

The Portrayal of Rama in Sanskrit Plays

Manjula Sahdev

Ramakatha (Ramayana), composed by Rishi Valmiki, occupies an important place in India's literature, culture and civilization. It has always been considered the first poem (*Adi Kavya*) of Sanskrit literature. Poets, through the following centuries, have written on this *Ramakatha*, and its influence can be assessed by the wealth of literature devoted to it.

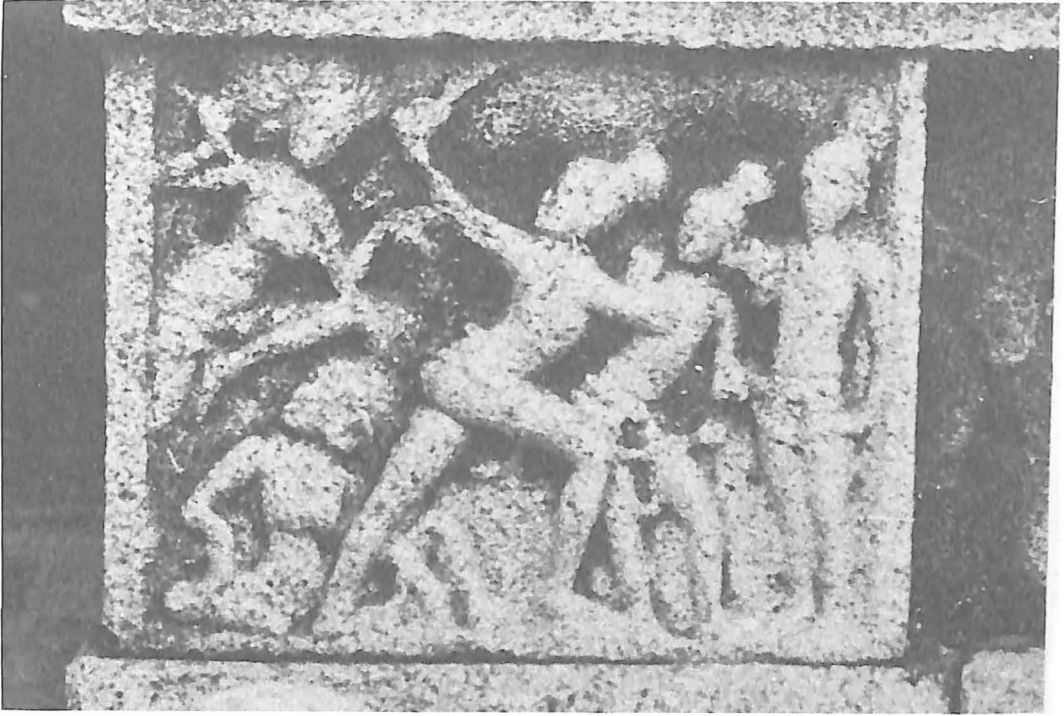
The study of *Valmiki Ramayana*, in its present form, suggests that it was not the poet's intention to portray his hero, Rama, as a superhuman being or a god. There Rama has been depicted with a few human weaknesses as well. Even so, Valmiki's Rama is no ordinary mortal. Poets after Valmiki transformed the *Ramakatha*, made changes in the character of Rama, presenting Rama's image more as that of a god or a god-oriented individual than a human being. It is difficult to encompass all the changes made by the later poets in one article.* But the pattern of the transformation is evident if we select just three episodes for discussion: *Tataka-Vadha*; *The Purification of Ahalya* and *Vali-Vadha*.

Tataka-Vadha (The Killing of Tataka)

In Valmiki's time, when women enjoyed respect in society, even a glance at another's wife was considered improper (*V.R.K.* 33.39). Physical punishment was reserved for women guilty of anti-social behaviour, but they were not killed. According to the poet, for a man to murder a woman was indeed a sinful and shameful act (*V.R.U.* 81.22). But in the case of the female-demon Tataka, we encounter a different situation.

Vishvamitra is taking Rama and Lakshmana with him to Siddhashrama. He needs them for the successful accomplishment of his *yajna* (sacrifice). On the way, they stop at Tatakavana, where Vishvamitra describes the havoc wrought on the forest by the demoness Tataka. He uses all his powers of persuasion to convince Rama to kill Tataka. But Rama does not show any zeal for performing this act. Then Vishvamitra cites the examples of Indra and Vishnu who, in the interests of the defenceless, killed women and punished them for their crimes (*V.R.B.* 19.4-6; 24.28-31; 25.15-22). His words have their effect on Rama who immediately agrees to kill Tataka (*V.R.B.* 26.4).

Rama takes his bow and twangs it so that all the four cardinal points echo with the sound. Hearing this noise, the enraged Tataka appears before Rama. When he sees her, Rama says to Lakshmana, "Look at this fearful *Yakshini* of formidable size. I shall now cut off her ears and nose and put her to flight. I do not have the heart to slay her because women deserve protection. I shall incapacitate her by depriving her of the power of movement" (*V.R.B.* 26.12). In the meanwhile, the dreadful Tataka comes tearing down towards Rama with uplifted arms. She raises a thick cloud of dust, and for a while the two brothers can see nothing at all. She causes a shower of rocks to rain on them. Rama, filled with wrath and parrying the rain of stones, cuts off both her hands. Then Lakshmana cuts off her ears and nose (*V.R.B.* 26.15-18).



Tataka-vadha, Brahmapurishvara Temple, Pullumangai, near Tanjavur, circa tenth century A. D.

Tataka invokes her magical powers and assumes various forms. From her hiding place she flings heavy rocks on them. Vishvamitra advises Rama to kill Tataka at once because she does not deserve any mercy. He adds that it is now evening and at night it is difficult to overcome demons. Rama then surrounds Tataka with arrows. Encompassed by his darts, she comes roaring towards both the brothers, when Rama, with a single shaft, pierces the heart of the *Yakshini* (*V.R.B.* 26.19-26).

These references in the *Valmiki Ramayana* clearly indicate that Rama was far from willing to kill Tataka. In every kind of situation he tries to punish her and force her to retreat, thus preventing her from causing any harm to the *yajna* of the *rishi*-s. The question of killing her arises only when Rama's own life and safety is at stake. So he kills her in self-defence. According to Valmiki, every man has the full right to save his life (*V.R.U.* 9.14).

Some scholars believe that Rama killed Tataka in the interests of society (for example, Shanti Kumar Nanurama Vyasa in *Valmiki Kalina Samaja Evam Sanskriti*). It is true that in the beginning Rama promised Vishvamitra that he would definitely kill Tataka in order to safeguard cows, Brahmanas and for the sake of the welfare of society. But when he encountered Tataka, his only thought was of punishing her. He even forgot his earlier promise to his Guru. Had Rama decided to kill her, he would have not given her a single chance to fight him. He would have meted out to her the same treatment that he gave to the demons,

Maricha and Subahu. Where they were concerned, he aimed his arrows at them without the slightest hesitation, as soon as he set his eyes on them. The above reference clearly indicate that Rama slew Tataka in self-defence.

The writers of the Sanskrit Rama plays have, each in his own way, justified Rama's conduct during this episode in his life. Some of the dramatists, for instance Bhasa in *Yajnaphala* (4th-5th century B.C.); Hanumana in *Hanumannataka*, *Mahanataka* (7th-12th century A.D.); Jayadeva in *Prasannaraghava* (12th century A.D.); Ramabhadradikshita in *Janaki-raghava* (17th century A.D.); Subrahmanya in *Sitavijayaindiraparinaya* (17th century A.D.); Vishvanatha in *Ananda-raghunandana* (18th century A.D.); Venkarya in *Sitakalyanavithi* (18th century A.D.); Ramapanivada in *Sitaraghava* (18th century A.D.); Sundaraviraraghudmahasuri in *Abhinavaraghava* (19th century A.D.); Narayana Shastri in *Maithiliyam* (20th century A.D.); Gopalarya in *Prataparaghava (N.R.D.)* and Venkateshasudhi *Amogharaghava-prekshanaka (N.R.D.)* have simply mentioned this incident as a link in the story and to demonstrate the strength and valour of Rama even in his youth. In these plays, Rama killed Tataka with a single shaft and there is no description of a fight.

Some of the dramatists have, however, devoted serious attention to this event. They have depicted the confusion and conflicts in Rama's mind. In the *Mahaviracharita* of Bhavabhuti (7th century A.D.), there is a moment when Vishvamitra asks Rama to kill Tataka and Rama promptly replies, "She is a woman." Kushadhvaja, the younger brother of King Janaka, appreciates Rama's feelings. Vishvamitra, in the interests of the safety of Brahmanas, encourages Rama to perform this act and Rama, setting his doubts aside, follows the advice of his Guru (Act I). In *Uttararamacharita*, however, Bhavabhuti refers to this episode (Act V, 34-35). Here Rama's son, Lava, remarking on the 'bravery' of Rama, says that even though Rama slaughtered Tataka, the wife of Sunda, his glory remains undiminished and he is revered as one of the illustrious ones of this world. This suggests that Bhavabhuti could not ignore or gloss over this act of even such a great and god-like individual as Rama.

In *Anargharaghava* of Murari (8th-9th century A.D.), Rama kills Tataka simply because he decides to obey the order of his Guru Vishvamitra. But after the killing, he is overwhelmed by sadness. He tries to justify his act, offering various explanations. Firstly, he reasons that murdering a woman is not a sin if it is carried out on the orders of a Guru. Secondly, he argues, "We are here today. Tomorrow we will be somewhere else. In the meanwhile we can overcome the shame by closing our eyes." But these justifications bring no peace to his mind. The act of killing a woman disturbs his feelings again and again. He says, "O! This deed of mine does not please me. When people learn of what I have done, my family Guru, Vasishtha, will be filled with shame." In fact, Rama feels so guilty that he does not face Vishvamitra (Act II, *Shloka* 59-60).

Shaktibhadra, in his drama *Ashcharyachudamani* (9th century A.D.), through the words of Ravana (5.18), and Rajashekhara, in his work *Balaramayana* (9th-10th century A.D.), through those of Sihanada, the son of Ravana, (Act VII), criticised the character of Rama on this very score. In both these works the deed is described as a blot on the fair name of Rama. In *Ramarajyabhisheka* of Viraraghava (19th century A.D.), Rama resists the idea of killing Tataka and says

that he had been ordered to kill male demons and not female ones. He feels that killing a woman, who is all alone in the forest, will smirch the reputation of Manu and Vasishtha. But under pressure from his Guru he carries out the order (Act VII). In *Harshavasana* of Kanailala (20th century A.D.) Rama repents the act of killing Tataka.

There are a few plays which try to justify Rama's act. In *Hanumannataka*, when Ravana blames Rama for the murder of Tataka, Angada says, "The characters of great men are worthy of worship, not of criticism" (Act IV, 22). In *Sitavivaha* of Sheshadri (18th century A.D.) it is said that the duty of the *kshatriya* is to kill anti-social individuals, whether male or female.

But Jagguvakulabhushana in his *Manjulamanjira* (19th century A.D.) has transformed the whole event to depict the character of Rama in a good light. Here Lakshmana asks Rama to shoot arrows at the *bhramara* (bee), which is sitting on a flower of the Ashoka tree on a mountain. Rama does exactly this and the death of Tataka occurs. The black mountain is none else but Tataka. Even here Rama criticises and curses himself for killing a woman but Vishvamitra pacifies him saying that a murder undertaken for the safety of others is not a sin but a good deed (Act II, 5).

A study of these works reveals that dramatists right till the 20th century tried to offer new interpretations of this act but they could not really ignore it. Their explanations varied but the deed had to be mentioned.

Purification of Ahalya

The next episode for consideration is the purification of Ahalya. In the *Valmiki Ramayana*, Rishi Gautama curses his wife Ahalya for her illicit relations with God Indra. The nature and the condition of his curse is: "You shall remain immobile in this place for thousands of years, subsisting on air, doing penance, lying on ashes, invisible to all beings. Such will be your existence in this hermitage. When Rama, the son of Dasharatha, enters this forest, you shall be purified. After you have offered him due hospitality, you will cease to be swayed by passion and in my proximity shall regain your present form" (V.R.B. 48.29-32).

Vishvamitra takes Rama and Lakshmana inside the *ashrama*. There they see Ahalya, so dazzling bright on account of her penance that it is difficult to gaze at her. The poet describes her as a divine and illusory image created by Brahma, a flame veiled in smoke, the brightness of the moon obscured by clouds, a reflection of the sun's splendour in water (V.R.B. 49.13-15). Both the brothers touch her feet. She, calling to mind the words of Gautama, offers them hospitality and they accept the homage in accord with tradition (V.R.B. 49.17-18).

These details show that Ahalya is not a stone but a living being engaged in rigorous penance to purify herself and be freed of the curse of her husband. Even in the *Uttarakanda* of the *Ramayana*, she has been described as a *tapasvini* (V.R.U. 30.41-44). Shatananda, the son of Ahalya, says to Vishvamitra, "Have you shown to the princes my revered mother who has for a long time been engaged in rigorous austerities?" (V.R.U. B. 51.5). Regarding the invisibility of Ahalya, it is clearly said in the epic that Gautama has strictly ordered her to



Purification of Ahalya, Deogarh Temple, circa sixth century A. D. (now in The National Museum, New Delhi). Photograph: Courtesy, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi.

remain in the *ashrama* and secondly that she appears dazzling bright on account of her austerities and it is impossible to gaze on her.

The poets, after Valmiki, in an attempt to indicate Rama's supernatural power, gave a new turn to this episode. Some of the dramatists, in order to continue the chain of the story, mention that Ahalya was purified by the godly grace of Rama. Several dramatists (Hanuman in *Hanumannataka* (Act III, 19) and *Mahanataka* (Act III, 45); Murari in *Anargharaghava* (Act II, pp. 62-63); Bhagavantaraya in *Raghavabhyudaya* (Act II, 2); Srinivasa in *Sitadivyacharita* (Act III, p. 31); Vishvanatha Singh in *Ananda-raghunandana* (Act I, 86); Narayana

Shastri in *Maithiliyam* (Act II, 7); Sundaraviraraghudmahasuri in *Abhinavaraghava* (Act III, 10); Vedantasuri in *Raghuviracharita* (N.R.D.) (Act II, p. 80); Sheshadri in *Sitavivaha* (N.R.D.) (Act II, p. 89); Bhattasukumara in *Raghuviracharita* (N.R.D.) (Act II, p. 42); Nrisimha in *Yadavaraghaviya* (N.R.D.) (Act I); and Varadakavi in *Janakiraghava* (N.R.D.) (Act I) have all described Ahalya as a stone who resumes the form of a woman with the touch of Rama's feet.

Some plays, like *Janakiparinaya* (Act I), *Ramarajyabhishekha* (Act I) and *Manjulamanjira* (Act II), depict either that Rama, by chance, sits on a stone or that Rama removes a stone from the path. In both these accounts the stone then assumes the form of Ahalya.

There are only two dramas which do not refer to Ahalya as a stone. One of them is *Mahaviracharita* of Bhavabhuti and the other is *Sitaraghava* of Ramapanivada. But both the poets accept the divine influence of Rama on Ahalya.

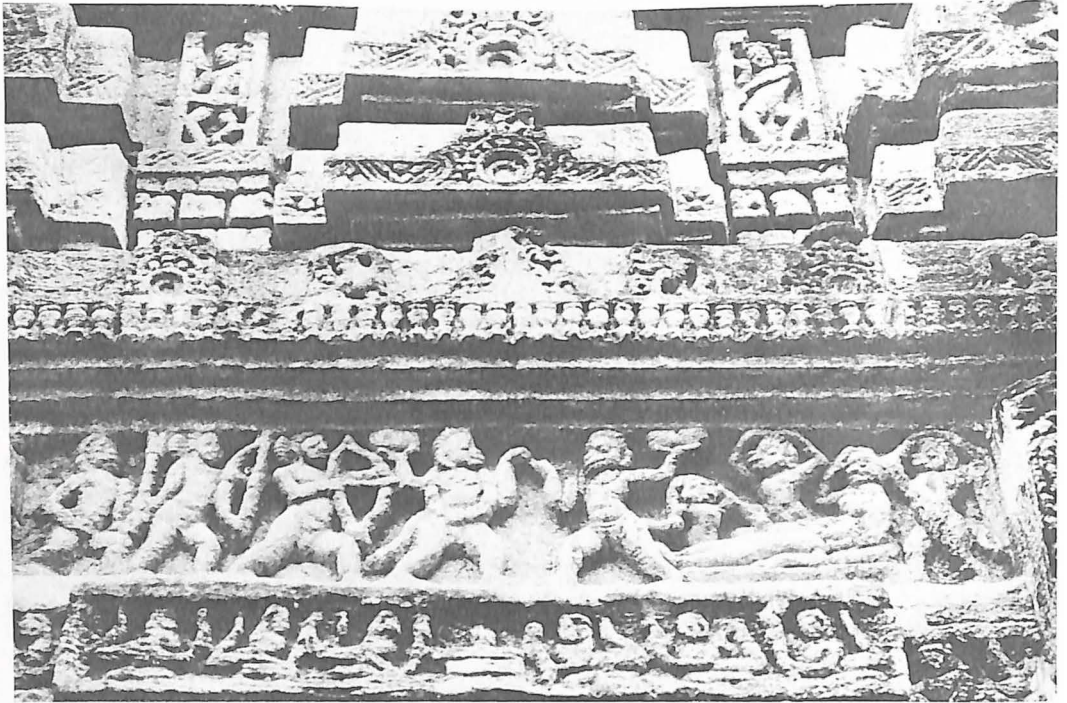
In this way the latter poets depict the personality of Rama not as that of a mortal, but an incarnation of Vishnu.

Vali-vadha (The Murder of Vali)

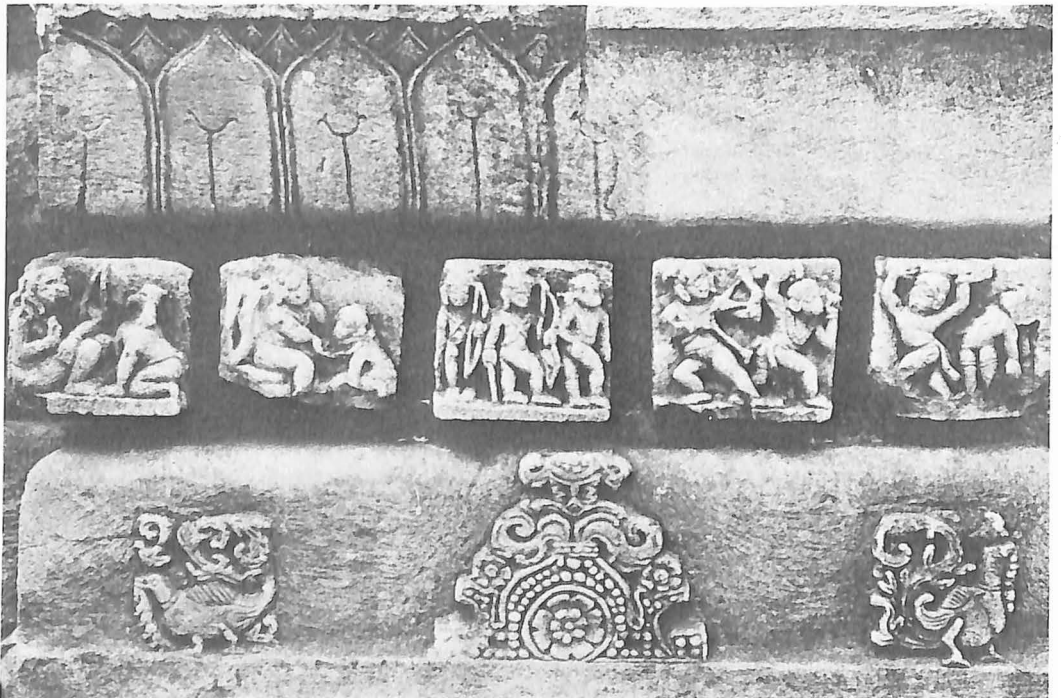
One of the most controversial episodes in Rama's life is *Vali-vadha*. In dealing with this particular event a few questions naturally arise: (i) Why does Rama choose Sugriva as his ally and not his brave brother Vali? (ii) Why does Rama kill Vali, at a time when he is engaged in fighting another person? (iii) Why does not Rama appear before Vali during the fight? (iv) To what extent can the explanations set forth by Rama before Vali be justified?

In the *Ramayana*, Vali is described as powerful and brave, much more so than Sugriva and Ravana. He could have been more useful to Rama in his search for Sita. As he himself explains to Rama, "Had you asked me for help, I would have brought Sita to you within a day and handed over to you the abductor Ravana" (V.R.K. 17.49-50). Even then Rama does not choose to be friends with him. The reason is clear, Rama himself has no knowledge of Sugriva and Vali. It is the demon Kabandha who tells him about the two brothers and advises him to make an alliance with Sugriva who is faced with a situation similar to the one faced by Rama (V.R.A. 72.23-24). If Kabandha had recommended Vali as an ally, Rama might perhaps have sought his help. Anyway, one cannot be certain whether Vali, a well-established king, could have helped Rama or refused to do so.

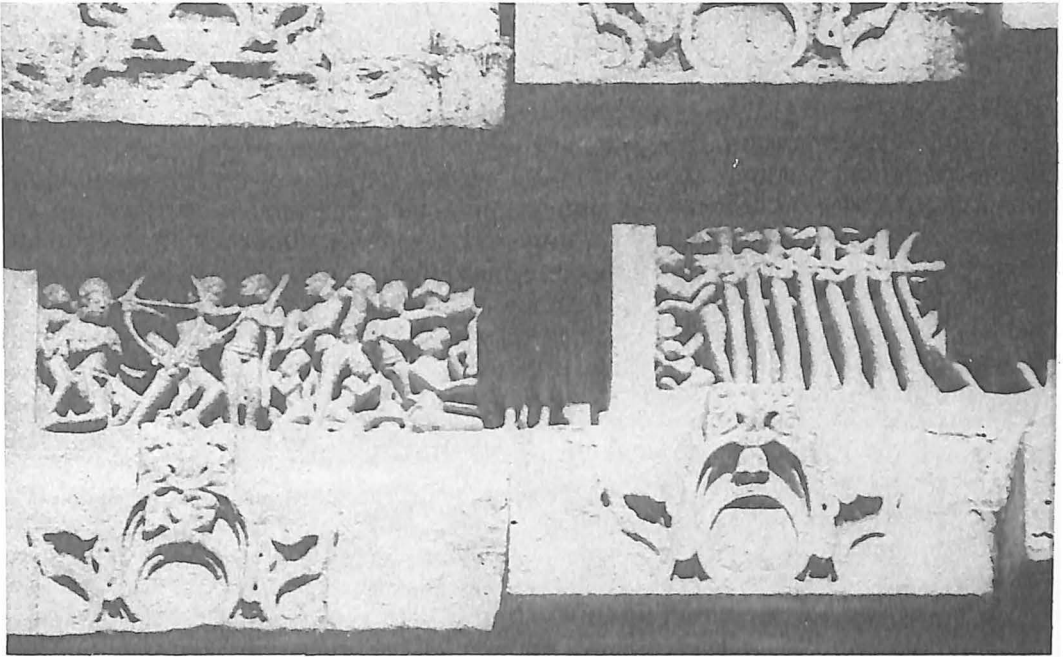
The point at issue is: Why did Rama kill Vali when the latter had done him no harm? After making friends with Rama, Sugriva tells him his pathetic story and relates to him the tale of Vali's atrocities. Rama's heart is moved by the suffering of his friend, and his friend's enemy becomes his own enemy (V.R.K. 5.24-30). Sugriva repeatedly appeals to Rama to kill Vali (V.R.K. 8.39; 10.30; 12.11). Rama promises Sugriva that he would kill Vali on that very day (V.R.K. 5.26-28). Again Sugriva reiterates his fears, speaks of his difficulties and Rama repeats his promise to kill Vali (V.R.K. 8.21; 10.32; 14.13-14). But in these details there is no hint of Rama's killing Vali from a hiding place. Moreover, Rama clearly says to Sugriva, "If you do not have faith in my strength and valour, I shall demonstrate them in battle" (V.R.K. 11.83). This is only possible when there is face-to-face



Vali-vadha, Singanatha Temple, near Cuttack, *circa* ninth century A. D.



Vali-vadha, Shatrughneshvara Temple, Bhubaneswar, *circa* seventh century A. D.



Vali-vadha, Ghot Manglod Temple, Rajasthan, circa tenth century A. D.

fighting. The question of killing Vali with one shaft arises only when Sugriva, defeated in the first combat by his brother, curses Rama and the latter pacifies him by saying that he will kill Vali with one arrow and promptly he pierces seven *Sala* trees with one arrow (V.R.K. 12.37; 14. 10-11). But even here there is no mention of Rama killing Vali from behind.

Rama, accompanied by Lakshmana and Hanuman, goes to Kishkindha to slay Vali. But he does not walk to the open battlefield; he stands behind a tree (V.R.K. 12.14; 14.1). Shiromani, a commentator on the *Ramayana*, has tried to justify Rama's action: "To avoid the heat of the sun, they stood behind the trees" (V.R.K. 14.1). Even so, there are ample references to prove Rama's absence from the battlefield. On the first occasion Sugriva leaves the field only because he fails to find Rama there (V.R.K. 12.21) and Vali does not see anyone else but Sugriva (V.R.K. 12.22). During the second encounter Vali learns about Rama from his wife Tara. But he does not actually see Rama on the field. This clearly shows that Rama shot his arrow from behind the trees.

It is a matter of great surprise that Rama, who was such a splendid archer, so powerful of body, one who had killed dangerous demons in his youth, killed Vali from a hiding place. Perhaps Rama would not have slain Vali thus had Sugriva not appealed for help, indicating his own critical condition (V.R.K. 16.27, 28.31). Rama was moved by the plight of his friend and shot the arrow without giving thought to the situation. Commentators hold different views on this subject. Govindraja says, "Rama had promised Sugriva to kill Vali, so he adopted this crooked policy *chhadmaniti*. Had he revealed himself to Vali and had Vali surrendered to him, then the promise made by Rama to Sugriva would have remained unfulfilled." (V.R.K. 18.43). Tryambakarayamakhi in his *Dharmakuta* says that Rama

had promised to kill Vali on the very day he sealed his friendship with Sugriva. If he had challenged Vali to a fight and the latter had left, or asked Ravana for help or returned with his army, Rama's promise to Sugriva would have remained unfulfilled. So Rama slew Vali from the hiding place (*V.R.K.* 18.43).

A study of the *Ramayana* and the commentaries suggests another reason. There is a reference to a golden necklace given by Indra to Vali (*V.R.K.* 17.5, 22.16). Whenever Vali goes to war, he has the necklace round his neck. Govindaraja says, "Indra gave this golden *mala* to his son Vali to ensure victory. The effect of this *mala* was that whenever anyone came before Vali to engage in a fight, all his strength and power was transferred to Vali. Perhaps Rama was aware of this fact and so he did not face Vali" (*V.R.K.* 11.30). In the *Ramayana*, Sugriva simply tells Rama about this golden necklace of Vali, but he does not utter a single word about its effect.

To what extent is Rama's justification of his act correct? Vali sharply criticises Rama for his non-*Kshatriya* war policy. In his reply, Rama says, "This earth belongs to the Ikshvakus and the virtuous Bharata is now ruling this earth. We, other princes, carry out his righteous commands and range the whole earth in our desire to promote the law. You have acted in opposition to the spiritual law. You have had marital relations with Ruma who is your sister-in-law. Being a warrior of an illustrious race, I am unable to brook your villainy. A person, who makes his daughter or sister-in-law an object of lust, is punishable by death" (*V.R.K.* 18.6, 7, 9; 18, 20, 22).

Again Rama says, "People, in the open or concealed, catch innumerable wild beasts with snares, nets and traps. Those who feed on flesh do not pause to consider whether these beasts are fleeing in terror or are unafraid and standing still as they shoot them when their backs are turned on them. I do not believe that they are at fault" (*V.R.K.* 18.39). "Even royal *rishi*-s, devoted to their duty, go out to hunt. So you are struck by my arrow, whether you enter into combat with me or not, because you are a beast" (*V.R.K.* 18.39-40).

There is not a single mention in the *Ramayana* that the whole earth belonged to the Ikshvaku dynasty or that Bharata had issued such instructions to Rama. In fact, we find various regions governed by different kings like Kaikeya, Janaka and Vishala. Vali himself tells Rama that he has done no harm to his land, city or to him personally (*V.R.K.* 17.24).

According to critics like Dr. Benjamin Khan (*The Concept of Dharma in Valmiki Ramayana*) and N. R. Navlakar (*A New Approach to the Ramayana*), Rama's second justification does not hold water. For his relations with Ruma, Vali was treated as a human, a man, and meted out the punishment of death. On the other hand, he was also regarded as a monkey. If Vali and Sugriva are to be regarded as monkeys, the funeral rites of Vali and the installation of Sugriva on the throne of Kishkindha with full Vedic rites cannot be justified.

Valmiki states that a person who is not engaged in a fight should not be killed (*V.R.U.* 80.39), but we find that this rule is not observed in the case of Vali.

Actually Rama kills Vali only to fulfil the promise made to Sugriva that he would regain for him his wife and kingdom. Rama himself confesses that this is his approach (V.R.K. 18.26-27).

Some of the writers of Sanskrit Rama plays, namely, Jayadeva, Someshvara (13th century A.D.), Rajahchudamani Dikshita, Venkateshvara (17th century A.D.), Srinivasa Subrahmanya, Narayana Shastri Lakshmanasuri (20th century A. D.), Jagguvakulabhushana, Sriranganatha, (N.R.D.) and Nrisimha, have merely mentioned the story of *Vali-vadha*. Shaktibhadra, Rajashekhara and Mahadeva (17th century A. D.) in their respective works *Ashcharyachudamani* (5.18), *Balaramayana* (Act VII) and *Adbhutadarpana* (3.11) have criticised Rama for killing Vali from a hiding place.

Except for the dramatist Bhasa, all the other writers have changed the whole situation to justify the action of Rama. In *Abhishekanataka* of Bhasa, Rama does not agree with the arguments of Vali which seem to be quite fair. In Act One, Rama emphatically says, "You deserve punishment; so has it been given to you."

In *Mahaviracharita* by Bhavabhuti, Malyavan, Ravana's minister, persuades Vali to kill Rama. So Vali engages Rama in combat and is killed by him. But in *Uttararamacharita* (Act V, 34), Lava (Rama's son) says, "Who does not know the exploits and the greatness of the Lord of Raghu's race?" Lava then refers to three actions of Rama (the destruction of Tataka, the wife of Sunda, the fight against the demon Khara, and the killing of Vali) and speaks in a sarcastic vein of those whose glory is undiminished even after such deeds. Obviously the poet could not ignore the manner of Vali's death.

In *Anargharaghava* of Murari, when Vali learns that Rama has thrown the skeleton of the demon Dundumbhi, he is furious. His minister Jambavan persuades him to fight Rama. As a result he is killed by Rama (Act V). In *Hanumannataka*, Vali is annoyed with Rama for piercing the seven *sala* trees and comes out to fight. Here Rama feels sorry that the innocent Vali has been killed (5.50, 54). He says to him, "I shall earn peace and purification of mind only if you kill me when I am asleep." In *Sitanandanataka*, Ravana sends Vali to kill Rama. In *Janakiparinaya*, Vali opposes the friendship of Rama with Sugriva and offers to fight a duel with him (Act VI). In *Raghavabhudaya* of Bhagavantaraya (17th century A.D.), Vali challenges Rama to a combat. The poet has not offered any reasons for this step.

In *Ananda-raghunandana* of Vishvanatha Singh, Vali sends word to Ravana to bring Rama and Lakshmana to him. In the meantime both the brothers (with Sugriva) come to Vali. Vali expresses a desire to fight and his challenge is accepted by Rama (Act IV). In *Raghuviracharita* of Bhattasukumara (N.R.D.), Vali offers to fight and is killed by Rama (Act V).

In *Ramarajyabhisekha*, the poet Viraraghava has given a new turn to the whole situation. Here Vali demonstrates his desire to fight both Sugriva and Rama. Rama asks him, "Against both together or one by one?" Vali replies, "Together, one in front and the other from behind." Rama again asks him, "Who would you wish to be in front and who behind?" Vali prefers Sugriva, being his own blood, to be in front and Rama behind. In this way he is killed by Rama.

In *Unmattaraghava* of Virupaksha (14th century A.D.), Lakshmana kills Vali. In *Abhinavaraghava* of Sundaraviraraghudmahasuri and *Valivijayavyayoga* of Yogananda, Rama does not come into the picture at all. In these two plays, Sugriva himself kills Vali.

While dealing with the portrayal of the character of Rama, mention of *Shambuka-vadha* will not be out of place since, like *Vali-vadha*, the episode is also controversial from the point of view of the depiction of Rama's character. In the *Ramayana*, it is said that the vigorous penances and austerities of the Shudra Shambuka cause the death of a Brahmana boy. Nārada advises Rama to prevent Shambuka from conducting these penances. Rama goes in search of Shambuka and when he finds him he does not say anything to him but simply cuts off his head. As soon as the Shudra Shambuka dies, the child regains his life (*V.R.U. Sarga* 74, 75, 76).

Except for Bhavabhūti and Sundaraviraraghudmahasuri, the other poets do not mention this episode. While Sundaraviraraghudmahasuri simply refers to this incident, Bhavabhūti tries to modify its importance. Here, too, Rama slays Shambuka for the sake of the Brahmana child; but before he kills him, he is overcome by pity for the saint, Shambuka, and curses himself. After his destruction at the hands of Rama, Shambuka assumes the form of a holy man. He pays his respects to Rama, who confers blessings upon him and the promise of joy in the next *loka* (2. 10-12).

In this way succeeding poets have tried to justify the acts of Rama by giving new twists and turns to certain events in his life, all the while keeping in view Rama as a god or an incarnation of Vishnu. But they could not overlook certain episodes. In the *Ramayana* of Valmiki, Rama has been described as an half-incarnation of Vishnu-*Vishnorardham Mahabagam* (*V.R.B.* 18.11), and at certain places his godly grace has been demonstrated. Even so, the very personality of Rama and the qualities of his character (as depicted in the epic) clearly indicate Valmiki's intention to portray Rama as the hero of his epic and not as a god or god-oriented man. In tracing the development of the traits in Rama's personality and the origin and development of the Rama saga, one realises that the maximum changes in the *Ramakatha* as well as in the character of Rama were made around the seventh and eighth centuries A.D. when his image as a god (*avatara*) was fully established.

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*A detailed discussion appears in the author's work *Valmiki Ramayana Evam Sanskrit Natakon Mein Rama*, Vimal Prakashan, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, 1979.

Abbreviations

V.R.A. *Valmiki Ramayana Aranyakanda*

V.R.B. *Valmiki Ramayana Balakanda*

V.R.K. *Valmiki Ramayana Kishkindhakanda*

V.R.U. *Valmiki Ramayana Uttarakanda*

N.R.D. Refers to those manuscripts which offer us no clue to their date and historians of Sanskrit literature have marked them as lost plays. In all such cases, *N.R.D.* indicates that references to date are not available.

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