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RAMAYANA

The Story of Rama (English)

Retold

and illustrated by BAPU

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THE STORY OF RAMA

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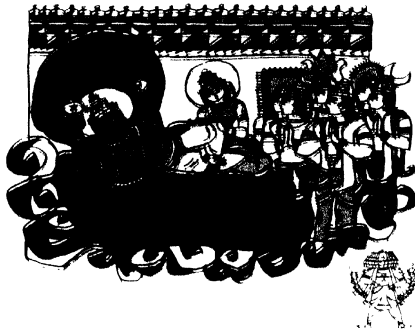
Publisher's Note

The *Ramayana* of Valmiki is one of the greatest epics ever written. It narrates the story of Rama and how he killed the ten-headed Ravana. Sri Rama, the hero of the epic, is the ideal prince, brave and accomplished, devoted to his duty and unflattering in his truth.

The *Ramayana* describes the wanderings and adventures of Rama who goes into forest exile for fourteen years at his father's order, accompanied by his devoted wife, Sita and loyal brother Lakshmana.

Sri Rama's valorous deeds, Hanuman's exploits in Lanka, bridging of the ocean and fighting from the clouds all make the *Ramayana* a story of high adventure in unexplored areas, while Rama's obedience to his father Dasaratha, the faithfulness and womanly love of Sita, the loving devotion of Rama's brothers and the veneration of saints make the epic a remarkable work with great sanctity attached to it. The *Ramayana* is an ideal book which emphasises the rule of dharma in every facet of our life.

We are happy to present the *Ramayana* retold and illustrated by the renowned artist Bapu, specially for children.



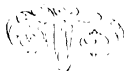
Harassed by Ravana, the King of Lanka, the Devas appealed to Vishnu, the Protector of the Universe, asking him to put an end to his atrocities. Vishnu, reclining on his serpent couch, listened to their tales of woe in thoughtful silence.



Ravana was protected from death at the hands of Devas, Siddhas, Kinnaras, Yakshas, and the like etc., by a boon of Brahma, the Creator of the Universe. So, Vishnu planned Ravana's end through the agency of man and beast. He ordered the Dikpalakas to be born on earth as monkeys.



And, with the intention of assuming a human incarnation, He deposited His own spirit in a pot of nectar



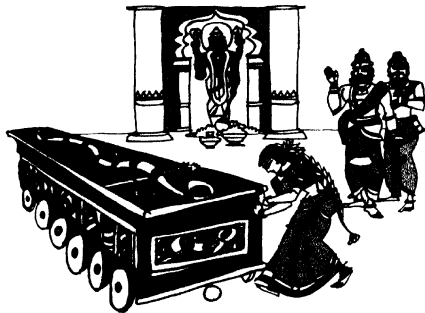
Anxious that the great clan of Raghu should not end with him, childless Dasaratha, King of Kosala, performed a ritual called "Puthra Kamesti". From the ceremonial fire rose Agni with the pot of nectar containing the spirit of Vishnu and the three queens of Dasaratha partook of it. Lord Vishnu was born of Kousalya as Rama. Sumithra gave birth to Lakshmana and Shathrugghna. To Kaikeyi, the youngest queen, Bharatha was born.



As the four princes were being schooled in all the manly arts by great sages, old Dasaratha looked on with pride at the prowess of Rama, his first-born, whom he was particularly fond of



Goddess Lakshmi was born as a baby girl in Lanka. Learning from astrologers that she would be the cause of his death, Ravana put her in a box and threw the box into the sea. The sea threw it upon dry land in Mithila. King Janaka of Mithila, found the box while ploughing the land for a ritual. Finding a baby girl of peerless beauty in it, he adopted her and named her Seetha.



Janaka had in his palace the great bow of Shiva which a thousand strong men could not lift. He was awe-struck when, one day, he saw young Seetha pushing aside the bow with her little finger. So he decided that the man who could fit that bow and string it, would marry her.



Sage Viswamithra came to ask Dasaratha to send Rama to protect a sacred ritual he was planning, from being polluted by Rakshasas. Dasaratha was reluctant to send his darling son on such a dangerous mission, but fearing that the sage might curse them all, he agreed. So, Rama and Lakshmana followed Viswamithra to the forest.



As they entered the forest, they encountered a she-demon, Thataka. Rama was reluctant to lift his bow against a woman, but urged by Viswamithra, he killed her with a single arrow

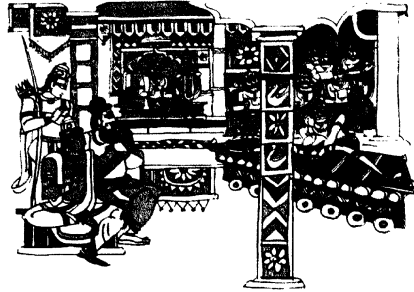


The sage was so pleased with the brothers that he taught them how to invoke and use divine weapons - such as Fire, Wind, Light and Water

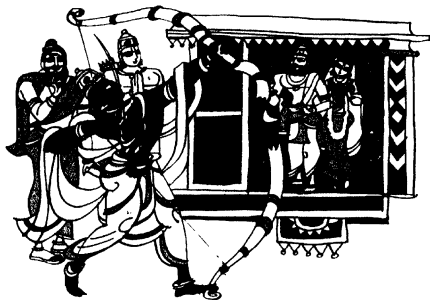




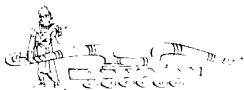
As Viswamithra's sacred ritual was in progress, two Rakshasa brothers - Mareecha and Subahu tried to pollute it by throwing filth into the sacrificial fire from the sky. Rama, who was guarding the ritual, killed Subahu with an arrow and threw Mareecha across the seven seas, with another



After the successful conclusion of the sacred ritual, Viswamithra led Rama and Lakshmana to Mithila. Kings and princes from many lands came there to claim the hand of Seetha by stringing the bow of Shiva. But none of them, including the great Ravana, could even move it.



And then Rama went to try. He lifted the bow with ease and trying to string it, broke it in two.



And king Janaka gave away Seetha in marriage to Rama.

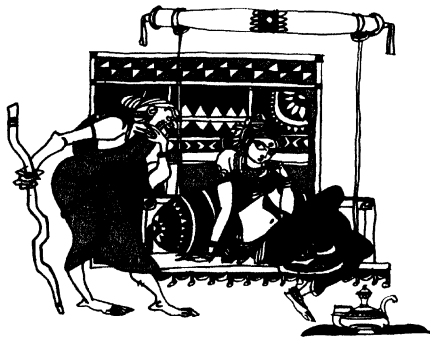




Breaking Shiva's bow angered Parasurama who had killed hundreds of Kshatriyas with his axe. Mocking Rama for having broken the old rusted bow of Shiva, Parasurama dared him to handle the great bow of Vishnu. As Rama took the bow from his hands, Parasurama felt all his strength and power flowing into Rama's hands. Then he realised that Rama was the very incarnation of Vishnu.



King Dasaratha proclaimed in the open court that he was going to crown Rama as the future king. And Vasishtha, the Royal Priest, set an auspicious day for the ceremony.



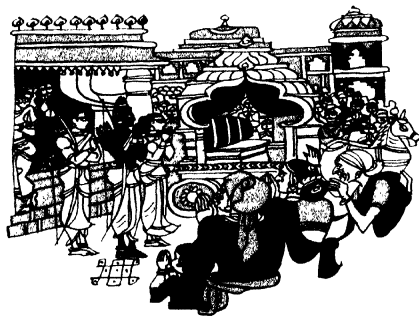
But the scheming Mandhara, the maid of Kaikeyi, poisoned her mistress's mind arguing that if Rama became the crown prince, Kaikeyi would be reduced to the status of a servant of Kousalya. Dasaratha granted two wishes to Kaikeyi a long time ago, when she helped him on the battlefield. Mandhara urged Kaikeyi to ask them now.



When Dasaratha entered her chamber, Kaikeyi demanded him to fulfil the two wishes he had granted - one, sending Rama away to the forest for fourteen years and two, crowning her own son Bharatha as the king. The old king was stunned at this unjust and cruel demand



Kaikeyi sent for Rama and told him about the two wishes his father had granted her. To save his father's honour, Rama agreed to go to the forest with a smile. When Lakshmana drew his sword in anger against Kaikeyi, Rama checked him

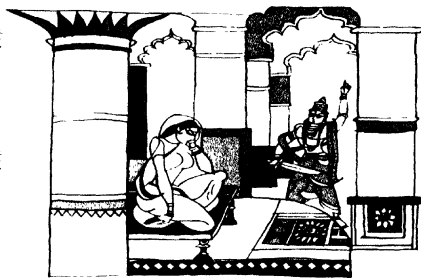


Rama, followed by Seetha and Lakshmana, left Ayodhya for the forest





Dasaratha never recovered from this shock. The ailing king remembered how, a long time ago, he had killed a young man inadvertently and how his old blind parents had cursed him saying that he would one day die like them pining for his son. The curse came true and Dasaratha died wailing for Rama.



Bharatha was at his maternal uncle's place when all this happened. Learning about the events on his return to Ayodhya, he fell foul of his mother and refused to be crowned king.



Then Bharatha went to meet Rama in the forest. He wept at his feet and begged him to return to Ayodhya. But Rama gently but firmly refused declaring that he would not go back on the word he had given to his father



But Bharatha, loyal brother that he was, refused to enter Ayodhya without Rama. In a small hut on the outskirts of the city, he installed Rama's sandals on the throne and ruled the kingdom in his name.





Travelling south through the Dandakaranya, Rama chose a lovely spot on the banks of the Godavari, by name Panchavati, for his stay. He was enjoying the simple ascetic life amidst nature, with Seetha and Lakshmana. One day, Surpanakha, Ravana's sister, saw the handsome Rama and fell in love with him.

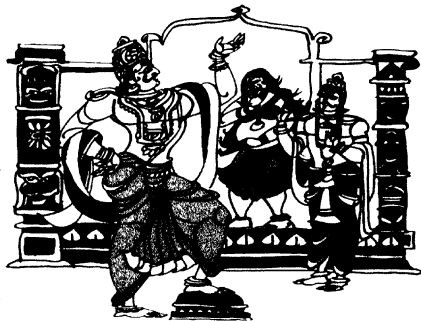


Assuming the shape of a pretty girl, she tried to entice Rama





So, he sent her to Lakshmana, who cut off her nose and ears. When her ugly form was revealed, Seetha clung to Rama out of fear. But Rama had no eye for any other woman than Seetha. Moreover, he knew who she really was.



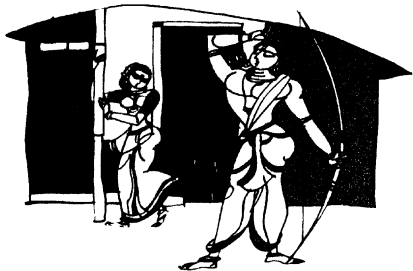
Ravana was mad with rage. He planned to take revenge on Rama by kidnapping Seetha. His wise brother Vibhishana warned him that stealing another's wife was a sin and that courting the enmity of such a valorous man as Rama would be disastrous, but Ravana did not heed his warning.



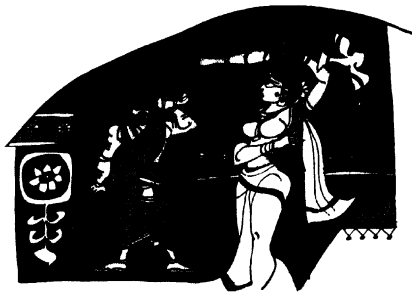
He ordered his henchman, Mareecha, to take on the form of a golden deer and attract the fancy of Seetha. Seetha wanted to possess it and prevailed on Rama to capture it and bring it to her. The deer eluded Rama and led him deep into the forest.



The chase led him far away from his abode and Rama, realising that it was a Rakshasa trick, shot the deer with his arrow. The dying Mareecha changed back into his original form and cried aloud in Rama's voice, "Ah! Seetha! Ah! Lakshmana!"



Hearing that voice, Seetha thought Rama was in danger and urged Lakshmana to rush to the rescue of his brother. Lakshmana tried to convince her that it was all a ruse of some Rakshasa. But Seetha, blinded by anxiety and anger, unjustly accused him of trying to benefit by his brother's death. Lakshmana, deeply hurt, went in search of Rama.



Then came Ravana in the garb of a mendicant to the hut where Seetha was now all alone and asked alms of her.





As she stepped close to him with a plate of fruits, Ravana revealed himself to Seetha in his diabolical form and she fainted at once. But Ravana could not touch her on account of the curse of Nalkubara that his heads would explode into bits if he touched an unwilling woman. So, along with the chunk of earth on which Seetha was lying, he rose into the sky and carried her away



Jatayu, the giant-winged bird, was an old friend of Dasaratha. He fought valiantly with Ravana and tried to rescue Seetha. But Ravana cut his wings and he fell down to earth, half dead





In the hope of leaving some trail for Rama to find her, Seetha peeled off her jewels and tying them in a piece of her saree, threw them down. The bundle fell into the hands of Anjaneya who was offering his prayers to the Sun God



Ravana held Seetha captive in his garden. He threatened to kill her if she did not agree to become his queen. He gave her twelve months' time to decide.





Rama roamed through the forests, calling out for Seetha. He could not find her. He was very unhappy.



Near the hill of Rishyamuka, the brothers met Hanuman. He introduced them to Sugreeva, the deposed King of Kishkindha. He also showed them the bundle of jewels thrown down by Seetha. Sugreeva gladly offered the services of his army for the rescue of Seetha. In return, he requested Rama to kill Vali, his brother, and restore to him the kingdom that Vali had usurped from him.



Now Vali had the miraculous power of acquiring half the strength of his opponent in a direct fight. So Rama had to resort to a ruse to kill him, though he hated it. As the brothers resembled each other closely, he asked Sugreeva to wear a garland as a mark of identification and engage Vali in a duel. While the brothers were fighting, Rama shot an arrow from behind a tree and killed Vali. He then installed Sugreeva on the throne of Kishkindha.



Then Sugreeva sent squads of Vanaras in the four directions in search of Seetha. Rama gave Hanuman his diamond-studded ring to identify himself as Rama's emissary if ever he met Seetha.





The party headed by Hanuman reached the seashore in the south. Across the ocean was Lanka where, probably, Ravana had held Seetha in captivity. Preparing for a leap across the ocean, he grew into a colossus.



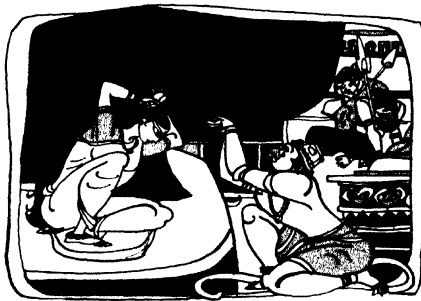
In one giant leap, Anjaneya crossed the ocean and landed on the shore of Lanka.



With one iron-fisted blow, he killed Lankini, who was guarding the gates of Lanka.



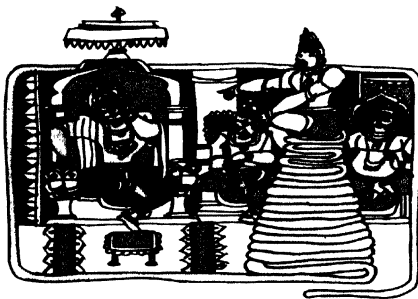
He searched for Seetha in every nook and corner of Lanka and ultimately found her in "Ashokavana" - Ravana's garden. Perched on a tree, he heard Ravana threatening her that if she did not agree to marry him within two months, she would be mercilessly killed. She told him that Rama would surely come and kill him soon.



After Ravana left in mad rage, Hanuman revealed himself to Seetha and gave her Rama's ring to convince her that he was Rama's emissary. He offered to carry her away on his shoulders, but proud Seetha refused the offer saying that she wanted Rama to kill Ravana and rescue her. She gave Hanuman a jewel adorning her hair to reassure Rama that she was alive



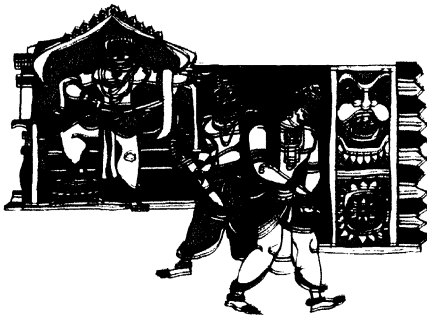
Furious at Seetha's plight, Hanuman began destroying the beautiful garden and killing several Rakshasas. Then he allowed himself to be caught by Indrajit, Ravana's son, who tied him up and took him to Ravana



In the court of Ravana, he freed himself with ease, and growing his tail into a majestic throne, higher than that of Ravana, sat on it. Then, as Rama's emissary, he gave an ultimatum to Ravana that if he refused to return Seetha, Rama would kill him, and ruin this kingdom.



Ravana was so angered by Hanuman's threat that he wanted to kill him, but Vibhishana reminded that killing an emissary was not in keeping with royal dignity. Then Ravana ordered the monkey's tail to be set on fire. Hanuman leaped into the air and with his burning tail set the entire city in Lanka on fire.



When Vibhishana tried to prevail on Ravana to send back Seetha to Rama, Ravana was furious and banished Vibhishana from Lanka



As Rama approached the southern shore with his Vanara army, Vibhishana came to him and sought his protection and Rama gladly admitted him into his camp.





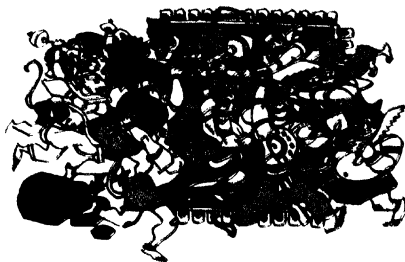
When the Vanaras tried to build a stone bridge across the sea, they found every stone sinking into its depths. Rama angrily lifted his bow when the sea God, Samudra, came out scared and told Rama that he would make the stones float on the water.



Then the monkey army set about building a bridge across the ocean with floating rocks. Anxious to serve Rama in whatever little manner it could, a squirrel rolled its wet body in sand and shook it off on the bridge to fill the gaps. Rama was touched by its devotion and taking it into his hands, caressed it on its back with his fingers. The squirrel retains to this day three beautiful stripes on its back as a mark of Rama's affection for the species.



Rama crossed the ocean on the floating bridge
to Lanka along with his mighty Vanara army



And then the battle began. Ravana lost many
of his soldiers



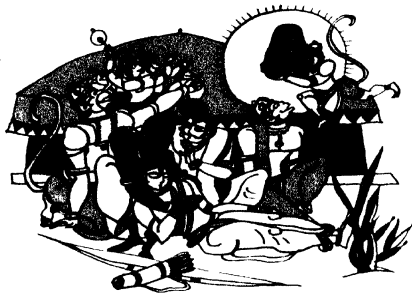
Ravana had a giant brother, Kumbhakarna, who normally slept for six months of the year and was invincible if he had his full quota of sleep. But, Ravana, afraid of defeat, ordered him to be woken up prematurely



Kumbhakarna ravaged the Vanara hordes but met his death at the hands of Rama.



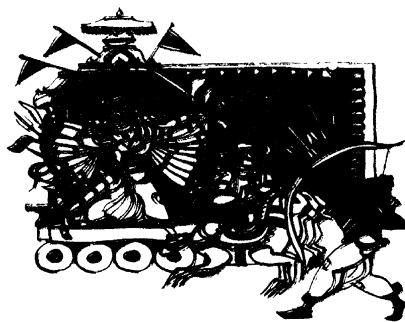
Then Indrajit, son of Ravana, assumed command of the Rakshasa army and fought valiantly from the clouds. His Nagastra tied up Lakshmana in a rope of serpents and he fell down unconscious.



The army physician told Rama that if someone could bring the herb, Sanjeevi, from the Sanjeevi hill before sunrise, Lakshmana could be saved. Hanuman flew several leagues to the hill, but could not identify the herb. So he carried the entire hill in his hands and flew back in time and Lakshmana was brought back to life.



Lakshmana avenged his defeat the next day, by severing the head of Indrajit in a fierce fight.



And then began the greatest of battles between two mighty warriors. Rama shot down several heads of the adversary only to find that they miraculously attached themselves again. Rama was puzzled.



Then Vibhishana told Rama about the secret of Ravana's life, and pointed out to him the most vulnerable spot in his body, his belly. But Rama refused to hit the enemy below the navel as it was against the rules of chivalry in war, and kept on aiming his arrows at Ravana's chest.

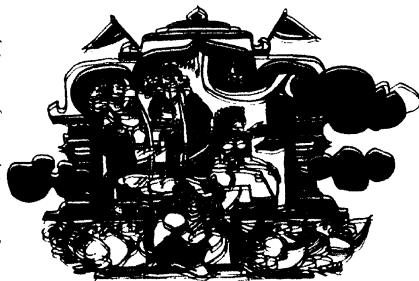
Anjaneya then prayed to his father, Vayu, the Wind God, who diverted one of Rama's arrows to the abdomen of Ravana and he was instantly killed.



The dying Ravana realised that Rama was Lord Vishnu Himself and prayed to Him for salvation.



Though Rama knew that Seetha was chaste, he was reluctant to take her back, as people might say she was tainted because she stayed for ten months in Ravana's house. If he were to set an example of ideal human conduct, he should be pure not only in his own eyes, but in the eyes of his people as well. Realising her husband's moral dilemma, Seetha entered fire to prove her purity. And Agni, the Fire God, gave her to Rama proclaiming to the assembly that she was pure and untainted.



After crowning Vibhishana as king of Lanka, Rama flew back to Ayodhya, in pushpaka, the divine aeroplane.



It was a day of rejoicing for the people of Ayodhya, when Rama was crowned king. In his conduct as man and king, he set such an ideal example, embodying goodness, truth, and righteousness, that no other man could even be compared to him through all the subsequent ages.





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