

The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki



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AN EPIC OF ANCIENT INDIA

Volume II  *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*

Introduction, Translation, and Annotation by

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PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS : PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

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For Estera Milman

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Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton,
New Jersey 08540

In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, Guildford, Surrey

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data will be found on
the last printed page of this book

ISBN 0-691-06654-X

This book has been composed in Linotron Baskerville

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Printed in the United States of America by Princeton University Press
Princeton, New Jersey

The translation of this volume was made possible through a grant from the
translation program of the National Endowment for the Humanities,
an independent federal agency, to which we would like to express
our deep appreciation

Frontispiece: Bharata crossing the Ganges with his army. From the "Jagat
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The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient India

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INTRODUCTION

1. Prelude to the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*

ALTHOUGH one can no longer claim with Jacobi's confidence that in its "original" form the *Rāmāyaṇa* began with the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*,¹ nonetheless, the main narrative of the poem commences in this book. The name of Ayodhyā, the capital city of the ancient state of Kosala in east-central India, is an apposite choice for the title of the section. For in contrast to the other four central books of the epic, where the action takes place in the unpeopled wilderness (Book Three), the land of the monkeys (Book Four), and the island fortress of the *rākṣasas* (Books Five and Six), here the center of interest is the city, where social life reaches its greatest degree of complexity and intensity.

It was probably not much earlier than the seventh century B.C. that the major urban centers of aryan India came into existence,² and yet during the composition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in pre-Mauryan times the city had already become the literary focal point of civilized life. Not surprisingly, given the conditions of their existence, the epic poets were primarily concerned with life as played out in the city. Their interest embraced both social life—especially the family with its inherent tensions, the responsibilities it imposes on the individual, and the often conflicting allegiances it exacts—and political life, the "state," and the powers of the state, which appeared in their most tangible manifestation in the city. For all the attention they pay it, the village might not have existed for the epic storytellers. Moreover, as we shall see in the *Aranyakāṇḍa* (Book Three), they regarded the "desolate forest" as a zone of mystery, where supernatural forces came into play, yet where a certain Edenic quality had been preserved, as well.

The contrast—at times tension—between the city and the forest, which was increasingly to command the attention of the urban poet,³ becomes palpable, perhaps for the first time in Indian his-

¹ Jacobi 1893, pp. 50ff., 64. See the General Introduction in Volume 1.

² A recent overview of the question can be found in Ruben 1978. Archaeology and philology are in accord; cf. Rau 1976, who notes (p. 51) that such words as *nagara* occur with the meaning "town" only in the very latest stratum of vedic literature.

³ The theme becomes commonplace later on, as in the fifth-century poet Kālidāsa. See Ingalls 1976, especially pp. 22ff.

tory, here in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*. It is with an unmistakable sense of liberation that Rāma will find himself banished from Ayodhyā and its troubles, and declare:

To set one's eyes on [Mount] Citrakūṭa and the Mandākinī [River], my lovely, is far better than living in the town.⁴

This attitude, partly a function of the innovative world view that we shall discover in the hero, seems also to be symptomatic of a new urban malaise.⁵

But this opposition remains secondary in the present book. For the most part, Vālmiki directs our attention to the city and its central concerns—those social and political features that are thrown into particularly high relief in an urban setting. As a consequence, the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* is a remarkably human book; the story it tells is realistic and credible, and its subject-matter familiar and immediately understandable to an audience, village or urban, that would never march with an army of monkeys against a demon fortress.

Although these characteristics distinguish the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* from the rest of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the book by no means stands isolated from the main concerns of the poem as a whole. Quite the contrary. Because the scene later shifts beyond the human social order, the issues raised here may become attenuated, but they still remain the fundamental ones for Vālmiki.

These problems can be formulated through a large comparative generalization. If Homer, for example, addresses a transcendent problem, showing us what makes life finally impossible—in the words of one writer, “the universality of human doom”⁶—Vālmiki poses the more difficult question: What is it that makes life possible? This is more difficult because it is a social, not a cosmic question. The answer, as we might anticipate, is complex, raising additional questions that demand resolution: it is behavior in accordance with *dharma*, “righteousness,” that alone makes life possible. But what

⁴ 2.89.12; cf. 2.50.22 and 2.88.1ff., especially verses 3 and 19.

⁵ The *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* in particular, may well have contributed from the beginning—as it certainly did later—to the legend of the life of the Buddha, whose spiritual quest is at least partly conditioned by social problems of the sort noticed here (see Fairservis 1975, pp. 378-79). The city-forest antithesis does not, of course, exhaust the meaning of Rāma's exile, or fully explain it. Other themes are also present: a folkloric quest motif, for example, and perhaps that of a ritual enthronement (for the latter cf. Heesterman 1978).

⁶ Griffin 1980, p. 69 (cf. p. 76).

exactly does “righteousness” mean? What are the kinds and limits of the obligations it imposes? Who is placed under these obligations, and to whom and how are they to be discharged?

Vālmīki, who represents the culmination of an epic tradition, was certainly not the first to explore this problem. On the basis of all the epic poetry we know, it seems safe to say that “the subtlest of things, *dharmā*,” had figured centrally in the genre from the start. That the interest in this issue was historically vital is demonstrated by the fact that an emperor of the third century B.C., toward the end of the creative epic period, had the question carved into rock: “*Dharma* is good. But what does *dharmā* consist of?”⁷ Vālmīki, however, subjected the matter to an especially sustained and profound analysis, and offered a set of answers that has deeply affected and durably fixed itself in the Indian imagination.

⁷ Aśokan Pillar Edict II. For the subtlety of *dharmā*, cf. *MBh* 2.34.3 and elsewhere in that epic. See also Cg on *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* 18.36: “The main concern of this *sāstra* (that is, the *Rāmāyaṇa*) is to validate *dharmā*.”

2. Synopsis of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*

THE STORY opens abruptly. Bharata, the king's second-eldest son, departs with his younger brother Śatrughna to the north-west land of Kekaya, to visit his maternal family. Rāma meanwhile carries out, on his father's behalf, the administrative duties of the kingdom, and his unique virtues begin to manifest themselves to the king, who consequently decides to consecrate him as prince regent. Daśaratha convenes an assembly of vassal kings and leading citizens, declares his resolution, and receives their ceremonial ratification (*sargas* 1-2). Rāma is informed of the decision, and then in a private meeting with his father learns that the ceremony is to take place the following day lest, as Daśaratha points out, Bharata have time to return and contest the succession. The people of Ayodhyā joyfully decorate the town, while the family priest Vasiṣṭha ritually prepares Rāma and Sītā for the ceremony (*sargas* 3-6).

Bharata's mother Kaikeyī, meanwhile, learns about the king's plans from her hunchback servant, Mantharā. At first delighted for Rāma, the queen is gradually convinced by the servant that the coronation poses a serious threat to Bharata. She resolves to secure her own son's succession and Rāma's banishment to the wilderness of Daṇḍaka for fourteen years (*sargas* 7-9). In her meeting with the king that follows, Kaikeyī attempts to realize her objectives by means of two boons Daśaratha had granted her long ago, the terms of which she now formulates in a devious way. Alternately threatening and pleading, the king in the end finds himself unable to change her mind (*sargas* 10-12).

Kaikeyī has Rāma summoned, and amid the joyful bustle of preparation for the consecration the prince makes his way to the king's palace (*sargas* 13-15). While Daśaratha lies prostrate and speechless with grief, Kaikeyī tells Rāma about the two boons and the demands she had made, and insists on his compliance. He agrees unhesitatingly, assuring her he will depart the same day (*sarga* 16). Rāma then leaves to inform his mother Kausalyā of the calamitous reversal of fortune, and both she and his youngest brother Lakṣmaṇa attempt to dissuade him from obeying Kaikeyī. Rāma stands firm in his resolve, and finally Kausalyā gives him her blessing for a safe journey (*sargas* 17-22). Returning then to his

wife Sītā, he breaks the news to her and, though he is at first apparently reluctant, he is finally persuaded to take her along to the forest (*sargas* 23-27). He also grants Lakṣmaṇa permission to accompany him into exile (*sarga* 28). While preparing to leave, Rāma gives away all of his wealth to brahmans, mendicants, and his dependents, and then returns to his father to receive formal permission to depart (*sargas* 29-30).

The king at first remonstrates with Rāma, exhorting him to disobey—in fact, to depose him. When that course of action is rejected by Rāma, Daśaratha orders the whole army and treasury of Ayodhyā to accompany his son. But Rāma refuses it all and, dressing in the barkcloth garments of an ascetic, he takes leave of his parents and sets out, now amid the lamentation of the inhabitants of the city (*sargas* 31-36). The king desperately wants to follow Rāma, but his ministers prevail upon him to return. Back in the palace, Kausalyā laments and denounces her husband until she is calmed by the sage words of Sumitrā, Lakṣmaṇa's mother (*sargas* 37-39).

Many inhabitants of the city, however, resolutely continue to follow Rāma; on the next morning he deserts them, for their own good, and they return grief-stricken to Ayodhyā (*sargas* 39-42). Rāma makes his way south to the Ganges river, where he meets his old friend, the tribal chief Guha. After dismissing his charioteer Sumantra, he crosses the river and reaches the abode of Bharadvāja (*sargas* 42-47). This seer advises Rāma to establish his hermitage on Mount Citrakūṭa, and it is there that Rāma, his wife, and brother finally settle down (*sargas* 48-50).

On returning to Ayodhyā, Sumantra delivers Rāma's greetings to the king and queen, and attempts to console the sorrowing parents. Daśaratha and Kausalyā continue to grieve through the day and evening until late at night, when from out of the very depths of his misery, Daśaratha recovers the memory of something that had happened in his youth. He had accidentally killed a young ascetic, and the boy's father, a sage, had laid a curse on him that he, too, would end his days in grief for a son. A little after midnight on that, the sixth night of Rāma's exile, Daśaratha dies (*sargas* 51-58).

While the palace and city mourn the death of their king, the ministers, who are reluctant to perform the funeral with no prince at court, embalm the corpse. After consultation, they determine that the proper course of action is to fetch Bharata (who, after all,

is now heir-apparent), in order to install him as king. Envoys are dispatched to the land of Kekaya (*sargas* 59-62). On the night of their arrival, Bharata has an ominous dream, and returning to the city of Ayodhyā, he learns to his horror of the crimes his mother has perpetrated in his absence (*sargas* 63-68). After protesting his own innocence to Kausalyā, Bharata performs the funeral rites for Daśaratha (*sargas* 69-72). The ministers afterward press the kingship upon him, but he adamantly refuses it, vowing instead to have Rāma brought back from the forest (*sargas* 73-76).

With a vast army Bharata goes out in pursuit of Rāma. Along the way he encounters Guha and Bharadvāja, and allays their suspicions concerning his intentions. At last he reaches Citrakūṭa (*sargas* 77-87). Rāma, strolling over the mountain, perceives the army of Bharata approaching. Lakṣmaṇa is convinced the expedition is a hostile one, but Rāma calms his fears and meets with Bharata (*sargas* 88-93). Assuming Bharata now to be king, Rāma interrogates him about his administration, only to learn of Daśaratha's death. After Rāma performs the funeral rites on his father's behalf, repeated attempts are made—by Bharata, the minister Jābāli, and the family priest Vasiṣṭha—to persuade Rāma to return and assume the kingship. But it is all to no avail: he is resolved to keep his father's promise and his own (*sargas* 94-103). He consents only to give his slippers to Bharata in token of his kingship, and after receiving them Bharata returns home and begins the period of his viceroyalty from the neighboring village of Nandigrāma (*sargas* 104-107).

Sometime later, the sages among whom Rāma is living decide to quit the hermitage on Mount Citrakūṭa because of repeated attacks of *rākṣasas*, and soon afterward Rāma departs as well. He heads further south, to the hermitage of Atri. The seer's wife Anasūyā bestows precious gifts on Sītā, and the princess tells her the story of her marriage to Rāma (*sargas* 108-110). The book ends with Rāma, Sītā, and Lakṣmaṇa leaving Atri's hermitage and entering at last the wilderness of Daṇḍaka.

3. The Central Issues

THE MEANING and significance of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* will come into focus more readily if we view the story against the background of other ancient Indian epic narratives and locate those narratives in their historical context.¹ Although the problems addressed by Vālmīki are typical of the epic genre, the manner in which he treats them is markedly innovative. History can suggest why these problems were addressed by resuscitating for us the crucial importance they once possessed. Just as, according to the first rule of interpretation, we determine the signification of a word in reference to the words surrounding it, so the literary text can be viewed as a semantic entity that acquires specific meaning in reference to the "texts" in which it is embedded: the literary genre, for example, and its historical situation. These are critical procedures the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* presses upon us in an unusually insistent manner, though here it is not possible to do more than indicate their application in a brief and general way.

Indian epics—not only the other great epic, the *Mahābhārata*, but also the *Harivaṃśa* and a variety of lesser heroic tales—are admittedly interested in a wide range of issues. In the course of their transmission, in oral and afterwards in written form, and as a result of their appropriation by brahmanical orthodoxy, a congeries of topics—mythological, philosophical, religious, and so on—was incorporated into them. But at the root, in the very heart of many of these epic narratives, can be found a political problem similar to the one with which the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* confronts us. This is true, for example, in the *Mahābhārata*. Here two claimants, Yudhiṣṭhira and Duryodhana, contend for the succession to the Kuru throne. They are related as *bhrātr̥vya*, first cousins in the male line, called also *bhrātr̥*, which signifies in the first instance "brother," half- as well as full (Yudhiṣṭhira refers to Duryodhana's father as *pit̥r̥*, "father"). Their contention leads to the division of the kingdom and eventually to the exile of Yudhiṣṭhira. The dispute is finally resolved only by a cataclysmic struggle that spirals out to engulf the entire Indian world, besides resulting in the extermination of Duryo-

¹ What follows is an abbreviated version of a paper delivered at the Third Rāmāyaṇa Conference, Berkeley, summer 1978.

dhana and all his ninety-nine brothers. The *Harivaṃśa*, on the other hand, tells the story of Kṛṣṇa, the *bhrātr*² of the usurping prince Kaṃsa. He is likewise exiled, in a sense, but returns to slay the tyrant and reinstate the deposed ruler, the father of Kaṃsa himself. King Nala, in the *Nalopākhyāna*, finds his position usurped (by his *bhrātr*) and is driven into exile. In the stories of Yayāti, Śakuntalā, and Devavrata (Bhīṣma), to cite only a few more of the better-known examples, the struggle among "brothers" for succession to the hereditary throne forms the core problem of the narrative.

It seems, then, that an integral theme of Sanskrit epic literature is kingship itself and its attendant problems: the acquisition, maintenance, and execution of royal power, the legitimacy of succession, the predicament of transferring hereditary power within a royal dynasty. We are naturally led to wonder why this question should assume such importance for the Indian epic. We are not dealing here, as in other epic traditions, with just the heroic deeds of warrior kings, but with the nature and function of kingship as such; and these questions are not tangentially significant but central to the structure of the epic. One explanation may be that the problems of kingship addressed so insistently by the epic texts were new ones and, in their very nature, urgent.

This formative and referential relationship with historical reality that I propose holds true for certain other important aspects of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, as well. The historical context is a complex one, and no less than the literary text an object of interpretation. But a couple of major developments and their consequences seem clear and especially relevant.

During the three or four hundred years following the middle vedic age (c. 800 B.C.),³ a critical period of dynamic transition, fundamental and enduring changes came about in the Indian way of life. Besides the growth of cities like Ayodhyā and the rise of politically discrete polities like Kosala, the most important social development seems to have been a far more markedly defined hierarchical ordering of society.⁴ The pyramidal social organization

² Cf. *HariVaṃ* 65.77, where Kṛṣṇa's father Vasudeva is called the husband of Kaṃsa's father's sister; cf. also verse 88.

³ See most recently Mylius 1970.

⁴ For example, according to Rau (1957, pp. 62ff.), "the classical Indian caste-order did not exist" at the time of the *Brāhmaṇas*; "the four orders of the *Brāhmaṇa*-

maintained by institutionalized inequality is now often met with; the assumptions about it are made clear enough in the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself:

The kshatriyas accepted the brahmins as their superiors, and the *vaiśyas* were subservient to the kshatriyas. The *sūdras*, devoted to their proper duty, served the other three classes (*varṇas*) (1.6.17).

However gross and ideal this schematization might be—whether, indeed, we are here presented with fact or, far more likely, hope or injunction—seems finally beside the point. It has now become the single paradigm of social relations, an inflexible hierarchy based on birth.

A second change, more pertinent to our immediate purpose, concerns the extraordinary expansion of the role of the king. Whether or not it is true that vedic India knew no “institution that we can usefully call kingship,”⁵ the nature of monarchy in this period appears unlike anything existing earlier. As the *Rāmāyaṇa* represents it, the welfare of the “state”—the economic, social, political, and cultural welfare—was now felt to depend exclusively on the king.⁶ Again, the model contained in this representation is of principal interest here, whether it was fully actualized or not—though it is a fact that the king’s central position in the life of the community was steadily enhanced until, by the end of the epic period, his power would radiate out to encompass every sphere of social activity.

Political power, moreover, came to be concentrated in royal dynasties as exclusive proprietors. For the first time it became the conventional practice to transfer the kingship through heredity.⁷

period do not resemble the later castes in any one point.” A vertical mobility is widely attested in the earlier period (p. 63). It is clear from his citations from the *Brāhmaṇas* that *varṇa* affiliation was not yet intimately connected with birth. As in the political sphere, it would seem to be only during the later *brāhmaṇa* period that the element of heredity unambiguously enters the picture, and the society makes “the transition from varna to caste” (Dumont 1980, p. 148).

⁵ See Mabbett 1972, pp. 15, 19. On the various nonmonarchical structures existing before and into the epic period, see most recently J. B. Sharma 1968, pp. 15-80, 237-43.

⁶ Cf. 2.46.18, 61.8ff., 94.37ff.

⁷ A similar evolution has been suggested for “Celtic” kingship, where more or less strict primogeniture developed from the right to kingship of a much larger royal kin group. Cf. Binchy 1970, pp. 24-30.

This is a significant development because it implies a specific type of control of royal power; even more important, it is in itself problematic and regarded as such by the epics. Several consequences of hereditary monarchy are continually thrust upon our attention by their central position in the story of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*; none of them figures significantly in the pre-epic documents.

One such feature is the *yauvarājya*, "prince regency," whereby the still-reigning king appoints his successor (as Daśaratha intends to appoint Rāma). It is likely that this type of transfer of power would evolve as a response to the problem of legitimacy within a dynastic succession,⁸ presumably because other, more communal mechanisms for legitimation, such as popular assemblies, are no longer effective (the assembly in *sarga* 2 of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* is clearly *pro forma*). Another feature is intertribal—or what is now really interstate—marriage. Its function is to secure a political alliance (such as the Kosala-Videha alliance here, or the Kuru-Pañcāla in the *Mahābhārata*), and that can be done effectively only when high office is transferred within a single dynasty. Closely related to this is the politically significant practice of *rājyaśulka*, "the bride-price consisting of the kingship (or kingdom)," which Daśaratha had offered to the king of Kekaya (99.3). Like the marital alliance, this brideprice, a pledge to the woman's male relations that her son shall succeed to the throne, would be practicable only when the kingship is proprietarily controlled.⁹ Moreover, one must wonder whether there had actually been any clear conception of an

⁸ Goody 1966, p. 8. He continues: "But the difficulties [of this type of premortem succession] are clear. For the sharp contrast that exists between king and ex-king . . . makes it well-nigh impossible for a man easily to cast off the authority he has held by right of birth. . . . This aura that attaches to the ex-king creates problems . . . which can often be resolved only by the banishment or killing of the king" (cf. Tod's remarks on the Rajputs of medieval India: "It is a rule [for an ex-king] never to enter the capital after abandoning the government; the king is virtually defunct; he cannot be a subject, and he is no longer king" [1920, vol. 3, p. 1,467]). The Ikṣvāku dynasty solved this problem by the institutionalized ritual exile of the king, his entering upon abdication into the *vānaprasthāśrama*, the stage of life of the forest hermit. It is not the least of the ironies of the *Rāmāyaṇa* that Rāma should fulfil in his youth this "vow" of the aged Ikṣvāku kings (see the pointed verses of Kālidāsa, *RaghuVa* 12.20 and Bhavabhūti, *UttarāC* 1.22, and contrast the words of Lakṣmaṇa in *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* 20.20-21).

⁹ Though we do find records of marital alliances between dynasties at a comparable geographical distance (for example, the alliance of the Śiśunāgas of Magadha with the northwestern Madras effected by Bimbisāra), the *rājyaśulka* of Daśaratha makes

exclusive royal dynasty in the vedic period. We almost never hear of heirs displaced either by rival claimants or because of incompetence,¹⁰ so frequent an occurrence in the epics (as happens to Asamañja, 32.12-20). There seems to be no term for "royal dynasty," and the common epic word for it, *vaṃśa*, is not once employed in vedic texts in this signification (we hear only of undifferentiated, nonroyal lineages, *gotras*). Nor is any major role played by genealogy, which is the principal method of dynastic self-authentication and primogeniture validation.¹¹ Thus we have good reason to suppose that the special prominence of dynasties and dynastic succession in epic texts is at least partly the result of major changes in the structure of political power in late vedic times.

One final, and critical, intrinsic problem of kingship remains. The new restricted control of political power entailed a heightened competition attending its transfer. The process of transferring high office is inherently a perilous one, but the antinomies involved in hereditary monarchical succession posed the constant threat of the sharpest possible intensification of the process: the divisive and usually violent dynastic struggle.¹²

better political sense if we do not accept at face value the narrative of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, which locates the kingdom of the Kaikeyas in their vedic homeland, the Punjab. It may be that, first, Rājagṛha-Girivraja (cf. *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* 8.22 and note, and 62.14) is to be taken as referring to the Magadhan capital (mentioned at 1.31.5); the itineraries of 2.62 and 65, then, might be regarded as a set piece, archaic or archaizing, at all events imperfectly transmitted to the monumental poet (cf. notes on 62.9 and 65.1). Second, the Kaikeyas may be identical with Haihayas (cf. Lüders 1940, p. 108 note 4; according to "Jain sources" cited by Kosambi 1952, pp. 188-89, the Haihayas seem to have had some relation to the ruling house of Magadha at the time of the Buddha: "Ajātaśatru's grandfather, the Licchavi [Haihaya] Ceḍago . . ."). In this light, the alliance of Daśaratha and Kaikeyī would have a strategic geopolitical function, paralleled by the historical Kosala-Magadha alliance secured during the reign of Prasenajit (see Kosambi 1952, pp. 185, 189). Note also that earlier in the "history" of the Ikṣvāku dynasty, Sagara fought and defeated the Haihayas (*Mbh* 3.104.7; cf. *Rām* 2.102.14).

¹⁰ Zimmer 1879, p. 165 on *RV* 7.104 is to be corrected according to Geldner's translation.

¹¹ As Vasiṣṭha shows in *sarga* 102. It is a matter of some labor to reconstruct the few vedic genealogies available. See Zimmer 1879, p. 162; Rau 1957, p. 86 and notes 2 and 3. (The examples usually cited, such as Spellman 1964, pp. 53, 57, derive from the end of the vedic period.)

¹² The "law of primogeniture," while an ideal repeatedly pointed to in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* (cf. 8.12-16, for example) as in other epic narratives, was liable to con-

If, as most evidence leads us to believe, the genesis of Sanskrit epic literature is to be located in the period that witnessed these historical changes, then our interpretation of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* may acquire some new points of leverage. Just as we have begun to comprehend how much fiction enters into the writing of history, so we are beginning to understand how much reality comes to be represented in fiction. The *Rāmāyaṇa* appears to derive much of its meaning from its intense engagement with the conditions of social and political existence. A work of fiction it no doubt is, but fiction that in both its genesis and its reference is historically constituted, that issues from and, in a complicated way, describes, interprets, and evaluates reality. From this perspective it is reasonable to see in the poem's preoccupation with kingship responses to unfamiliar and serious political questions. But, though this is a major concern of the poem, it is not its exclusive concern. Such problems (particularly the "laws" of political succession) are finally subordinated to and made a pretext for the epic's larger interests. On this higher level, attention is directed to broader patterns and expectations of behavior in the social hierarchy that are likewise constituted by historical conditions. Thus, although these patterns are elaborated on the basis of political problems, they are by no means restricted to that narrow focus of the narrative.

By its nature, epic seeks to embrace the totality of a society—as Hegel put it, both its "world-outlook" and its "concrete existence."¹³ It is the most social, the most public of literary genres. We should

siderable variation in practice, as the same texts so often show. For if it were to be invariably employed, it would present a "challenging second" to the king by elevating the heir from the start to an "unambiguous second position" (Burling's terms). Indeterminacy, however, results in intensifying conflict among the possible heirs (see Goody 1966, pp. 2, 45; Burling 1974, pp. 58-83; Spellman 1964, p. 228 and note 3 [evidence from the *jātakas*]). Note that Rāma's succession is by no means a foregone conclusion; it comes as a surprise to Kausalyā, to Rāma's friends and enemies, and to Rāma himself. The important theme of the "disqualified eldest" was first clearly identified by van Buitenen (1973, especially pp. xvi-xix), and has more recently been analyzed from a psychoanalytic perspective by Goldman (1978).¹³ Hegel 1975, vol. 2, p. 1,044. He had the *Rāmāyaṇa* specifically in mind; he speaks of the "national bibles like the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*" (p. 1,087). (The *Aesthetik* consists of lectures prepared during the 1820s. Presumably Hegel got what knowledge he had of the *Rāmāyaṇa* from A. W. von Schlegel and the fragmentary translations mentioned below, chapter 9 note 6. Contrary to the translator's identification of the "English translator" [p. 344], Charles Wilkins never published, to our knowledge, a translation of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.)

not lose sight of the broader concerns and larger audience of this poetry, even when, as in India, its selection of "concrete existence" has been conditioned by special factors. The most important of these factors in the case of the Sanskrit epic is that it was a literature composed by more or less professional poets for the politically dominant group, the kshatriyas.¹⁴ Although the *Rāmāyaṇa* was also performed "on the streets and royal highways" of Ayodhyā (*Uttarakāṇḍa* 84.4), a popular function it has preserved to the present day, its primary and determinate audience, the one that authenticated and validated the work, was composed of kshatriyas; let us recall that Rāma, the hero of the poem, was also the original auditor (*Bālakāṇḍa* 4). It is natural that the issues addressed by the epic were those central to the lives of the kshatriyas who patronized it.

Thus, the genre itself and its primary social context restricted Vālmīki, like his predecessors and contemporaries, to a particular set of themes. But when we compare the *Rāmāyaṇa* with other examples of epic literature, it seems evident that Vālmīki found the previous treatments deficient not only aesthetically but ethically, as well.

As the *Mahābhārata* (and *Harivaṃśa*) makes clear, the early epic tradition had acknowledged, if sometimes reluctantly, only one means for the resolution of political and dynastic conflict: armed combat. For Vālmīki violence becomes, quite literally, the strategy of the inhuman. Although the position of the monkey prince Sugrīva resembles Rāma's own in many ways (4.4.19), he forcibly seizes the throne of the monkeys when, with Rāma's aid, he kills his elder brother, Vālin, who has "abandoned the path of kings" (4.18.12) through "sexual" excess (4.18.18ff.).¹⁵ Here, in *Kiṣkindhā*, force is explicitly promoted as the only correct means of dealing with infringements of righteousness (4.18.21), and Rāma resolves to employ force as soon as he learns of the circumstances of Sugrīva's

¹⁴ Oldenberg 1922, pp. 12-18, 96ff.

¹⁵ Given the fact that royal proprietorship of the land is so often in the text expressed through sexual metaphors (the king is "husband" of the earth, 2.1.28, for instance, and his death leaves the earth a widow, 2.45.12, 97.11), one wonders whether the "sexual" perversity of Rāma's foils, Vālin, Rāvaṇa, and Daśaratha himself, is not in part to be read as proprietary rapacity, a correspondence the poet elsewhere implies (see 2.94.22 and note). Rāma's monogamy, contrasting sharply with the polygyny of the other kings, may continue and advance the correspondence. (On the possible symbolic resonances in the name "Sītā," cf. note on 110.30.)

exile (4.4.19). No attempt at peaceful reconciliation is made. In the sixth book, when the banished Vibhīṣaṇa, the younger brother of the demon king Rāvaṇa, takes refuge with Rāma, it is not—or not primarily—an act of disinterested altruism.¹⁶ As Hanumān perceives (6.11.18)—and as Vibhīṣaṇa, in fact, later admits (6.40.18-19)—his defection is prompted in the first instance by his ambition to secure the kingship of the *rākṣasas* for himself. Rāma crowns him at once,¹⁷ and repeats the ceremony after he kills Rāvaṇa (100.9ff.), another king who has erred, again through “sexual” immoderation. In Laṅkā, once more, the struggle for political power among brothers is settled by the sword.

These incidents establish instructive parallels with the events of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*. Bharata, too, has the chance to displace his elder brother in dynastic succession, while Rāma himself is dispossessed and driven from his country through a tyrant’s unrighteous conduct (resulting from “sexual” excess). But the naked violence and unscrupulous political opportunism we encounter in Kiṣkindhā and Laṅkā are rigorously excluded from the city of Ayodhyā. For civilized society the poet inculcates, by positive precept and negative example, and with a sometimes numbing insistence, a powerful new code of conduct: hierarchically ordered, unqualified submission.

As we saw at the beginning of the poem, Vālmīki is shown to have developed a new form for his epic,¹⁸ the *śloka* meter—itsself an emotional response to violence and unrighteousness (1.2.13)—as the formal prerequisite for the communication of his new criticism of social life. In the context of the epic tradition, the ethics he advocates would have been thought an equally pronounced innovation.

Everyone in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* expects Bharata to mount a struggle for power: Daśaratha (*sarga* 4), Kausalyā (69), Guha (78), Bharadvāja (84-85), and, of course, Lakṣmaṇa (90). This was the established pattern of behavior. “There is no brotherly love among

¹⁶ Note that in the *MBh*, Vibhīṣaṇa had gone into exile with Vaiśravaṇa when the latter was driven from the kingship of Laṅkā by his younger brother Rāvaṇa (3.259.36). Cg predictably tries to argue away Vibhīṣaṇa’s political ambitions: the *rākṣasa* wants only to serve Rāma, as Lakṣmaṇa does (GPP 6.17.1, VSP vol. 3, p. 110).

¹⁷ Perhaps to ensure his continued support. No further mention is made of Vaiśravaṇa, who, theoretically at least, is the rightful successor.

¹⁸ But see the remarks below regarding the truth of this claim, chapter 6.

heroes," Rāvaṇa is told when urged to take up arms and drive his elder brother Vaiśravaṇa from the throne of Lañkā (7.11.12). The *Mahābhārata* narrates in full the tragic consequences of this principle, which historical kings throughout the period—the young Aśoka, for example—tried to forestall by the summary execution of virtually all possible claimants, elder brothers among them. For Vālmīki such struggle must be averted at all costs. Bharata himself is the first to agree:

It has always been the custom of our House that the kingship passes to the eldest son. . . . Rāma, our elder brother, shall be the lord of earth. (73.7-8)

The kingship belongs to that wise prince. . . . How would a person like me dare seize it from him? How could a son born of Daśaratha usurp the kingship? The kingship, and I myself, belong to Rāma. . . . Righteous Kākutstha, the eldest son and the best . . . must obtain the kingship just as Daśaratha did. The other course is an evil one, followed only by ignoble men, and leading to hell.¹⁹ Were I to take it I should become a blot on the House of the Ikṣvākus in the eyes of all the world. (76.10-13)

There is an ancient practice of righteousness . . . established among us for all time. It is this: with the eldest brother living . . . a younger may not become king. (95.2)

And the way to obviate this deadly antagonism is by the doctrine of unqualified submission of the younger to the elder brother:

The way of righteousness good people follow in the world is just this: submission to the will of one's elders [here, elder brothers]. (35.6)

Analogously, Rāma is urged to seize the throne of Kosala. La-kṣmaṇa (*sargas* 18 and 20; cf. Śatrughna's words in 72.3-4) and Daśaratha himself (31.23) exhort him to do so, with the kinds of arguments that might have been adduced in the many actual instances of usurpation occurring in this epoch and afterwards—as in the case of Ajātaśatru (himself both a parricide and a victim of

¹⁹ "Followed only . . .," a quarter verse appearing in the *Bhagavadgītā* (2.2c), where significantly it is used by Kṛṣṇa in reference to Arjuna's "fear" of engaging in the war against his kinsmen for the kingship.

parricide), or, in the ruling house of Kosala itself, Viḍūḍubha. For Vālmīki, the forceful seizure of power and the bloodshed that, as the *Harivaṃśa* shows, it inevitably brings in its train, must likewise be prohibited. And again the means is unqualified submission, now to one's father:

And righteousness is this . . . : submission to one's mother and father. . . . My father keeps to the path of righteousness and truth, and I wish to act just as he instructs me. This is the eternal way of righteousness. (27.29-30)

The *Mahābhārata* is no doubt sensitive to the desperate dilemma of living made possible only through killing. But its interrogations are indecisive; it can conceive of no solution except the final one in heaven. Political violence is no less necessary for its impossibility. That the fratricidal doctrine is so often and positively enunciated and defended in the *Mahābhārata* suggests that for this and other epic stories, as for the historical kings of ancient India, the acquisition and retention of political power ultimately if tragically superseded all other concerns. We shall later have an opportunity to appreciate how starkly the *Rāmāyaṇa* differs in this regard from the *Mahābhārata* when we juxtapose Rāma's attitudes to those of Kṛṣṇa.²⁰ Here it is enough to remark that Vālmīki altogether inverts the priorities both literature and history had valorized, asking incredulously,

How, after all, could a son kill his father, whatever the extremity, or a brother his brother, Saumitri, his very own breath of life? (91.6)

The question contains less rhetoric than admonition and instruction; and "just as you do not legislate against things nobody does," as one recent writer puts it, "so also no one needs to teach what everybody knows."²¹

Viewing the poem against such a literary and historical back-

²⁰ See chapter 10. At times the political restraint is so exaggerated that it seems nobody wants to be king (cf., for example, 16.33-34, 91.78). Kālidāsa appears very near the truth when he says that Rāma received his father's offer of the kingship in tears, and the order to go to the forest with deep delight (*RaghuVa* 12.7).

²¹ The author continues: "ethical doctrines are in this sense to be understood as symptoms of a social situation which calls out for the supplement or the corrective of the doctrine in question" (Jameson 1976, p. 37).

ground, and keeping in mind its primary audience, we can appreciate more fully the significance and urgency of its contribution: the moral injunctions it seeks to place at the center of political life. The code of behavior Vālmiki prescribes in this context has a practical as well as an ethical dimension. If hereditary power could not be transferred smoothly, the consequences could be disastrous: the fragmentation of the state among rival claimants, or a dangerous interregnum entailing pressures for redistribution of power and liability to external attack.²² The *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* seeks to solve this dilemma (one that may, in fact, be insoluble) by prescribing a pattern of behavior consonant with the demands of political order. Whatever the rival claims among the heirs themselves or of a single heir against the king, submission to the hierarchy—younger to elder prince, eldest prince to king—is essential, for only in this way is it possible to arrest the tendency in hereditary kingship toward ruinous fragmentation.

In addition to this practical vocation, the ethics represents a new and hopeful humanism in the realm of political behavior. Violence is brutality in the radical sense of the word, and belongs to the subhuman world of monkeys and demons; it is no longer to be regarded as a way of resolving social conflict. In this regard we may agree that the *Rāmāyaṇa* constitutes the first literary attempt in India to “moralize” the exercise of political power.²³

Yet much of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* will remain unaccounted for if we restrict our analysis to this level of practical and ethical instruction designed for a kshatriya audience. Indeed, the larger audience of the epic might naturally be expected to extrapolate the narrative beyond the princely relationships and what is, after all, a remote struggle for dynastic control. The poem itself, however, urges us to penetrate the surface discourse to another set of references embedded in it. By both its explicit injunctions and the implications of its structure, the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* invites and, in fact, has always been subject to wide social extension. “One must behave like Rāma” is the later proverbial formulation (one that was to receive encouragement from the kings of medieval India, who endowed pub-

²² See Goody 1966, p. 10.

²³ Ruben 1975, p. 19. This humanism appears to have been a truly felt conviction of the poet, even beyond the strictly political sphere. Consider particularly his treatment of the forest-dwelling Niṣādas, whom the *MBh* regards as little more than animals. See the note on *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* 45.9.

lic recitations of the epic).²⁴ For Rāma represents a comprehensive model of behavior, enacting in particular two roles that encompass communal life in its totality.

After Rāma's banishment Kausalyā exclaims to Daśaratha:

If only Rāma could have lived at home though it meant his begging in the city streets! You had the freedom to grant such a boon, which at the worst had made my son a slave. (38.4)

The verse directs our attention to an important aspect of Rāma's status: his absolute heteronomy. The status of junior members of the Indian household was, historically, not very dissimilar to that of slaves (as was also the case in ancient Rome), both with respect to the father and, again, hierarchically among themselves. The image of Rāma's bondage is enhanced by the fact that he is obliged to pay a debt that devolves upon him with the death of his father (104.6). More generally, like the slave, Rāma is "not his own master, he is subordinate to others and cannot go where he wishes," as an early Buddhist text defines the condition of slavery.²⁵

On this level of signification, where Rāma's position is one of unqualified subservience to the will of his master, the relations that had come to characterize the social formation in general can be understood. As Lakṣmaṇa and Bharata submit to Rāma ("I am your

²⁴ On the endowments made by the Pallavas, Colas, and Paṇḍyas for *Rāmāyaṇa* recitation see Raghavan 1956, p. 504, who goes on to remark on the unbroken tradition of exposition, which at present "constitutes one of the leading forms of popular religious instruction all over South India. . . . The epic that holds the people enthralled is the *Rāmāyaṇa* . . . hardly a day passes without some expounder sitting in a temple, *maṭha* (centre of religious preaching), public hall, or house-front and expounding to hundreds and thousands the story of the *dharma* that Rāma upheld" (p. 505). For the proverbial formulation, see *SāhiDa* 1.2 *vṛtti*. The didactic function of poetry is repeatedly stressed in the later rhetorical tradition, which regards it as literature's primary function. See, for example, *Kāvyaśālā* 5.3; *KāvyaPra* 1.2 and *vṛtti*. Despite the view of one school that includes *itihāsa* within *kāvya* and ascribes this didactic function to it as well (Mahimabhaṭṭa, Bhoja; see Raghavan 1963, p. 694), we would argue that it is precisely *upadeśa*, "instruction," that distinguishes "poetry" from narratives of things "as they were" (*itihāsa*); it idealizes, exemplifies, and creates paradigms.

²⁵ See, for example, Bongert 1963, especially pp. 184-85. The definition cited is found in *Dīghanikāya* 2.72. The *MBh* repeatedly attests to the congruence in status of slave and son; for example: "There are three who control no wealth whatever: a wife, a slave, and a son" (1.77.22, 5.33.57, and elsewhere). Note too that the Paṇḍava princes are temporarily reduced to slavery (through gambling, that is to say, debt; cf. Bongert 1963, pp. 151, 160, and note 2).

servant," says Lakṣmaṇa to Rāma, 20.35; "I am your slave," says Bharata, 97.12), and as Rāma himself submits and suffers ("the king [my] master is exercising his authority over . . . me," 21.17), so all the orders of society are to recognize and observe the strict boundaries of hierarchical existence. This is not something the poet is content merely to suggest. It is explicitly enunciated: "as I myself have shown you," Rāma tells the people of Ayodhyā, explaining the example he is setting, "you must obey your master's order" (40.9). Rāma's behavior is a paradigm to which all subordinates must conform. Where his status might seem to be different is in his apparent freedom to choose to obey. But this freedom is illusory, conjured by the poet only to dismiss it; it is precisely such freedom that Rāma himself denies: "It is not within my power to defy my father's bidding" (18.26); "I cannot disobey my father's injunction" (18.35). He acts, in fact, as if he had no choice, without deliberation, "without questioning my father's word" (16.37).²⁶ His obedience as unreflective action holds as much interest for the poet as its justification—indeed more, for the latter is consistently minimized.

On another socially symbolic level, where Rāma's filial relationship with the king is brought into prominence, the relations obtaining in the political organization at large are grasped. According to the paternalistic formulation of the text, the people are the *prajāh*, the "children," of the king. The institutionalization of dependency and loyalty would appear to be a major precondition for the centralization of power;²⁷ a basic problem, especially in the period of consolidation, is how to incorporate and manage the more traditional local allegiances. The mediating expression of a higher yet recognizable unity, the broadly integrating and richly allusive image of the state as family and the king as father would do this effectively—perhaps even more effectively than the ascription of divine status to the king (which, as we shall see in Book Three, likewise plays a significant role in the ideology of the poem). For the king comes to represent a superior kinship bond, drawing on and incorporating the symbolic power of those that had previously been dominant. The deeper resonances of "father" in the following verses would have been perceptible to any Indian audience "on the streets and highways of Ayodhyā":

²⁶ On the corroborative function of Rāma's fatalism, see chapter 5.

²⁷ Cf. also Thapar 1961, p. 147.

There is no greater act of righteousness than this: obedience to one's father and doing as he bids. (16.48)

It is this that is my duty on earth, and I cannot shirk it. Besides, no one who does his father's bidding ever comes to grief. (18.31)

As long as Kākutstha lives, my father and lord of the world, he must be shown obedience, for that is the eternal way of righteousness. (21.10)

Both you and I must do as father bids. He is king, husband, foremost guru, lord, and master of us all. (21.13)

My father keeps to the path of righteousness and truth, and I wish to act just as he instructs me. That is the eternal way of righteousness. (27.30)

Thus the ideological dimension of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* comprises two principal components. Actual relations of subordination, on the one hand, and the identification of "state" and more localized political interests, on the other, can no longer be recognized as having a determinate and historical character; the one is now in every sense natural and inevitable; the other, an inextricable genetic bond. Social subordination and political domination now become "the eternal way of righteousness" and the ultimate horizon of possibility for human life. They thus acquire a heightened value, which in turn promotes their continuous reproduction.

It should come as no surprise to the reader of Spenser or Milton to find, as we do on our first level of signification, an extension of a private ethics into a public context,²⁸ a grounding of political success on moral success, and an embodiment of these concerns, with self-conscious didactic purpose, in epic poetry. In Vālmīki, however, no screen of allegory or allusion is interposed between the literary text and the political "subtext." The latter has a less ambiguous presence and is permitted a greater degree of transparency than most Western literature has prepared us to expect.²⁹ Similarly and more importantly, on the second level, the actual formulations of the larger social and political reality and its fictional

²⁸ See Hill 1977, pp. 345ff.

²⁹ It was left to the medieval commentators to rewrite the text according to an analogical code. Much of the material for the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* is made available in the annotations below (see for example on 47.22).

representation—the literary and “general” ideological discourses—are more simply and directly related than we are accustomed to finding.³⁰ They seem, in fact, to be fused into virtually total congruence, and they are enunciated with all the force and authority of a commandment of *śāstra*—precisely what the *Rāmāyaṇa* came later to be considered.

What external evidence substantiates the claim that the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* incorporates such a “general ideological discourse”? Here we find ourselves in a more favorable position than that of students of many other oral epic traditions. The inscriptions of Aśoka (mid-third century B.C.) furnish an instructive historical analogue for the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The perspectives and attitudes, almost the very formulations that we find in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, were also those of the king who consolidated and ruled the first great Indian empire:

How might the people be made to advance in *dharma*? . . . This thought occurred to me: I shall have messages about *dharma* proclaimed.

It is the supreme duty of the king to instruct people in *dharma*.

[The people] must believe that the only true success is success through *dharma*.

This world and the other are impossible to secure without a deep love of *dharma*, extreme vigilance, extreme obedience, extreme fear, and extreme effort. But thanks to my giving instruction, attention to and love of *dharma* grow day by day and will continue to grow.

Whatever good deeds I have done the people have followed and will imitate. Thereby they have been made to progress and will be made to progress, in obedience to parents.

One's parents must be obeyed, one's gurus must be obeyed.

And this is *dharma*: . . . Obedience to one's mother and father.

. . . that [the people] may learn that the king is to them like a father . . . that they are to the king like his children.

³⁰ Cf. Eagleton 1976, especially pp. 44-63 and 81.

All men are my children.³¹

Vālmiki's chronological relationship with the Mauryan king is problematical. But this should not conceal the essential and intriguing fact that so similar a discourse should come to be intimately shared. Whether it permits us to draw conclusions about the poem's "genetic" history, or restricts us to its "effective" history, in either case this fact invites us all the more readily to situate the ideological dimension of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* in the world of actual social experience.

³¹ The nine citations are, respectively, from: Pillar Edict VII, Rock Edict IV, Rock Edict XIII, Pillar Edict I, Pillar Edict VIII, Minor Rock Edict II, Rock Edict XI, Separate Rock Edict II, Rock Edict I. For an informed analysis of Aśoka's *dharma* see Thapar 1961, pp. 147-75, also Tambiah 1976, especially pp. 56 and 59. There is no question but that many of its elements are old (cf. *TaiU* 1.11 and *Dīghanikāya* 3.188-89); what is important here is how these components, hitherto considered exclusively "sacred," are introduced into the political context (contrast Tambiah 1976, pp. 49-50).

4. A Problem of Narrative and Its Significance

WHEN we speak of “Vālmīki,” we are using the name as a convenient, shorthand way of referring to the composer of the monumental *Rāmāyaṇa*, which we have before us in the critically edited text. But we should bear in mind that this text is only the middle point of a poem in progress: we know that it continued to be amplified even after Vālmīki fixed the essential contours of the work; similarly, the monumental poem was itself not the beginning of the tradition, but a major synthesis of antecedent elements.¹ We would not expect such a synthesis to be seamless, but rather to show traces of elaboration or re-working.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* does contain such traces, which reveal themselves in the occasional discrepancies and inconsistencies of the narrative. We are surprised, for example, to find that the hero has such a superfluity of magical weapons—in fact, four different sets;² that now Sumitrā, now Kaikeyī, is the “middle mother” among the three (note on 18.22); that Sītā at one point is said to be wearing jewelry, then not wearing it, then again wearing it (34.17, 54.16, 82.13); that Rāma is shown to be crushed with grief at the news of his father’s death (95.8ff.), and then described as one who is never “affected by sorrow, however insufferable” (99.45; see note to 99.15 and, more generally, note to 28.12-13). But, like the constitution of the embassy to Achilles or the death and later reappearance of the warrior Pylaimenes in the *Iliad*, such lapses are really trivial. There are, however, more instructive remnants of a premonumental version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* that do not appear to derive, like those, from poorly conflated traditions, imperfect transmission, the “inconsultability” of an oral text, or a faulty memory. Nor are they simple matters of formulaic amplification or thematic accretion. They may be seen, though with some caution, as revisions. They affect certain structural features of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, and stand out as knots in the otherwise closely woven narrative of the book.

¹ See Volume 1, General Introduction.

² Given by Viśvāmitra (1.26), Varuṇa (2.28.12), Brahmā (2.39.11; see note there), and Agastya (3.11; this last will be used to slay Rāvaṇa, cf. *Yuddhakāṇḍa* 106).

By analyzing some of these remnants, we can try both to clarify a troublesome obscurity in the story and, in a more speculative way, to suggest how the narrative could have been adjusted by the monumental poet to serve his larger objectives.

Bharata's claim to the throne of Kosala, as the early chapters of our *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* present it, has an unsteady foundation. His mother Kaikeyī, we are told, once received two boons—the fulfilment of two wishes—from Daśaratha in gratitude for her somehow having saved him at a battle “when the gods and *asuras* were at war” (9.9-13). On the eve of Rāma's consecration as prince regent she claims her boons, demanding with one that her own son be made king, and with the other that Rāma be exiled (*sarga* 10).

There is no question that the theme of the two boons belongs to the monumental poem of “Vālmiki.” The textual evidence for 9.9ff. is sufficient to guarantee its authenticity. Yet, on the face of it, the story Mantharā tells Kaikeyī has an unusually contrived appearance:

When the gods and *asuras* were at war, your husband went with the royal seers to lend assistance to the king of the gods, and he took you along. . . . In the great battle that followed, King Daśaratha was struck unconscious, and you, my lady, conveyed him out of battle. But there, too, your husband was wounded by weapons, and once again you saved him, my lovely. And so in his gratitude he granted you two boons. (9.9-13)

The presence of a queen at a battle is extraordinary and virtually unparalleled in Sanskrit literature. The later manuscript tradition of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* evidently felt further explanation to be in order. It attempts to supply this by attributing some “magical knowledge” to Kaikeyī (see notes to 9.27 and 10.25), though that hardly suffices. Later adaptations of the *Rāmāyaṇa* are similarly troubled, but can do no more than replace the story with one still more improbable: Kaikeyī's service was to have held together the broken axle of Daśaratha's chariot.³ All of this points to the adventitious, secondary character of the incident. It is like a makeshift part with no integral position in the structure of the story, which the tradition felt free or obliged to tinker with until it could be made to work.

³ First in *BrahmP* 123.24ff. (cf. also *AdhyāRā* 2.2.63ff.). Here note also that Daśaratha rewards Kaikeyī with three boons, none of which she is ever said to use.

A close reading of *sargas* 9-10 reinforces this impression and strongly suggests that originally the two boons played no part in the scene. Kaikeyī has oddly forgotten about the boons, and even when reminded (9.14) she does not simply claim them as her due. Instead she is told, "recognize the power of your beauty" (9.19), and "when the great king Rāghava . . . offers you a boon, then you must ask him for this one, first making sure he swears to it" (9.22). In *sarga* 10, Daśaratha tries to mollify his angry wife: "I will do what will make you happy, I swear to you" (10.19), to which Kaikeyī directly replies, "Let the . . . gods . . . hear how you in due order swear an oath and grant me a boon. This mighty king . . . in full awareness grants me a boon—let the deities give ear to this for me" (10.21, 24). The queen thus "ensnared" the king, "who in his mad passion had granted her a boon" (10.25). With a quite casual indifference to the logic of the narrative, the text here continues, "I will now claim the two boons you once granted me" (10.26). Vālmīki clearly wanted to preserve the scene that originally, one would infer, must have shown Kaikeyī trick Daśaratha into offering, now for the first time, a single boon, to be used to exile Rāma.⁴ For the poet can thus impugn her claim to the kingship for her son, transforming it into a deception when in truth it had been nothing of the sort.

Early in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* we are shown how Daśaratha fears the presence of Bharata and insists on holding the royal consecration while the prince is absent from the city (4.25-27). His motive is not merely to avoid the dispute which, given the problematic character of succession, a younger brother might be expected to raise. As Daśaratha knew, Bharata had a legitimate title to the throne, for near the end of the book we learn how the aged king, in order to gain the hand of the beautiful princess of Kekaya, had agreed to pay the highest brideprice. This was the *rājyaśulka*, a promise to the woman's male kin that her son shall succeed to the throne—a

⁴ Since Rāma could not very well be killed outright, the purpose of this boon is to allow Bharata time to "sink deep roots" in the kingdom (9.25). In 6.114.5 only one boon is mentioned, used to banish Rāma (as also in 2.99.4, though here still, artificially, it is tied in with the Timidhvaja war). For the problems this poses the scribes and commentators, consult the critical apparatus. See also 3.45.7 and note. The *MBh* also knows only one boon (3.261.21ff.). The original scene would thus have been isomorphic, as was probably the design, with the Viśvāmītra incident in the *Bālākāṇḍa*: there, with similar rashness, Daśaratha offers the seer a boon, which likewise results in Rāma's departure to the forest (1.17.34-38; 18.3).

decision of major political significance. “Long ago, dear brother,” Rāma explains to Bharata, “when our father was about to marry your mother, he made a brideprice pledge to your grandfather—the ultimate price, the kingship” (99.3). In the premonumental version, the armature of which is still visible here, it would have been on the basis of this pledge that Kaikeyī raised the legitimate demand that her son be crowned. This inference is corroborated by testimony from outside the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition, namely, in the work of the first-century Buddhist poet, Aśvaghoṣa.⁵

Why, we must now ask, did Vālmīki revise the story, introducing the two boons and attempting to minimize, if not eliminate altogether, the *rājyaśulka*, at some cost in narrative coherence? Several answers suggest themselves.

First, the revision enables the poet to preserve the honesty and integrity of Daśaratha. The king is no longer endeavoring to repudiate his marriage pledge by a calculated and opportunistic political maneuver. On the contrary, he is now keeping his word to fulfill two promises given as a noble gesture of gratitude, however deceitfully and cruelly the terms of both of them were formulated by Kaikeyī. This would then be yet another in a series of attempts at idealizing the story that we find in the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition. Just as, for instance, the later tradition will exculpate Kaikeyī by turning her slave Mantharā into an agent of the gods and making a divine virtue of her vicious ambition; just as it will maintain the chastity of Sītā by having Rāvaṇa abduct not the real princess but a magically enlivened simulacrum of her,⁶ so already in the monumental version Daśaratha is to a large extent freed from guilt. He is transformed from an object of reproach into one worthy if not of admiration at least of commiseration. The necessity of this idealization

⁵ In a verse describing the origins of the Śākya, the tribe of the Buddha, Aśvaghōṣa writes as follows of their ancestors, the Ikṣvākus: “They did not try to seize the royal office that had come [to their half-brother] as the brideprice of their mother. No, instead they guarded their father’s truth [that is, ensured that his word would be made good] and so retired to the wilderness” (*Saund* 1.21). Aśvaghōṣa knew the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* in particular, with great intimacy and adapted it in his work repeatedly (see, for example, note on 2.51.4). Here we would submit that he is alluding to the incident of Daśaratha’s brideprice agreement, in the awareness of a tradition in which it played a more conspicuous role.

⁶ Mantharā as emissary of the gods already in the *MBh* 3.260.9-10; the simulacrum of Sītā first, it seems, in *KūrmaP* 2.33.112-41 (see note on *Aranyakāṇḍa* 43.34), and cf. *AdhyāRā* 3.7. In the *Bālarāmāyaṇa*, a drama of the late ninth-century poet Rā-

from the political and ethical point of view is suggested in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* itself:

Subjects will behave just like their king. The actions of a king must always be truthful and benevolent. The kingdom will thereby be true, the world firmly established on truth. (101.9-10)

And more pointedly by a verse in the *Mahābhārata*:

A king must be an example to his people. If he lie let him be destroyed. In whatever the plight he finds himself, a king must never deceive. (1.77.18)

Second, a considerable intensification in the dramatic action has been achieved by the alteration. Like Shakespeare in adapting his sources for, say, *Macbeth* or *Othello*, Vālmiki may have chosen for aesthetic reasons to redirect the emphasis of his plot, diminishing such external factors as had hitherto been prominent (the marriage agreement) while magnifying the more personal motivation of the hero. How different the book would have been, to paraphrase the words of the Shakespearean critic, had the poet dwelt more on the reasons for Rāma's going into exile than on the reasons for his not going.⁷

Another explanation, similar to but more consequential than the last, is that, by amalgamating into a single act of Kaikeyī's perversity Rāma's dethronement and exile, the revision allows the poet to reinforce the principal didactic thrust of the book. For Rāma no longer abdicates the kingship and submits to his elders merely in recognition of the just claims of a contractual agreement (as in the version alluded to by Aśvaghōṣa, and like Bhīṣma in the *Mahābhārata*, whose father had made the identical pledge), nor does a *deus ex machina* demand compliance by asserting the validity of the agreement (as in the not dissimilar circumstances of the *Śakuntalā* story). He submits, instead, in the face of what is presented as a grave injustice—the unfounded, capricious, and selfish demand, indeed the deception (as Rāma sees, 21.8) of a junior wife. He submits in

jaśekhara, we are told that Sūrpaṅakhā took the form of Kaikeyī, and another *rākṣasa* that of Daśaratha, and they were the ones who banished Rāma to the forest (thus, as the poet explicitly says, Daśaratha is totally exculpated; cf. Raghavan 1963, pp. 882, 792).

⁷ See Stoll 1961.

the face of repeated protestations of its injustice by all his loved ones, including his father and spiritual preceptor. The moral code exemplified in Bharata's self-abnegation before his elder brother, an innovation in political ethics already present, presumably, from the beginning of the Rāma legend, is effectively recapitulated by the hero's obedience to the word of his parents, regardless of the mendacity, unjustness, and avarice underlying it.

One wonders, then, why the later passage about the marriage pledge was retained, despite the serious inconsistency it presses upon our attention. Is it a simple question of the natural conservatism of oral poetry, or a function of its "inconsultability"? I think not. A closer scrutiny here discovers a basic and unresolvable problem in the argument of the poem. Later in the book Rāma must know of and reveal the agreement in order to justify his obdurate refusal to acquiesce in the pleas of his brother, his spiritual preceptor, and his people, and to fortify a position that appears increasingly untenable (for the argument is finally and forcefully made that what Daśaratha did was mad, "done in delusion"; it was "sinful, contrary to all that is right and good," he did it "just to please a woman," and thus Rāma is urged to save his father "from sin," 98.50-55, 66). Yet he cannot have known of the pledge if he is to have a tenable position at all: had he been aware of it in the early chapters of the book, he would then have been directly implicated in precisely the fraud he is so determined to avoid.⁸ In much the same way, Rāma will later repeatedly justify his behavior by asserting that he must "obey his father's order." But nowhere in the book does Daśaratha issue any such order, nor even explicitly grant Kaikeyī's demands. At every crucial juncture where he might do so, he faints or remains speechless; at times we see the poet struggling to eliminate any suggestion of Daśaratha's involvement.⁹

⁸ The commentators are baffled by the revelation in 99.3, and try to dismiss its relevance by claiming that Daśaratha's promise was not binding (see 99.3, 5, 6 and notes). If that were so on the story's own terms, Rāma would obviously not adduce the promise as an argument to support his position. For a more traditional interpretation of several of the problems raised here, see Ramaswami-Sastri 1944, pp. 78-82.

⁹ For Rāma's obeying his father's express order, see 97.21; 98.38 and 69; 99.7; 101.16 and 24; 103.21. In 16.32 he in fact asks, "But there is still one thing troubling my mind and eating away at my heart, that the king does not tell me himself that Bharata is to be consecrated," but his question is never straightforwardly answered

We may have some reason to conclude that what Vālmīki found essential to underscore later in the story (the brideprice, the order) he found equally essential to bracket provisionally in the earlier portion. A direct royal order for banishment, which is a judicial punishment exacted only for the gravest offenses (cf. 66.37-38), would unavoidably have called into question the righteousness of the king and so the ultimate basis of his authority—a question now only rhetorically put, when not altogether suppressed. The same holds true, as we saw, if the brideprice had earlier been accorded the prominence it merits in the narrative. We are left to infer that these loose ends had to remain loose if the foundation of Rāma's obedience was to be secure. It is, once again, the necessity of obedience that the poem desires to emphasize, rather than the quality of the authority demanding it.

It may still be objected that this interpretation of the dramatic and didactic reasons behind the revision of the boon-motif shows an insensitivity to certain tensions and nuances within the poem. Doesn't Vālmīki himself actually demur before his hero's sacrifice? Indeed, the price of that sacrifice is deliberately shown to be high—maybe, by that very fact, too high for us to believe it to have been justified in the eyes of the poet. What are its consequences? Rāma's mother is left in a state of abject misery. His young wife and brother are to be exposed to the harshest trials. The city, whose protection should be Rāma's chief concern, is left without a king, as he would have anticipated, knowing that Bharata would never acquiesce in the fraud. The people are overpowered by their grief and desert Ayodhyā en masse to live out the period of his exile in the village of Nandigrāma. Last, and crucially, it is in part his very compliance that kills the man whose word he set out to make good. What results from Rāma's submission is despair, sorrow, and death. Can it be claimed that the poet means to endorse this, and not suggest by the crescendo of misery the need for reason to temper an obedience that might, in the end, destroy its own object?

These are considerable tensions, more easily exposed than resolved, which raise some delicate problems of the historical relativity

(16.41), nor is it ever posed again. The order is simply taken for granted. Furthermore, in 18.15 Kausalyā calls it Kaikeyī's order, and when not ignoring her argument (18.26-31), Rāma fails to explain clearly how Daśaratha is involved (18.35). See also chapter 9 note 9 below.

of cultural meaning. They may exist for us, but have we sufficient reason to believe they existed for the poet and his audience? The suffering brought about by the hero's sacrifice may be meant precisely to enhance its grandeur, not call it into question. Friction, severe friction, is necessary if heroic resolution is to keep its radiance and not fade into a common dullness. Rāma is aware of the suffering (47.19ff., for example, or 95.13), but he is never swayed from his purpose. He knows the price and is willing to pay it; the more he must pay the more precious the act becomes. And who is to gauge, for a work like an ancient Indian epic, the degree of suffering beyond which the value of a heroic act begins to depreciate? Finally, and most important, we must bear in mind that there was thought to exist no integral or causal relation between the sacrifice and the suffering. As the poem itself so often stresses, to have suffered was ineluctable.

5. The Philosophy

OBEEDIENCE and the suppression of the individual will are not self-validating moral imperatives. On the contrary, the individual resists his abnegation, and empirical arguments to justify his sacrifice will necessarily fall short. The surest philosophical foundation would be provided by some transcendent authority that obviates the possibility of verification: a metaphysical category, a nontestable axiom. One function of the profound fatalism in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, it would seem, is to supply this authority.

It has long been recognized that fate plays a central role in much epic poetry, but considerable variation in the role can be discerned among the different traditions.¹ Achilles may be doomed to choose between a short life of heroic glory and a long but obscure existence; nevertheless, the choice is his and he knows it. The characters of the *Rāmāyaṇa* believe themselves to be denied all freedom of choice; what happens to them may be the result of "their" own doing, but they do not understand how this is so and consequently can exercise no control. This essential difference implies another, equally weighty. Since the Greek hero in large measure makes and is aware of making his own fate, fate carries with it a substantial element of justice.² The fate of Rāma and the others is prepared for them, at some plane beyond their intervention or even comprehension. "Justice" never enters the picture in any demonstrable or even cognizable way. Further, since in the archaic Greek world fate has both a cosmic dimension and an aspect of justice, the gods can guarantee the whole process as guardians of a just and moral order. Significantly, the gods play no role whatever in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*. There is a mechanical quality to the course of human affairs, regulated only by some "dark, dumb force that turns the handle of this world." (The component of theodicy would, however, be affixed to the story at this point by the later *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition and elaborated in the medieval scholiastic allegories.)

In the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* man is prohibited from making his destiny,

¹ An early meditation on the question is to be found in Hegel (1975, Vol. II, pp. 1,070 ff.).

² Dietrich 1965, pp. 283, 333, etc. On the "justice" of fate, see, for example, p. 327.

and cannot truly comprehend the cause of his suffering. His predicament results from and is perpetuated by something entirely beyond his control. Fate—*daiva*, “what comes from the gods”; *kāla*, “time”; *adṛṣṭa*, “the unforeseeable”; *kṛtānta*, “doom” or “destiny”—is something one cannot understand and against which one cannot struggle:

It is nothing but destiny, Saumitri, that we must see at work in my exile. . . . For why should Kaikeyī be so determined to harm me, were this intention of hers not fated and ordained by destiny? (19.13-14)

What cannot be explained must surely be fate, which clearly no creature can resist; for how complete the reversal that has befallen her and me. What man has the power to contest his fate, Saumitri, when one cannot perceive it at all except from its effect? Happiness and sadness, fear and anger, gain and loss, birth and death—all things such as these must surely be the effect of fate. (19.18-20)

No one acts of his own free will; man is not independent. This way and that he is pulled along by fate. (98.15)³

Rāma has no choice, as we saw; no one does. Choice is replaced by chance, and action is nothing more than reaction.

If the possibility of verification is obviated, the need for it cannot be denied. The doubts and hesitations in the face of so paralyzing an axiom are not suppressed; Lakṣmaṇa throughout much of the epic and the minister Jābāli in *sarga* 100 of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* are permitted to express them. They urge the antithetical position: reliance on *puruṣakāra*, “human effort,” “free will”:⁴

For it is only the weak and cowardly who submit to fate; heroic men, strong of heart, do not humble themselves before fate. A man able to counter fate with manly effort does not give up for all that fate may frustrate his purposes. (20.11-12)

³ Compare also *Bālakāṇḍa* 58.21-23 and *Aranyakāṇḍa* 62.11.

⁴ As the commentators are at pains to point out, this, significantly, is the *Lokāyata* or materialist posture. See, for example, Cg on 18.36, as well as 61.22 and 94.32-33.

But these characters are only foils, supplying a pretext for Rāma to advance his uncompromising position. His own convictions are never affected.⁵

Besides generally underpinning the action of the story, this fatalism takes on, in the recurrent appeal to *karma*, a more specific shape. Though the word *karma* seems not to be used in so technical a sense in the *Rāmāyaṇa*,⁶ the belief is clearly present that there exists a latent and unfailing mechanism of retributive justice for transgressions committed in the past, usually in a former life.⁷ No other explanation is ever available to the characters in the midst of their suffering. Without this, their suffering must remain inexplicable:

It must be, I guess, that in the past I injured many living things or made many childless; that must be why such a thing has happened to me. (Daśaratha, 34.4)

I guess, my mighty husband, yes, it must no doubt be that once upon a time, when calves were thirsting to drink, I ruthlessly hacked off the udders of the cows, their mothers. And so now . . . I who love my child so have been made childless by Kaikeyī. (Kausalyā, 38.16-17)

It must be that in some past life women were separated from their sons by my mother's doing, Saumitri, and so this has happened to her. (Rāma, 47.19)

The cause of sorrow is hidden in a vast obscurity that effectively renders hopeless any attempt to remedy it—or to have prevented

⁵ The controversy over fate and free will is not restricted to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and it is often the antagonist (Duryodhana, for example, or Kāṃsa) who articulates the free-will position. There is one intriguing exception to this in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, near the end of the poem. In 6.103.4-5 Rāma does claim (despite such earlier statements as 6.39.28) that he, a human being, has overcome the adversity of fate through human effort. But by this point in the narrative we are too aware of the divine plan underlying the theft of Sītā and Rāvaṇa's death to fail to hear a certain irony in the words the poet places in Rāma's mouth.

⁶ See note at 62.16 in the *Aranyakāṇḍa*.

⁷ "Normally the good or evil deed a person does bears its fruit in some other world or in some other life. Because [Daśaratha's] deed was so heinous it bore its fruit in this very world" (Cg on 57.8). On the logical problems involved in the coexistence of the doctrines of fate and *karma* see Hopkins 1906.

it. Only once is the connection ever perceived (by Daśaratha, *sargas* 57-58) between a specific deed and its grievous consequences, which might serve to clarify the mechanism, to explain or justify suffering. But as we shall see, Daśaratha's deed was accidental; the inscrutability of retribution is only intensified.

6. Aesthetic and Literary-Historical Considerations

ALTHOUGH the *Rāmāyaṇa*, in the form we have it, must represent the culmination of a long bardic tradition of heroic song, the poem is more easily considered as the first chapter in a new volume of Indian literary history than as the last of an old one. As the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* well illustrates, little in antecedent literature can be brought to bear to situate the *Rāmāyaṇa* in a literary-historical continuum, and even less that prefigures its formal character.

The *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* does not in any consistent way presuppose the earlier sacred literary tradition. Though many stray allusions can be found (at one point a *yajurmantra* is quoted, at another a well-known *ṛksloka*),¹ these are by and large oblique and sparse. One intriguing, if minor, exception is the poet's use of the *Taittirīya* corpus.² The *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* is virtually cited once (85.42), and it is probable that the *Brāhmaṇa* and later texts of the school are alluded to in at least four other places, which lends credence to the tradition associating Vālmiki with this branch of vedic learning.³ With respect to the lawbooks, the situation is similar. Although parallels with many extant *dharmaśāstras* are not uncommon, no particular one appears to inform the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*; the *Manusmṛti* tradition seems, however, to have particular affinities with it.⁴

I do not think it can be questioned that the monumental poet adopted certain motifs from folk literature as we find it represented in the Buddhist *jātakas*. The *Sāma Jātaka* (#540), for example, is closely related to *sargas* 57-58 and represents, as I shall argue, the prototype for that apparently rather late stratum of the text. Sim-

¹ We have been unable to trace the mantra (see 26.16 and note). For the *ṛksloka* citation, see 68.14 and note.

² Contrast the note on *Bālakāṇḍa* 13.23, where it seems that the poet of the episode was most familiar with the Aśvamedha sacrifice known to the *VājaS*.

³ See note on 29.13 for the possible allusions, and *Taittirīya Prātiśākhya* 5.36, 9.4, for Vālmiki's affiliation with this *śākhā*.

⁴ For the eclectic use of the *dharma* tradition, see 69.14ff. and notes; for the *Manusmṛti*, see the notes on, for example, 2.22; 25.7; 69.22; 94.44 and 51; 99.12; 101.8 and 26; 103.9; 109.24.

ilarly, the tradition of *Rāmapaṇḍita*, “The Wise Rāma,” which is preserved in the *gāthās* of the *Dasaratha Jātaka* (#461), seems to have been adapted in *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* 98.15ff., where it is tacked onto the narrative.⁵ By contrast, several *jātakas* presuppose the Rāma legend in broad outline, and perhaps even the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* itself.⁶ The *Jayadissa Jātaka* (#513) is a case in point. One *gāthā* found in it refers explicitly to the events—minor events after all—narrated in *sarga* 22 of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*:

As Rāma’s mother made her prayers for him when he was about to leave for Daṇḍaka wilderness, so I make my prayers for you . . .⁷

The vast body of early Indian legend and myth is only occasionally narrated or adumbrated, and then only in two contexts.⁸ One is the rhetorical figure, where mythical allusions are quite common, but serve only to elevate the tenor of the figure by supplying a point of paradigmatic and nonspecific reference.⁹ The second is the appeal to mytho-historical precedent, as when Kaikeyī cites the stories of King Śibi and others to show that Daśaratha must keep his promise, whatever the cost (*sarga* 12). Several of the stories contain archaic features, testifying to an origin antedating the rise of Vaiṣṇava syncretism.¹⁰ There are also a few rather obscure tales that, as Vālmiki’s passing references imply, must have been well known. But they remain obscure, for there are apparently no surviving versions elsewhere in Indian literature.¹¹

The complicated issue of the relationship between the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, sketched in the General Introduction (in Volume 1), will not be simplified by a detailed analysis of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*. The evidence of the present book obliges us to regard

⁵ See 98.15ff. and notes for the parallel verses and discussion.

⁶ *Vessantara Jātaka*, #547, for example. See *Jātakas with Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 557.29-30. For a discussion of the date of the *gāthās* here see Cone and Gombrich 1977, p. xxix (possibly pre-Buddhist).

⁷ *Jātakas with Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 29.1.

⁸ For example, the stories of Alarka, Śibi, 12.4-5; Kaṇḍu, Rāma Jāmadagnya, 18.27ff.; Sāvitrī, 27.6; Surabhi, 68.15ff.; Anasūyā, 109.9-12.

⁹ See note on 2.29.

¹⁰ Indra (not Viṣṇu) and Bali, 12.8; the boar incarnation of Brahmā (not Viṣṇu), 102.3. See notes there.

¹¹ See, for example, 18.20 and 24 with notes.

the two epics as more or less co-extensive and to a high degree interactive traditions. We have already seen that the intractable problem of dynastic power lies at the heart of both. But there is a deeper structural affinity between them, and it emerges nowhere more dramatically than in their second books.

The *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* and the *Sabhāparvan*¹² follow an almost identical narrative pattern; their congruence is astonishing and quite involved. Both constitute the true commencement of their respective stories. All the action that follows depends directly on what happens here, just as everything that precedes serves no other function than to prepare this site. The problem of royal power is brought abruptly into sharp focus. Yudhiṣṭhira's claim to sovereignty, though ostensibly vaster than Rāma's, rests on a similar legitimacy of primogeniture succession,¹³ and is asserted, as in the case of Rāma, by the decision to perform the royal consecration. This decision is likewise a provocation that evokes immediate and open opposition in the party of a rival claimant (a "brother"). It is the rival's maternal kin that promotes the opposition, and the means resorted to is comparable: the deception on the part of Bharata's mother finds its parallel in the trickery (at dicing) of Duryodhana's maternal uncle Śakuni. Like Kaikeyī, Śakuni aims at securing a long exile for his opponent so that in the interval Duryodhana can "sink deep roots" in the kingdom (*MBh* 2.66.22; cf. *Rām* 2.9.25). As in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, the only voice of authority able to check the course of the tragic events, that of the aged king, is silenced by a weakness born of reckless affection (Dhṛtarāṣṭra's for his son Duryodhana parallels Daśaratha's for Kaikeyī; both kings, incidentally, justify themselves on the grounds of fatalism, *MBh* 2.45.57, 51.15, etc.; cf. *Rām* 2.34.4, 53.17). Like Rāma, Yudhiṣṭhira acts out of obedience to his "father's" order (*MBh* 2.52.15, 18); like Lakṣmaṇa, the prince's brothers exhort him to armed resistance (*MBh* 3.28-34), only to receive a response similar to Rāma's: Yudhiṣṭhira gave his word (at the time of the dicing, *MBh* 2.35.11, 14, 21); and so on.¹⁴

¹² Some of the relevant narrative spills over into the third book, the *Vanaparvan*.

¹³ For dramatic reasons this legitimacy is deliberately complicated in Book One but clearly untangled in Book Five (see, for example, *adhyāya* 147, especially verses 29ff.).

¹⁴ The public enactment of the drama unfolds in virtually identical ways. The justice

Although this isomorphism is remarkable and merits more detailed exploration, the disagreements are equally significant and instructive. A difference of vision, first, seems to be inscribed in the very names of the books, as it is in the texts throughout. There is a keen awareness of the broad social impact of political behavior, and consequently an exemplary figuration to it, in the "City of Ayodhyā," which is missing in the story of the idiosyncratic, at times erratic, conduct of the leaders who sit in closed session in the "Assembly Hall." Like Rāma, Yudhiṣṭhira is a victim of treachery and deceit, but he is in large measure also a victim of his own moral vacillation, lack of judgment, and ambition—characteristics that adhere to him throughout the poem, and that he himself recognizes.¹⁵ He feverishly gambles for the crown that Rāma abandons with indifference; to put it another way, he confronts (and will be ruined by) the insoluble dilemma of the political problem transcended and so annulled by Rāma.

Bharata's temperamental distance from any participation in the political struggle finds an objective correlative in his removal from Ayodhyā to the land of the Kekayas. Duryodhana, by contrast, remains present all the while; his "humiliation" at the hands of the Pāṇḍavas (*MBh* 2.43) is the correlative of his clear recognition of, and sharp emotional response to their political challenge. Bharata's horror at learning of his mother's intrigues and his frantic attempt to conciliate and reinstate his brother stand in irreducible oppo-

of the hero's dispossession, for example, is called into question (*MBh* 2.60-64; cf. *Rām* 2.32), but the controversy ends in similar indecision. The prince in the end must strip and don the clothing of a beggar. His wife suffers the humiliation of public exposure (*MBh* 2.62.4ff.; cf. *Rām* 2.30.8ff.); in sorrow she takes leave of her mother-in-law and receives the latter's tearful parting advice (*MBh* 2.71.25ff.; cf. *Rām* 2.36.9ff.). The hero departs amid dire portents (*MBh* 2.71.25ff.; cf. *Rām* 2.36.9ff.). The people condemn the king for his weakness (*MBh* 2.61.50; cf. *Rām* 2.33.13) and denounce the victor, the prospect of whose coming rule terrifies them (*MBh* 3.1.12; cf. *Rām* 2.42.17ff., especially 21). They long to desert the city and follow the prince into banishment, but he urges them to return (*MBh* 3.1.16ff.; cf. *Rām* 2.40).

¹⁵ These traits, of which Yudhiṣṭhira shows a clear understanding in 2.35.1ff., and which come into particularly distinct prominence in the fifth book, are difficult to dismiss on the basis of the role of dicing in the *rājasūya* ceremony as presented in the *Brāhmaṇas* (see van Buitenen 1975, pp. 3ff., especially pp. 27-30). The ritual explanation accounts only for the least interesting and least meaningful features of the narrative.

sition to Duryodhana's collusion at every step of the plot and his final exultation.

Finally, although the injustice surrounding the hero's exile is similar in the two books, in the *Mahābhārata* it is no pretext for brotherly submission. On the contrary, injustice is magnified into atrocity, which can only be cleansed in the blood of kinsmen. The symbolic focus of fratricidal conflict is the heroes' wife, Draupadī. The sexual outrages Duryodhana and the others commit against her in the *Sabhāparvan* call forth vengeful threats on the part of the Pāṇḍavas, and it is toward the fulfillment of these threats in the extermination of their "brothers" that all the remaining action of the poem inexorably moves. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Sītā functions as a comparable symbolic focal point, but its location is shifted. A sexual outrage is similarly perpetrated (Rāvaṇa's rape), but this will occur outside the assembly hall; it is, so to speak, strategically isolated in the forest, whereby its political charge is defused.¹⁶

The structural congruence of the two books thus seems to point to a more fundamental relationship between the epics than generic affiliation. Equally interesting, however, are their divergences. Their basic uniformity only illuminates the more distinctly the ways in which the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* has sought to reformulate the terms of their common problem. This image of formative interaction remains if we examine the two poems on a more superficial level.

It is true that the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, like the rest of the poem, betrays no knowledge of the main narrative of the *Mahābhārata*, but it is reticent about much other early literature, as well. The *Rāmāyaṇa* has a single-minded purpose, with none of the encyclopedic interests of the *Mahābhārata* in its final form. Nor was it ever subjected to a literate, comprehensive redaction of the sort the *Mahābhārata* underwent. The *Rāmāyaṇa* has no interest in, and actually appears hostile to placing itself in history, as reference to the *Mahābhārata*—history for the Indian audience—would place it. It exploits only those features of the *Mahābhārata* narrative that can furnish a mythic paradigm: the story of Yayāti, for example (which the *Rāmāyaṇa* knows in detail and whose earliest known source is probably

¹⁶ For a discussion, see the introduction to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Volume III. If it is anything more than rhetoric, Rāma's willingness to surrender his wife Sītā to his brother Bharata (16.33-34, for example) would only reinforce the contrast between the two narratives.

the *Mahābhārata*).¹⁷ Its silence about the *Mahābhārata* may come not from ignorance but from wilful disregard. As if it were attempting to supersede the second epic, the *Rāmāyaṇa* incorporates the great personages of the lunar dynasty into Rāma's solar lineage: Bharata, Nahuṣa, Yayāti, and perhaps even Janamejaya.¹⁸

By contrast, those specific themes that the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* shares with the *Mahābhārata* by and large fit more appositely in Vālmiki's poem—if we are prepared to ascribe any cogency to the idea of narrative propriety. A good example is furnished by the *kaccīparvan*, *sarga* 94, where Rāma interrogates Bharata about his administration of the kingship. Many scholars, including the editor of this volume, Vaidya, have asserted the priority of the *Mahābhārata* version (2.5).¹⁹ However, the scene plays a vital narrative function in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*. It serves in part to testify to Rāma's profound knowledge of righteousness and statecraft, and so to make his refusal to assume the kingship all the more poignant—and unarguable. No such integrating purpose can be discerned for *Mahābhārata* 2.5, where a divine sage puts the questions to a prince who, in fact, is not yet fully a sovereign. But, on the other hand, the very aptness of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*'s handling of the motif might lead one to conclude that it adapted and enlivened a stale, extraneous didactic catalogue with the careful attention to narrative functionality that is one of Vālmiki's talents.²⁰

Problems like this, coupled with the numerous features of the folk tradition of storytelling in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, suggest that the question of priority with respect to preliterate epic or popular texts is in general misleading. The oral traditions of all the various genres and particular works must have been continuously interactive and

¹⁷ *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* 5.9, 11.1, 71.10, etc.; *Aranyakāṇḍa* 62.7; *MBh* 1.70ff. The vulgate of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* (GPP 7.58-59) relates the story, which seems to be a late addition, in a modified form.

¹⁸ Cf. 2.102.13, 27; 1.69.30, 2.58.36 and note.

¹⁹ Vaidya 1962, p. 702; cf. also more recently Kane 1966, pp. 51ff.

²⁰ See, for example, the note on 69.14ff. Besides the *kaccīparvan*, other sections the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* holds in common with the *MBh* include the *arājaka* chapter (*sarga* 61) and the story of Surabhi (68.15ff.). See the notes there. Although a verse like *Rām* 2.61.22 seems to be a clear borrowing from the *MBh* (see note at 61.22), several introductory (and probably late) portions of the *MBh* appear to borrow from the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*. Compare *MBh* 1.133.5ff., especially verse 12, with *Rām* 2.30.15ff.; *MBh* 1.138.15ff. with *Rām* 2.82.1ff. (the two motifs are irrelevant in the *MBh* contexts).

cross-fertilizing. Even more clearly than the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata* has roots that stretch back into the late vedic age. This fact, coupled with the structural similarity of the poems, forces us to think of the two epic traditions as coextensive processes that were underway throughout the second half of the first millennium B.C., until the monumental poet of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the redactors of the *Mahābhārata* authoritatively synthesized their respective materials and thereby in effect terminated the creative oral process.

The impress of Vālmīki has been left particularly deeply on the formal aspects of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*. The reader who comes to it with an awareness of the literary character of late vedic myth and legend, the *jātakas*, or other early Pāli or Sanskrit Buddhist narratives, or of the central portions of the *Mahābhārata*, must be struck by the sophisticated artistry of the book, which nothing in the antecedent or contemporary literature had prepared him to expect.

We have already noted that the poet represents himself as developing a new formal vehicle for his work. Nothing of the sort really occurred, of course; the elements of the metric revert to vedic times (and were in great measure an Indo-European heritage). But Vālmīki's versification does unquestionably possess a polish and grace, a quiet elegance, that markedly differentiate it from anything known before.²¹ We should also note the function of the "lyric" verses at the *sarga* ends. They are designed to mark closure, either by recapitulating the action (such as 76.27-30), or by providing a synoptic preview of what is to come (such as 21.25). There is no analogy for this device that I know of in early Indian literature.

If the balladlike refrain style to which Vālmīki is especially partial in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* has antecedents in the folk tradition,²² nowhere else do we find it used with the same degree of skill. It is employed here with a fine sense of proportion and restraint, and is used only when there is compelling contextual motivation for the tone of pathos that it contributes. This kind of mature execution holds true for the poetic style of the book in general.

Unlike much early Sanskrit epic poetry, indeed, unlike oral epic

²¹ There are very few technical problems: one apparently hypermetric *pāda*, in 95.31, and two verses that, no doubt because of the complexity and rarity of the meters, have suffered from an imperfect transmission (108.25, 26).

²² For examples of the refrain, see 25.6ff., 61.8ff., 69.14ff., 77.3ff., 92.4ff., 103.4ff. For the relationship of this style to the folk tradition, which appears far more archaic, see the remarks of Oldenberg cited in the note to 25.5.

in general, with its natural impulse to subordinate the line to the paragraph, the paragraph to the book, and the book to the whole,²³ Vālmiki is particularly (though by no means exclusively) interested in sculpting the memorable individual line, often by the use of almost classical rhetorical devices. Consider the moving figure in the following verse, which concludes Sītā's supplication of Rāma to take her to the forest. Speaking of the pain of fourteen years of separation she says,

I could not bear the grief of it even for a moment, much less ten years of sorrow, and three, and one. (27.20)

Or the very effective anaphora (in Sanskrit rhetorical terminology, an *ekāntarapādayamaka*) when Daśaratha is making ready to shoot the arrow that is to have such disastrous consequences for him:

I drew out a shaft that glared like a poisonous snake, and I shot the keen-edged arrow, and it darted like a poisonous snake. (57.17)

Or the "poetic fancy" (*utprekṣā*) in Daśaratha's lament before his wife at the departure of Rāma:

I cannot see you, Kausalyā! Oh please touch me with your hand. My sight has followed after Rāma and has not yet returned. (37.27)

In all these cases, which one could easily multiply, the listener or reader is asked to pause and relish, as he had not often been asked before.

Perhaps the most impressive formal feature, and the most sophisticated aesthetic advance, is to be found in the construction of the book. Besides its overall architectonic design and cohesion, it exhibits at times a complex narrative technique, quite unlike either the simple episodic or the emboxing procedures that are the norm in Sanskrit literature. This not only achieves a dramatic intensity of a very high order, but serves, on occasion, obliquely and for that reason the more effectively, to concretize certain aspects of the basic problematic of the story.

²³ Well described by Lewis 1942, pp. 1-2.

The *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* is probably the most skillfully structured of the seven sections of the poem; the links of the plot are securely and tightly concatenated. Our sight is never allowed to wander as the story progresses toward the final conflict and resolution (or provisional resolution, for the story does continue). And the progress has an implacable quality to it, marked by stirring and at times vehement and bitter encounters between the principal characters, by sudden and compelling reversals, and the stimulation and frustration of our expectations. This kind of artistry will be perceptible to even the casual reader, who will immediately appreciate how the narrative is propelled by the intensely dramatic series of confrontations: between Mantharā and Kaikeyī (*sargas* 7-9), Kaikeyī and Daśaratha (10-12), Rāma and Sītā (23-27), Bharata and Kausalyā (69), Rāma and Bharata (97-99, 103-104), to mention only the most prominent.

Beyond the mere linear development of the action, we can discern two other narrative modes that function as formal correlatives to the major problematic of the story. The first is distinguished by its spatial discontinuity, the second by its temporal synchrony.

The narrative time span for approximately the first two-thirds of the book is extremely brief. The action of *sargas* 1-40 (1-4 and 7-12 excepted) occurs in a single day; 1-63 all together occupy only ten days.²⁴ The feeling we get about Rāma's departure is a long ache rather than a single sharp pain. Moreover, if so much of the story occupies so limited a temporal framework, we would naturally expect a lingering, minute examination of what action there is from multiple perspectives—which, in fact, we do find. Whereas the narrative in the first mode proceeds directly forward, here we constantly find the scene shifting to register individual responses to the action. Diachronic narration starts in *sarga* 13, where for the first time the separate strands of the narrative are fully interwoven, but soon a spatial discontinuity sets in. With Rāma's departure from the city in *sarga* 35, the narrative focus begins to alternate frequently: to Ayodhyā (36-39), to Rāma (40-41), to Ayodhyā (42), back to Rāma (43-50), to Ayodhyā (51-87; on 51-58 in particular

²⁴ 2.64-104, with the seven days of Bharata's journey and the thirteen days of Daśaratha's funeral subtracted, take up some eight days. The narrative time-keeping pretty much ends with Bharata's departure from Mount Citrakūṭa and the commencement of Rāma's stay in the forest where, in a sense, normal time is suspended.

see below), to Rāma (88-91), to Bharata (92), when finally the action is again unified (93-104), only to disconnect once more into separate strands (105-107 concern Bharata, 108-11 Rāma).

Rāma's fate is not his alone; his family as well as the entire community are involved in it. From the hero's banishment result dilemmas of every sort—social, political, ethical. This kind of narrative presentation (which is not in any way a "natural" consequence of the story, as a comparison with the end of *Mahābhārata* 2 shows) permits us to witness each successive predicament as it is individually addressed. At the same time, it continually underscores the central importance of Rāma, and, by juxtaposing his response to those of the other characters, allows us to distinguish its uniqueness. Additionally, in a way less easily analyzed or demonstrated, the form of dyadic progression itself seems to incarnate the spirit of dilemma that so pervades the book.

A rather more subtle narrative procedure is discernible in the synchronous mode. Here the narrative does not move directly forward but retraces itself to examine the same narrative time frame from two different vantage points. A telling example is provided early in the book.²⁵ *Sargas* 7-9 backtrack to show us the previous day's conversation between Mantharā and Kaikeyī, which is taking place at the same moment as the one between Daśaratha and Rāma (*sarga* 4). The simultaneity of plot and counterplot produces the expectation of explosive fusion.

Less transparent but more elegant and expressive is the instance that occurs in *sargas* 50-58. In *sarga* 50 Rāma reaches the grove of asceticism and settles down, with a feeling almost of contentment, to his life in exile. It is the sixth evening of his banishment, as we can discover by following the poet's careful chronological indications.²⁶ At that very hour, back in Ayodhyā, Daśaratha lies plunged in sorrow and recovers at last the memory of the evil deed of his youth: he remembers that long ago he had slain a young ascetic and had been cursed by the boy's father. Now blind and feeble and

²⁵ The passage won the enthusiastic admiration of A. W. von Schlegel as early as 1838: "Not only is nothing confused in the ordering of events, but we can observe a marvellous artifice on the poet's part in ordering the narrative: presenting first everything that could awaken the most certain expectations of the happy event, he delays till the last possible moment the presentation of the fatal obstacle that will suddenly confound everything" (Schlegel 1838, p. 257).

²⁶ The six evenings of Rāma's exile: *sargas* 40, 45, 47, 48, 49, 50. See also 51.1, 4, and notes; 56.14, 57.3, where the poet becomes explicit.

as good as childless, Daśaratha is reduced to a condition identical to that of the seer he had bereaved, while Rāma, the son whom Kausalyā accuses her husband of having destroyed (55.20), has at the same moment been transformed into an ascetic of the sort Daśaratha had murdered.²⁷

The synchronicity of the narrative here helps to make manifest a complex and richly suggestive set of latent correspondences. One further effect it has is to reinforce a dominant theme that we have already noticed: the role of fate, which blends together in an often violently interactive synthesis separate and perhaps otherwise benign destinies, and whose operations are as mysterious as they are inexorable.²⁸

²⁷ Although Rāma mats his hair and adopts "the vow of forest hermits" in 46.55-58, he does not appear to enter fully on the renouncer's way of life until he reaches the grove of asceticism in *sarga* 50 (in 49.14, for example, he still eats meat, despite his claim in 17.15; see note to 48.15). For further parallels between the stories of Daśaratha/Rāma and the seer and his son, see 57.20, 27, 32 and notes, and note to 58.48. Jacobi underestimates the poet's narrative skill. He explains Daśaratha's death on the sixth day (rather than immediately after Rāma's departure, as *poetische Gerechtigkeit* demands) either as the result of the mistaken belief that narrative time must correspond to real time (that is, if Rāma's progress had been followed for six days, the scene in Ayodhyā that immediately ensues must be six days later), or for other, more implausible reasons (Jacobi 1893, pp. 47-50; addendum p. 255). See note on 57.3.

²⁸ Not so significant but nonetheless interesting as an indication of the poet's self-conscious artistry is the narrative parallelism of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*. The city and forest scenes where Rāma is begged to reconsider his decision unfold in similar ways: Kausalyā's demands for obedience, 18.16-21 = Vasiṣṭha's, 103.1-4; Lakṣmaṇa's counter-arguments, 18.1-15, 20.1-35 = Jābāli's, 100; Rāma's defense, 19.13-22 = 101; Kausalyā's threat to fast to death, 18.23 = Bharata's, 103.12-19; the sentiments of the people, 30.15-20 = 103.19-23. This was first pointed out, though with some not very persuasive conclusions, by Ruben (1956, pp. 48-49).

7. The Characters

IF THE STYLE and narrative organization of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* often show great and easily accessible artistry, it may perhaps be more difficult for the modern reader to evaluate and gauge the quality of characterization. Since the characters are first fully introduced to us in this book, it is appropriate here to consider how they are depicted and to enquire whether there is any reason for us to temper our response, which initially may be unfavorable.

I think we can observe definite and important differences in the methods of characterization. Two distinct groups of characters seem to present themselves: those, on the one hand, who possess the natural uneven contours of imperfect human beings, depths where we can hear the cacophonous resonances of familiar emotions—hate no less than love, and ambition, remorse, fear, envy, rancor—and the many tones of moral uncertainty, of doubts, compunctions, scruples; and those, on the other, who seem to lack all this, who are more regular and flat, with almost emblematic features.

Daśaratha, Kaikeyī, and Kausalyā have a natural unevenness. They command full and complex emotional and moral registers, and a wide range of their modulations can be clearly heard throughout much of the book. Choices confront them with which they must grapple; they suffer and in their suffering engage in a painful and very human process of self-recognition. They thereby learn some fundamental truths about themselves and come to understand the consequences of reckless desire, or the hollowness of success achieved at the cost of one's integrity, or the futility of naive hope.

Yet we perceive all this only if we search for it; the culmination of these processes is rarely allowed into the foreground of the narrative. In the case of Daśaratha, the impact of recognition is deflected and appreciably diminished: it is turned into a useless if exonerating discovery of an act done long ago, over which he no longer has control—if, indeed, he ever had. With respect to Kaikeyī, although we see the groundwork prepared for her realization, we are never given the opportunity to witness it. After her principal narrative function is completed (*sarga* 33), she is given only several silent entrances (37.4, 60.1ff., 72.19ff., 86.16). What appears to be

reconciliation (77.6) or contrition (86.16) is never developed or explained.

The treatment of Kausalyā is similar, and the many hints about her personal tragedy scattered throughout the book make the absence of some final resolution more conspicuous. Much of her story is only vaguely suggested, and we are left to reconstruct it inferentially. Her husband never loved her, and she set her hopes on finding in a son the joy and comfort denied her in her marriage (17.22, cf. 10.17 and note on 40). With the arrival of Kaikeyī she was “superseded” (see 28.7 and note), and from then on she sought retribution for her wrongs by her son’s succession to the throne (4.38-39), living a life of religious austerity with the aim of securing her goals. But her realization is a bitter one:

What a sorrowful thing that my vows, my gifts of alms, and acts of self-denial have all been to no avail, that the austerities I practiced for my child’s sake have proved to be as barren as seed sown in a desert. (17.31)

But this limited discovery is all we are shown. The more important resolution of her relationship with Daśaratha is never provided. We get some sense of a final reconciliation through shared suffering (*sarga* 56; note on 57.7), but the poet does not take the trouble to substantiate it.

Vālmīki, rather clearly, is uninterested in these contingent characters. This whole rich ensemble of substantial and comprehensible human emotion is left incomplete, reduced to an epiphenomenon taking place on the periphery of Rāma’s world. The poet’s indifference is, of course, partly a result of the fact that Rāma and those who directly participate in his sacrifice—Lakṣmaṇa, Sītā, and Bharata—are the principal focus of his attention. But Vālmīki’s unconcern has some other origin, which will become apparent if we examine his characterization of the second set.

The reader will probably be struck, despite the driving momentum of the action, by a feeling of stasis in these four characters. In contrast to those just discussed, they do not grow or change in the course of the narrative, or develop through inner struggle in the presence of moral choice.¹ They answer without hesitation the so-

¹ It has been argued that the poet disallows this by his bipartition of “whole” character types. Rāma’s inner struggle is objectified in his alter ego Lakṣmaṇa, as less significantly Bharata’s in Śatrughna (see Goldman 1980, pp. 164ff.).

cial and moral questions with which they are presented, for the most part secure in their particular patterns of behavior. Unlike Kaikeyī or Daśaratha, they define themselves in relation to others with an immutable and unnatural consistency. Their actions, consequently, have an emblematic regularity about them.

This, I believe, is exactly what the poet wishes us to perceive in them. He was not restricted in his characterization by some metaphysical concepts peculiar to India about time, causality, or reality, which predisposed him to see the transcendent and enduring in the local and transient. We have just viewed in the first set of characters the full range and clarity of his vision. Rāma and the others are evidently designed to be monovalent paradigms of conduct.

Vālmīki has not only an aesthetic intention but a didactic purpose, as well. And he has created these four great moral figures to achieve that purpose. The specific moral dimension of each is encapsulated in a formulaic, often alliterative, epithet, which augments the impression of stasis; no such tags are, or could have been, provided for Daśaratha, Kaikeyī, or Kausalyā. Rāma is the "champion of righteousness" (*rāmo dharmabhṛtāṃ varah*); Bharata "a man of brotherly love" (*bharato bhrātṛvatsalah*); Lakṣmaṇa "marked with goodness" (*lakṣmaṇaḥ śubhalakṣaṇaḥ*) in devotedly serving his eldest brother; Sītā is "like the daughter of the gods" (*sītā surasutoḥpamā*), by reason of both her beauty and the virtue (that is, unwavering fidelity to her husband) that in Indian culture beauty is so often said to reflect.²

The two sets of characters thus serve very different literary func-

² The concomitance of beauty and virtue is stated most succinctly by Kālidāsa as a proverb: "Beauty cannot do wrong" (*pāpavṛttaye na rūpam*, *KumāraSaṃ* 5.36; also *yatrākṛtis tatra guṇā vasanti*, "Virtue and beauty go hand in hand," *Śāk.* 4.0.7-8 [Pischel]). Cf. Kale's remark, "For beauty of person presupposes a degree of religious merit on the part of the person endowed with it; hence such a person cannot be expected to lead a sinful life" (Kale 1967 ad loc.), and the passages he adduces, especially *Mṛcch* 9.16, *na hy ākṛtiḥ susadr̥ṣaṃ vijahāti vṛttam* ("Beauty and good conduct always go hand in hand," spoken by the judge).

The later purāṇic tradition clearly was aware of the four moral dimensions and the paradigmatic quality of the characters:

[Kuśa and Lava sang the story of Rāma] wherein the ways of righteousness are set forth before one's very eyes [Rāma], and fidelity to one's husband [Sītā], great brotherly love [Bharata], and devotion to one's guru [Lakṣmaṇa]" (*PadmaP* 4.66.128).

tions. The four central ones embody permanent moral values in a society marked by generalized contingency.³ The others (and this is the only sort known to the poets of the central portions of the *Mahābhārata*) typify precisely that uncertainty, hesitancy, and vacillation; it is for this reason that their personal fates are not pertinent. We may find it hard to respond to the former, since they will necessarily lack moral variety, although they retain a certain "freedom of sentiment" that often saves the work from lapsing into melodrama.⁴ But we must remember that if they do not manifest a recognizable human complexity it is because they were never intended to do so; Rāma's "true feelings" will remain secret, and properly so, for they are quite irrelevant to the poem's purposes. These characters must be ideal because they are imaginary solutions to problems that do not admit of real solutions. The didactic exigencies of the work required perfect moral types, and perfection, by definition, does not alter.⁵

³ This manner of characterization has parallels in other traditions (cf. Fränkel 1962, pp. 30, 37), and it has even been argued that it is fundamental to much western epic (not just to "altorientalische Despotismus," as claimed by Ruben 1936, pp. 34-35). One authority has remarked that "what epic can't do is to accommodate private, esoteric states of feeling or complex analyses of character. From Virgil to screen westerns the characters act out the *type* of a Roman, a barbarian" (Lawrence Kitchen cited by Merchant 1971, p. 83). But these kinds of generalizations are less helpful than specific explorations of the reasons enforcing the convention. We see in the *Rāmāyaṇa* that it is only partially observed, and in that part quite purposefully. Thus, with respect to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, it is not possible to agree that "there are no individuals in Sanskrit literature, there are only types" (Ingalls 1968, p. 17).

⁴ This point is well brought out by D.H.H. Ingalls, whose remarks are worth quoting at length:

"In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which sets the pattern for much in Sanskrit literature, we witness the making of decisions, but there is never any doubt what the decisions will be. Rāma could not disobey his father without ceasing to be the Rāma he has been from the moment we first see him in childhood. Nor can one imagine a Sitā who would not join Rāma in his banishment. How different are Rāma and Sitā from the characters that set the patterns of European literature! An Antigone only comes to be Antigone by the tragic choice that we see her make. And yet, the predestination of action in the Indian poem does not produce a mechanical effect. The characters have a certain freedom of sentiment as opposed to a freedom of action. What they will do is not in doubt, but they may do it with compassion or stoicism, with laughter or eagerness or fear, sentiments which seem to arise from within as much as to be occasioned from without" (1968, p. 17).

⁵ Rāma's madness in the *Aranyakāṇḍa* (56-60) is a unique deviation, which will be discussed in the introduction to that volume.

With all that said, it will still be useful to consider more closely several of the main characters of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*: the female figures as a group, Daśaratha, and Rāma. In the first case, we must investigate an apparent disjuncture between precept and practice; in the second, we have to examine further the poet's idealizing treatment of a problematic character; and in the third our attention is commanded by a figure who represents a new attitude in the history of Indian thought.

8. The Women of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*

LIKE THE *Rāmāyaṇa* as a whole, the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* is as interested in the domain of sexual relations as in socio-political life in general. The structure of relationships in the one sphere is fundamentally congruent with that of the other, not surprisingly, given their constitutive (if complex) interaction.¹ We have already seen that the poet is reluctant to let the message of the story emerge on its own, that he intervenes to explain what the fictional events are supposed to mean to the social formation at large. The same thing happens with respect to sexual relations, and to a much greater degree.

“A woman’s first recourse is her husband,” Kausalyā says to Daśaratha, “her second is her son, her third her kinsmen. She has no fourth in this world” (55.18). Here we have, possibly for the first time in Indian literature, a formulation of what was to become the normative view, strictly enforced in practice, on the status of women. The *locus classicus* is found in the *Lawbook of Manu*,² which recasts the idea and unambiguously appends the logical conclusion:

In childhood a woman must bow to the will of her father, in adulthood, to the will of the man who marries her, and when her husband is dead, to the will of her sons. She must never have independence. (5.148)

Inasmuch as the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* deals chiefly with marital relationships, it is the woman’s position vis-à-vis her husband that is the principal subject of explicit didactic intervention, and the poet seems never to tire of repeating the categorical imperative:

So long as she lives, a woman’s one deity and master is her husband. (Rāma to Kausalyā, 21.17)

You must not feel disdain for my son in his banishment. He is your deity, whether he be rich or poor. (Kausalyā to Sītā, 34.21)

¹ This interaction is apparent to some degree in the text itself, in the political doctrine of paternalism and in the sexual metaphors used to express a primary economic relationship, the king’s possession of the land (see chapter 3 note 15 above). More particularly, one might consider such a verse as 2.61.9.

² The *Rām* commentators ad loc. make the same connection with *Manusmṛti*, only they point to the doublet, 9.3.

I fully understand how to behave toward my husband. . . . A husband is a woman's deity. (Sītā to Kausalyā, 34.23 and 27)

Ever venerate the feet of my lord [your husband], as if he were a god. (Rāma to Kausalyā, 52.14)

To a woman of noble nature her husband is the supreme deity, however bad his character, however licentious or indigent he might be. (Anasūyā to Sītā, 109.24)

A woman must show her husband obedience and earnestly strive to please and benefit him. Such is the way of righteousness discovered long ago, revealed in the *veda* and handed down in the world. (Rāma to Kausalyā, 21.21)

There is a close congruence between these precepts and the broader social interpretation offered by the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*. Although the poet portrays some expression of resistance to this interpretation (Lakṣmaṇa, Jābāli), this seems to be little more than artifice, enabling the hero to argue out his position; no one enacts opposition. In the case of the female characters, however, we find some essential contradictions between the ideal and the actual, between the accepted norms and the specific behavior. For the women of the story do seem to be strong, self-willed, in fact independent.

Whatever the real purpose behind Rāma's initial reluctance to take her with him to the forest,³ Sītā is by no means ready to submit to his command. She argues vigorously, at one point insulting her husband:

What could my father Vaideha, the lord of Mithilā, have had in mind when he took you for son-in-law, Rāma, a woman with the body of a man? . . . like a procurer, Rāma, you are willing of your own accord to hand me over to others. (27.3, 8)

Her declared position is that "Even if my husband were wholly lacking in good behavior, . . . still I would always obey him wholeheartedly" (110.3). Yet here we see her caustically disputing and engaging with her husband as an equal.

Kausalyā similarly opposes her husband, with equal spirit and even greater frequency (38.1-7; 51.24-27; 55). If she can say that a woman has but three recourses in her life, she can also tell her

³ See the notes on 23.23 and 27.26.

husband, "And you are no recourse for me." When Rāma informs her of his banishment, she insists that she shall desert her husband and go with her son. Rāma must remind her that

For a woman to desert her husband is wickedness pure and simple. You must not do so despicable a thing, not even think it. (21.9)

In the same way, later in the story, during Kausalyā's harshest attack against her husband, Daśaratha himself must reacquaint her with the imperative:

And as you know, my lady, a woman who has regard for righteousness should hold her husband, whether he is virtuous or not, to be a deity incarnate. (56.5)

The contradiction between precept and practice that surfaces in these episodes is concretely realized in the character of Kaikeyī.

There are substantial ambiguities in Kaikeyī's character. If, by formula, Sītā is beautiful and therefore good (as the servant Mantharā is ugly and therefore wicked), Kaikeyī occupies some ambivalent middle zone. "The golden Kaikeyī," Vālmiki calls her—fair as gold and just as malleable, as one commentator explains.⁴ And indeed the impression is unavoidable, for the modern reader at least, that here is a good and trusting woman who is being slowly corrupted (*sargas* 7-9). But for nearly everyone in the story—Lakṣmaṇa (90.20-21), Kausalyā (60.3ff.), Bharata (*sarga* 67), and the people at large (42.18-21)—she is simply an evil woman, blinded by her ambition to the cruelty of her acts. Her inclination to do wrong was natural and was only activated by her servant:

A greedy person is oblivious to risks; he will eat even fruit that makes one sick. And thus, at the instigation of the hunchback, Kaikeyī has destroyed the House of the Rāghavas. (60.6)

One branch of the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition, in fact, adds an illustrative story to prove that her evil nature was inherited,⁵ and Daśaratha discerns inimical scheming in her family as well as in the woman herself (53.15).

The poet cannot refrain from judging Kaikeyī. He calls her guile-

⁴ See 9.44 and note.

⁵ Properly rejected by the critical edition; see note on 32.1.

ful (10.3), unscrupulous (12.8), ignoble (16.54), artful (66.14), and so on. More effectively, he illustrates these traits through her behavior in the skillfully crafted scene of her reunion with Bharata (*sarga* 66), where the calculated nonchalance of her horrific disclosures evinces a brutality that has numbed her to all normal emotional response. As we have seen, Vālmīki also goes out of his way to eliminate the one factor that can extenuate her guilt, the legitimacy of her claim to the kingship. Only Rāma affirms the propriety of her behavior (103.29),⁶ or excuses it on the grounds that she was compelled by fate (19.16-22). And only the seer Bharadvāja is vouchsafed the larger view:

Bharata, you must not impute any fault to Kaikeyī. The banishment of Rāma will turn out to be a great blessing. (86.28)

Vālmīki, it appears, meant Kaikeyī to serve largely as a negative exemplar. The scene, for example, where the impudent queen forces her husband to grovel before her (*sarga* 10.40-*sarga* 11) is hard to forget, and not only because of its drama. The poet will not let us forget, for he later shows how a good wife is to behave in such circumstances (55.7-13). Kaikeyī, then, would be intended as an illustration of what happens when a woman seeks to act autonomously: she destroys the foundation of her life, her husband:

Without strings a lute cannot be played, without wheels a chariot cannot move, without her husband a woman finds no happiness, though she have a hundred sons. (34.25)

And it is no doubt this aspect of her portrait that makes the greatest impact on the reader.

But if, like both Bharadvāja and the later *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition, we are disposed or even supposed to see her primarily as an instrument, a catalyst, a "dramatic mechanism," we may be approaching a vantage point where the contradictions between the poet's stubbornly reiterated homilies and the behavior of the other female characters can be transcended and so resolved. From such a perspective we see that these characters actually function on the whole either to enact the emotional content of the narrative, or as sound-

⁶ His words in 47.14-18 may well be, as the commentators suggest, only pretense: he is trying to persuade Lakṣmaṇa to return to Ayodhyā in order to take care of Kausalyā.

ing-boards by means of which the proper role of women may be clearly articulated. They are merely instruments of the narrative, passively acted upon but not significant agents of the action. If superficially they deviate from the pattern, structurally, in their fully subservient functionality, they conform to it. In this sense, then, there is no conflict: in their "real" practice they are permitted no independence and exercise none.

9. Daśaratha

I HAVE ALREADY argued that in the course of the development of the Rāma story, alterations appear to have been made in order to secure a more idealized action and characterization. The effects of this revision are particularly noticeable in the case of the portrait of Daśaratha.

Initially Daśaratha is presented to us as the venerable, dignified, self-disciplined, and virtuous monarch. He tells us that as king he has “always kept to the path my ancestors followed” (2.4). We are invited to infer his integrity when he says, “I have grown weary bearing the burden of righteousness for the world. For it is heavy, one must have self-discipline to bear it” (2.7). Early in the story he advises Rāma, “exercise constant self-control, and avoid all the vices that spring from desire and anger” (3.26), giving us every reason to suppose that he practices what he preaches.

In the development of the story, however, the conflict between these professions and his behavior becomes irreconcilable. For other traits, elements of the structure of the narrative, slowly but with unmistakable clarity emerge: Daśaratha is weak, tyrannical, and reckless.

If these traits can be subsumed under any single character flaw, it is the king's unmastered sexual desire.¹ In the magnificent scene in *sarga* 10, under the pressure exerted by this desire, the king's whole personality begins to disintegrate. The unspeakable deeds of which it makes him capable now come out into the open. Pathetically attempting to ingratiate himself with his capricious young wife, the king asks her,

Is there some guilty man who should be freed, or some innocent man I should execute? What poor man should I enrich, what rich man impoverish? (10.10)²

If the reader should overlook the enormity of this offer, the text itself, once again, is there to remind and instruct him. When Bha-

¹ On the possible multivalence of this theme, see chapter 3 note 15 above.

² The first line is one of the very few from the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* that appears verbatim in the *Rāmopākhyāna* (*MBh* 3.261.22), an indication of its power if not of its antiquity.

rata is told that Rāma has been banished, he fears it might have been as the result of some heinous crime:

Concerned for the greatness of his dynasty, he began questioning her further: "Rāma did not seize the wealth of any brahman, did he? He did not harm some innocent man, whether rich or poor?" (66.36-37)

Later on we learn from Rāma that what Daśaratha has proposed to Kaikeyī is the kind of conduct a king must avoid at all costs:

No noble, honest man is ever charged with theft, I hope, without being interrogated by men learned in the sacred texts; and if innocent, is never imprisoned out of greed. And when a thief . . . has been seized and interrogated, I hope he is never set free . . . out of greed for money. . . . For the tears people shed when falsely accused come to slay the livestock and children of the king who rules for personal gain. (94.47-48, 50)

Daśaratha, in fact, should be viewed as one of several studies in calamitous passion, along with Vālin and Rāvaṇa himself,³ and like them a figure designed as a foil to Rāma. He conspicuously lacks the emotional control of his son, the self-discipline, equanimity, and dignity. Rāma's strictly monogamous sexuality likewise stands in sharp contrast to the habits of his father. And whereas Daśaratha offers the kingship as brideprice for Kaikeyī (the *rājyaśulka*), Rāma wins Sītā by a "feat of heroic strength" (the *vīryaśulka*, *sarga* 110; *Bālakāṇḍa* 66ff.). Daśaratha's own character is distinctly projected when at one point he imagines Rāma's banishment as a kind of holiday outing: in the forest "there will be deer and elephants to kill, forest liquor to drink" (32.5). Rāma conceives of his sacrifice in considerably different terms:

But it is righteousness . . . that I am set on following today. (27.28)

I will . . . live a life of purity in the forest, restricting my food to holy things, roots, fruit, and flowers. . . . My five senses will have contentment enough, and I shall be maintaining the world on its course. (101.26-27)

As Daśaratha's transgression was committed, in Bharata's words, "out of anger [v.l., greed], delusion, and recklessness" (98.52), so

³ For a full discussion cf. Ruben 1950, especially p. 352.

Rāma says to Jābāli that “not out of greed, delusion, or ignorance” would he himself ever act untruthfully (101.17). Although Rāma seems clearly to recognize the failings of his father, the latter is not once shown to possess any awareness of the need to uphold righteousness. At one point Rāma makes him the object of an important—perhaps the most important—gnomic utterance of the book:

Whoever forsakes righteousness [*dharma*] and statecraft [*artha*] and follows the urgings of desire [*kāma*], will soon come to grief, just like King Daśaratha. (47.13)

The portrait, then, is constructed with careful, effective, and tragic irony—we suppose. But standing against the whole spirit and much of the letter of the story are many disavowals. The “truthful Rāma” himself assures us that the king is “noble and self-controlled” (46.20), “a truthful man, true to his word, ever striving for truth” (19.7). Is this wilful blindness, one wonders, a son’s attempt to reassert his father’s rectitude in the face of so much evidence to the contrary? Yet when the poet begins to describe the king as “the truthful and righteous lord of men, like the ocean in profundity and as free from taint as the sky” (31.6), our suspicions are aroused, and they focus on Vālmīki himself.

We might conclude that there is a fundamental ambiguity in Vālmīki’s conception of Daśaratha. But it is even more probable that he was reluctant to reproduce unchanged the received characterization of the king.⁴ It was too fundamental to discard, but it could be transfigured by some extenuating incident.

The earlier tale, as we saw, must have turned on the brideprice offer Daśaratha attempted to reverse and the one boon the reckless king was seduced into bestowing during his interview with Kaikeyī. This Vālmīki revised into the present story: two boons granted as a noble gesture of gratitude at a war of gods and demons, Kaikeyī’s claim to the throne being now complete deception. A further transmutation, in the same spirit of exoneration, seems to have been effected elsewhere.

⁴ Epic bards participated in a world of social relations like anyone else. Open criticism of legitimate kings is rare, and if weakness and tyranny are represented, an attempt is usually made to palliate this representation. An instructive example is *MBh* 15.15, especially verses 15ff., where this mechanism leads the poet to an encomium on Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Duryodhana that is irreconcilable with the description of their actions in the first fourteen books of the epic.

The text suggests that originally the tale recounted the tragedy of an old king overmastered by his passion for a beautiful young woman, who then had to face the disastrous consequences of the grave commitments he rashly made and later found impossible to keep. Daśaratha himself at one point is shown to perceive and admit his guilt. He fell into the trap set for him by Kaikeyī and her family, and abdicated the responsibility incumbent upon him as king to make rational political and moral judgments:

Kaikeyī, a woman of evil family and evil designs, forced me, and I failed to seek the advice of elders skilled in counsel. I failed to take counsel with my friends, my ministers, and wise brahmins. It was on my own, in delusion, for a woman's sake that I did the rash thing I have done. (53.15-16)

But then there follows the defense that the poet will shortly expand into the only⁵ fully developed subnarrative of the book:

Or perhaps—yes, surely charioteer, this great calamity was something destined to be, that had somehow to happen, to bring ruin upon this House. (53.17)

Under the impact of Kausalyā's harsh criticism of him (*sarga* 55), Daśaratha plumbs "the very depths of his grief, and there a memory was revived of something evil he once did" (55.21). Later, as he continues to brood, the recollection of an evil deed of his youth again flashes momentarily across his mind (56.2). Finally, in the dark night of his soul, there emerges into full consciousness the remembrance of the event that made Rāma's exile inevitable, and doomed Daśaratha (57.3).

Sargas 57-58 constitute a brilliantly composed and moving section with considerable poetic power.⁶ But at present its narrative function is of principal interest. Daśaratha here still recognizes the weakness and imprudence that led him to spurn Kausalyā and come under Kaikeyī's power (57.6-7), traits that he seems to recognize as part of his own character even in youth. As a young man he was proud of the reputation he had earned as an archer who could

⁵ With the possible, if minor, exception of *sarga* 110.

⁶ It caught the attention of early European scholars. Aside from the rudimentary attempts of Friedrich Schlegel in 1808 (cf. Oppenberg 1965, pp. 54ff.), it was the first extended passage of the *Rāmāyaṇa* to be correctly translated in Europe (Chézy 1814; the work of Carey and Marshman, 1806-1810, was carried on in India).

strike a target without looking, merely by hearing it move. And with this pride was coupled a natural intemperance (57.8-9, 15). But perhaps we should believe that it is less Daśaratha's weakness that opens the door to doom than the compulsion of doom that causes the weakness to begin with.⁷ Out hunting, Daśaratha shoots blindly in the night at a sound coming from the deserted riverbank. What he had thought to be an elephant was a young ascetic who had renounced all violence, and whose murder will entail the death of his two blind parents. The fact that the crime was wholly unintentional only secures for Daśaratha a temporary reprieve (58.20-21); it cannot avert the curse of the boy's father that ultimately the king, like the sage, "will end his days grieving for a son" (58.45-46).

Vālmiki appears to have reworked and inserted a narrative derived from the folk tradition (preserved for us in the form of the *Sāmajātaka*), one that could be adapted to harmonize with the pervasive fatalism of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*.⁸ By means of this, the poet was able to effect yet another alteration in his idealization of Daśaratha, and to relieve him of any direct responsibility for what happened to his son.⁹ "How unlike me it was . . . to do what I did to Rāghava!" the king protests one last time before he dies. It was not an act, we now are told, that was in any way characteristic of him, or for which he is to be held accountable, but the doing of some hidden power, as inexplicable and uncontrollable as the force that guided an arrow shot in the dark to the heart of an ascetic boy. The king is no longer

⁷ "When a man is to be ruined by implacable doom," we are told later in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, "he loses all sense of right and wrong—and it is this that dooms him" (3.54.16; cf. 2.98.51 and *MBh* 2.72.8-11).

⁸ See note on 57.10. The degree of inter-recensional divergence for these two chapters is unusually high. This may well indicate that the episode originates in the latest compositional stratum of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and was imperfectly absorbed into the oral tradition. Oldenberg, on stylistic grounds, likewise puts the *Rām* version later than the Pāli *jātaka* ("One sees how the simple presentation of the other text is here [in the *Rām*] enriched, nuanced, lent accents," and so on, 1918, p. 459).

⁹ This tendency is evident elsewhere in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*. Nowhere in our text does Daśaratha explicitly command Rāma to leave; in 31.25ff., he only gives the prince permission to depart, and even here some manuscripts, including the critical edition, seem reluctant to attribute the words directly to Daśaratha; see note *ad loc.* and on 12.16ff. A problem never conclusively solved by the text is the lie of which Daśaratha becomes guilty by *failing* to consecrate Rāma after having declared in open assembly that he would do so (*sarga* 2). The king himself, in a curious aside, recognizes his dilemma (11.2), and later in the epic Lakṣmaṇa pointedly reverts to it (6.70.27).

a victim of his own choices, as all the previous narrative would seem to have us believe; he is instead a victim of chance. And thereby, again, his probity is preserved intact.¹⁰

¹⁰ Despite the purely accidental character of the deed, the later *Rāmāyana* tradition apparently felt it necessary to minimize even this degree of Daśaratha's guilt. The ascetic boy seems originally to have been described as the son of a brahman, and was subsequently changed, in our *Rāmāyana*, into the son of a *vaiśya* (and a *sūdrā*). See the notes on 57.37, 58.46 and 47.

10. Rāma

IN SOME respects it may be erroneous for us to think of the protagonist of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a hero. Properly understood, heroes are those who do great things in the face of certain defeat, such as Achilles, Siegfried, Roland, Cuchulain.¹ They far transcend us and are not figures we are supposed to emulate. Rāma emphatically is; and the various types of behavior that he exemplifies—filial devotion, for example, or obedience—we have already observed.

Moreover, as has often been remarked, heroes generally set themselves apart from their community, and it is the latter that asserts the true values of the society, to which the hero as an outsider is unable to accommodate himself. In the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, just the reverse is true: the community itself is shown to be in the wrong. At every step of the way, Rāma must instruct each in his proper role: his mother (18.26-31, 21.9-22), his father (31.25, 32), his brothers Lakṣmaṇa (18.32-36, 20.36, 91.2-6) and Bharata (97.17-24, 98.37-39, 99.8-14), his ministers (101). The appeal to Rāma that is sounded throughout the book ends, finally, in the choruslike supplication made by his own spiritual teacher, Vasiṣṭha:

I was your father's teacher and am yours, too, slayer of foes; in doing my bidding you will not stray from the path of the good. Here are the men of your assembly and the guildsmen gathered together; in practicing righteousness on their behalf, my son, you will not stray from the path of the good. Your mother is aged and righteous, and you must not disobey her; in doing as she bids you will not stray from the path of the good. If you do as Bharata bade when supplicating you, Rāghava, you will not go astray in your pursuit of truth and righteousness. (103.4-7)

But Rāma is uncompromising, secure in the conviction that the imperatives he is honoring must take precedence, since they are fundamental. This feature of his character is intimately related to another model role he plays in the poem, that of the ideal king.

Two primary considerations that underpin Rāma's behavior are

¹ Cf. Griffin 1980, pp. 81-102, especially pp. 92-93.

his concern for public opinion and for “righteousness” (*dharma*). The former has its parallels elsewhere in Indian epic poetry, but nowhere else is it so conditioned by a sense of “righteousness,” and nowhere is “righteousness” itself invested with the special significance it possesses in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*.

A keen sense of honor and shame—an overriding emphasis on the opinion of other men—is characteristic of most protagonists in heroic epics. And this is no less the case with Rāma. Consider his statement to Lakṣmaṇa:

In my rage, Lakṣmaṇa, all by myself I could overpower Ayodhyā or the world with my arrows. But truly force is useless. I fear the danger of unrighteousness [*adharmā*], blameless Lakṣmaṇa, and I fear what other people might say. That is why I do not have myself consecrated at once. (47.25-26)

It is from this fear of what “other people” might say that Rāma wishes to free the king:

Let my father . . . be freed from the fears he has of what other people might say. For if this rite were not called off, he too would suffer mental torment to hear his truthfulness impugned. (19.7-8)²

Lakṣmaṇa realizes that here Rāma is indirectly speaking of himself, and responds accordingly:

Now is not the time for panic, the source of this sheer folly. Could a man like you talk this way were he not panicked, fearful of losing people’s respect on account of some infraction of righteousness [*dharmadoṣa*-]? (20.5-6)

In the sixth and particularly the seventh books of the poem, this motivating factor in Rāma’s character will be dramatically highlighted. For fear of public opinion (about the chastity of his queen), he will demand that Sītā undergo an ordeal, and for the same reason he will ultimately repudiate her, the wife for whom he suffered so deeply, just as here in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* he renounces his claim to the kingship.

² See note on 19.7 for a discussion of this interpretation of *paraloka*-, “what other people might say.”

It is not so much concern for the “world to come” that conditions Rāma’s behavior³ as concern for this world and the opinion of the men who inhabit it. His desire for *yaśaḥ*, “glory,” a good name that will outlive him, weighs heavily when he prepares to go into banishment:

I cannot for the sake of mere kingship turn my back on glory [*yaśaḥ*], whose reward is great; nor, since life is so short, my lady, would I choose today this paltry land against all that is right [*adharmataḥ*]. (18.39)

That Rāma’s abdication was meant to confer glory on him is reiterated in Sumitrā’s address to Rāma’s mother:

What gain has your son failed to reap, who is waving the banner of his fame throughout the world by his self-restraint and devotion to truth? (39.7)

A thirst for glory is a quality everywhere associated with the heroic, and many analogies are to be found in Indian epic literature; a good example is Karṇa in the *Mahābhārata*. Normally it is prompted by fear of cowardice and ignominious behavior on the field of battle, and is quenched in suicidal struggle. In Rāma’s case, however, the desire for fame is coupled with and qualified by his understanding of “righteousness.” And for Rāma’s valuation of righteousness the other epics provide no precise antecedents; it is virtually a new attitude.

Rāma is a kshatriya, and we are well informed by other epic texts about the conventional understanding of the *dharma*—the proper conduct, the duties, the “righteous” behavior—of a kshatriya. The *Mahābhārata* takes pains to set it out with special clarity:

I shall explain to you the *dharma* of the kshatriya: He must give and not demand. . . . He must always be ready to slaughter the enemy, he must show bravery in battle. . . . The kshatriya who conquers in battle most effectively wins the [higher] worlds. Killing is the chief *dharma* of one who is a kshatriya. There is no higher duty for him than to destroy enemies. . . . [A kshatriya] who would satisfy the claims of his *dharma*, a king in particular, must fight. (*MBh* 12.60.13-18)

³ Though this does play some role; see 101.8ab, 104.6, etc.

The *dharma* of a kshatriya, as we have been told, includes great savagery. He lives by the sword and in due course dies by the sword in battle. . . . One's heart, a kshatriya's heart in particular, must be hard as adamant. . . . Indra was born the son of Brahmā, but he became a kshatriya by his actions: he slew his evil kinsmen, all ninety-nine of them, an act worthy of esteem and praise, and one that made him king of all gods. (*MBh* 12.22.5-12)⁴

Perhaps the most celebrated formulation occurs in the *Bhagavadgītā*, where Kṛṣṇa exhorts Arjuna before the cataclysmic battle:

You must take regard for your proper code of conduct [*svadharma*] and not waver. There is no better thing for a kshatriya than to wage righteous war. . . . Fortunate the kshatriyas who are granted such a war as this. . . . Better to die in the adherence to one's own code of righteousness; to adopt another's is a greater peril. (2.31-32; 3.55)

The injustice of Rāma's banishment, the unrighteousness of everyone implicated in it, is repeatedly emphasized by the text. We have already seen how Rāma acts in response to the arguments in favor of resistance that Lakṣmaṇa and others offer (*sargas* 18, 20, 90, 100, etc.), arguments very like those made by Kṛṣṇa.⁵ But how does Rāma answer the charge that he is acting contrarily in preferring the wilderness to the kshatriya order, "matted hair" to the government of men (98.56)? that he is neglecting "the code of righteousness appropriate" for him, the "code of kings" and the "traditional code of his House" (98.61, 104.10)? that, in essence, he is failing in his proper duty, his *dharma*? He answers by altogether reinterpreting what that proper duty is. He replies to Lakṣmaṇa:

So give up this ignoble notion that is based on the code of the

⁴ Note that for Rāma, Indra has achieved his position of preeminence not by slaughtering his kinsmen (vindicated by Vyāsa, 12.23.2), but rather by sacrificial rites (*Rāmāyaṇa* 2.101.29). (According to the *Mahāvāmsa* [5.18-20], Aśoka likewise slew his ninety-nine brothers to secure the kingship.)

⁵ Rāma's actions are consciously designed to ensure a moral order in society: "Were I to adopt this practice," he tells Jābāli, "the entire world would follow suit in acting as it pleases, for subjects will behave just like their kings" (101.8cd-9). This is exactly the position of Kṛṣṇa (*BhagGī* 3.21), but defends precisely the opposite course of action.

kshatriyas [*kṣātradharmā*]; be of like mind with me and base your actions on righteousness [*dharma*], not violence. (18.36)

Similarly, in his response to the *Realpolitik* of the minister Jābāli, Rāma asserts that he has a “personal code of righteousness” (*pratyagātma dharma*), one that he knows to be correct—a code that good men have always observed. He rejects out of hand

the kshatriya’s code [*kṣātram dharmam*], where unrighteousness and righteousness go hand in hand [*adharmam dharmasamhitam*], a code that only debased, vicious, covetous, and evil men observe. (101.20)

The glory at which Rāma aims, then, is not the martial fame his own guru Vasiṣṭha urges on him (102.31), but the fame of *dharma* in its new valuation (18.39) on behalf of which “force is useless.” Rāma is unequivocal: it is not for the sake of political power (*artha*) that he suffers living in the world; he is only concerned with *dharma*, “like a seer” (16.46); he is like the sage “who has passed beyond all things of this world” (16.59), he has “given up attachment to everything” (33.2). And it is the seer alone whom Rāma considers to be deserving of esteem and emulation:

Those men who are earnest in righteousness and keep company with the wise, who are supremely generous, nonviolent, and free from taint, those supreme and mighty sages are the ones truly worthy of reverence in this world. (101.31)

The path to the highest heaven for Rāma is not “conquest in battle,” as in the *Mahābhārata*,⁶ but “truth, righteousness, and strenuous effort, compassion for creatures and kindly words, reverence for brahmans, gods, and guests” (101.30).

We must not, however, leap from this to the conclusion that Rāma

⁶ Yudhiṣṭhira in the *MBh*, especially in Book 2, before the royal consecration, and in Book 5, before the decision to fight is made, exhibits some of the traits we see in Rāma. But these are not consistent and constitutive aspects of his portrait. If anything they are simply *pūrvapakṣas*, raised only to allow Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna, and the others to refute them and reassert true kshatriya *dharma* (which Yudhiṣṭhira invariably, albeit reluctantly, accepts). This becomes particularly clear in Book 12, where Yudhiṣṭhira’s desire to renounce is branded as *nāstikya* (atheism, heresy; cf. 12.25), while his brothers’ arguments for his enjoying the fruits of victory, however bloody, are called *vedanīscaya* (in conformity with the teachings of the *vedas*; cf. 14.1); Vyāsa himself, the authorial voice, concurs (*sargas* 23, 25; cf. Bhīṣma’s words in 12.55.14ff.).

represents a renouncer (though he is that in a special, restricted sense); he will come back to rule his kingdom. Here he is not so much rejecting the obligations of his social order as redefining them, transvaluating them. By subsuming his caste-specific *dharma* under a larger, superordinate *dharma*, he loosens the claims of the former by the same power that had given them their strength.

What is the significance of this reformulation? It has long been observed that there existed a fundamental dichotomy in the structure of power in ancient India. Although real power lay in the hands of the kshatriyas, its legitimation was in the hands of the brahmins. Hierarchy of status conferred supremacy on the brahman; the differentiation of actual power ("mere force") conferred supremacy on the kshatriya. There was a mutual dependence, the brahman depending for his material welfare (*artha*) on the kshatriya, the kshatriya for his spiritual welfare (*dharma*) on the brahman. The two domains remained separate:

The supremacy of *dharma* is beyond question. . . . *Artha* is recognized only in second place, we may say in matters indifferent to *dharma*; *artha* remains finally contained within the all-embracing *dharma*, confined within *dharma*-prescribed limits. . . . Being negation of *dharma* in a society which continues to be ruled by *dharma*, the political sphere is severed from the realm of values.⁷

Or as another scholar has more pertinently formulated it:

Kingship as an institution has no authority and legitimacy of its own. It is dependent on the uneasy relationship between king and brahmin. . . . [The brahmin's] monopoly of the source of authority and legitimation leaves the king with mere power and effectively bars kingship from developing its full potential as the central regulating force.⁸

⁷ Dumont 1962, p. 66. See also Buss 1978 (Buddhist evidence). The legitimizing power exercised by the brahman derives ultimately from his magical control of the sacrifice, which he could manipulate for political purposes, as the *Brāhmaṇa* texts show (cf. Rau 1957, pp. 60-61).

⁸ Heesterman 1978, p. 4. The *Rāmāyaṇa* evidence suggests conclusions different from those drawn by these authorities. Dumont argues that the bifurcation is a "necessary institution" (p. 54) that makes kingship "in some way . . . 'rational'" (p. 66). Heesterman appears to deny any competition for priority (p. 5); he finds the king seeking his authority in a supernatural domain outside the community.

The characterization of Rāma seems to be a response to this politically incapacitating bifurcation.

We find this dichotomy manifested in a number of brahmanical and epic narratives. It is certainly no coincidence that several of the more striking examples are in one way or another intimately associated with the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition—in particular the biography of the Buddha, for which the *Rāmāyaṇa* may well have served as a prototype, and the legend of Viśvāmitra, absorbed into Vālmīki's work itself. But in these accounts the dilemma is resolved in quite different ways. On the one hand (in the case of the kshatriya prince Śākyaṃuni), the problem is repudiated and a new *dharma* altogether extrinsic to society is introduced, the *śramaṇadharmā*: communal asceticism as a self-sufficient and fully integrated way of life receives new valorization. On the other hand (in the kshatriya king Viśvāmitra),⁹ we meet an isolated, unrepeatable, in effect a fantasy transcendence of the actual: by means of asceticism a kshatriya king is literally transformed into a brahman. Rāma, by contrast, resolves the contradiction through a new definition of the *dharma* incumbent on him as a kshatriya. By the increment of a hieratic component, not derived from but only enriched by his temporary ascetic vocation,¹⁰ his code is enlarged to become simply "righteousness." It is made to intersect with and so absorb brahmanical *dharma* and its legitimizing ethics, nonviolence, and spirituality.¹¹ In this way the kshatriya becomes self-legitimizing, and the "full potential" of kingship as an integrating power can at last be activated. The political and spiritual spheres may now converge in a single locus: the king.¹²

⁹ See especially *Rām* 1.53.15, 55.4, 23. The problem reverberates throughout the Viśvāmitra-Vasiṣṭha legend and is unusually well articulated in the story of Satya-vrata (Triśaṅku) as given in the *HariVaṃ* (9.88-10.20), where Vasiṣṭha seizes control of the Ikṣvāku kingdom. The brahman thus not only possessed the legitimizing authority, but could present himself as an actual rival for power. Such passages as *AitBr* 8.23 presuppose that a brahman could be king (cf. Rau 1957, p. 63).

¹⁰ Rāma's asceticism during his exile (cf. note on 25.7 and references) may be an "overdetermination" of this spiritualizing tendency: the political exile of the Pāṇḍava princes, of Nala, Triśaṅku, and so on, includes no ascetic features.

¹¹ Thus the remarkable ambiguity of Rāma's status, which will be repeatedly underscored in Book Three. See 3.2.10-12; 16.11, and especially note on 2.48.8. This may help account for the many similes in which Rāma is likened not to the divine embodiment of kshatriya power, Indra, but to Brahmā. See 2.29.11, 93.27, 96.27 and especially note on 46.64, where we read in the Southern Recension, "Rāghava . . . prayed like a brahman and a kshatriya."

¹² This conjunction may figure as an element in the *dharma* of Aśoka, and go some

By the resolution of the dichotomy through the character of Rāma, the conditions are provided for the poem's conclusion, with its utopian vision of peace and abundance on earth, of an enduring empire based on righteousness. This hopeful image at once cancels and justifies all the misery and suffering that had gone before and prepared the way. It carries us beyond the more or less negative functionality of the text's broad social prescriptions and beyond its positive political and ethical mission, standing as the ultimate incentive to both. And it is made possible, it appears, only by the presence of a moral or spiritualized king, for whom violence is inhuman and is to be exercised only against the bestial (Vālin) or demonic (Rāvaṇa).

The *Mahābhārata* ends in anomie, ascetic suicide, and apocalypse. Individual life on earth can have no meaning for those who fail to understand the true "syntax" of social existence: it becomes instead a "living death."¹³ The *Mahābhārata* heroes failed to understand this syntax precisely because it was incomprehensible as such, in that its constituent elements, the political and the spiritual, could never be construed. In sharp contrast, the righteousness of Rāma, not only as exemplar for the collective sense of duty but also as the integrating force of these two realms of human life, restores a universal Golden Age, the perfectly harmonious existence of man with nature and man with man (6.116.80ff.).¹⁴

way to explain his political success. (The connection between the usual subordination of the "political element" to the "religious" and "India's political instability" is drawn by Dumont 1964, p. 53, cited and translated by Derrett 1976, p. 597.) One is again struck by the similarity between the inscriptions and the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*. For Aśoka, too, "the only true conquest is conquest through *dharma*": through "compassion, generosity, truthfulness, and honesty," through "reverence for brahmans and ascetics." Glory, too, is desirable only on account of his aim that "men may [be induced] by him to practice obedience to *dharma*, that they may conform to the duties of *dharma*." The "drum of battle" (for another analysis of the phrase see La Vallée Poussin 1922, p. 515) is similarly transformed into the "drum of *dharma*," and the "abiding welfare of all the world" (*sarvalokahita*, as in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, 52.22) becomes the fundamental concern (the citations come respectively from Rock Edict XIII, Pillar Edict II, Rock Edict IV, Rock Edict X [after Hultsch 1925, p. 18], Rock Edict IV [for the *bherī* used to give the call to arms see, for example, *Rām* 6.24.19-20], Rock Edict VI [see lines 9, 11]).

¹³ *Mṛtā jīvāmahe vāyam*, says Yudhiṣṭhira (*MBh* 15.46.8), and he elsewhere articulates the fundamental contradiction between *ksatriya dharma* as conventionally understood and social life (12.38.3, 76.15, 98.1).

¹⁴ Much of the parallel passage in 1.1.5ff. may well be an adaptation of the *Yud-*

Although the compensatory aspect of *Rāmarājya* is in part responsible for the undiminishing vitality of the poem and its enshrinement in Indian culture, as well as for the ready acknowledgement of its often proscriptive admonitions, it may be less significant in itself than for its latent foundations. If, in his course of action, Rāma explicitly affirms hierarchical subordination, the spiritual commitment that allows for his utopian rule seems implicitly to oppose it. If we are prepared to accept that the separation of domains was an actual model for social behavior, one broadly sanctioned in historical India; if we agree that

status and power, and consequently spiritual authority and temporal authority, are absolutely distinguished. . . . The supremacy of the spiritual was never expressed politically . . . [and] only once this differentiation has been made [can] hierarchy manifest itself,¹⁵

then we are obliged to see the characterization of Rāma as a judgment on that model. Rāma expressly seeks to cancel the dichotomy by integrating the two “forces”—a resolution that inaugurates the Golden Age. Hierarchical life and the separation of “powers” that underpins it, which the poem elsewhere unambiguously attempts to validate, appears at the highest and critical level to be questioned, and a reformulation is offered in its place. And it is this that makes it possible for real political stability and social harmony finally to be secured.¹⁶

Whatever the validity of these speculations, much of the meaning and significance of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* does seem to lie in its vigorous, sustained, and searching interpretation of the conditions of social existence. A great culture’s exploration of such central issues as the nature and function of political power and of a hierarchical social

dhakāṇḍa, presumably included again with the aim of idealizing Daśaratha; the narrative of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* certainly stands in opposition to it. At all events, the important contrast drawn here is not between Daśaratha and Rāma but between the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*.

¹⁵ Dumont 1980, p. 72.

¹⁶ That at a deeper level the significance of this complicated work may lie in questioning rather than in affirming social hierarchy will no doubt seem surprising. For the theoretical foundations that support this conclusion, see the work of Jameson (1981).

order is preserved for us in this poem. The formulation, on the one hand, of hopeful solutions to what may be insoluble political problems, and on the other, of a code of conduct that appears to call that social order into doubt, supplies the particular answers of India's first poem to the question of what makes life possible.

11. The Text, Annotations, and Translation

THE GENERAL Introduction (Volume 1) discusses the nature of the critical edition upon which this translation is based, with regard to both its merits and its limitations. A careful and prolonged scrutiny of all the published manuscript evidence for the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* has validated the general principles adopted for the critical edition. The manuscripts for the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, however, make it clear that in some places the original form of the poem cannot be confidently recovered. The annotations here often suggest alternative approaches (such as the note to 12.16), but only in a hypothetical way. For such passages, certainty is unattainable with the evidence available to us.

The critical edition is, furthermore, occasionally subject to question. Both the unavoidable subjectivity of text-editing, even upon the most scientific principles, and the natural limits to every editor's knowledge force us to recognize that any such edition can secure only a provisional status. Thus, when I found myself in serious disagreement with the editor, I emended and translated as I thought necessary. All departures from the constituted text are listed in an appendix to the translation and explained in the notes. No large segments of the text have been affected. I did not find it necessary to remove anything from the critical edition, though had I been editing the work I would probably have made some different decisions.¹ There was only one occasion when it proved necessary to add something that had been discarded—a short passage of two verses.² At this higher level of the work, my disagreements with the critical text were rarely serious. I usually concur with the editor about the secondary character of the additional material. But because the *Rāmāyaṇa* is not only a discrete poem but a tradition as well, every insertion that holds interest for the general reader or scholar has been translated or summarized in the notes.

At the level of the phrase, the word, the syllable, however, I have

¹ See, for example, notes to 75.1 and 92.1.

² See 31.25 note. A second addition (after 95.19) is the editor's (cf. Vaidya 1962, p. 706).

introduced some seventy changes in the text. Sometimes this was required when the editor preferred the hazardous procedure of ignoring the absolute unanimity of the manuscripts (e.g., 23.30) or the principles upon which the critical edition is based (e.g., 43.14); when a good variant was apparently mistaken by the editor as a corruption (e.g., 12.22, 63.4), or when the text as printed seemed to be nonsense (e.g., 106.9, 111.5). In all these cases I emend on the basis of manuscript testimony, evaluated on the grounds I discuss in the General Introduction. In a few instances I have conjectured readings, but only when I had good reason to believe in their inherent probability (e.g., 20.5, 30.10, 101.22; contrast the notes on 45.24 and 87.13).

The annotations have been prepared in accordance with the guidelines collectively decided upon for this translation: to serve as expeditiously as possible the needs of both the general reader and the scholar. They are intended in the main to explain the translation where necessary and to indicate how and why I arrived at such an interpretation. While I have sought to keep my attention focused on the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* text itself and to refrain from enlarging on cultural matters beyond what was essential for the immediate comprehension of the translation, the work presents a multitude of textual and philological problems that required more detailed investigation.

I have kept before me all the medieval commentaries on the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* that are available in print.³ My admiration for the learning and perspicacity of the commentators is as great as my indebtedness to them. Many of the verses owe their English shape directly to the exegetical labors of these scholiasts, although, as will be obvious on virtually any page of the annotations, I have never followed them uncritically. But even when I disagree with them, I often record their remarks if some interesting observation is offered. Their responses are the closest approximation we have to those of an original audience. In addition, since in their eyes the *Rāmāyaṇa* is a *dharmaśāstra* or manual of proper conduct as well as a work of theological significance, I have translated or summarized many of their comments of a more general sort (ritual, legal, al-

³ These are the ten listed in the General Introduction. I have additionally made occasional reference to the *Tanīślokī* of Ātreya Ahobala, printed in extracts in the VSP edition. The modern Sanskrit notes of K. S. Varadacharya, published in his edition of Kataka's commentary (1964-1965), have also proved useful.

legorical), though these may have no direct bearing on our understanding of the text.

All translators acutely feel the obligation of not disappointing their author, well aware, at the same time, that there is always someone to charge them, as Blake put it, with being "hired to run down men of genius under the guise of translator." Vālmīki has substantial elements of genius, and I have striven to discharge the duty his genius imposes. But he is uneven, and the temptation to improve—supposing I had been able to do so—had to be resisted. The *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* is roughly two-thirds the size of the *Odyssey*, and there is bound to be a certain amount of chaff in it. It is in large part an oral composition; the repetitions of formula and epithet are as essential to it as any other literary or narrative feature, and for this and other reasons, these can no longer simply be thrown overboard at the whim of the translator. It is a heroic epic, too, and for that sort of literature a truly appropriate diction is no longer available. The only serviceable medium is, predictably, the "idiomatic, living language," but, besides its clear limitations in the present case, it seems sometimes a disappearing target. There is a certain indeterminateness, a certain evanescence about it, and in those moments when it disappears bombast usually finds a way in.

Finally, the problem of tradition. The contemporary translator of the Greek epic, to take the most celebrated parallel, has behind him some four hundred years of attempts at producing an English Homer, in which solutions have been reached that he can accept, blind alleys followed that he can now safely ignore. The Sanskritist works in a tradition both much more recent and less useful, and cannot safely assume that a single problem, whether philological or literary, has already been solved. He must start from the ground up—in fact from the very word *dharma*—and the only reasonable hope he may entertain is to have cleared some of this ground satisfactorily.