

Different Versions of Ramayana

August 6, 2020

The Ramayana is not a single book but rather a chronicle of history and a tradition of storytelling. Ramayana serves as an excellent window through which the great panorama of the Indian civilization is opened. The story of Rama depicted in the Ramayana unlocks a gateway leading the readers in any part of the globe to encounter with the world-view of a great civilization that both resembles, and markedly differs from current civilization and a process which enables them to realize that they should have a world view in the first place. **The Ramayana tradition has enjoyed a unique popularity throughout the subcontinent of South Asia (comprising the modern states of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka) and beyond – for versions of the tale have flourished in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and Indonesia.**

Although the **core story of the travails of Prince Rama and Princess Sita and their companions remains much the same everywhere, storytellers and poets in dozens of languages have chosen not simply to translate some “original” version, but instead have retold the saga in their own words, often modifying and embellishing it according to regional traditions or their own insights and interpretations.** Thus we have today different versions of Ramayana in various languages indicating the deep penetration and influence of the personalities of Rama and Sita in the hearts and minds of the people.

India is very vast and has varied cultural and literary traditions. It has always maintained and nurtured plants and flowers of different kinds, colors and shapes. Therefore an assortment of varieties and traditions of Rama Katha has been flourishing here not only in Sanskrit but in many other languages over the centuries. Sri Rama, even now, is the pet

subject of poets, novelists, story writers, cartoonists, philosophers, thinkers, dramatists, film-makers and management consultants besides contemporary politicians of different hues.

- The influence of the Rāmāyana of Vālmīki has been so powerful and deep that quite a few other Rāmāyanas have come into existence in course of time, thereby enriching our Rāmāyana literature. Of these, mention must be made of the **Adhyātma Rāmāyana** (4200 verses) **considered to be a part of the Brahmānda Purāna**. Modern scholars however feel that it is an independent work of an unknown author and assign it to the 14th century. Cast in the form of a **dialogue between Shiva and Pārvatī, this work is highly devotional and is dedicated to the spreading of the cult of Rāma**. It abounds in beautiful hymns and quite a few philosophical discourses including the well-known Rāmagitā.
- The **Ānanda Rāmāyana** (12,000 verses), also called Manohara-Ānanda-Rāmāyana is another popular work. It is also in the **form of a dialogue, first between Pārvatī and Siva and later between Rāmadāsa and his disciple Viṣṇudāsa**. This work contains a number of stories popular even now, such as those of Gokarna, the famous pilgrimage centre in Karnataka and of the rākṣasa brothers Ahirāvaṇa and Mahirāvaṇa of the nether world who tried to help Rāvaṇa. This work also is assigned to the 14th century or even a later date.
- Then there are **some other Rāmāyanas, also in Sanskrit**, like the **Adbhuta Rāmāyana** (1355 verses), the **Yogavāsistha Rāmāyana** (32,000 verses), the **Tattva-saṅgraha Rāmāyana** and the **Saṅgraha Rāmāyana** which have been printed but have not become popular except in limited circles. Other Indian languages also have been enriched by the Rāmāyanas based on Vālmīki's Rāmāyana or its adaptations.

. **Rāmacaritamānasa of Tulasidās (in Hindi):** It is written in

a dialect of Hindi, and is one of the masterpieces of medieval Hindu literature and a work with significant influence on modern Hinduism. Written in the 16th century by the poet Tulsidas, the poem is distinguished both by its great expression of love for a personal god and by its exemplification through its characters of the ideal conduct of a husband and ruler (Rama), wife (Sita), and brother (Lakshmana).

. **Rāmāyana of Kamba (in Tamil):** Ramavataram, popularly referred to as Kamba Ramayanam, is a Tamil epic that was written by the Tamil poet Kamban during the 12th century. Ramavatharam is different from the Sanskrit original in many aspects – both in spiritual concepts and in the specifics of the storyline. Kamban wrote this epic with the patronage of ThiruvennaiNallur Sadayappa Vallal, a Pannai kula chieftain. In gratitude to his patron, Kamban references his name once in every 1,000 verses.

. **Rāmāyana of Kṛttivāsa (in Bengali):** Composed by 15th century [Bengali](#) poet Krittibas Ojha, it is rendition of the Rāmāyana into Bengali. Written in the traditional Rāmāyaṇ Pāchālī form of Middle Bengali literature, the Krittivāsi Rāmāyaṇ is not just a rewording of the original Indian epic, but also a vivid depiction of the society and culture of Bengal in the Middle Ages. The text is also remembered for its exploration of the concept of Bhakti, which would later contribute to the emergence of Vaishnavism in Gangetic Bengal and the surrounding regions.

. **Rāmacaritam and the Kannassa Rāmāyanam of Ceramān and Kannassa (in Malayalam):** Niranam is a small village in Southern Kerala in India near Mannar town. In the 14th century Niranam gave birth to three poets who became well-known as the Niranam Poets. They were Madhava Panikkar, Sankara Panikkar and Rama Panikkar of the Kannassa family. Before their period the poetry of Kerala was a mix of Malayalam and Sanskrit, known as manipravalam. Niranam poets were instrumental in

successfully freeing the literature from the influence of this mix. The appearance of the modern Malayalam language starts with the works of Niranam Poets.

. **Rāmāvatār of Guru Gobind Singh (in Punjabi):** Chaubis Avtar, a collection of twenty-four legendary tales of twenty-four incarnations of the god Visnu, forms a part of Bachitra Natak, in Guru Gobind Singh's Dasam Granth. The complete work contains a total of 4,371 verse units of which 3,356 are accounted for by Ramavtar and Krishnavtar. The greater part of the tales of Ramavtar and Krishnavtar are taken up with battle scenes evoked through many alliterative devices with the clash and clang of arms constantly reproduced.

. **Raṅganātha Rāmāyana (in Telugu):** It is one of the most famous adaptations of the Valmiki Ramayana in Telugu, a Dravidian language. Ranganatha Ramayana was written by the poet Ranganatha, also known as Gona Budda Reddy, between 1300 and 1310 A.D. This Ramayana was composed in 17,290 couplets (in Dwipada metre). This meter is lyrical and can either be recited like the Valmiki Ramayana (written in Anustupa metre) or sung like the Ramcharitmanas. Although Ranganatha follows the theme of the Valmiki Ramayana, he still made changes in some incidents which affected the course of events. Ranganatha added some significant incidents to make the theme more natural and reliable.

. **Rāmacaritra of Girdhar (in Gujarāti):** He derived the story from [Ramayana](#) of [Tulsidas](#) and several other Puranic texts. His version is lucid and musical as it is in simple language and uses traditional [metres](#) and melodies.

. **Saptakānda Rāmāyana of Sarala Dās (in Oriya):** It is a 15th-century retelling of the Ramayana, written by Sarala Das in Odia, describing the fight between Rama and [Ravana](#) (1000 headed). The story is written as a poem. Applying colloquial words for his poetical purpose, his writing was free from sanskritisation. His work can be seen as adapting the popular

oral conventions of earlier Odia folk songs.

. **Rāmāyana of Mādhava Kandali (in Assamese)**: The ramayana of Madhava Kandali is a text that is critical and historical study of the four kandas of ramayana viz ayodhaya, aranya, kiskindhya and sundara kandas.

. **Torave Rāmāyana of Narahari (in Kannada)** are some of the more well-known **Rāmāyanas in the vernaculars**.

- The story of Rāma, either in its original form as depicted by Vālmiki or in a metamorphosed form, has travelled widely outside India, to Tibet and Eastern Turkestan, to South East Asian countries, Japan and even Mongolia. The following list of works gives an idea of this movement:

- . Rāmāyana Kakawin (Javanese)
- . Hikayat Seri Rāma (Malaysian)
- . Rāmakien (Thai)
- . Pha Lak Pha Lam and (Laos)
- . Khvay Thuaraphi Hobutsushu (Japanese)
- . Rāmāśvamedha (Nepali)
- . Jānakiharana (Sinhalese)

There are many different versions of the Ramayana that are available today. Of these, the **Valmiki Rayamana is considered to be the original source**. Others include:

. **Adhyathma Ramayanam by Veda Vyasa** (found in the Brahmanda Purana)

. **Ramcharitmanas by Goswami Tulsidas**