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## Ranganātha Rāmāyaṇam – Bālakāṇḍam : A Critical Study

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### Abstract

The Ramayana is a story of everlasting interest. It has influenced the hearts and minds of millions of Hindus for countless ages; it has inspired them to high thinking, splendid effort and right conduct. Even today, there is hardly a hamlet in India where the Ramayana story is not told and expounded in Sanskrit, or in the vernacular language, to hundreds of men, women and children who listen to the discourse with rapt and rapturous attention. Apart from daily or occasional expositions, it no exaggeration to say that young children are fed by the folkwomen with the important events of the story together with their mother's milk. Romesh Chandra Dutt has rightly observed that 'there is not a Hindu woman, whose earliest and tenderest recollections do not cling round the story of Sita's sufferings and faithfulness, told in the nursery, taught in the family circle, remembered and cherished through life'. Referring to the two great epics of ancient India, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, Jawaharlal Nehru says in his 'Discovery of India' 'I do not know any book anywhere which has exercised such a continuous and pervasive influence on the mass mind as these two. Dating back to a remote antiquity, they are still a living force in the life of the Indian people'. We have Ranganatha Ramayanam by Gona Buddha Reddy, in which Rama's life and achievements figure prominently. The present paper describes the important events in Balakandam of Ranganatha Ramayanam.

### Keywords

Ranganatha Ramayanam, Dasaratha, Rama, Viswamithra, Thatakai, Ahalya, Sarayu

There are many works in different languages which deal with the lives of Sri Rama and Sita, in prose as well as in poetry. We have the Raghuvamsa of Kalidasa in which Rama's life and achievements figure prominently. Sanskrit dramas written by authors of great eminence,

In India, two great epics are always remembered. One is the *Ramayana*, Adi Kavya and another is the *Mahabharata* (the great epic of the Bharatha Dynasity). The Valmiki Ramayana consists of some 24,000 couplets divided into seven books called 'Kānda' (canto). Each canto is named for the theme or place of the events it describes. 1. Bala kanda (Book of Youth), 2. Ayodhya kanda (Book of Ayodhya), Aranya kanda (Book of Forest), Kishkinda kanda (Book of Monkey), Sundara kanda (Book of Beauty) , 6. Yuddha kanda (Book of War), and 7. Uttara kanda (Book of the next events of war). The Ramayana is a classic story of the triumph of good over evil from two poles of moral axis. Each character of the epic moves along this axis toward one or the other pole as a result of personal decisions and actions. It also teaches moral and ethics. Rama, the protagonist, is considered to be the embodiment of Dharma and is regarded as the ideal son, husband, and eventually king. The scholar Mr. A.A. Macdonell says "probably no work of world literature, secular in origin, has ever produced so profound an influence on the thought of a people as Ramayana". For at least the last two and a half millennia, the tragic tale of Rama and Sita, the oldest version of Valmiki's poem, has entertained enhanced and uplifted untold millions of people in India for many generations.

*Ranganatha Ramayanam* was written by *Gona Buddha Reddy*. It was named for the poet's father, *Vitala Dharanesuni*. It is described at the beginning of the epic. Some critics opine that *Valmiki Ramayanam* by *Valmiki*, *Bhaskara Ramayanam* by *Bhaskara*, as *Ranganatha* had written this epic, so it was called *Ranganatha Ramayanam*. A few lines refer to the author.

Bhūmī gavīndrulu budhulunu meccha  
Rāmāyaṇambu purāṇamam mārgamuna  
dappaka nā pēra daga anadhra bhāsha  
jeppi prakya tambu sēympu murvi

1. According to traditional belief, it was written by Ranganatha.
2. Appa Kavi, in the 17th century quoted some lines from Ranganatha Ramayanam.
3. The poet Anantamatya, in his salutation poem to the classical poets, referred to the name of Ranganatha along with other poets Nannaya, Tikkana, Errana, Bhaskara and others.
4. Veturi Prabhakara Sastry suggested that Chakarapani Ranganatha, contemporarian of Palkuriki Somanatha of the 12th or 13th century, might be Ranganatha who assisted to Gona Buddha Reddy in his work.
5. Gona Buddha wrote Ranaganatha Ramayanam in his father's name, *Panduranga Vittalanatha*.

Ranganatha Ramayanam contains 17,290 dwpadas couplets or 34,580 lines. It is the earlier epic of Ramayanam in Telugu. Mallampalli Somasekhara Sarma and Vavilla Ramaswami Sastrulu believe that it was written in about 1240 AD. Veturi Prabhakara Sastry says it was composed between 1280 and 1300 or at the end of the 14th century. Ranganatha Ramayanam occupies the first place, second to *Bhaskara Ramayanam* and finally *Molla Ramayanam*. *Kankanti Paparaju* wrote *Uttara Ramayanam* based on Valmiki Ramayanam. It narrates that Rama, even though he was a man with holistic elements of Lord Vishnu, a chaste man, obeys the holy words of his parents.

padamula rthambulu bhāvamulgatulu  
 padasayyalartha soubhāyamul yatulu  
 rasamulu kalpana lpārusa sangatulu  
 nasamāna rītulu nanniyu galuga

When Rama left Ayodhya for exile, Dasaratha, father of Rama, was unstable in his thoughts and he was very anxious. The poem shows Dasaratha's mind.

anavuḍu dasarathudatu pōka nilichi  
 tanusunu rathamunu tappaka chūchi  
 adiyunu gānaka dūlinatu chūchi chūchi  
 adiyugānaka bayalatu chūchi chūchi

When Rama thinks about Sita, his feelings are clearly expressed by the poet.

idi mahāranayamai yippuḍu tōche  
 nidi parnasālayai yippudu tōche  
 nidi nāku dapamani ippudu tōche  
 nidi nāku dukhamani ippudu tōche

like this, Ranganatha Ramayanam is decorated with beautiful words and metaphors.

### Some aspects in Balakandam

(a). Ranganatha Ramayanam begins with a conversation between the sage Narada and Valmiki. the poet describes Sarayu river beautifully, the country of Kosala and Ayodhya looks like an ornament to the earth. Further, he says all the citizens of Ayodhya are ardent devotees of Lord Vishnu.

(b). Dasaratha is interested in performing Aswamedha and Puthra Kameshti yāgās, First, he discloses it to his ministers, then to his teacher Vasista and others. Brahma suggests to all gods for approaching Lord Vishnu to take birth as the son of Dasaratha and rescue the world by destroying the Ravana. Lord Vishnu agrees to protect them by taking an incarnation of Lord Rama.

- (c) Rama was born on Wednesday (bhudhavaramu) and the naming ceremony 'Namakaranam' which took place on the eleventh day.
- (d). When Rama was a child, an important incident happened. Once, Rama and his friends play a game of a ball and stick. Kaikey's maid Manthara passes that way and hits the ball with her hands, which Rama punishes her by breaking her leg by playing stick. She rushes to Kaikey, who in turn informs the king. Then Dasaratha requests Vasista to teach his sons the Vedhas and other subjects.
- (e). The Balakanda of the Ramayana is the earliest text to describe Ahalya's life in detail. It states that Indra becomes enamored by Ahalya's beauty, learns of her husband's absence and enters the ashram disguised as Gautama to request embrace with her, and praising her as a slender-waisted woman. Ahalya sees through his disguise but consents owing to her curiosity. After a while, the sage returns when Indra to leave the place. Engaged in this act, Gautama curses him to become castrated. Immediately, the curse comes true. The sage looks at his wife and curses her also to become a boulder, suffer from hot sun, wind and dust and be unnoticed. Ahalya feels deeply and requests for salvation. Gautama says she will be free from curses when Rama's foot touches the stone. On the way to Mithila, Rama comes to the place where Ahalya has been lying as a stone. When Rama's feet touch it, the stone is transformed into a beautiful woman. Ahalya shines like fabricated gold; the crystal-clear tank, the smoke-less fire-free and the cloudless moon. Meanwhile, Gautama goes over there and worships Rama and takes back Janaki with him.
- (f) During the breaking of the bow, Rama says to Janaka that the bow was very old, light and fragile. Still, Janaka praises it in many words. The journey of Dasaratha to Mithila is described in twenty lines. The marriage of Sita looks like a Telugu wedding. When Rama and Sita see each other during the marriage hours, it is really poetic and beautiful.
- (g). At the muhurtha time the veil was lifted, Rama looked at Sita and was pleased. His lotus eyes derive pleasure at the sight of a full moon. Sita's looks were like fishes in the ocean of her beauty. As they were looking at each other, they forgot themselves for a while.
- (h). While sending Bharatha and Satrukana to their uncle's house. Dasaratha asks them to learn different branches of learning, including the Vedhs and sastras, archery etc. Accordingly, they train under the great masters. After completing the studies, Bharatha sends through a Brahmin a letter to Dasaratha expressing their desire to see him.

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