Asia", article in V.C.V.,p.181.

¹³ Drvahuti, D., "India Malaya and Borneo-Cultural Synthesis", article in V.C.V., p.519.

¹⁴ Sunoto, Kipto, "ramayana- A Cultural Legacy in Indonesia", article in RUAGR,p.65.

¹⁵ Op.Cit. p. 66

¹⁶ Op.Cit, p.52

¹⁷ Srisurang, Poothupya," The Character of Rama in Thai Ramayana", article in RUAGR,p.26

¹⁸ Srinivasn, K.S. Op.Cit. p.xxxiii

¹⁹ Op.Cit.p.xxxiv

²⁰ Filliozat, Jean, Op.Cit. p.lxv

²¹ Sinha, Gokul, "Ramayana in Nepalese Arts", article in CIRSW, p.clix-clxii

²² Golakumbura,C.E. "Ramayana in Srilanka and Lanka of the Ramayana", article in CIRSW,p.cxv.

²³ Singhal, D.P., "Red Indians or Asiamericans-Indian Settlers in Middle and North America", article in V.C.V.,p.640

²⁴ Lokesh Chandra, "Indian Culture in Transbaikalian Siberia", article in V.C.V.,p.629.

²⁵ Op.Cit.p.632.

²⁶ Richman, Paula, ed., Many Ramayanas- The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South India, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1992, p.16