

SHRI SITA RAM FOUNDATION BLOG POSTS

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Ramayana is a story that people understand easily. It is a simple story about relationships, our culture, values and ethics. We live in times when the very ethos of being ‘human’ is severely compromised. Yes, Aristotle was not wrong when he stated that “**Man is a social animal**” and today when the world and our very existence is threatened by a deadly virus, an even deadlier alienation, is creeping in insidiously. Perhaps, this may get further accentuated in the days to come — one doesn’t really know. What one definitely knows is that globally the human spirit refuses to take it lying down.

According to Indian tradition, and according to the Ramayana itself, the Ramayana belongs to the genre of itihāsa, like the Mahabharata. The definition of **itihāsa** varied over time, with one definition being that itihāsa is a narrative of past events (**purāvr̥tta**) which includes teachings on the goals of human life. According to Hindu tradition, the Ramayana takes place during a period of time known as Treta Yuga.

It is believed that the **Ramayana had its origins in folklore** and was preserved and spread as an oral epic (**Akhyana**), for a very long-time. It is suggested that poet **Valmiki** rendered the folk lore into a very beautiful, sensitive and lyrical epic poem by about 7th century BCE. Thereafter, in age after age, the **Suthas narrated and sang the glory of Rama and Sita, in divine fervour**; and spread the epic to all corners of the land and beyond. Even to this day, the tradition of devote groups of listeners gathering around a Sutha to listen to the ancient story of chaste love between Rama and his beloved, and their unwavering adherence to Dharma amidst their trials and tribulations; is still very alive. **What characterizes the Dharma in Ramayana are its innocence, purity and nobility.** The Indian people prefer listening with joy, the rendering of Ramayana as musical discourse, to reading the epic themselves.



The rendering of Ramayana as musical discourse

The general cultural background of the **Ramayana** is one of the post-urbanization period of the eastern part of North India. By tradition, the text belongs to the **Treta Yuga, second of the four eons (yuga) of Hindu chronology. Rama is said to have been born in the Treta Yuga to King Daśaratha in the Ikshvaku vamsa (clan).**

The names of the characters (**Rama, Sita, Dasharatha, Janaka, Vasishta, Vishwamitra**) are all known in late Vedic literature, older than the Valmiki Ramayana. However, nowhere in the surviving Vedic poetry is there a story similar to the Ramayana of Valmiki. According to the modern academic view, Vishnu, who according to **Bala Kanda** was incarnated as Rama, first came into prominence with the epics themselves and further during the ‘**Puranic**’ period

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of the later 1st millennium CE. There is also a **version of Ramayana, known as Ramopakhyana**, found in the epic *Mahabharata*. This version is depicted as a narration to Yudhishtira.

The 7 Kandas or Books :

The Epic is traditionally divided into several major “**kandas**” or books, that deal chronologically with the major events in the life of Rama —

- **Bala Kanda.**
- **Ayodhya Kanda.**
- **Aranya Kanda.**
- **Kishkindha Kanda.**
- **Sundara Kanda.**
- **Yuddha Kanda.**
- **Uttara Kanda.**
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The division into 7 **kandas**, or books, is as follows :

1. Bala Kanda (Book of Childhood)

The origins and childhood of Rama, born to King Dasharatha of Ayodhya and destined to fight demons. Sita’s swayamvar and subsequent wedding to Rama.

2. Ayodhya Kanda (Book of Ayodhya)

The preparations for Rama’s coronation in the city of Ayodhya, his exile into the forest, and the regency of Bharata.

3. Aranya Kanda (Book of the Forest)

The forest life of Rama with Sita and Lakshmana, his constant companion. The kidnapping of Sita by the demon king Ravana.

4. Kishkindha Kanda (Book of the Monkey Kingdom)

Rama meets Hanuman and helps destroy the monkey people’s king, Bali, making Bali’s younger brother, Sugriva, king of Kishkindha instead.

5. Sundara Kanda (Book of Beauty)

Detailed accounts of Hanuman’s adventures, including his meeting with Sita. Traditionally read first when reading the Ramayana, this book’s name derives from the fond name given Hanuman by his mother.

6. Yuddha Kanda (Book of War)

Also known as “Lanka Kanda”. The battle in Lanka between the monkey and the demon armies of Rama and Ravana, respectively. After Ravana is defeated, Sita undergoes the test of fire, completes exile with Rama, and they return to Ayodhya to reign over the Ideal State.

7. Uttara Kanda (The last book)

Rumors of impurity lead to Sita’s banishment, during which she gives birth to and raises Lava and Kusha. Rama and Sita reconcile. The twin boys later ascend the throne of Ayodhya, after which Rama departs from the world.

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Characters in Ramayana



Rama- seated with Sita, fanned by Lakshmana, while Hanuman pays his respects.

1. Rama :

He is one of the protagonists of the tale. Portrayed as the seventh avatar of the God Vishnu, he is the eldest and favorite son of the King of Ayodhya, Dasharatha, and his Queen Kausalya. He is portrayed as the epitome of virtue. Dasharatha is forced by Kaikeyi, one of his wives, to command Rama to relinquish his right to the throne for fourteen years and go into exile.



Rama and monkey chiefs

2. Sita

She is one of the protagonists and the beloved wife of Rama and the daughter of king Janaka. Rama went to Janakpurdham, current city of Janakpur, Nepal, and got a chance to marry her by lifting a heavy Bow in a competition organized by King Janaka. The competition was to find the most suitable husband for Sita and many princes from different states competed to win her. Sita is the avatar of Goddess Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu. Sita is portrayed as the epitome of female purity and virtue. She follows her husband into exile and is abducted by Ravana. She is imprisoned on the island of Lanka until Rama rescues her by defeating the demon king Ravana. Later, she gives birth to Lava and Kusha, the heirs of Rama.

3. Hanuman

He is the tritagonist and a vanara belonging to the kingdom of Kishkindha. He is portrayed as the eleventh avatar of God Shiva (He is also called Rudra) and an ideal bhakta of Rama. He is born as the son of Kesari, a vanara king, and the Goddess Anjana. He plays an important part in locating Sita and in the ensuing battle. He is believed to live until our modern world.

4. Lakshmana

He is the younger brother of Rama, who chose to go into exile with him. He is the son of King Dasaratha and Queen Sumitra, and twin of Shatrughna. Lakshmana is portrayed as an avatar of the Shesha, the nāga associated with the God Vishnu. He spends his time protecting Sita and Rama during which he fought the demoness Surpanakha. He is forced to leave Sita, who was deceived by the demon Maricha into believing that Rama was in trouble.

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Sita is abducted by Ravana upon him leaving her. He was married to Sita's younger sister Urmila.

5. Ravana

He is a rakshasa, is the king of Lanka. After performing severe penance for ten thousand years he received a boon from the creator-God Brahma: he could henceforth not be killed by Gods, demons, or spirits. He is portrayed as a powerful demon king who disturbs the penances of Rishis. Vishnu incarnates as the human Rama to defeat him, thus circumventing the boon given by Brahma.

6. Jatayu

He is the son of Aruṇa and nephew of Garuda. A demi-god who has the form of an eagle that tries to rescue Sita from Ravana. Jatayu fought valiantly with Ravana, but as Jatayu was very old, Ravana soon got the better of him. As Rama and Lakshmana chanced upon the stricken and dying Jatayu in their search for Sita, he informs them the direction in which Ravana had gone.

7. Dasharatha

He is the king of Ayodhya and the father of Rama. He has three queens, Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra, and three other sons: Bharata, Lakshmana and Shatrughna. Kaikeyi, Dasharatha's favourite queen, forces him to make his son Bharata crown prince and send Rama into exile. Dasharatha dies heartbroken after Rama goes into exile.

8. Bharata

He is the son of Dasharatha and Queen Kaikeyi. When he learns that his mother Kaikeyi had forced Rama into exile and caused Dasharatha to die brokenhearted, he storms out of the palace and goes in search of Rama in the forest. When Rama refuses to return from his exile to assume the throne, Bharata obtains Rama's sandals, and places them on the throne as a gesture that Rama is the true king. Bharata then rules Ayodhya as the regent of Rama for the next fourteen years. He was married to Mandavi.

9. Shatrughna

He is the son of Dasharatha and his third wife Queen Sumitra. He is the youngest brother of Rama and also the twin brother of Lakshmana. He was married to Shrutakirti.

10. Sugriva

He is a vanara king who helped Rama regain Sita from Ravana. He had an agreement with Rama through which Vaali — Sugriva's brother and king of Kishkindha—would be killed by Rama in exchange for Sugriva's help in finding Sita. Sugriva ultimately ascends the throne of Kishkindha after the slaying of Vaali, and fulfils his promise by putting the Vanara forces at Rama's disposal.

11. Indrajit

He is a son of Ravana who twice defeated Lakshmana in battle, before succumbing to him the third time. An adept of the magical arts, he coupled his supreme fighting skills with various stratagems to inflict heavy losses on the Vanara army before his death.

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12. Kumbhakarna

He is a brother of Ravana, famous for his eating and sleeping. He would sleep for months at a time and would be extremely ravenous upon waking up, consuming anything set before him. His monstrous size and loyalty made him an important part of Ravana's army. During the war, he decimated the Vanara army before Rama cut off his limbs and head.

13. Surpanakha

She is Ravana's demoness sister who fell in love with Rama, and had the magical power to take any form she wanted.

14. Vibhishana

He is the younger brother of Ravana. He was against the kidnapping of Sita, and joined the forces of Rama when Ravana refused to return her. His intricate knowledge of Lanka was vital in the war, and he was crowned king after the fall of Ravana.

One of the most important literary works of ancient India, **the Ramayana has had a profound impact on art and culture in the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia.** The story ushered in the tradition of the next thousand years of massive-scale works in the rich diction of regal courts and Hindu temples. It has also inspired much secondary literature in various languages, notably the **Kambaramayanam by the Tamil poet Kambar** of the 13th century, the **Telugu-language Molla Ramayana**, 14th century **Kannada poet Narahari's Torave Ramayana**, and 15th century **Bengali poet Krittibas Ojha's Krittivasi Ramayan**, as well as the **16th century Awadhi version, Ramacharitamanas, written by Tulsidas.**

The Ramayana became popular in Southeast Asia during the 8th century and was represented in literature, temple architecture, dance and theatre. Today, **dramatic enactments of the story of Ramayana, known as "Ramlila"**, take place all across India and in many places across the globe within the Indian diaspora.

Take Shri Sita Ram Foundation's heartfelt thank you to all concerned for the decision to let you all know about "Ramayana" at this juncture. But let us be responsible, safe and yes, compassionate.

Jai Shree Ram!!