

The Jain Versions of Rāmāyaṇa

(With Special Reference to Vimalasūri Guṇabhadra and Śīlāṅka)

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Introduction:

There is no need to highlight the influence of Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa on further Indian Literature and Culture. Though hundreds of Brahmanic, Jaina and Buddhist versions of Rāmāyaṇa are available, Vālmiki's position as Ādikavi is unanimously accepted. Some stray different traditions about the chief characters may be prevalent in the society, but Vālmiki was the first to present it in Epic form. For this paper, the date of the available Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmiki is assumed as 3rd Century B.C. According to the prominent scholars, of course the Bālakāṇḍa and Uttarakāṇḍa is spurious and there are some additions, here and there.

Scope of the Research Paper :

Though there is a long tradition of Rāmakathā among Jains, here I have purposefully selected a few of them. Vimalasūri's Paumacariya is the first Jain Rāmāyaṇa written in Jain Mahāraṣṭri or Ārṣa Prakrit in 3rd Century A.D. We find both Śvetāmbara and Digambara elements in Vimalasūri. Some of the scholars have opined that Vimalasūri represents Yāpaniya Sect, reconciling Śve. and Dig. views. Raviṣeṇa's Skt. Padmacarita (8th Cen. A.D.) is almost the replica of Prakrit Paumacariya of Vimalasūri. Raviṣeṇa has presented his Rāmāyaṇa without mentioning the indebtedness of Vimalasūri, added some detailed descriptions and his Dig. attitude is quite clear. Apabhraṁśa Paumacariu written in the later half of the 8th Century by Svayambhū, who was a householder (Śrāvaka), almost imitates Vimalasūri and Raviṣeṇa. He mentions Raviṣeṇa but neglects Vimalasūri probably due to the sectarian bias.

Hemacandra follows the same tradition of Ramakatha in his Skt. work *Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacarita* written in the 12th Century with few additions. So, when we consider Vimalasūri, all the abovementioned Rāmakathās are covered.

The Rāmacarita presented in Skt. *Uttarapurāṇa* (a part of *Ādipurāṇa*) by Guṇabhadra (9th Cen. A.D.) differs a lot from Vimalasūri and being a Digambara, presented his Rāmakathā totally in new manner. The scope, characterization, incidents and style differs from that of Vimalasūri. Pandit Āśādhara (13th Cen. A.D.) a Dig. Jaina householder presents Guṇabhadra's Rāmakathā in a very compact manner in his *Triṣaṣṭismṛtiśāstra*.

Śilāṅka (9th Cen. A.D.) presents a very small story of Pauma (Rāma) in his Jain *Mahārāṣṭri Prakrit* work *Cauppannamahāpurisacariya*. It is very remarkable that his account of Rāma is mostly a brief summary of Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa.

Daśaratha Jātaka presents the story of Rāma Paṇḍita in nutshell. This story, written in Pāli, contains some queer Buddhist elements unlike Brahmanic or Jain versions.

Thus the observations and remarks in this research paper are based on the Rāmakathās of (i) Vimalasūri, Raviṣeṇa, Svayambhū and Hemcandra, (ii) Guṇabhadra and Āśādhara, (iii) Śilāṅka and (iv) Daśaratha Jātaka.

The Method followed in the Paper :

In the first place, the basic similarities in all Jain versions are pointed out. The searchlight is thrown on the typical Jain elements.

In the second part, the striking differences among these Jain versions are noted in the light of some important points.

In the last part, conclusive remarks are presented on the basis of the abovementioned observations.

(A) Common Jain Elements in all Jain Versions of Ramakatha

(1) Tradition of 63 Śalākāpuruṣas :

All the authors of Jain Rāmākathā claim that Rāmākathā was handed down to them right from Lord Mahāvira through succession. Jain tradition has created a format of 63 illustrated human heroes, of course in spiritual perspective. These are designations and all of them occur in each Avaṣarpiṇī and Utsarpiṇī of the time-wheel (Kālacakra). Rāma or Padma is the 8th Baladeva (Balabhadra or Balarāma), Lakṣmaṇa is the 8th Vāsudeva (or Nārayaṇa) and Rāvaṇa is the 8th Prati-Vāsudeva of the present Avaṣarpiṇī.¹ Hanuman is enumerated as among the 24 Kāmādevas but not included in the 63 Śalākāpuruṣas in the Jaina Purāṇa perennis. According to this format, all Jaina authors agree that Lakṣmaṇa killed Rāvaṇa. Both of them were born as infernal beings immediately after their birth as human beings. After a long span of time, after having gone through many cycles of birth and death, they will attain Liberation. Padma and Hanuman had attained Nirvāṇa while Sitā had attained heaven.

(2) Polygamy :

In the format of Śalākāpuruṣas, Balādevas and Vāsudevas necessarily possess thousands of wives. All Jain authors have depicted that Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Rāvaṇa possessed thousands of wives. In Valmiki Rāmāyaṇa, very few males are monogamists. The citations like रामस्य परमाः स्त्रियः (Vālmiki Rā. 2.8.12) may have inspired Jain authors to picturise Rāma as polygamist. 'The vow of complete celibacy' is greatly honoured in Jain monachism but still Hanuman is Kāmādeva and householder, he possesses many wives.

(3) Vānaras and Rākṣasas :

The Jain authors have depicted Vānaras and Rākṣasas as Vidyādharas or Khecaras, a variety of sub-human beings possessing various lores like Ākāśagamana etc. Vimalasūri has

given totally new meanings of the words, viz. Vānara and Rākṣasa.² Jain authors feel that Vālmiki's depiction of Vānaras and Rākṣasas is unbelievable and irrational.

(4) Doctrine of Karman and other Jain Tenets :

Doctrine of Karman is the backbone of Jain Philosophy. According to this theory, every misery and happiness is connected with the rise of the fruits of good and bad karmans which are performed previously. Most of the important incidents in Rāmakathā are explained in the light of Karmasiddhānta. While explaining the painful separation of Padma and Sitā³, the agonies in the life of Añjanā⁴, the infatuation of Bhāmaṇḍala towards Sitā⁵, the Jaina authors have not missed the opportunity to elaborate the doctrine of Karman. When Sitā embraces Dikṣa, she explains the theory of Karman in nutshell.⁶ In all Jain Rāmakathās, every now and then, we find the keywords of Jainism like Vairāgya, Saṁyama and Dikṣa. During the preaching of Munis, the conduct of layman and monk is narrated at length.

(5) Ascetics and their dwellings :

In Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa we find several names of sages, ascetics, their dwellings (i.e. Āśramās), their preaching and giving out different lores and weapons to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. In the Jain versions, we see complete Jainification in this respect. Every now and then we find the descriptions of Jain Sādhus, Munis, Anagāras and Kevalins engaged in giving religious sermons, offering bigger and smaller vows to householders. There are Jinamandiras, Chaityas and places of pilgrimage. Padma, Sitā, Hanuman, Rāvaṇa etc. visit these places, worship and adore in Chaityas and attend the religious assemblies.

(6) An approach to the Sacrifices :

In Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa we find ample references of various sacrifices and sacrificial acts. Vimalasūri and

Guṇabhadra had attempted to offer new allegorical meanings to these sacrificial acts for enhancing the Jaina tenets like Ahimsā, Saṁyama and Tapas.⁷ The discussion about the meaning of the word 'अज'^{7a} occurs in Vimalasūri's and Guṇabhadra's Rāmāyaṇa. The protest against the Brahminic sacrificial institution can be seen in the major Jain versions.

(7) Introducing the character of Narada :

It is well known that Narada is a Paurāṇika figure and is added to Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa sporadically in Bālkāṇḍa and Uttarakāṇḍa. This interesting character is introduced often in all major Jain Rāmāyaṇas to accelerate the speed of the main story in convincing manner.⁸ Nārada frequently visits Padma and Rāvaṇa, carries messages and gives detailed reports of various incidents. We find the peculiar character of Nārada in Ardhamāgadhi canons like Nāyādhammakahā⁹ and Rṣibhāṣita.¹⁰ 'The Episodes of Nārada in Jain Literature' is an interesting subject of a separate research paper.

(8) Rāmasetu :

Vālmiki describes the episode of Setubandha in Yuddhakāṇḍa. Pravarasena, a non-Jain poet has dedicated his whole epic to Setubandha or Rāvaṇavaho; written in Mahārāṣṭri Prakrit in 5th Century A.D. Recently a lot of discussion is going on this controversial issue. The literary evidence of Kamba Rāmāyaṇa is quoted often in this matter. After a genuine scrutiny of major ten Jain Rāmakathās, it is known that none of these Rāmakathās have mentioned the building of a bridge to cross the ocean to enter Laṅkā. Vanaras and Rākṣasas used Vānari and Khecarī Vidyas to cross the ocean.¹¹ Padma and Lakṣmaṇa reached Laṅkā with the help of Vimānas.¹²

(9) A Liberal Feminist Approach :

When we examine the Jain versions of Rāmāyaṇa, we come to know that on the whole, a liberal feminist perspective is reflected in the presentation of Rāmakathā. The observation

and scrutiny of each female character in the Rāmāyaṇas of both traditions is a vast subject; still some important points are noted here in order to illuminate the liberal approach of Jain authors towards women.

According to Vimalasūri, Sitā is a daughter of King Janaka and queen Videhā.¹³ The myth of finding Sitā in the box buried underground is totally absent in Paumacariya. Padma or Rama accepts Sitā in Laṅkā without any doubt or ordeal (Divya).¹⁴ Vimalasūri picturises the episode of banishment of Sitā in 'जणचितापव्व'¹⁵, but the tone of Padma towards Sitā is less harsh than Vālmiki. Guṇabhadra and his literary followers had ended the Rāmakathā at the consecration of Rāma in Ayodhyā and had kept mum about the incidents of expulsion of Sitā. In Paumacariya, Sitā goes through the ordeal only once and after proving her 'purenness' voluntarily embraces Dikṣā and goes away.¹⁶

In all major Jain versions, the episodes of Mantharā, Ahalyā and Śabarī are absent. They do not want to picturise Mantharā as 'jealousy incarnate'. Kaikeyī was very much anxious about Bharata's consecration to create interest of worldly things in him who was on the verge of renouncing the house and becoming a monk. Kaikeyī is not responsible for the banishment of Padma. The decision of Vanavāsa is taken by Padma and it is not the effect of the boon given to Kaikeyī. Kaikeyī's repent and her sincere efforts to persuade Rama from Aranyavāsa throw new light on Kaikeyī's character. The sympathetic attitude toward Kaikeyī is very peculiar to Vimalasūri and his followers.¹⁷

It is quite evident from the absence of Ahalyā episode that Jain authors do not wish to depict Padma as the uplifter of 'Patitā' woman like Ahalyā, by mere touch. Likewise they do not want to depict Padma as the spiritual uplifter of Śabarī merely by his presence.

Mandodari, the chief queen of Rāvaṇa is presented by

Valmiki only at the end after the slaughter of Rāvaṇa.¹⁸ Jain Rāmāyaṇas, especially Vimalasūri had developed the character of Mandodari throughout his epic very skillfully.¹⁹ Mandodari persuades Rāvaṇa again and again to send Sitā back. She puts forth her protest against Rāvaṇa's unethical deeds. Her love and loyalty to Rāvaṇa is quite evident from her dialogues. The justice given to Mandodari's character is remarkable.

We find very stray and strange references of Añjanā, the mother of Hanuman in Valmiki. In Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa it is said that Hanuman is 'औरसपुत्र' of Vāyu and 'क्षेत्रजपुत्र' of Kesari.²⁰ For removing the blemish on the character of Añjanā, Vimalasūri and particularly Svayambhu have reconstructed and developed the Añjanā episode into a full-fledged 'उपाख्यान'. The name of Hanuman's father is Pavanañjaya. In his character, there is a mixture of the characteristics of Vāyu and Kesari. He is a brave egoist Vidyādhara and acts according to his male instincts and free wills. Añjanā bears painful sufferings created by him for twelve years, solacing her mind with the help of Karmasiddhānta. Pavanañjaya realizes his guilt and the episode ends on a happy note. In Jain tradition, Añjanā is enumerated among the sixteen adorable women.

With this brief account of some female characters in Jain Rāmāyaṇas, we can conclude that the Jaina approach to them is more humanistic, sympathetic and liberal than the contemporary Brahmanic tradition. It is very apt to note that in Jaina environment, right from the first Tirthaṅkara Ṛṣabhadeva, the number of Sādhvis and Śrāvikas is almost twice than that of Sādhus and Śrāvakas.²¹

The Striking Dissimilarities Found in Various Jaina Versions of Rāmāyaṇa

It is already noted that Paumacariya of Vimalasūri is the first Jaina version of Rāmāyaṇa. He is well-acquainted with Valmiki Rāmāyaṇa, but has not mentioned his name. The

introductory portions of Paumacariya reveal quite openly the purpose of writing the story. The cause of the Jainification is explained as follows —

अलियं ति सव्वमेयं, भणंति जं कुकइणो मूढा (Paum Ca.3.15) and
अलियं पि सव्वमेयं, उववत्तिविरुद्धपच्चयगुणेहि ।

न सद्दहंति पुरिसा, हवन्ति जे पंडिया लोए ॥ (Paum Ca.2.117)

It means, 'All this appears to me to be lies, contrary to reasoning and not worthy of belief by wise men'. It is quite clear by this remark that he has deliberately rejected the Brahmanic version of the same story.

Not only Vimalasūri but all Jaina authors have the same reason to refute the accounts of Rāma and Rāvaṇa that they have heard from the Kuśāstra-vadins i.e. expounders of false scriptures. According to them, Lord Mahāvira had narrated the story to Gautama Gaṇadhara. They got the story through the tradition of their teachers. If this claim is true then one expects basic minimum similarities in all Jaina versions. The similarities are already noted beforehand. Here some of the striking differences in major Jain versions are taken into account.

(1) Daśaratha and his sons :

According to Paumacariya, Daśaratha was a king of Śāketa or Ayodhyā. He has four sons, Padma from Aparājītā, Lakṣmaṇa from Sumitrā and Bharata - Śrughna from Kaikeyī.²² According to Uttarapurāṇa, at first, Daśaratha was ruling at Varāṇasī. Rāma or Balabhadra was born in Vārāṇasī. Rāma's mother was Subālā. Afterwards Daśaratha transferred his capital to Ayodhyā. One of his queen gave birth to Lakṣmaṇa and the other to Śatrughna.²³ Triṣaṣṭismṛtiśāstra mentions four queens and four sons of Daśaratha.²⁴ In Daśaratha Jātaka, Daśaratha was ruling at Vārāṇasī. He has 16,000 queens. His chief queen gave birth to Rāma-paṇḍita, Lakṣmaṇa-kumāra and Sitā-devī.²⁵ There is no mention of Bharata - Śatrughna.

(2) Birth of Sitā :

Paumacariya mentions that king Janka's wife Videhā gave birth to a twin, Sitā and Bhāmaṇḍala. A Vidyādhara abducted Bhāmaṇḍala. In course of time he was infatuated with Sitā. After knowing the reality, he became a monk.²⁶ According to Uttarapurāṇa, Sitā was an offspring of Rāvaṇa and Mandodari. A fortune-teller declares the female child as unlucky and Rāvaṇa abandons Sitā. Mārica keeps her in a box and buries underground at Mithilā, with ample wealth in the box. Some farmers find her and handover the child to Janaka and Vasudha.²⁷

(3) Svayaṁvara of Sitā :

In Paumacariya, Janaka seeks help of Padma and Lakṣmaṇa against Mlecchas. He decides to give Sitā to Padma, a valiant warrior. Afterwards he arranges the Svayaṁvara.²⁸ We do not find reference of Rāvaṇa in this context. In Uttarapurāṇa the episode of Svayaṁvara is totally dropped.

(4) Kaikeyi and Her Demands :

In Paumacariya, Daśaratha declares his decision of renunciation and decision of the consecration of Padma. Bharata decides to follow the path of Liberation. Kaikeyi demands her boon which was kept previously with Daśaratha. She wants her son to be a king for engaging him in worldly life. Padma spontaneously declares his decision to go in forest. The span of fourteen years is not mentioned.²⁹

The account of Kaikeyi's demands is totally dropped in Uttarapurāṇa. Daśaratha sends Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to Vārāṇasi. Rāma became king and Lakṣmaṇa, a crowned prince.³⁰

However, It is very surprising that in Vāsudevahindī, (6th Century A.D.) Saṁghadāsagaṇi follows Valmiki in this whole account of fourteen-year' forest-wanderings of Rama.

In Daśaratha Jātaka, Kaikeyi demands royal throne for

Bharata. Daśaratha accepts her demands, but comments on the deceitful and jealous nature of women and sends Rama to forest.

(5) The Slaughter of Vāli :

In Paumacariya, after a fierce war between Vāli and Sugriva, Vāli becomes a Muni and attains Nirvāṇa.³¹ In Uttarapurāṇa, Lakṣmaṇa kills Vāli.³² Śīlāṅka follows Vālmiki and depicts Rāma as a killer of Vāli.³³

(6) Story of Śambūka :

The story of Śambūka is dropped in Jaina Rāmāyaṇas except Paumacariya. In Paumacariya he is not depicted as a Śūdra, but a son of Caṇḍranakhā (Vālmiki's Śurpaṇakhā) and Kharadūṣaṇa. While observing austerities in the bamboo-thicket, Lakṣmaṇa kills Śambūka by mistake.³⁴

(7) Abduction of Sītā :

This episode is picturised in Paumacariya and Uttarapurāṇa in different manners.

(8) Banishment of Sītā :

Vimalasūri depicts this account in Parvas 93 and 94. Raviṣeṇa and Hemcandra follow him. Saṃghadāsagaṇi, Guṇabhadra, Śīlāṅka and Āśādhara have completed their Rāmākathās at Rāmā's consecration.

CONCLUSIVE REMARKS :

When we consider the Jain versions of Rāmāyaṇa in totality, at first, readers' attention is attracted towards the reasonable changes done with positive attitude. Depicting the Vānaras and Rākṣasas as sub-human beings and not as wild animals and ferocious flesh-eaters is of course a positive and reasonable change. The sacrificial rituals involving violence are condemned and new approach is presented. Whenever there is an opportunity, the Jaina authors explain the incident by applying Doctrine of Karman. The narratives of Vāli and

Śambuka are presented in entirely new manner. Comparatively sympathetic and liberal attitude towards women is seen throughout the Rāmakathā. Vimalasūri and his followers have picturised the ordeal of Sitā only once and Digambara authors, otherwise famous for their rigid attitude towards women, have dropped altogether the incident of the ordeal of Sitā.

In spite of all these plus-points, an objective analysis and valuation of the Jaina versions is needed.

If Jainas charge the Brahmanic Rāmāyaṇa as 'मतिविकल्पित' and claim that they got the tradition of Ramakatha from Lord Mahāvira, naturally the readers expect consistency at least in the basic facts in all Jaina versions, which is not the reality. So the charge of 'मतिविकल्पना' applies to them in the same manner.

These Jainified versions are successful in creating Jaina environment but it is difficult for even Jaina readers to believe that there are so many Chaityas and Mandiras and places of pilgrimage and religious preaching and Dikṣas during the forest wanderings of Padma and Sitā and elsewhere, at the time of Rāmāyaṇa. These new renderings of Jaina authors are not popular among the Jainas even today due to the popularity of Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa, which is deep-rooted in the society. An unbiased reader is compelled to admit that beautiful descriptions of nature and seasons, the presentation of dialogues and especially the poetic and aesthetic values of Vālmiki -Rāmāyaṇa are much more lacking in the Jaina versions. The total Jainification seems to be the cause of this lacuna. That is the reason why the Jaina authors like Saṃghadāsagaṇi and Śilāṅka have followed the story-line of Rāmakathā of Vālmiki with some reasonable and rational changes here and there.

Due to the disparity in various renderings, lack of poetic values and exaggerated Jainification, Jaina Rāmkaṭhā is not very popular even among Jainas.

Comparatively Kṛṣṇakathā which is introduced in convincing manner is much more popular among Jainas, but it is a separate thought-line for further research.

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