Influence of Ramayana on the Life, Culture and Literature in India and Abroad Ramayana

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Abstract

The Valmiki-Ramayana is a splendid creation of the sublime thoughts of Valmiki, the seer poet; it serves as a source of eternal inspiration, salutary ideas and moral behaviour for millions of people all over the world. It transcends the limitations of time, place and circumstances and presents an universal appeal to people speaking different languages, dwelling different countries and having different religious persuasions. The Vedas and the Puranas along with two great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata constitute the solid and enduring foundation of age long and magnificent edifice of Indian culture and civilization. The ever-lasting appeal of these treatises still influences, to a great extent, the cultural life and behaviour-pattern of crores of Indians.

Introduction

Anybody, intending to know India’s present properly, even unwillingly, goes through its thriving past history; because in order to know the present of a nation properly, one cannot ignore its past history and cultural heritage. If we look into the great epics, all the traditional characteristics of Indian civilization, along with its magnanimity as well as deficiency will be unveiled. The popularity of the Ramayana spread throughout India so widely that the story is heard or read with pleasure and piety in the palaces as well as in the hovels. The excellence of this unique story enchant the hearts of the rich and poor, of the advanced and underprivileged, of the intellectuals and illiterates as well as of the urban and rural people. Fr. C. Blucke rightly says that “the popularity of the Valmiki Ramayana and the voluminous Rama-Literature of many centuries is a monument to the idealism of India, its high esteem of moral values and its belief in the ultimate triumph of good over evil. In the same way, the enthusiastic response of the millions of Indians to the message of Ramayana testifies to the deep-seated religious belief and spontaneous piety of the soul of India.”

ii. Origin of Ramayana

A number of scholars have traced the origin of the epics to the Vedic literature, especially to the Akhyana hymns of the RgVeda as well as Akhyanas (Narratives), iïïhasas (legend) and Puranas (ancient tales) and some other resembling topics in the Brahmana literature. A simple subject-matter of the Gatha Narasamwis (one kind of song in praise of men), gradually assumes the form of some lengthy ballads as well as different song-cycles with complicated and elaborate plots. Passing through this preceding process and having undergone through some intermediate stages, these ballads and song-cycles transformed into the great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, which may be called the finished products of the lengthy process of transformation.

Although, the Ramayana earns the distinction of great antiquity in world literature, still it is accepted as a splendiditerous literary specimen for all times due to its universal appeal in affording perpetual solution of all the problems that confront us in every stage of life. There is, probably, no other work is the world literature, which has exercised such a stupendous influence on the mind, life and thoughts of the masses. The epic portrays many-sided picture of a perfect life. The story of the Ramayana reveals the conquest of good over evil. Valmiki composes the epic, merging religion with morality and statesmanship with common sense, in such a manner that it presents an excellent combination of sociology, philosophy, Arthasastra, History and ethics.

The Ramayana comprises 24000 verses, divided into seven books, styled Kandas. After a minute scrutiny of the comprehensive manuscript material, gathered by the Ramayana Department of the M. S. University of Baroda, for preparing a critical edition of the epic, some scholars express the opinion that the text of the Ramayana has been preserved in two recensions i.e. (1) the northern and (2) the southern. Each of these recensions are further sub-divided into three versions.

iii. The Northern recension is composed of (i) the north eastern, (ii) the north western and (iii) the western. The southern recension again comprises of (i) The Telugu, (ii) The Grantha and (iii) The Malayalam versions.

Million of devout Hindus, spread across the length and breadth of India and also living abroad, believe Rama, the hero of the epic, to be an incarnation of Lord Visnu. But, a study of the epic reveals that in the texts of five books (from book II to VI) Rama is not portrayed as an incarnation of Visnu, but as a heroic person embellished with superb human qualities and extra-ordinary capabilities. There are, of course, just a few chapters which present Rama as an incarnation of Visnu, but many scholars consider these as spurious insertions, added to the main epic in latter periods. Some chapters of Book I and VII, which presents the incarnation aspect, are also considered interpolations by many scholars. It is interesting to note that in the very first chapter of Bala Kanda, sage Valmiki, the epic poet asks the divine sage Narada to trace such a man as the hero of his peerless work, who is the repository of all good qualities.

While answering to the query of the sage, Narada also asserts that Rama is merely a human being, adorned with some excellent virtues, seldom found in the character of gods even. These expressions unveil the truth that the poet intends to
depict the character of an extra-ordinary human being in his epic. As the epic beautifully presents the ideal relationship between individuals of a family, viz. between the brothers, between the husband and wife, between the mother and son and so on, its appeal remains ever-lasting to all the peoples of our country and abroad. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India, while commenting on the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the two great epics of India, says — "They deal with the early days of the Indo-Aryns, their conquests and civil wars, when they were expanding and consolidating themselves, but they were composed and compiled later. I do not know of any books anywhere which have 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. They represent the typical Indian method of catering all together for various degrees of cultural development, or the highest intellectual to the simple unread and untaught villager. Deliberately they tried to build up a unity of outlook among the people, which was to survive and overshadow all diversity."

1) **Ramayana as an Adikavya**: There is a difference of opinion amongst the scholars on the question whether the Ramayana should be regarded as an epic or not. Some western rhetoricians do not accept the Ramayana as an epic. But, in the light of the definition of epic as given by Indian rhetoricians like Dandin, Bhamaha, Visvanatha and others, the Ramayana is recognised as an epic by most of the Indian scholars.

The Valmiki-Ramayana is acclaimed as the 'adikavya' or the first spurt of poetry, sprung out of excessive emotion, in this case out of karuna rasa or the sentiment of pathos. It may be regarded as the milestone of a new epoch. This first poem, issuing forth from the lips of Valmiki, takes birth in the background of a sorrowful situation. One day, having got the advice to compose the Ramayana from the distinguished divine sage Narada, Valmiki went to the river Tamasa for his midday bath. On his way back to the hermitage, he saw a sportive pair of cranes, amongst which, a Nisada (one belonging to a hunting wild tribe) struck and killed the male one. The female bird of the pair, seeing her mate mortally wounded and fallen on the ground, began to wail pathetically. Moved by this piteous event, Valmiki uttered some rhythmical speech, sprung out from the bottom of his heart.

Being astonished, Valmiki himself said about the first poem spontaneously coming out of his lips, that since this first spurt of poetry took birth from the womb of the sentiment of pathos or the Karunaraasa, the base of which is soka, it should be termed as 'Sloka'. This indicates that the name of sloka or poetry was unknown before this incident. The composition of the Ramayana takes place after this event. The seperation of Sita from Rama and the resultant pangs, suffered by both, seem to reflect the pangs of seperation undergone by the female crane. On the question of the Ramayana being designated an 'Adikavya', The Oxford History of India says — "The Ramayana deserves the name of epic because it is essentially a single long narrative poem composed by one author named Valmiki and is devoted to the celebration of the deeds of the hero Rama with due regard to the rules of poetry. The work is in fact the first example of the Sanskrit Kavya or artificially designed narrative poem." The epic-poet also says in many places that the Ramayana is a 'kavya'. The Ramayana is not only an excellent poetry but also the ideal specimen of many epics of later period; and that is why the Ramayana is called an 'Adikavya' and 'Valmiki an 'Adikavi'.

**ii) Influence of the Epic on the Life, Culture and Literature in India and Abroad**: The Ramayana left an ineffable and infaceable impression on the family life and social life, culture and literature of the people dwelling various parts of India and various countries abroad. The Ramayana, being the oldest epic of India, is the store-house of perpetual knowledge as well as an abundant source of information about the social and political atmosphere of ancient India. It occupies a unique place in the realm of literary development and religious thoughts. Moreover, it exerts great influence on the activities and thoughts of the Indian people of the later ages too. It is not only a very popular epic but also an ethical code of the Hindus. The teachings of the Ramayana are easily comprehended because of its ethical contents. The Ramayana teaches us how an ideal king, an ideal father, an ideal mother, an ideal son, an ideal brother, an ideal servant, an ideal husband and an ideal wife should behave in life.

In this regard, the statement, made by U. Thein Hen, chairman of the Burma Historical Commission, deserves special mention — "Ramayana is not only a literary treasure but also a source of ennobling influence of the relationship of men as parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, relations and friends, teachers and pupils and rulers and the ruled." Dasaratha’s sincerity in keeping his promise, his fondness for his son etc. are unique. Kausalya's sense of duty or Sumitra's spirit of sacrifice are unparalleled and Laksmana's reverence towards his elder brother and his brother's wife is simply amazing. To speak in brief, in the Ramayana, we find living examples of highest moral ideals of life. The ethical standard of Aryan (noble) culture, has been brought out by the epic poet, through a portrayal of the spirit of sacrifice, deep attachment to adventure, utmost esteem for veracity, persistence and rigid constancy. Some sorts of superstitious practices, harmful features of the caste system, common practice of polygamy etc. are the shortcomings of the people of the period alluded in the Ramayana.

**Ramayana is also a mirror of the social life of ancient India**: It shows us that all good attributes like faithfulness, sincerity, obedience, truthfulness etc. are the spine of a civilized social order prevailing in those days. The high ideals of life as portrayed in the epic, influence the Indian people in the field of their daily activities. Thus, it helps us to build our character in young age. Rsi Sri Aurobindo says — "The work of Valmiki has been an agent of almost incalculable power in the moulding of the cultural mind of India; it has presented to it to be loved and intitated in figures like Rama and Sita, made so divinely and with such a revelation of reality as to become objects of enduring cult and worship, or like Hanuman, Laksmana, Bharata, the living human image of its ethical ideals, it has fashioned much of what is best and sweetest in the national character, and it has evoked and fixed in it those finer and exquisite yet firm soul-tones and that more delicate humanity of temperament which are a more valuable thing than the formal outsides of virtue and conduct...


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Ramayana also influences the religious life of the Indians to a great extent

Religion is a part and parcel of the social life of a nation, which plays a great role in moulding the socio-cultural life of that particular race. The high ideals presented in the Ramayana are revered as religious teachings. Thus, we find that the characters, delineated in the Ramayana, ordinary human beings, are elevated to the rank of gods by the common people of India. The mighty monkey chief Hanuman is also worshiped as a deity, who saves hapless people from calamities. As such, the Ramayana is regarded as the oldest religious book by the Indians. The Ramayana songs are performed before huge audience composed with people of all the castes and classes. It will not be an exaggeration to say that the Ramayana inspire millions of lives in India and abroad in the past, inspires today and will inspire in the future.

It would be pertinent to mention here that some social conventions, mentioned in the epic, are found to be prevailing in the societies of later periods in India. The reflection made by the poet exhibits that the people of that period have a great respect for their parents and elders, absence of which is regarded as an offence. The people should obey the orders of their elders at any cost. Four social divisions or castes of the Hindu society (Caturvarna) viz. Brahmanas, Ksatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras and Caturasrama i.e. the four stages of life, viz, Brahmacharya, Garhasthya, Vanaprastha and Samyasa and Caturvarga, i.e. four objects of human pursuit, viz, virtue (dharma), riches (ortha), lust (kama) and final beatitude (moksa) etc. are considered as the foundation of a well planned society in India. The epic informs us that the members of the society as found in the epic, are men of various professions, such as, architect, artist or mechanic, cutter, excavator astrologer, actor, expert in fine arts, dancer, warriors, well versed in the science of weapons, businessmen, manufacturer of weapons, jeweller, potter, weaver, surveyor, goldsmith, persons attending one at bathing, doctor, carpenter, artisan, vintner and so on.15 It is most amazing to find that the application of surgery at the time of child-birth is very common at that time.16 Selling of lac, honey, meat, iron or metal, poison etc. are regarded as sinful business.17 The prostitute has a specific importance in the society of that period.18 The purdah system19 as well as the veil system20 are also present in the period, portrayed in the epic. The long-practiced ethical code, established in the society, exhibits that the elder brother, father and teacher are regarded as fathers, the younger brother as own son and the virtuous disciples are regarded as sons.21 Accepting of younger brother's wife as one's22 own and abduction of women23 are considered as most reprehensible and contemptible deed at the Ramayanic period. The evidence found supports the fact that the women of that period can move freely and openly. The epic upholds that the house, cloth or veil or enclosure—these all are not the coverings of a woman; it is only the good conduct of a woman, which can cover her. The epic further expresses that a woman can appear before others publicly at the time of adversity, marriage and also at the time of the ceremony of choosing one's husband. Moreover, the women of ancient India can join in the army of the country and the post of air hostess is also meant for the ladies.

The education system as reflected in the epic is Guru-kula based. In this system of education, the students are entitled to take their education, residing in the houses of their preceptors. The preceptors bear all the expenditure of their students. The preceptors or sages, who have the capacity to bear the expenditure of and to give the shelter to ten thousands students, are entitled to get the title of kulapati. The epic shows that sage Atri has got the title of kulapati.24 Moreover, the epic reflects that the hill tribes of ancient India are also blessed with higher education. The Nisada-king Guha is described in the epic as an architect of exalted quality.25 Description of Rama's friendship with Guha illustrates that the society of that period is free from untouchability or unhealthy trends of disintegration. Some aspects of social life, as reflected in some texts of the Ramayana, sometimes compel us to think over that whether the described events actually happen in the long past, or whether we are going through the narration of the events of present age. Description of the use of bricks for building palaces and houses or the walls,26 or using of machine to carry away the stones from one place to another,27 the airconditioned puspapakratha,28 the technique of constructing a bridge on the sea29 etc. present enough room to think over these matters. In one place, Vibhishana, with a view to dispelling the fear of the Vanara force, narrates Kumbhakarna as a Yantra or machine.30 This assertion makes some people think that the yantra in the shape of human being as described in the epic is nothing but a robot of present day.

Thus, it is found that, whatever existed in the society of the Ramayanic age is extended through the ages. Not even the modern age is free from the impression of the society of the epic period. The Ramayana exercises a tremendous influence on the individual life, social life or religious life of the common people of India in every respect. It will not be a hyperbole to say that the Ramayana serves as the foundation stone of Indian culture and social life through the ages, on which, the whole structure of the present society also has settled firmly.

Ramayana has also influenced later literature in India and abroad in various ways. Its use of Alamkaras, sentiments, description of nature, subject-matter and plot-making — all these things are copiously imitated by the poets of succeeding generations. The poets of later periods use some words or convey some senses in their poetic compositions, which appear as the facsimile of Valmiki's work. We can mention the names of illustrious figures like Asvaghosa, Bhasa, Bhatti, Bhavabhuti, Kalidasa, Rajasekhara and others, who have adopted the themes of their works from the Ramayana in various ways. The latter Sanskrit poets and dramatists have been greatly influenced by the epic Ramayana in selecting the subject matters of their works. Bhasa, the antique poet as well as the pre-Kalidasiyan dramatist, composes his two dramas, viz, the Pratima Nataka and the Abhiseka Nataka on the model of the Ramayana. The great poet Kalidasa, the prince of Indian poets, writes his famed work Raghuvamsam, taking the theme from the Ramayana. Bhavabhuti earns much fame in delineating the sentiment of pathos in dramas like the Mahavira Carita and the Uttaranamarcita, the subject-matter of which are adopted from the epic of Valmiki. The plot of Bhaktikavya, otherwise known as Ravananadakavya, the famous work of the noted scholar Bhatti, is also taken from the Ramayana. The Anangaraghava, a drama composed by Murari on the Rama-episode of the Ramayana, is also
influenced by the Ramayana. Rajasekhara composes his drama Balaramayana. This epic also gives birth to the Janakiharana, the drama, composed by Kumaradasa.

Besides the drama and court epics, in composing Caurukavyas also, poets have taken themes from various familiar events of the Ramayana. For instance, we may mention here the name of Ramayana Campu, written by Bhujoraja. The epic Ramayana is abound with copious myths and legends, which give birth to various literary works of later periods. The Ramayana has an immense popularity on the poets of different languages and religions also. Thus it is observed that many Buddhist and Jain literatures are moulded by the epic events and style of composition in different modes. Asvaghosa composes his famous work Buddhacarita on the life-cycle of Buddha, on the model of the Ramayana. As we mentioned earlier, Kalidasa, the greatest poet of Sanskrit literature, also is greatly influenced by the earliest poet, Valmiki. It may be said that Kalidasa is in some respects no other than Valmiki himself, in a different garb.

The delineation of Sita by Valmiki while she is detained by Ravana in the Asoka garden reminds us the misery of the love-sick yaksavadhu, the heroin of his melodious lyric poem Meghaduta, in Alakapuri where she holds a single braid of hair. The bridge of Rama on the sea, looking like the milky way in the sky is equally described in the Raghuvaamsam too.

Kalidasa's noticeable attraction for Valmiki makes us think that he perhaps plucks the name of his illustrious court epic Kumarasambhavam from the epic Ramayana.

Bharavi, although, takes the plot for his literary work Kiratarjunyam from the epic Mahabharata, still, some ideas and words used by him seem to be picked up from the Ramayana. Not only in India, but also in many other countries abroad, the Ramayana has become the source of numerous literary endeavours. Thus, the Rama story has been attracting the Indians or the foreigners even in the form of translations. The life and culture of the people as well as the poets of classical period are influenced by the Ramayana profoundly. Because of their remarkable attraction towards this epic, the poets of abroad also, feel a strong inclination to express Rama story in various ways. Thus, this Rama legend is revealed in multifarious ways in countries like China, Sri Lanka, Tibet, Bhutan, Indonesia, Burma, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, Laos etc. In India also, many versions of the Ramayana have been composed in various modern Indian languages and in the dialects of forest and hill tribes, living in remote parts of India. The extensive popularity of the Ramayana overflows the poets of the later periods all over the world. We are amazed to observe such immense of influence of the epic on them and their poetic creation. It is not an exaggeration to say that as an ornate poetry, this epic has influenced the thoughts and minds of the poets of later period more than any other poem of the world for thousands of years.

A reputed scholar of N.E. Region observes — “The story of Rama was so popular that it flooded each and every corner of our country and overflow many countries abroad. We have seen ups and downs, rise and fall in the events of Indian history but the Ramayana remained an ever-lasting source of inspiration to every section of Indian people. It is so popular that it exercises an unparalleled influence in the mind of Indian people. Similar or air and water, the story of the Ramayana has become an indispensable constituent of the life of our countrymen. Its eternal message penetrates into the heart of people residing even in the remotest part of the vast country through popular tales, paintings, episodes, folklore’s, oral tradition etc.”

From the above discussion, it is apprehended that, in the eyes of Indians, Rama is the ideal prince or king, the embodiment of all worth-accepting virtues and Sita is the ideal of India woman, as corporeal image of conjugal law and fidelity. Through the portrayal of the exemplary character of Sita, the poet attempts to bring out the propriety of conduct, considered worthy of admiration and adoration by Indian women in general.

iii) Science of Polity in Indian context: Indian statesmen and seers pondered different aspects of the science of polity and presented their views on the subject in various treatises. Rajasatra, Rajadharmasa, Dandaniti, Arthasastra, Nitisasra etc. are the synonyms for the Rajaniti or the science of polity in Sanskrit language. The Dharmasstra and Arthasastra occupies a prominent place in Sanskrit literature. Different branches of the state administration, including the duties of a monarch, defence and diplomacy, civil and criminal laws as well as the art of warfare and other topics, fall within the domain of Arthasastra, an epithet for the science of polity in Indian context. It is known traditionally that Indra, the son of Bahudanti, authored the first book on Arthasastra. But the enumeration made by the celebrated poet Vyasa, in the Rajadharmasa section of the Sanasarvan of the Mahabhatarah, holds that Prajapati Brahma is the pioneer amongst the ancient ‘Rajasatra pranetarah’ of this time. He is the first composer of a comprehensive jurisprudence, which comprises one lakah chapters in it. He is regarded as the first exposers of Trivarga i.e. Dharma, Artha, Kama and caturvaraga, i.e., the said three of Trivarga and Moksas as well as four-fold expediants, i.e., Sama, Dana, Bheda and Danda, six-fold polices, viz. Sandhi, Vigha, Yana, Asana, Dvaidhabhava and Samsraya.

Visalaksa (Siva) learns the Dandaniti asra of Brahma and abridges the same for the first time. The christening of this abridged scripture as Vaisalaksa is imputed on the name of its author. This work is said to have been divided into ten thousand chapters. Indra, for the first time, reads this Vaisalaksa Dandaniti and composes a work with ten thousand chapters in it; this work is famous by the name ‘Vahudandaka’. Behaspati, again condenses this Nitisasra of Indra into three thousands chapters, known as ‘Barhaspatya Niti’, which is again compressed by the highly glorious scholar Sukraarya into one thousand chapters, which is known as ‘Sukraniti’. The Mahabhatarah puts on record some names of ancient scholars of the science of polity, who are described as the ancient authors of Arthasastra. They are — Visalaksa, Sukraarya, Indra, Manu (the son of Praceta), Bharadva, the sage Gaurisira, Kamandaka and others. The name of the ‘Barhaspatya Arthasastra is mentioned in the Kamasutra of Vatsyayana. The name of Bhaspati also occurs in the Aitareya Brahmana.”

We also know the name of Bhaspati as an author of Arthasastra from the Santipurvan of the Mahabhatarah, the Yajnavalkya Smriti, the Kamandakiya Nitisara and the Kautuliyar Arthasastra. The ‘Bhaspati Sutra’ has been edited and published by Dr. F. W. Thomas (Lahore, 1921). References to the thoughts of Upanas or Sukra on Rajasatra are found in
the Santipurvan of the Mahabharata, the Kumarasambhavam of Kalidasa, the matsyapurana etc. The Arthasastra of Usanas is called 'Dandanitisara' in the Mudrarakasas of Visakhadatta. Some scholars opine that the 'Sukranitisara' is based on the 'Dandanitisara' or the 'Arthasastra' of Usanas which is now lost. The Arthasastra of Pisuna, otherwise known as Narada, is known as 'Narayandasarastra'. Many quotations from 'Narayandasarastra', are found in the Valmiki Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the two great epics. Bharadvaaja, the son of Brhaspati is also venerated in the science of polity or Arthasastra. The Arthasastras are thought to have originated after the age of Kalpasutra (700 BC), particularly after the period of 'Baudhayanadhamraksasastra' (500 BC) The Arthasastras are regarded by the scholars as the principal source of the science of polity. These have been regarded as authentic sources of knowledge on the science of polity from time immemorial.

Some Dharmasastras such as the Visnu Dharmasastra, the Aparastamba Dharmasastra, the Baudhyayana Dharmasastra, the Visnu smrti, the Manusmrti, the Naradasmrti, the Vajavalkyasmrti, the Brhaspatismrti etc. abound with different delicate aspects of the science of polity, which are considered conducive to the attainment of success in the sphere of politics. Amongst these, the Manusmrti, having a plentiful information in it, stands on an exalted position. But, it is a universally admitted fact that the Arthasastra of Kautilya is considered as one of the best among the ancient books on polity since it contains relevant knowledge of inestimable value. It affords us the most important information on the science of polity including the ways of maintaining law and order and social codes. While discussing the excellences of the Arthasastra of Kautilya in meticulously presenting the methods of good governance and effective administration of a state, N. C. Bandyopadhyaya observes — "It is needless to multiply references, but one fact appears clear viz. that Kautilya was universally looked upon as one of the greatest authorities on the science of polity. Many later authorities regarded him as a great teacher and utilised materials drawn from his work." The authorship as well as the antiquity of the Arthasastra of Kautilya, otherwise known as Canakya (the son of Canaka) or Visnugupta, is always considered a matter of dispute among the scholars of succeeding periods. But, Dandin's 'Dasakumaracarita' Kamandakiya Nitisa and above all, Kautilya's Arthasastra itself evidently aduce some facts in favour of Kautilya, who installs Candragupta, the son of Mura, on the throne of Magadh and lays the foundation of Maurya dynasty, after exterminating the Nanda dynasty. Kautilya puts in his book Kautilya Arthasastra, the names of fourteen Acaryas out of eighteen, who are his harbingers in the discipline called Arthasastra. They are Visalaksa, Indra (the son of Bahudanti). Brhaspati, Sukrakarya, Bharadvaaja, Pisuna, Manu, Gaurisiras, Kaunapadanta, Parasara, Ghotomukha, Charayana, Varvayadhi and Katayana. All these Acaryas, like Kautilya, presented detailed views on administrative policies in their respective works on the science of polity.

iv) Seven limbs of a state and their Enumeration in the Ramayana: The principal elements, which constitute the political system of a state as mentioned by the political thinkers of ancient India, are seven in number. These seven limbs are known sapta prakrti or saptanga of a state. These are,

1. svamin (king),
2. amatya (minister),
3. janapada or rastra (territory and the people),
4. durga (fort) or pura (capital city or fortified capital city),
5. Kosa (treasury),
6. danda or bala (army) and
7. mitra (allies).

These seven elements are considered congruently of great consequence, inevitable and complementary to each other. This saptanga theory of the state is postulated in the two great epics, Arthasastras, Dharmasastras, Nitisasras, puranas and also in Apanakosa – a lexicon. These works enumerates the seven elements in the same manner, of course, with minor changes in one or two names.

A human body has seven very indispensable parts or limbs, which cannot be estranged from the body if one desire to keep it fully active, thus, the saptamaka rajya, having its seven limbs, is considered as a fully expanded state. None of these seven limbs existing independently or remaining unattached to other limbs of the state, can carry out respective function. The all-around prosperity of a state depends upon the joint efforts of these seven limbs.

The Arthasastra manifests the idea thus – excluding the enemy these seven limbs have been enumerated with each one's excellences, but while operating these become subservient to the surpassing qualities of the king.

Manu, the famous smrtikara maintains that among these seven limbs, no limb is superior to others as these are mutually beneficial. Missing of any one of these elements may result in imbalanceness in the body politic. The constituent element, which is supposed to accomplish its specific function is regarded as the best for the particular assignment. While emphasising the interdependence of the saptanga the Kamandakiyantisara echoes the opinion expressed by the Agni Purana, as mentioned above. Thus the importance of these seven limbs is well accepted by the ancient scholars.

These seven limbs, as expressed by Sukra, the author of the Sukranitisara, can be compared with the seven organs of the human body. Thus he compares the king with the head of the human body, the ministers with eyes, the allies with ears, the kosa with mouth, the army as mind, the fort or fortified cities as hand, and the rastra as legs of the human body. So, the formation of the state is completely based on these seven constituent elements of the state. These organs have equal role in the state formation. The Mahabharata gives more stress on the king, population and state by saying So, it is clear that, in ancient India, the state is considered as an organic whole. Among these seven organs, the king and the ministers are always taken into account as the two principal element of the body politics of ancient India.
The scholars of ancient Sutra Literature enumerate the following, i.e., (1) the king, (2) government, (3) territory and (4) population as the four indispensable constituent elements of the state. The aforesaid statement reemphasizes the definition of a state as given by the political science of the modern period. As per this modern view, the territory, population, government and sovereignty are the four indispensable constituent elements of the state. It deserves to be noted that the ancient Indian political thinkers consider the state as an organic whole of seven limbs, which have, equal importance in so far as smooth execution of state affairs is concerned. These organs perform functions in their respective spheres of activities and are interdependent and complementary to each other. While dexterously performing their respective roles, these organs contribute to the governance, stability, security and prosperity of the state.

The ideas of seven constituents of the state have been amply illustrated in various cantos of almost all the books of the Valmiki Ramayana. The poet of the epic uses at random the terms like bala, kosa, mitra, rstra, durga, jana, rajan, mantri, amatya etc. in the epic. The Ramayana occasionally mentions the necessity as well as importance of sapta prakrits distinctly here and there, considering their role in the state administration. The term ‘saptavarga’ also is used in the epic to mean the seven limbs of the state.

V) Objectives of the Study: There is a general belief amongst the people that the epic Ramayana is a product of poetic imagination. The supernatural and spirituality of Rama-katha enchant the minds of the readers and listeners. The fanciful descriptions of events, the doctrine of incarnation etc. fascinate the imaginative mind of the reader to such an extent that for the time being he thinks himself a traveller of a dreamland, full of exquisite charms and splendour. But, behind this fascinating narration, the poet beautifully delineates the real picture of ancient Indian society, religion, state-craft etc.in the epic. Thus inspite of being a superb specimen of colourful poetic composition, the epic is regarded as a storehouse of evidences of minute knowledge of statecraft in those days of yore. A superficial knowledge of the epic does not enable the readers or listeners to explore the facts that lie hidden in the texts of the superb creation of the poet. A minute perusal of the texts helps the reader to comprehend the facts that lie hidden. In the course of our research endeavour, we propose to throw light on the mundane aspects (related to statecraft) of the epic. The wise poet illuminates the ideas of states and statecraft as prevalent in ancient India; these ideas are amply reflected in many verses of the epic and lay scattered in various chapters. The delineation of these ideas of state and statesmanship are not at all the fabrication of the poet’s ingenuity, rather these ideas existed even before the poem was composed. The narrations of state-administration, duty of a monarch, defence, diplomacy, expedition, war and other topics as reflected in the Ramayana conforms with the ideas as found in the Arthasastra, an epithet for the science of polity in Indian context.

There are many Arthasastras authored by prominent scholars like Vishispati, Yajnavalkya, Manu, Sukra, Vyasa, Kautilya, Kamandaka and so on; and the elements of statecraft, found in the Ramayana, reflect various aspects related to the smooth running of state administration as well as ensuring the security and prosperity of the state. We find a great resemblance of ideas regarding state and statecraft between the Ramayana and ancient works on the science of polity. Dhanurveda, the Upaveda of Yajurveda contains the science of archery in it, the extensive application of which is found all through the epic. The employment of various fatal weapons, having tremendous devastating impact on the hostile forces, indicates the practice of and proficiency in advanced methods of offence and defence on the part of some celebrated warriors. A strong defence system ensures the protection of the kingdom and the subjects and this is highlighted by the events portrayed in the Ramayana. Likewise, other aspects of the statecraft have been nicely illustrated by the epic texts and events. A careful study of the narration of events, occurring during the expedition of Rama's army towards Lanka, throws light on the strategics and logistics, ought to be executed by a vijigisu (a king, willing to conquer). Appointment of capable envoys, endeavours for the subjugation or annihilation of the enemies or enemy's friends as also for winning new allies are parts of diplomacy, followed during the days of the first epic and this is evidenced in the epic text.

In addition to the above-said aspects relating to defence, expedition and diplomacy, Valmiki, the sagacious poet also throws light on other aspects of statecraft, which may be explained as the principles of good governance. The multifarious functions of a state include appointment of capable ministers and other officials, establishment of fortified cities, making provisions for a well-managed treasury, collection of taxes, initiating welfare measures for the benefit of the people, appointment of dexterous secret agents with a view to collecting information regarding the internal affairs of the state as well as the intentions and movements of the allies and enemies and other related activities.

A thorough study of the epic events enlightens us to properly comprehend the elements of an efficient state administration as prevalent in ancient India. In the course of our study, we propose to analyse the information in the light of other celebrated works on Arthasastra, composed by learned authors, who command a mastery on the subject. The elements of statecraft as available in the Ramayana and other Arthasastra works including the Mahabharata — another important great epic of India — which is also regarded as a superb specimen of Arthasastra class of literature.

Conclusion

The elements of statecraft as revealed in these works belies the impression that Indian seers are concerned about other worldly affairs only. A thorough study of the statecraft-related issues as revealed in the epic and other works, will be instrumental to prove that the intellectual elite of ancient India considered mundane affairs also as important as matters related to philosophy, fine arts and spirituality. This study will enable us to gather a comprehensive knowledge about the art of statecraft, aimed at the establishment of a welfare state, which caters to the material needs and moral development of the people dwelling the kingdom.

ii Cultural Heritage of India, VoII. P.-23

iii Nehru, Jawaharlal. ‘The Discovery of India’. PP.- 99, 100.


v Valmiki Ramayana - 1.1.99 ; 1.5.3


viii Ibid - 5.28.6

ix ValmikiRamayana - 2.100. 9,11,13 ; 7.15.21

x Ibid - 6.127.3

xi Ibid - 2.15.20

xii Ibid - 6.111.61-62

xiii Ibid - 4.18.13-14

xiv Ibid - 4.18.19

xv Ibid - 6.111.68

xvi Ibid - 6.123.50

xvii Ibid - 2.50.33

xviii Ibid - 1.13.9

ix Ibid - 6.22.60

xx Ibid - 7.15.42

xxi Ibid - 6.22.55-73

xxii Ibid - 6.61.33

xxiii V.R. - 5.19.19

xxiv Ibid - 6.22.74

xxv Raghu. - 13.2

xxvi V.R. - 1.37.31

xxvii Dey, Sitanath, A Reflection to our Cultural Heritage through Sanskrit Studies, P. 81.

xxviii Mbh. (S.P.) - 58.29

xxix Kam.Su. - 1.17

xxx Kum. Sam. - 3.6

xxxi Mudrarakshasa - 1.7.

xxxi Bandyopadhyaya, N. C. Kautilya or An Exposition of his Social Ideal and Political Theory, P-5.