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## SHARING THE STORY, REVISING THE IMAGE: INTERACTION OF PURĀṆAS AND OTHER DEVELOPING RĀMA NARRATIVES

The Rāma story presented in the so-called *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* rapidly became popular and widely known — so much so that the compilers of most of the Purāṇas incorporated brief references, summaries or a few longer retellings or elaborations. In this article I examine the use made of the Vālmīki narrative by these Purāṇic tellers, exploring the innovations in the context of the developing religious and social framework and in relation to other contemporary narrative corpora. The summaries and allusions rely for their effect on the audience's familiarity with the longer Vālmīki version, but what about the innovations? Are they the result of the Purāṇic authors' creativity, or have they been borrowed from, or suggested by, other versions, perhaps Jain or classical literature? How far have Śaivas felt able to make use of the Vaiṣṇava Rāma narrative, and why? And what effect have the Purāṇic versions had on the subsequent development of the Rāma narrative tradition?

*Keywords:* Rāma, Vālmīki, Purāṇa, Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava.

In this article I examine the contribution made by Purāṇic authors to the development of the Rāma story as a whole.<sup>1</sup> As a class of texts the Purāṇas present little that is new; innovations and elaborations certainly are found, but they are not always unique or original to the Purāṇas. The vast majority of their many compilers take it for granted that their audience is familiar at least with the outline of the Vālmiki narrative, and incorporate only brief allusions or summaries of the salient elements.<sup>2</sup> Such non-innovative Purāṇas are none the less making an important point by their very conformity to tradition, a point liable to be distorted in an article such as this that necessarily focuses attention only on those innovations that certainly do exist. Departures from the Vālmiki narrative are rare, and those that are found demonstrate a certain amount of interaction between different classes of texts; they also reflect the evolving religious situation of their time. By the date of even the earliest Purāṇas (perhaps the fourth century AD),<sup>3</sup> understanding of the status of Rāma and Sītā had been developing from their epic presentations as human; by the time of the latest (about the sixteenth), they were regarded as fully divine. Episodes included to reflect this development sometimes have unintended consequences.

A long passage in the *Padma Purāṇa*, *Pātālakhaṇḍa* 5,1-68, probably of twelfth century date, details the wanderings of Rāma's *aśvamedha* horse, glorifying Rāma and the prowess of members of his family, notably Śatrughna, Bharata's son Puṣkara, and Lava and Kuśa; the twins are identified as Rāma's sons when they defeat and humiliate the horse's guards. The logic of this revision of the so-called Vālmiki account, where the boys are identified when they sing the Rāma story at his *aśvamedha*,<sup>4</sup> is that surely no-one but Rāma's sons could be capable of defeating his brothers, allies and finally Rāma himself. This

<sup>1</sup> This article is an amplified form of a presentation delivered at the 16th World Sanskrit Conference, Bangkok, 2015. I am happy to offer it to this volume in tribute to my valued long-term friend and colleague Yaroslav Vassilkov.

<sup>2</sup> Details are too many to be included in this article, but may be found by consulting the John and Mary Brockington Archive, "Development and spread of the Rāma narrative (pre-modern)" on the Oxford Research Archive (ORA) to be found at <<http://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:8df9647a-8002-45ff-b37e-7effb669768b>>, or rather more easily via the Bodleian Library homepage by following the link and searching for 'Brockington'.

<sup>3</sup> Dates tentatively ascribed to individual texts can be found in the list of References.

<sup>4</sup> *VRm* 1,4; 7,84-86 (1-3 C AD).

motif is recorded first in Jain tellings of the Rāma story of the fifth century if not earlier, where Lava and Kuśa had also been portrayed as belligerent, and identified as a result of their hostility to their father;<sup>5</sup> these versions were created specifically, not to glorify, but to denigrate Rāma as less than all-powerful, and it is ironic that the motif should have been used in the *Pātālakhaṇḍa* with the opposite purpose. In the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, Somadeva pursued the same motif but by means of a different incident, but neither he nor the Jains linked it to the *aśvamedha*.<sup>6</sup> That link, including the presence of a son of Lakṣmaṇa, had already been made by Bhavabhūti in his *Uttararāmacarita*, where the focus is on Rāma and his emotions;<sup>7</sup> it is likely that it was the much developed Purāṇic version rather than the classical drama that inspired the shift of focus in some vernacular treatments to the resentful boys and their suffering and increasingly defiant mother, with its correspondingly weak and humiliated Rāma;<sup>8</sup> some Southeast Asian versions portray him as using harsh and intensified violence.<sup>9</sup> It is the narrative element found in the *Pātālakhaṇḍa* that has been shared and developed, not its purpose.

Innovations introduced into Vaiṣṇava-oriented passages to safeguard Rāma's enhanced position and avoid the suspicion that, by accepting Sītā back as his queen after rescuing her from Rāvaṇa, he becomes the husband of a polluted and polluting wife, can also have unintended consequences. The concept of Sītā's purity, clearly established in the earlier forms of the narrative, is reinforced by innovations ensuring that she is no longer touched by Rāvaṇa as he abducts her. It is ironic that this sensitivity to the polluting effect of Rāvaṇa's touch on Sītā and therefore on Rāma himself does not usually extend to her seizure by

<sup>5</sup> Raviṣeṇa 2008: 102.1-78; Pampa 1882: 16.7-8; Hemacandra 1954: 9.35-116; Vimalasūri, *Paūmacariya* 99 in Kulkarni 1990: 15-50; Svayambhū 2002: 82.6-18.

<sup>6</sup> In Somadeva's account Rāma's sacrifice is to be of a human, and Lava is to be the victim: *Kathāsaritsāgara* 9,51; Tawney 1880: I, 487; sacrifices of any kind were eliminated from the Jain retellings, and the boys attack Ayodhyā out of revenge for Rāma's treatment of their mother.

<sup>7</sup> 2007: IV, 169-80; V, 4-16.

<sup>8</sup> In Prakāśa Rāma's Kashmiri version Sītā, fearing a repetition of his ill-treatment, locks herself in her hermitage dwelling, leaving the king outside begging her to open the door, while she reproaches him in bitterly outspoken terms (2001: 131-32, 135-37; 1930: *sarga* 78); Khmer and Thai versions present her as particularly resentful and independent.

<sup>9</sup> John Brockington and Mary Brockington 2016.

Virāḍha earlier in the story, although a rare exception is found in the *Narasimha Purāna*, where she had not been touched by this monster.<sup>10</sup>

One narrative device explains that it is not she whom Rāvaṇa abducts, but a counterfeit, while Sītā herself is kept safe by Agni and restored after the victory. In the earliest record, the *Kūrma Purāna*, Rāma is unaware of the substitution; illogically, in the *Brahmavaivarta Purāna* he has been informed by Agni before the golden deer appears, and in the *Devībhāgavata Purāna* all credibility is abandoned when he nevertheless continues to grieve for the wife he now knows has not been abducted, but is safe and well.<sup>11</sup> Logic, of course, plays a very small role in traditional narratives, its claims being outweighed by the need to retain as much as possible of the original, well-known and well-loved story. A *Rāmāyaṇa* in which Rāma did not grieve for his abducted wife would be no *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Two ways are found of dealing with the eventually redundant counterfeit: in the *Kūrma Purāna* she enters the fire and is burned before Agni restores the real Sītā; the more merciful compiler of the *Devībhāgavata Purāna* presents Rāma and Agni instructing her to practise asceticism in order to be reborn as Draupadī.<sup>12</sup> The counterfeit Sītā episode seems to be a Purāṇic innovation, perhaps suggested by the counterfeit Sītā created by Indrajit in the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* to deceive Rāma;<sup>13</sup> it achieved widespread popularity when taken into the instructional Sanskrit *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* (only in theory an integral part of the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāna*) and Tulsīdās's vernacular telling in his *Rāmcaritmānas*.<sup>14</sup>

Another solution to the problem of Rāvaṇa's polluting touch is that Sītā is deceived and enters Rāvaṇa's chariot voluntarily and untouched. This motif is not found in the Purāṇas until the Vaiṣṇava *Narasimha Purāna*,<sup>15</sup> and also appears in the Śaiva-oriented *Bṛhaddharma Purāna*,<sup>16</sup> but it had clearly already been in general circulation for some

<sup>10</sup> *NarSP* 49.22-25.

<sup>11</sup> *KūP* 2,34.115-40; *BVP* 2,14; *DBhāgP* 9,16.31-48; the episode is alluded to at *MBhāgP* 42.30.

<sup>12</sup> *KūP* 2,34.129-37; *DBhāgP* 9,16.49-53.

<sup>13</sup> *VRm* 6,68.

<sup>14</sup> *AdhyRm* 3,7.1-8; 6,13.19-21; *RCM* 1952: 310-11,422-23.

<sup>15</sup> Sītā is told by the disguised Rāvaṇa that he has been sent by Rāma with the message that Bharata has arrived to take them all back to Ayodhyā; deceived, she enters the chariot: *NarSP* 49.81-86.

<sup>16</sup> Rāvaṇa attempts to lure her from the hermitage by convincing her that Kausalyā wishes to see her urgently: *BṛDhP* 19.49.

time; it was used in the ninth or tenth centuries by the classical dramatist Śaktibhadra,<sup>17</sup> and at much the same date by the Jains Guṇabhadra and Puṣpadanta.<sup>18</sup>

A third, even more spectacular, way of safeguarding Sītā's purity seems not to have been taken up in the Purāṇas: Rāvaṇa lifts the whole hut and the plot of ground it stands on. Within India, the earliest example I have yet come across is in Kampan's Tamil version, but it appears earlier than this in the Tibetan version discovered in the library cave at Dunhuang, followed by Dmar-ston, and in later Mongolian tellings.<sup>19</sup> In a Lao adaptation Rāvaṇa is warned that the heat of Sītā's *tapas* will protect her if she is abducted forcibly, so he creates a stone figure to carry her away.<sup>20</sup>

Rāma's banishment of Sītā is another sensitive issue, explained away in a minor anecdote found in the *Pātālakhaṇḍa* of the *Padma Purāṇa*: as a child she is cruel to a parrot couple, and incurs a curse to be separated, pregnant, from Rāma.<sup>21</sup> This tale has a more than decorative effect, for it absolves Rāma of the guilt of his harshness, but at the expense of Sītā's character: now that the virtuous maiden of the epics has been elevated to divine status, she is portrayed as an all-too-human naughty little girl. A burlesque parody in the *Śiva Purāṇa* featuring — thinly-disguised — Sītā, Janaka, Rāvaṇa, Kumbhakarna, and Rāma's *vānara* allies, however, places the blame entirely on Viṣṇu himself. When asked to help the lovesick Nārada win Sītā at her *svayamvara*, he tricks and humiliates the irascible sage, who gains limited revenge by cursing the future human victor to experience the misery of separation from a woman.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Approached by Rāvaṇa and his charioteer counterfeiting Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, Sītā is deceived that Bharata has been attacked by enemies and enters the chariot voluntarily to go to his aid: Śaktibhadra 1984: III, 32-33.

<sup>18</sup> Deceived by Rāvaṇa disguised as Rāma, Sītā enters the vehicle voluntarily: Guṇabhadra, *Uttarapurāṇa*: Kulkarni 1990: 117-28; Puṣpadanta, *Mahāpurāṇa* 72: Kulkarni 1990: 154-68, Warder 1988: V,633-65 (§§3393-97).

<sup>19</sup> Kampan: Hart and Heifetz 1988: 3490-91, 3553, 3579; Dunhuang: de Jong 1989: 25-26; Dmar-ston Chos-kyi rgyal-po: de Jong 1993 (=1983): II, xliv; Mongolian, de Jong 1993: xliv. In the Dunhuang version he has already failed to entice her away by approaching in the form of an elephant, then as a horse, but she has refused to mount: Tibetan, Dunhuang: de Jong 1989: 25-26.

<sup>20</sup> Sahai 1996: II,120.

<sup>21</sup> *PdP* 5,57.5-18,57-66.

<sup>22</sup> *ŚiP* 2,3—4. I am grateful to Professor R.K. Sharma for making me aware of this anecdote.

It is not surprising that it is in the more overtly Śaiva material that the greatest modifications to the Rāma story are found. It is not the purpose of a Śaiva narrator to glorify an incarnation of Viṣṇu, so the fact that so many chose to refer to Rāma at all is in itself testimony to the overwhelming vitality of his story. If they could not ignore him — and very few so-called ‘Śaiva Purāṇas’ do not mention him — they clearly felt a need to diminish his prominence. Attempts by Śaivas to tackle the problem were less radical and less subversive than those devised by Jain authors, faced with the same dilemma;<sup>23</sup> nevertheless, some of their innovations had important consequences in diminishing Rāma’s status.

The simplest change was to present Rāma — Viṣṇu in human form — as a devotee of Śiva, subordinate to him, in a variety of episodes that can only detract from his status. Before the crossing to Laṅkā he prays to Śiva for victory and obtains his grace;<sup>24</sup> returning victorious, he installs one or more *liṅgas*.<sup>25</sup> In the *Mudgala Purāṇa* Rāma interrupts his search for Sītā for a whole month to worship Śiva until he is promised by Śiva that he will recover her, and it is Śiva who reveals his identity as an incarnation, but adds the explanation that he is human, not out of benevolence, but by a curse of Bhṛḡu.<sup>26</sup> In the *Skanda Purāṇa*, while it is death at Rāma’s hands that liberates Rāvaṇa (a familiar outcome for any of his adversaries in later texts of all classes), it is Śiva with whom the *rākṣasa* king attains *sārūpya*.<sup>27</sup> Back in Ayodhyā, in three Purāṇas it is to worship Śiva that King Rāma performs his *aśvamedha*;<sup>28</sup> in the *Saura Purāṇa*, Lava and Kuśa are devotees of Śiva, and Rāma — the *avatāra* of Viṣṇu — attains at death the realm of Śiva.<sup>29</sup>

Sītā, too, can be linked to Śaiva benevolence: in both the *Kūrma* and the *Saura Purāṇas* her birth is granted to Janaka by Pārvatī as a reward for his asceticism.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Mary Brockington 2016.

<sup>24</sup> *ŚiP* 4,31.10-41; *PdP* (*Pātālakhaṇḍa*) 5,116.219-33.

<sup>25</sup> *KūP* 1,21.46-48; *SauP* 30.64-65; *SkP* 3,1.1-2; 3,1.43-47; 6,99-104; *EkP* 53.31-55; at *ŚiP* 3,20.29 the *liṅga* is established before the crossing to Laṅkā. The *liṅga* established at *BrP/GM* 123.191-94 has no connection with the battle against Rāvaṇa.

<sup>26</sup> *MudP* 3,26.44-49.

<sup>27</sup> *SkP* 1,1.8.113.

<sup>28</sup> *KūP* 1,21.55; *SauP* 30.67; *EkP* 53.20-24.

<sup>29</sup> *SauP* 30.68,70.

<sup>30</sup> *KūP* 1,21.18-20; *SauP* 30.51.

The compilers of other Śaiva or Śākta Purāṇas correspondingly subordinate the Rāghavas to the Devī,<sup>31</sup> or to Gaṇeśa.<sup>32</sup>

A rather less paradoxical way of decreasing the status of Rāma was to increase the prominence of his helper, Hanumān; this modification was to have far-reaching effects on the later Rāma tradition, both within India and in Southeast Asia. New narrative episodes such as his rescue of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa from Mahīrāvaṇa (Rāvaṇa's underworld ally who abducts the brothers), first recorded in the *Śiva Purāṇa*,<sup>33</sup> subordinate Rāma to Hanumān and associate him with Śiva via Kālī, whose aid the mighty rescuer enlists; in the *Nārada Purāṇa* Hanumān in a former birth is a disciple of Gautama and favoured devotee of Śiva.<sup>34</sup> His much elaborated meeting with the Devī as guardian of Laṅkā after his leap combines narrative development with theological innovation when she recognises him as an incarnation of Śiva; his manifestation of his fierce form enables him to instruct her to leave Laṅkā so that Rāma may fulfil his destiny and save the world from destruction.<sup>35</sup>

In narrative terms a more straightforward identification of Hanumān as a son of Śiva, the result of an unintended ejaculation, is presented in the *Śiva Purāṇa*,<sup>36</sup> but the sectarian logic of this incident is convoluted: Śiva has been aroused by the sight of Mohinī, Viṣṇu in female form. Which god is the more responsible for the mighty monkey's elevation? Even more profound are the consequences of the fact that the mother, in this case, is still Añjanā, but that she is now identified as daughter of Gautama, an identification that poses profound narratorial and theological problems. Except in Jain texts, where *vānaras*, *rākṣasas* and *devas* are all presented as humanoid *vidyādharas*, Hanumān and his mother Añjanā had always been presented as monkeys, a quite different species from the sage Gautama and his wife. Later tellers explained the discrepancy in a number of increasingly fantastic ways; in Southeast Asia they revelled in the opportunities it

<sup>31</sup> *MBhāgP passim*; *DBhāgP* 3,30.18-43; *KāP* 60.24-30,39-41; *BrDhP* 20.43; 21.50-67.

<sup>32</sup> *MudP* 3,26.

<sup>33</sup> *ŚiP* 3,20.34. This and further occurrences of the episode are examined in depth by Dieter Kapp (1988, 1989, 1991) and William L. Smith (1982, 1996).

<sup>34</sup> *NāP* 1,79.50-94.

<sup>35</sup> *BrDhP* 20.24-37,61. Hanumān is recognised as a partial incarnation of Śiva at *BVP* 4,47.62-63; 4,62.62; *SkP* 1,1.8.100; 5,2.79.6; 5,3.84.6; *MBhāgP* 37.5-6,22; and *NāP* 1,79.90-94.

<sup>36</sup> *ŚiP* 3,20.3-7.



afforded, even to the alarming extent of making Hanumān the son of Rāma and Sītā, conceived while they are temporarily transformed into monkeys when they inadvertently bathe in a magic pool and abort the resultant foetus, with Añjanā acting as surrogate mother.<sup>37</sup> In an innovation even less acceptable to pious Hindus with their emphasis on Rāma's monogamous fidelity, Hanumān is the son of Rāma and someone other than Sītā: of Añjanā while both are temporarily transformed into monkeys in two Lao versions;<sup>38</sup> of Añjanā in the Malay *Hikāyat Serī Rāma*, as early perhaps as the thirteenth century, when the youthful Rāma is aroused by her beauty and asks Vāyu to insert two drops of his sperm into her mouth;<sup>39</sup> and of Potre Langawi in the Philippine version as the result of a dream experienced by the grieving Rāma.<sup>40</sup>

In a passage in the *Gautamī Māhātmya* incorporated into the *Brahma Purāṇa* less fanciful, but equally effective, more direct means are used to impair the image of Rāma and his father.<sup>41</sup> The whole purpose of the *Māhātmya* is to glorify the Gautamī and its *tīrthas*, and with that aim the compiler of this chapter presents carefully selected and revised excerpts from the Rāma story; there is no mention of subsequent events in Daṇḍaka or Laṅkā. Like the Buddhist *Daśaratha Jātaka*, this is not a retelling of the traditional narrative as a whole, but a single episode, selected and rewritten to exemplify a different sectarian point of view. Daśaratha is presented in a poor light: he is even prepared to break his oath to Kaikeyī — undermining the integrity that is the whole foundation of his portrayal in the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* — until he is overruled by Rāma;<sup>42</sup> this leads to Rāma's filial piety being redefined as rescuing Daśaratha from hell rather more than as fidelity to his father's oath. Unequivocally guilty of brāhman-murder in killing the ascetic boy and his parents (the parents refuse even to be touched

<sup>37</sup> Javanese, *Serat Kanda*: Stutterheim 1925: 76-77; Malay, *HSR*: Zieseniss 1928: 21/ Burch 1963: 30; Malay, *HMR* 1933: 118.

<sup>38</sup> Sahaī 1996: II,193; Vo 1971: 78.

<sup>39</sup> Malay, *HSR*: Zieseniss 1928: 25-26 / Burch 1963: 39 (ms Ro).

<sup>40</sup> Philippine, *Maharadia Lawana*: Francisco 1994: 63-72. On Rāma's adultery in a different episode in the Tibetan telling found at Dunhuang see Roesler 2016.

<sup>41</sup> *BrP,GM* 1989: 123.

<sup>42</sup> Daśaratha's desolation portrayed so movingly throughout *VRm* 2,10—58 is diminished in several Purāṇas: at *KūP* 1,21.26-27 he agrees reluctantly to Kaikeyī's demand; at *AgP* 6.26 and *SauP* 30.56 he pronounces the sentence of banishment himself, in the *SauP* even consecrating Bharata before the exiles leave.



by the tainted king), Daśaratha seeks to expiate his sin by performing sufficient *aśvamedhas* to become pure enough to engender his exemplary sons, but evidently not enough to save him from a miserable time in hell, until he is released by the power of the *tīrtha*; this power is not activated for three years until approached by Rāma, but is clearly the foremost element. When Daśaratha appears to the three exiles and explains that there is no expiation for his triple sin, the only person who comes out well is the practical-minded Sītā:

Seeing that [Rāma] lacked clear understanding, Sītā spoke, stating first of all that it was useless to lament, but that one should think about some counter action; [Daśaratha] should give her the sin of murdering the innocent Brahmin boy ... ; she would perform an expiation for that sin ... The second sin would be taken over by Lakṣmaṇa, and the last one by Rāma himself.<sup>43</sup>

This advice prods Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa into action in performing the ancestral rites at the *tīrtha* — an early example of the pro-Sītā, anti-Rāma tone of many later versions. The episode ends with Rāma erecting a *liṅga* and praising Śiva.

### Visual evidence

Paradoxically, it is two minor details in the *Gautamī Māhātmya* account of the ascetic boy's death that are, by their very obscurity, of wider developmental significance. The father's name, Śravaṇa,<sup>44</sup> helps to confirm a Central Indian origin for the text; it is apparently a back-formation from Śrāvaṇa, the name of the son prevalent in that area. The brevity of the phrase 'lifting his parents into a tree'<sup>45</sup> implies that the audience did not need to be told that their son carried them in baskets slung from a shoulder pole and always chose such a resting place. This detail, first found in a Buddhist painting of the *Sāma Jātaka* at Ajañtā, probably inspired by the need to represent in visual terms the abstract concept of devoted care, had clearly been added to the traditional verbal narrative. In this case, the *Gautamī Māhātmya* clearly stands at the centre of a tradition.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Summary of her speech by Söhnen and Schreiner 1989: 123.158-64.

<sup>44</sup> 1989: 123.37a; see note by Söhnen and Schreiner (vol.II, 202).

<sup>45</sup> *pitarau ... taruskandhe samāropya* (123.44); explained more fully in the Telugu *RaṅgaRm* 2001: 2.1241-70.

<sup>46</sup> The development is examined in detail at Mary Brockington 2010.

Similar reliance on transmission by visual means probably accounts for the increasingly substantive nature of the curses inflicted on Ahalyā in post-Vālmiki tellings. Instead of the original invisibility,<sup>47</sup> in the *Sṛṣṭikhanda* of the *Padma Purāṇa* she is cursed to become mere dry skin and bones.<sup>48</sup> Possibly four centuries later, a further interesting detail from a previous chapter of the *Gautamī Māhatmyā* presents a new curse adapted to the compiler's purpose of glorifying the Gautamī: Ahalyā will become a dried-up river, to be redeemed when, as the River Ahalyā, she unites with the Gautamī at a different holy place, the Ahalyāsamgama.<sup>49</sup> Rāma and his grace are entirely missing from this episode. Most Purāṇas, however, followed the convention established in classical literature at least since Kālidāsa's *Raghuvamśa* and Kumāradāsa's *Jānakīharaṇa* and had Gautama turn his errant wife to stone.<sup>50</sup> It is arguable that the stone-motif is another example of transmission by visual means: a relief in the National Museum, New Delhi, from the Gupta temple at Deogarh, roughly contemporary with Kālidāsa, has been plausibly identified as a kneeling Ahalyā offering Rāma a flower as he blesses her, his foot resting prominently on a rock.<sup>51</sup> The popularity of this motif, both in the Rāma story and also in unrelated, internationally widespread traditional tales,<sup>52</sup> makes it unsafe to attribute occurrences in an anecdote in the *Kathāsaritsāgara*,<sup>53</sup> and in vernacular literature such as Kampan's Tamil *Irāmāvatāram* and the Telugu *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa*,<sup>54</sup> directly to any Purāṇic source. Purāṇas cannot be credited with creating the petrification curse, but they may be responsible for popularising it.

<sup>47</sup> *VRm* 1,47.29; 48.16; for a detailed study of the Indra/Ahalyā/Gautama relationship and its developments see Söhnen-Thieme 1996.

<sup>48</sup> 1,54.32-43, perhaps 8th century; other passages in the *PdP* record the more usual transformation to stone motif: *Uttarakhaṇḍa* 6,242.133-40, also perhaps 8th century; *Pātālakhaṇḍa* 5,29.32-41; 5,36.11-15, 12th century.

<sup>49</sup> *BrP,GM* 87.58-66; but see *BrP,GM* 123.97-105 where the more usual transformation to stone is also implied.

<sup>50</sup> *Raghuvamśa* 1928: 11.33-34; *Jānakīharaṇa* see Chanda 1990: 52-53; motif later also used by Murāri (2006: II,25). Purāṇic occurrences include *NarSP* 47.97-98; *GnP* 1,21.19; 1,31.13-16; 1,32.3; *SkP* 5.3.136; *BVP* 4,62.6.

<sup>51</sup> Brockington, Brockington, and Loizeau 2016.

<sup>52</sup> Motif D 231 in the Thompson *Index* and in Thompson and Balys 1958.

<sup>53</sup> Somadeva 2,17: Tawney 1880: I,122-23.

<sup>54</sup> *Kampan*, Hande 1996: 40,53,76; *RaṅgaRm* 2001: 1.1481-1510; 1531-40; 3.1451-60; 6.1241-50,2021-30.

The Rāma story can be shared in a number of ways, for various purposes and with different results. Composers of Buddhist adaptations in Southeast Asia often make radical alterations to the narrative, but find that Rāma's position as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu and the Buddha's repeated activity as a Bodhisattva share sufficient analogies to cause them no difficulties of identification. Within India, Jains were confronted by the opposite situation: the brāhmanic Rāma story was more popular than they were prepared to accept, and they set out consciously to 'correct' it in new narratives that sharply subverted the image of Rāma while necessarily retaining enough similarities to the Vālmīki narrative to be recognisable. Even so, some of the more distinctive Jain motifs, such as the belligerence of Lava and Kuśa, and Rāvaṇa counterfeiting Rāma to gain Sītā's confidence, originally intended to denigrate Rāma, are shared with some non-Jain versions. As the evolving religious situation began to produce tensions between Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas, compilers of Śaiva material in Purāṇas resorted to a tactic that was similar, but much less radical, than the one used by the Jains. They felt able to share the tribulations and triumphs of Viṣṇu the *avatāra*, while subordinating him to Śiva or, more drastically, the Devī.

Just as the Rāma story was shared and enjoyed by adherents of opposing sectarian persuasions, so it was presented in every form of expression, visual as well as verbal, oral as well as written. The Purāṇas are notoriously difficult to date, but so are other traditions; even so, an earlier date does not guarantee knowledge by a later author; and oral traditions are virtually impossible to pin down. Until a vast amount more close work has been done — and probably not even then — all that can safely be done is to point to the sharing of motifs between different recorded sources, without necessarily assuming influence.

A far more fruitful line of enquiry is to examine the effect of narrative innovations on the image of the characters portrayed; the ramifications and unintended consequences of these attempts to fit the ancient story to the demands of later culture have been vast and occasionally startling. Clumsy innovations, whether demonstrating the creativity of Purāṇic authors or their receptivity, can succeed in diminishing both Rāma and Sītā. When Rāma's divine status is so sensitive that his position — continuing husband of a wife now seen as polluted and polluting — must be safeguarded to the extent that the reality of her abduction by Rāvaṇa is denied, the consequence is that

the grandeur of Sītā's original character is drastically reduced, her heroic resistance to Rāvaṇa's threats and blandishments eliminated. Now a goddess, she is well on the way to becoming a nonentity, the portrayal against which so many later women's versions in particular react. Even more drastic, it is Rāma too who is diminished when he grieves for an abduction that he knows has not taken place. Is Rāma — Viṣṇu incarnate — so stupid? Furthermore, when Viṣṇu has come to earth as Rāma solely to save the cosmos from Rāvaṇa, not to rescue his wife, nor even to uphold his father's integrity, there is no need for the abduction at all, or even for the exile. The play of these gods destroys the humanity that was the mainspring of their original characterisation, and modifies the whole purpose of the narrative. Perhaps it is fortunate that most Purāṇic accounts of the Rāma story are non-innovative; as a class, the Purāṇas act as a repository of ancient lore, and testify to widespread knowledge of the plot by their audiences rather than to the creativity of their compilers.

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