

INTRODUCTION

1. Preamble and Synopsis of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*

THE CONTENTS OF the *Uttarakāṇḍa* are to a very great extent strikingly different from those of virtually all the other *kāṇḍas* of the epic. As we have noted elsewhere,¹ the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a narrative tends, with certain exceptions,² to remain sharply focused on the adventures of the central hero, Rāma. Even in the one major exception, the *Sundarakāṇḍa*, which places Sītā and Hanumān as well as Rāvaṇa and the *rākṣasa* court on center stage, as it were, for almost the entire narrative, the book is filled with descriptions of Rāma and with retellings of his life and deeds.

By way of contrast, the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, by its location, its very nature, and its construction, makes little room for Rāma to engage himself directly in action. The tale of Rāma, as it is represented in the received text of the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, consists of two overlapping but not coterminous histories. One is the biography of King Rāma narrated from birth to death, while the other is the account of the *Rāmāvatāra* from the incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu until the fulfillment of his divine mission, which consists of the salvation of the world from the violent oppression of the monstrous *rākṣasa* lord Rāvaṇa and the establishment of a millennial rule of *dharma*. Rāma accomplishes this mission in the closing *sargas* of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, which then ends, in virtually all manuscript traditions, with a *phalaśruti* extolling the merits and rewards accruing to those who read, recite, or hear the poem.³

As both the closing verses of the initial *sarga* of the *Bālakāṇḍa* and the final verses of the last *sarga* of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* make clear,⁴ Rāma's *rājyābhīṣeka*, or royal consecration, inaugurates a millennia-long utopian era in which all natural, political, social, economic, and medical ills are said to be eliminated. This is the ten-thousand-year (or, in some passages, eleven-thousand-year) utopian re-creation of the conditions of the Kṛta Yuga,⁵ known in modernity as the *Rāmarājya*. The apparently

¹ Goldman and Goldman 1996, pp. 18–19.

² See, for example, *Ayodhyākāṇḍa sargas* 37–39, which describes Ayodhyā after Rāma's departure; *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* 51–87, which describes the death of Daśaratha and Bharata's return and journey to Citrakūṭa; *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* 36–42, 44–66, which tells of the monkeys' search for Sītā; and *Sundarakāṇḍa*, which, except for the last four *sargas*, tells of Hanumān's adventures in Laṅkā.

³ See Introduction, "Who Knows," p. 66, note 3.

⁴ See 1.1.71–76 and 6.116.82–90.

⁵ See 1.1.76.

untroubled nature of Rāma's reign, however, introduces an interesting factor more or less unique to the *Rāmāyaṇa* legend that makes it difficult for the hero to engage in any further gripping or dramatic actions. For by ushering in and presiding over a millennia-long period of utter peace, prosperity, and social harmony, Rāma, now the monarch and chief magistrate of his ideal kingdom, has (with a few critical exceptions to be discussed at length below) no longer any need to take much of an active part in matters of state or society.

The *Rāmācarita* differs markedly in this respect from its closest textual parallel, the *Kṛṣṇacarita*, as narrated in the *Mahābhārata*, as well as in the *Harivaṃśa* and other Vaiṣṇava *purāṇas*. In the case of Kṛṣṇa, his half brother Balarāma, and his Pāṇḍava companions, the divine mission (*devakārya*) of the incarnations and the lives of the heroes are more or less coterminous. All of them end their earthly manifestations at most within a few decades of completing their task of ridding the earth of its burden of oppressive and demonic kings. In contrast, Rāma, his brothers, and his *vānara* and *rākṣasa* allies live on after the death of Rāvaṇa for thousands of years, during which Rāma gently but firmly reigns and offers sacrifices until, at last, he is reminded that he is wanted back in heaven in his true Vaiṣṇava form.⁶

This matter is most clearly illustrated in a number of passages that several commentators as well as the editors of various editions, including the critical edition, regard as *prakṣipta*, or interpolated, and that either do not appear in some editions and translations of the poem or are specifically marked in them as interpolations. U. P. Shah, the editor of the critical edition of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, relegated these passages to his appendices, as will be discussed later in this introduction. In some of these passages the absence of grievances or problems among Rāma's subjects is addressed explicitly.⁷ In one such passage, Rāma, as a consequence of the utopian nature of his reign, while sitting in his judgment hall, has considerable difficulty in finding anyone with a complaint, dispute, or indeed any matter at all for him to adjudicate. He sends Lakṣmaṇa out of the palace to try to find someone with a grievance:

And then Rāma said to Lakṣmaṇa of auspicious marks: "Go out, great-armed increaser of Sumitra's joy.

"And go forth, Saumitri, to speak with those who have business to be attended to." When Lakṣmaṇa of auspicious marks had heard Rāma's

⁶ See *Uttarakāṇḍa sargas* 89, 93–100.

⁷ See, for example, *Prakṣipta* III, *sargas* 1–3 (= App. I, No. 8, lines 303–465; and App. I, No. 10, lines 1–134). In his introduction to the critical edition of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, Shah (1975, Introduction, pp. 23–25, 28–29) has presented his reasons for omitting these lines from the critical text. See Introduction, "Text," pp. 210–12.

speech, he proceeded to the gateway where he himself summoned those who had business to be attended to. But no one there said: “I have some business to be attended to here today.”

For when Rāma was ruling his kingdom, there were no mental or physical afflictions. The earth was covered with all kinds of plants and was filled with ripened grain. No child, youth, or person of middle age died at that time. Everything was governed in accordance with righteousness, and so no cause for grievance arose.

Therefore, while Rāma was ruling his kingdom, one could find no one who had business that needed to be attended to. Cupping his hands in reverence, Lakṣmaṇa reported as much to Rāma.

But Rāma, his mind calm, said this to Saumitri: “Go back again and seek out those who have business that needs to be attended to.

“Through properly executed statecraft, no unrighteousness is to be found anywhere. Therefore, in fear of the king, everyone always protects one another.”⁸

Finally, Lakṣmaṇa is able to locate only a miserable dog, who complains that he has been beaten by a mendicant brahman. After hearing this odd case, Rāma pronounces judgment on the offender.⁹ In a second such passage similarly relegated by Shah to an appendix, Rāma calls in his full complement of counselors and deliberates with them before rendering a judgment in a property dispute between a vulture and an owl.¹⁰

As its title indicates, the *Uttarakāṇḍa* is, in part, an extended epilogue to the epic story in which the hero, King Rāma, serves largely as either an auditor of historical, illustrative, or exemplary tales told by various other figures or as a sort of chief administrator who, as the occasion demands, dispatches his kinsmen to deal with such matters as the suppression of malefactors, the alleged infidelity of his queen and the supposed impropriety of his having taken her back, and the expansion of his dynasty’s territorial control. Other than this, of the one hundred *sargas* of the critical edition, Rāma plays an active role in only some forty. In fact, the first thirty-six *sargas* of the book, which account for almost exactly half of its total text,¹¹ consist of the sage Agastya’s responses to Rāma’s questions about the pre-*Rāmāyaṇa* histories of the important epic characters Rāvaṇa and Hanumān. The proportions of the text that

⁸ *Prakṣipta* III, *sarga* 1.6–13 (= App. I, No. 8, lines 313–328).

⁹ *Prakṣipta* III, *sarga* 2 (= App. I, No. 8, lines 386–465).

¹⁰ *Prakṣipta* III, *sarga* 3 (= App. I, No. 10, lines 1–134). See Introduction, “Text,” pp. 211–12.

¹¹ For statistical analyses of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, see Yardi 1989, 1990, 1994; Brockington 1998, pp. 373–77; and S. Goldman 2015a.

are devoted to these two figures and their backgrounds are widely different. The history not only of Rāvaṇa but also of his ancestry all the way back to the creation of the *rākṣasa* race itself occupies the book's first thirty-four *sargas*, while a relatively expansive retelling of the infancy of Hanumān takes up the following two.

The first section, a mini-epic in itself, which Hermann Jacobi termed the *Rāvaṇeīs*,¹² provides an unusually detailed history of the *rākṣasas*, including their genealogy, their marriages, their battles with the gods, and their acquisition, loss, and recapture of the magnificent city of Laṅkā (*sargas* 1–8). The following two *sargas* (9–10) recount the marriage of Viśravas and Kaikasī, the births of their children, Rāvaṇa, Kumbhakarna, Śūrpaṇakhā, and Vibhīṣaṇa, the asceticism of Rāvaṇa and his brothers, and the boons they obtained thereby. The great bulk of the section (*sargas* 11–34) narrates at length and in detail the pre-*Rāmāyaṇa* career of Rāvaṇa, including his seizure of Laṅkā from his half brother Kubera; his marriage and the birth of his son Indrajit; his torment of the gods, seers, *yakṣas*, and *gandharvas*; his military campaigns against kings, gods, and demons; his occasional defeats; and his abduction and rape of various women and the curses he incurs thereby. Following this elaborate account of Rāvaṇa's genealogy and career of conquest, two *sargas* (35–36) relate the birth and infantile exploits of Hanumān, including his attempt to swallow the rising sun, his wounding by Indra, the anger of his father, the wind god Vāyu, and how he came to receive various boons from the gods.

It is only in the thirty-seventh *sarga* of the book that the narrative returns to the actions and events in Rāma's life. *Sargas* thirty-seven through forty narrate the events following Rāma's consecration, including a curious account of the leave-taking of a group of some three hundred allied kings and their armies who, we learn for the first time, had apparently assembled to assist the hero in his assault on Laṅkā, a subject to which we shall return later. We also learn that Rāma redistributes the gifts and tribute he had received from these kings to his more active allies, the *vānaras*, and the few *rākṣasas*, Vibhīṣaṇa and his attendants, who had assisted him in the war. These allies then take their leave of Rāma and return to their respective homes. After this Rāma receives as a gift the fabulous flying palace Puṣpaka, which, after Rāma's return from Laṅkā, had been dismissed and returned to its rightful owner, Kubera.¹³ Bharata closes this section with a brief paean of praise for the utopian conditions that have prevailed in the kingdom during the brief period since Rāma's accession to the throne (*sargas* 37–40).

¹² Jacobi 1893, p. 26.

¹³ See 6.115.49–50 and notes.

Following the dismissal of the flying palace Puṣpaka, we have one of the very few *sargas* (*sarga* 41) of the epic to focus, albeit tastefully, on the romantic and erotic life of Rāma and Sītā. There is a dense description of the beauty of Rāma's *aśoka* grove, or pleasure garden, where he and Sītā at long last indulge in the joys of marital bliss, drinking, dining, and being entertained in the beautiful park. It is here that we first learn through Rāma's observation that his wife is "endowed with auspiciousness," that is to say, pregnant. She tells him of her pregnancy-longing to visit the sages who dwell along the banks of the Ganges, and, in what will prove to be a dark irony, Rāma agrees and promises her that she shall do so the very next day.

The following ten *sargas* constitute one of the core elements in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, and their contents form the principal basis for the discomfort with the book from medieval times down to the modern day. They narrate the sequence of events that comes to be commonly known as the *Sītātyāga*, or abandonment of Sītā. Immediately after his romantic idyll with Sītā in the *aśoka* grove, Rāma is informed by one of his agents that malicious rumors are circulating among the people about the propriety of Rāma's conduct in taking Sītā back after she has been in the power of the lecherous *rākṣasa*. Rāma summons his brothers and, in order to preserve his reputation as a perfectly dharmic ruler, commands Lakṣmaṇa to take Sītā and abandon her on the farther bank of the Ganges. Distracted but obedient, Lakṣmaṇa takes the unsuspecting queen, who thinks she is being taken on the pious excursion Rāma had promised her, and carries out his brother's instructions. Abandoned and desolate in the wilderness, Sītā is discovered by some young boys from the neighboring ashram of the sage Vālmīki, who takes her in as his ward. Lakṣmaṇa then learns from the charioteer and counselor Sumantra how all of this was long ago foretold to Daśaratha by the sage Durvāsas. Upon his return, Lakṣmaṇa consoles his grieving brother (*sargas* 42–51).

At this point, Rāma tells a series of tales to Lakṣmaṇa illustrating the terrible fate that befalls kings who offend or neglect their duty toward brahmins. These are the tales of King Nṛga, who was cursed by a brahman to become a lizard; of King Nimi and the sage Vasiṣṭha, who cursed each other to become devoid of consciousness; and of King Yayāti, who was cursed by his father-in-law, the sage Uśanas, to lose his virility for his disrespect to the sage's daughter, Devayānī, and her son, Yadu (*sargas* 51-1*–51-7*).¹⁴

¹⁴ The illustrative and cautionary tales told by Rāma occupy seven *sargas* that have, for reasons that we find questionable, been relegated by the editors of the critical edition to an appendix. We have restored these passages to their proper place in our translation (51-1*–51-7*) following *sarga* 51. For a discussion of the textual issues involved, see Introduction, "Text," pp. 212–16 and notes to these passages.

The book now turns to another matter. The next twelve *sargas* return with some interesting variations to the epic's central theme of Rāma's avatāric mission of defending the virtuous, especially the vedic sages, from the depredations of the *rākṣasas*, the demonic foes of brahmanical civilization. But, unlike in the case of Rāvaṇa, Rāma no longer takes a direct role in this defense. A delegation of sages who live along the banks of the Yamunā River arrives at the Kosalan court to lodge a complaint that they are being harassed by a powerful demon, Lavaṇa. After hearing from them and their leader, the Bhārgava sage Cyavana, about the monster and his oppression of the ascetics, Rāma dispatches Śatrughna, who has hitherto had virtually no active role in the epic, to go and destroy the *rākṣasa*. He consecrates Śatrughna as the new king of Lavaṇa's city, Madhurā, and sends him forth with troops and provisions. On his journey, Śatrughna stops for a night at the ashram of Vālmiki, where, that very night, Sītā gives birth to twin sons, Lava and Kuśa. The prince then proceeds to Madhurā, where, after a fierce battle, he kills Lavaṇa and founds a new city and kingdom, thus expanding the territorial reach of the Kosalan Ikṣvāku dynasty into the heartland of the Śurasenas. After ruling his peaceful and prosperous kingdom for twelve years, Śatrughna is consumed with longing to be with Rāma, and he returns to Ayodhyā. On his way to Ayodhyā, Śatrughna once again stops for the night at Vālmiki's ashram, where he and his troops overhear the singing of the tale of Rāma.¹⁵ But, once his brother is in Ayodhyā, Rāma brusquely tells him that his duty lies with his own kingdom and sends him back to Madhurā after only a few days (*sargas* 52–63).

Following Rāma's dismissal of Śatrughna, the *kāṇḍa* turns to another defining episode in its characterization of Rāma. In *sargas* sixty-four through the first half of *sarga* sixty-seven, as we have reconstructed it,¹⁶ we learn that a grieving brahman arrives at Rāma's palace gates carrying the dead body of his young son. The brahman places the blame for his son's untimely end squarely on Rāma, arguing that if Rāma were actually governing a perfectly dharmic realm, such a tragedy could not have occurred. Rāma accepts this position and learns from the sage Nārada that the cause of this rent in the otherwise perfect fabric of righteousness in his kingdom is that, somewhere in his realm, a *śūdra* is engaged in the ascetic practices that are, at least in that cosmic era, the Tretā Yuga, reserved for the higher *varṇas*, or social classes. Rāma orders that

¹⁵ The episode in which Śatrughna spends the night at Vālmiki's ashram has, for reasons that we find questionable, been relegated by the editors of the critical edition to an appendix. We have restored it to its proper place in our translation at *sarga* 63 following verse 3ab. For a discussion of the textual issues involved, see Introduction, "Text," p. 215 and notes to 7.63.*3ab–App. I, No. 9, lines 1–52.

¹⁶ See Introduction, "Text," p. 215 and notes to 7.67.4.

the child's body be preserved and then, in his flying palace, searches his kingdom for the *śūdra* ascetic. Upon finding the ascetic Śambūka and learning that he is indeed a *śūdra*, Rāma summarily beheads him. The instant that Śambūka dies, the dead child is miraculously restored to life, signaling that *dharma* is once more unblemished in Rāma's kingdom. Rāma is felicitated by the gods for killing the *śūdra*. This episode, meant, no doubt, to shore up the brahmanical social order, has had a controversial receptive history from ancient to modern times, like the episode of the abandonment of Sitā (*sargas* 64 through first half of 67).

After killing Śambūka, Rāma does not return immediately to Ayodhyā but instead visits the ashram of the sage Agastya, where he receives a splendid celestial ornament and, throughout the following six *sargas*, becomes once again the auditor of tales told by the sage (*sargas* 67–72). These are the strange tales of the kings Śveta and Daṇḍa. The former, we learn, was condemned because of his lack of charity to the hideous fate of having perpetually to eat his own corpse. The latter, for having raped the daughter of the powerful brahman sage Uśanas Kāvya, was cursed by the sage to be destroyed in a tremendous dust storm that will turn his once prosperous kingdom into the desolate Daṇḍakāraṇya, one of the principal sites of Rāma's exile and earlier adventures.

Rāma now returns to his capital, where he announces to Bharata and Lakṣmaṇa that he has resolved to perform the *rājasūya*, the rite of royal consecration. Bharata, however, counsels him not to carry out this plan as the *rājasūya* ritual inevitably involves the conquest and slaughter of all the rival kings of the earth. This is, no doubt, because such violence would accord poorly with the character of Rāma as we have seen it in the preceding books of the epic. Lakṣmaṇa then intervenes, advising Rāma to perform instead the *aśvamedha*, or horse sacrifice, a rite that, among other things, frees one from all sins and impurities. He bolsters this recommendation by recounting the tale of how Indra was freed from *brahmahatyā*, or the sin of killing a brahman, through a performance of the *aśvamedha*. Rāma responds by now turning from auditor to narrator. He relates at some length a variation of the widely distributed tale of King Ila/Ilā, according to which the famously transgendered monarch is only restored to masculinity through a performance of the *aśvamedha*. Finally, Rāma orders the performance of his own great *aśvamedha* in the Naimiṣa forest. The opulent sacrifice is conducted with great pomp. These discussions and narratives concerning the two sacrifices occupy ten *sargas* (74–83).

One of the honored guests at Rāma's *aśvamedha* is the sage Vālmiki, who brings with him Sitā and her sons, his two wards, the twin bards Lava and Kuśa, of whose birth and existence Rāma is apparently unaware. The boys sing the *Rāmāyaṇa* before the sacrificial assembly just

as they had learned it from the sage and are praised for their artistry by Rāma. Once Rāma realizes that the singers are, in fact, Sītā's and his sons, he asks the sage to present Sītā before the assembly. Vālmiki complies and testifies as an unimpeachable witness to her utter fidelity. Rāma nonetheless asks that she take a public oath of fidelity. Sītā does so, but as proof of her truthfulness, she calls upon her mother, the earth goddess, Mādhavī, to bear witness to her oath and take her back into her bosom. The earth opens and the goddess carries her daughter down into it, leaving Rāma stricken with grief and fury.¹⁷ Desolate, Rāma now has a golden image of his beloved fashioned and with it at his side performs many sacrifices and rules over his happy and prosperous kingdom for thousands of years. This resolution of the earlier account of the abandonment of Sītā occupies six *sargas* (84–89).

Then, in three brief *sargas*, the book once more makes a hasty turn toward the political and territorial expansion of the Kosalan dynasty. These *sargas* serve to supplement the earlier episode of Śatrughna's conquest of Madhurā. First, Rāma's maternal uncle Aśvapati sends his *guru* Gārgya as a messenger to solicit Rāma's assistance in conquering the country of the *gandharvas*, which lies along the banks of the Indus River. As in the case of Madhurā, Rāma does not assist directly but dispatches Bharata and the latter's two sons, Takṣa and Puṣkala, along with a vast host. They join with Aśvapati and launch an attack on the *gandharvas*. After an inconclusive weeklong battle, Bharata annihilates all thirty million *gandharvas* with a powerful divine weapon and founds the two eponymous cities of Takṣaśīla and Puṣkarāvati there, one for each of his sons.

Rāma is delighted by the news of this annexation of the realm of the *gandharvas* and directs Lakṣmaṇa to find yet another country in which he can similarly establish his own two sons, Aṅgada and Candraketu, as kings. He requests, however, that this be done less violently than in the case of Bharata's conquest. Bharata suggests that they subdue the salubrious country of Kārāpatha, which he then subjugates and in which he establishes Lakṣmaṇa's sons, respectively, in the eponymous cities of Aṅgadiyā and Candrakāntā. The three brothers, Rāma, Bharata, and Lakṣmaṇa, now utterly content, enjoy their lives and perform sacrifices happily for ten thousand years (*sargas* 90–92).

The final eight *sargas* of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* (and thus of the entire *Rāmāyaṇa*) deal with the last days on earth of Rāma and his brothers. One day

¹⁷ The *sarga* in which the sorrow and anger of Rāma is described has, for reasons that we find questionable, been relegated by the editors of the critical edition to an appendix. We have restored it to its proper place in our translation as *sarga* 88*. For a discussion of the textual issues involved, see Introduction, "Text," p. 216 and notes to *sarga* 88*.

Kāla, the god of death and personification of time, arrives in the guise of an ascetic and announces that he must have a serious, private conversation with Rāma. It is revealed that Kāla is serving as the messenger of Brahmā, who has sent him to inform Rāma that the period of his *avatāra* is at an end and that the gods long to have their lord, Viṣṇu, back with them in heaven.

Rāma posts Lakṣmaṇa at the door of his council chamber and instructs him that, on pain of death, he must permit no one to interrupt this meeting. Suddenly, the notoriously irritable sage Durvāsas arrives, famished after a prolonged fast, and demands instant access to the king in order, as it turns out, to beg a meal. When Lakṣmaṇa tries to put him off, the sage threatens a curse that would mean the destruction of the entire Ikṣvāku lineage. Faced with this dilemma, Lakṣmaṇa has little choice but to sacrifice himself. He admits the sage into Rāma's presence, thus obligating the king to fulfill his pledge to Kāla. After consulting with his advisers, Rāma reasons that, to the virtuous, exile is the moral equivalent of execution, and so he banishes his beloved brother and inseparable companion. Lakṣmaṇa immediately leaves the city and, on the bank of the Sarayū, experiences a yogic death and is escorted to heaven in his earthly body by Indra, along with the gods, seers, and *apsarases*.

Rāma now resolves to abandon his earthly existence. He installs his sons, Lava and Kuśa, as rulers of the two successor kingdoms of Southern and Northern Kosala and summons Śatrughna back from Madhurā. The latter arrives, as do Rāma's old comrades in arms, the *vānaras*, along with Vibhīṣaṇa and his *rākṣasa* retainers. Rāma then leaves Ayodhyā, leading a solemn procession of his allies, kinsmen, and subjects to the Gopratāra *tīrtha* on the Sarayū River. They all enter the waters, and Rāma at last returns to his true form as Lord Viṣṇu while, with the exception of Hanumān, Vibhīṣaṇa, and a few others, his followers and devotees also resume their proper heavenly forms and attain their respective heavenly abodes. The *kāṇḍa* and the epic conclude, in the critical edition, with the simple statement, "Here ends the foremost of tales, known as the *Rāmāyaṇa*, together with its epilogue (*sahottaram*). It was composed by Vālmīki and is worshiped by Brahmā." As one would expect, most manuscripts and published editions of the poem follow this verse with various *phalaśrutis*, as they do at the end of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* (*sargas* 93–100).