

## CHAPTER II

### Some General Remarks about the Similes in the Rāmāyaṇa

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2 In the Rāmāyaṇa the figure of simile is used with a remarkable frequency. Almost every eighth or tenth line contains a simile. This makes such an abundance of similes that at the very first sight a reader feels the overwhelming predominance of this figure over all other figures. There are other figures of speech also in this epic, such as Dr̥ṣṭānta, Rūpaka, Nidarsānā, Prativastūpamā, Utpreksā, Samāsokti etc. But it is most noteworthy that these figures do not occur in such a great number as the similes. This is quite natural.

3 Rāmāyaṇa is an epic, and as such it is above all other things a literary work. A thing if related as a matter of fact account, does not yield a bewitching enchantment. To arrest the attention of a sympathetic reader an author has to make his style more polished and attractive by the figures of words and sense. The author of Rāmāyaṇa is no exception to this rule. He also creates the wonderful interest like other poets, authors, novelists and playwrights do. In the evaluation of an author the 'what' of the matter need not be emphasised more, but the 'how' of the matter should be considered with the sympathy and critical judgement. Looked at from this angle the literary estimate of a work will be quite in proportion to the merits of the work. If we consider from this point of view there are many places of beauty in

the epic. But before we turn to their appreciation, some general discussion as to the use and abundance of similes in the Rāmāyana should be discussed at some length.

A close study of the most prominent epics of the world gives us a very clear cut idea about the form and content of the works termed as epics. The first striking characteristic of the epics is that they have the easily flowing narration. This factor is predominant in the epics. The very essential part of an epic is the narration. The element of narration can be very well compared with a great river flowing speedily towards its destination and with small rivers in the form of short stories from the whole range of mythology flowing to meet other big rivers. This can be marked quite easily as far as the two great epics of India are concerned. Both the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata have a very rapidly flowing narrative and a great number of smaller Ākhyānas and Upākhyānas. They all get so nicely interwoven that we hardly find any irrelevance of any Ākhyāna or Upākhyāna. Now, as already remarked this easy flow of the narration is likely to be heavy and boring if (i) it is not intermingled with the shorter anecdotes and (ii) if the style and the language are quite simple and crude in form. Just as the first feature i.e the pressure of the shorter anecdotes gives a sense of relief from the seriousness of the great narration of a story and pleasure, similarly the use of different figures of speech

makes the whole poem more attractive. Thus the figures have their place in the language and style of an epic. Now as regards the similes it is sufficient to say that the similes being a more convenient figure of speech it has been used with much remarkable frequency in both the epics of India. The popularity of similes is due to much convenience. A simile can be spread over and also can be compressed within the quarter of a stanza. Nay, it can be expressed even in a single compound. A poet therefore finds much ease in the use of this figure of speech. This elasticity of similes is also advantageous in other respects. It does not come as a jerk or an unwanted element in the speedy flow of the narrative, but it quite naturally fits in the course of its run. It also creates an effect which is enhanced by its very presence. It also creates a separate word-picture for itself. These word-pictures are themselves beauty-spots in the flow of the narration. Moreover there is a peculiar use of the similes from the literary point of view. The creation of a word-picture by a simile is a simpler process due to its capability. Therefore the use of this figure of speech is so frequent in the epic and other forms of literature. The economy of words employed to create such a word-picture at once speaks for the skill, genius and constructive power of the author. To create such a word-picture within a quarter of a stanza or a line or a mere couplet requires an ability of a very high merit, literary excellence and mastery over words.

If we look to the similes in the Rāmāyana this <sup>ability</sup> strength of creating word-pictures is the first and foremost characteristic which at once strikes us and creates an overwhelming impression. Examples of such pen-portraits and panoramic scenes created by the author of the Rāmāyana can be multiplied. It must be said that only if he had shown his capacity as regards the creation of word-pictures even then he would have won the <sup>place</sup> place of a great poet. But that is not the only remarkable thing in the Rāmāyana. The author has so many other distinguishing traits by which he can be acclaimed as quite worthy of such a highly esteemed and reverent place given to him by the literary critics of India and abroad. Surely, a poet has already won a place of high merit in the whole range of the vast literature of the world must have so many highly outstanding qualities both as an author and a creator of art. This we can say with pride about Vālmiki. It has been already pointed out that the number of the similes in the Rāmāyana is very large, nearly at the rate of a simile at the each seventh or eighth line. To give such a number of similes is not a mere play of some poet of mean order. There are repetitions, no doubt; but these repetitions in most cases are due to the similarity of incidents, situation, characterisation and conventionalism. So by merely taking the repetitions we cannot judge the intrinsic merit and value of the capacity of an author. Moreover for the repetitions in

the Rāmāyana as far as the similes are concerned in a majority of cases it can be said that the repetition does not at all discredit but on the contrary it gives an additional charm by drawing our attention to the most pleasant expressions conveying the similarity of the situation and incidents. Then there are similes referring to the different sciences, viz. architecture, sculpture, charioteering, cattle-breeding, law and administration, medicine, surgery, mythology both vedic as well as current among the masses, agriculture, gardening, botany, zoology, sacrificial ritualism, fighting with weapons and missiles, construction of aeroplanes, geography, astronomy, astrology, human anatomy, psychology, civics, grammar, nyāya, philosophy of Vedānta, human behaviour etc. These similes show what a versatile genius the author must have been. Over and above that while coming across such similes referring to many other sciences we get a clear idea about the development of the whole society, the sense of a clear picture of an advanced type of culture and civilisation, which was quite truly our own in that remote past. It is rightly said that the man improves by experience. This experience and the improvement accruing as a natural consequence out of the experience are surely a united organic whole. So if we can judge as to how the people of the age of the Rāmāyana were advanced, how refined and polished was their culture and civilisation, how were the

relations between a man and a man, what was the code of behaviour towards equals, elders and youngsters, what was the system of administration, what was the form of the state which governed the people, how the justice was administered, what and how was the standard of morality, what were the general ideals, aspirations and ambitions of the then common people at large - we surely get an illuminating and clear perspective of the glorious past; not only this but we are also able to receive guidance for future progress. Of course this is just to show how the study of the Rāmāyana, especially of its similes and other figures of speech is quite beneficial to our present society.

There is an astonishing abundance of similes in the Rāmāyana as regards the different mythological allusions. The wide range of these mythological references is also a topic worth studying. Here for our purpose only the references contained in the similes are to be considered. The mythology referred to in the similes oscillates from the mythology contained in the sacred revealed books of hoary antiquity viz. the Vedas upto the mythology known to the masses as being related in different Purānas. For the latter it must be said that the references may be to the form of these legends current among the people at the time when the Rāmāyan was written and not to the mythology found in the Purānas

because the majority of the Purānas cannot be taken with certainty to be earlier than the Epics, when many of them have been proved to be definitely later on many other decisive grounds.

The similes in the Rāmāyana are important for their vivid and picturesque effect. In this connection Shri M.V. Iyenger observes<sup>1</sup>. They are endless and as various. They came from all expanse of life. Often they are themselves excellent pictures. Quite as often their effect is heightened by a power of suggestion which is marvellously far-glancing. Most of these similes make word-pictures a forest on a hill which the fire is consuming, a dark cloud split by zigzag lightning; a great lamp with a thick wick from which drops of oil fall burning; full blown lotuses from which fall drops of water like tears from a beautiful eye, a hill and a cloud bending over it like a mother over her grown up son doing reverence; a deer which has seen a net and is afraid. These are pictures which come before us in Vālmiki's similes. Mr. Iyengar is perfectly right in his remarks at this particular point. A simile<sup>2</sup> at the time of Rāma's persuading Sītā not to accompany him in his exile - describing the effect

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1. The poetry of Vālmiki - pp. 199-207, by Mr. M.V. Iyengar 1940, Bangalore.

2. tasyāḥ sphatikasāṅkāśam vāri santāpasambhavam /  
netrābhyām parisusrāva paṅkajābhyām ivodakam //

of such a cruel suggestion at least from Sītā's point of view is a very fine word-picture. Here the sorrow and grief of a devoted wife like Sītā at the suggestion of separation from her beloved husband is at once visualised at the very outset; but that is not the only effect of this picture drawn with the brush of a great master like Vālmiki. He has suggested more than one through this single stanza. Sītā's face was as tender and pretty as a lotus. That is the first suggestion. But the whole finishing touch of the master artist in this picture is that part of the stanza which describes the fine small drops of water falling down one by one from the tender and delicate petals of the lotus. That if stated only with reference to the lotus is also a very fine description. But Vālmiki is more a perfect artist. He serves two purposes with a single stanza. He does describe the lotus as it is the standard of comparison but mainly he here suggests the delicacy and exquisite beauty of the eyes of Sītā which were like the petals of the lotus. No artist could have described this more beautifully than what the great Ādikavi has done.

The simile describing how Sītā appeared when she was being abducted by Rāvana is also a very fine description<sup>1</sup> which describes lightning. This description even if there were no hint of Sītā at all would have been itself a picturesque one.

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1. sā padmagaurā hemābhā rāvanam janakātmajā /  
vidyud ghanam ivāvisya sūsubhe taptabhūsanā //

But here the author has given a very fine suggestion also painting the picture of words with ~~two~~ very exquisitely beautiful/colours. The idea of the lightning shining when flashing across a dark black cloud is itself a very beautiful and here over and above that primary beauty, the effect is more <sup>heightened</sup> elevated by the most outstanding and fine suggestion of the black colour of Rāvaṇa and the beautiful golden shining <sup>complexion</sup> colour of Sītā.

The simile<sup>1</sup> describing the tears falling out of the most irresistible indignation of Rāvaṇa on hearing the tidings of the havoc done by Hanumat in the beautiful pleasure garden of Rāvaṇa viz. Asoka Vanikā from the lips of the demoneses in charge of Sītā is beautiful and uniquely presenting a superb pen-portrait of the enraged king of demons. The highly living impression and effect in the description of his wrath is created at the very first instance and together with it a very vivid picture of enormous lamps with huge wicks and the drops of hot and burning oil from them is quite naturally created. It also suggests the most imposing and terrifying effect of the eyes of Rāvaṇa which <sup>c</sup>one seen would ~~would~~ create a sense of <sup>e</sup>terror and an effect of piercing trembling on the gazer who happens to see them quite occasionally.

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1. tasya kruddhasya netrābhyāṃ prāpatannasrabindavaḥ /  
dīptābhyāṃ iva dīpābhyāṃ sārciṣaḥ snehabindavaḥ //

These are only scattered instances of such fine and picturesque similes. The Rāmāyana profusely abounds in the similes of this type.

There are some similes which can be considered as having distinct merits of literary beauty. In the course of the famous description of Śārad a very fine simile<sup>1</sup> occurs which describes the clear firmament in the autumn<sup>n</sup> studded fully with beautiful moon, luminous stars and bright constellations in order to depict how beautifully a lake appeared. Here the whole panoramic vista of a lake is opened before our eyes with the help of a single stanza. Within the scope of four quarters only it has compressed the whole picture of beautiful clear sky of Śārad, which has been a source of beauty and literary inspiration for so many centuries. Such similes are really most remarkable beauty spots.

In the same description of Śārad a simile<sup>2</sup> occurs which is full of such a plenty of erotic and literary beauty

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1. suptaikahaṃsam kumudair upetaṃ mahāhrdasthaṃ salilamvibhātī  
ghanair viṃkṭam nisi pūrṇacandram tārāganākīrṇam ivāntari-  
kṣam //

IV.30.49

2. darsāyanti śārannadyaḥ pulināni śānaiḥ śānaiḥ /  
navasaṅgamasamvrīdā jaghanānīva yoṣitah //

IV.30.46.

that we are at once overwhelmed to see the extent to which such a situation be described so beautifully ! That description is simply meant for depicting the slowly and gradually appearing banks of rivers in autumn because up to that time they had been covered by waters which had risen so high due to the profuse rain which preceded the pleasant season of autumn. To describe such banks of rivers the poet has referred to a very delicate incident in the course of union of loving couples. Surely we have to admit that if it is believed that the greatest exponent of eretic literature viz. Kavikulguru Kālidāsa had been influenced by the Adikavi Vālmiki, it is not only a casual remark of some idle person gossiping without proper consideration but it is a definite conviction based on sound conclusion arising out of a close comparative study of the two great master minds out of the whole vast literature of glorious ancient India. There are definitely some similes which are very important to show how the master poets of the classical Sanskrit literature like Bhāsa, Kālidāsa and Asvaghosa are influenced by the imagery and literary art of the great epic poet Vālmiki.

In the description of the painful situation which Rāma has to face when he returns to the Parnakuti after after killing the demon Mārica who had assumed the form of

the golden deer there is a simile<sup>1</sup> describing how the hermitage appeared in that situation to Rāma. It is said that the hut appeared to Rāma a devoid of beauty and totally crushed and faded off as a lotus creeper quite without beauty and absolutely crushed off due to the extreme cold of Hemant i.e. the winter season. In the fifth act of his famous drama viz. Svapna Vāsavadattam, Bhāsa gives vent to a similar idea in a stanza<sup>2</sup> spoken by the hero king Udayana when he is about to call on his queen Padmāvati on account of her adverse health. He says that he thinks his beloved queen to be just like a lotus creeper whose beauty has been marred and which is totally crushed by the extreme cold of winter. This exactly shows the influence of the simile quoted above. There are two similes in the Rāmāyana which refer<sup>3</sup> to a well covered with grass as a standard of comparison. The former

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1. dadṛśā parnaśātām ca rahitām sītayā tadā /  
śriyā virahitām dhvastām hemante padminīm iva //

III. 30.5

2. śtāghyām avantinrpatch sadṛsim tanūjām,  
kalakramena punar āgatadārabhārah /  
lāvānake hutavahena hrtānga yaṣṭim ,  
tām padminīm himahatām iva cintayāmi //

Svapnavāsavadattam V.1.

3. abhyavartata vaidehīm citrām iva śanaiścarah /  
sa pāpo bhavyarūpena trnaiḥ kūpa ivāvṛtah //

III. 46.10

simile describes Rāvāna who had come to the residence of Rāma in the forest to perform the most heinous action of the abduction of Sītā. There is yet another simile in this same stanza which by the by throws light on the fact that the author of the Rāmāyana was quite proficient in the science of astronomy as he describes here the movement of the planet saturn towards the constellation Citrā, of course here the male sex of the planet Śani and its bad and illuminous effect and the female sex indicated by the word Citrā are the points <sup>le</sup> leading to this comparison. But the simile which refers to a well concealed by grass very accurately brings out the evil in Rāvāna because he had come to Rāma's residence in the absence of the latter and not as himself but in the guise of a wandering mendicant. The other simile viz. V.47.20 in the Rāmāyana describes Hanumat who had been approached by the prince Akṣa, the second son of Rāvāna. Here the ignorance of Akṣa as regards the enormous strength of the famous warrior Hanumat is very nicely suggested. The influence of such similes of Rāmāyana has been appropriately utilised by the most luminous <sup>us</sup> star of the firmament of the literature of India viz. Kavikulaguru Kālidāsa. In the fifth act of the Abhijñāna Śākuntalam when the king Duṣhyanta in spite of the appealing entreaties of the heroine of the drama and his most beloved wife Śakuntalā refuses to accept her

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1. sa bālabhāvād yudhi vīryadarpitaḥ  
 pravṛddhamanyuḥ kṣatajopamekṣaṇaḥ /  
 samā sasādāpratimaḥ kapim raṇe  
 gajo mahākūpam ivavram tṛṇaiḥ // V.47.20

as his rightful wife; she out of a ~~feast~~ of righteous indignation gives out the expression<sup>1</sup> that the king is just like a well covered with grass whom she did not know in his proper <sup>nature</sup> and now that he ~~has~~ assumed the pretext of following the so-called religion and hence he, under the cloak of religion is really just as she calls him - a well covered with grass; that is the only thing with which he can be compared.

The influence on the famous poet Asvaghosa has been quite evidently accepted. The description of the ladies sleeping in the harem of the palace of the prince Siddhārtha occurring in the V canto of his famous Mahākāvya, Buddhacaritam has many distinct parallels with the description of the sleeping ladies in the harem of the king Rāvana seen by Hanumat who had been there in search of Sītā. This beautiful description occurs in the most beautiful part of the Rāmāyana viz. the Sundara Kānda cantoll. In both the descriptions contained in the Rāmāyana as well as Buddhacaritam there is a great deal of similarity in the expression, imagery and fancy. These are some scattered references to show the influence of the great poet Vālmiki on the famous author's of

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1. Śakuntalā - (sarosam) anārya, ātmano

hrdayānumānena paśyasi /

ka idanīm anyo dharmā -

kañcukapraveśinas trna -

cchannakūpopamasya

tavanukrtim pratipatsyate /

Abhiññāna - Śakuntalam , V.act.

classical Sanskrit literature like Bhāsa, Asvaghosha and  
 and Kālidāsa. The influence of Vālmiki is there on Kālidāsa  
 that on more than Bhāsa and Asvaghosha. Bhāsa has written two dramas  
 Pratimā <sup>^</sup> ~~trating~~ and Abhiṣeka having the plots based on the incidents  
 of Rāmāyana. Another famous author of the classical Sanskrit  
 literature viz. Bhavabhūti has written two most famous dramas  
 on the former and latter part of Rama's own life viz. Mahāvīr  
 Caritam and Uttara-Rāma-caritam. The influence of Vālmiki on  
 him is quite evident and that on other later writers of the  
 campū type of literature based on the incidents of Rāmāyana  
 and the author of the famous Bhaṭṭikāvya viz. the poet Bhaṭṭi  
 is also quite evident enough.

The other important feature regarding the similes in  
 the Rāmāyana from the point of view of the style of the author  
 is that he uses this figure of speech with a very refined  
 sense and taste of propriety. Usually the similes are not  
 given as whole bundle of them nor as separated or widely far  
 off from each other. Almost at every place it appears that  
 it was quite proper for the author to use that figure of spee  
 But there are some exceptions to this also. In longer descri  
 ptions like the description of the lake Pampā in the Kiṣkin-  
 dhā Kāṇḍa Canto 1, there are similes but they are scattered  
 in the whole long description covering the whole of the  
 canto whereas in the famous description of saraḍ in the  
 same Kāṇḍa given in canto 30, the similes are scattered like  
 the description of the lake Pampā, but they are more  
 important and beautiful than those in the former description

There is really yet more striking and exceptional instance of piling up so to say a heap of similes in the Sundara Kānda canto, 19. Here in a single canto containing only 22 stanzas nearly more than 30 similes describe the condition of Sītā who was in the captivity of Rāvana in the Asokavānikā very vividly and beautifully. The other important feature regarding the style is that the similes occur with more frequently in the speeches of the characters and the description of the battles. In this respect the Rāmāyana has a very close resemblance with the other epic viz. the Mahābhārata which also contains abundantly the similes in similar speeches and descriptions.

The Rāmāyana is not merely a literary work, a piece of artistic beauty but it is a great epic creating the whole panoramic picture of the people, society and the age to which it belongs. So it has much of the material which can be a very definite source of social and cultural data. These data can be had from the similes also because the very structure of the simile necessitates the upamāna, the standard of comparison to be from the whole range of life. Thus we get a great deal of material from the similes in the Rāmāyana which throws a flood of light on the social and cultural condition of the people and time to which the Rāmāyana belongs.

There are some striking things which can be had from the data which can add to our knowledge.

There is a reference<sup>1</sup> in the Rāmāyana contained in a simile which shows that some sort of a system of surgical operation had been in vogue in that period. Rāmāyana. The simile seems probably to refer to the operation done on a foetus in a womb. Similarly there are some references to the punishment fixed for certain drastic offenses.

A simile<sup>2</sup> describes the punishment for the offence of destroying the foetus. The line is spoken by Bharata to his mother Kaikeyī when he came to know that she was responsible for Rāma's exile. But it seems here quite probable that the punishment for such an offence was banishment. There is yet another reference which describes the method of observing the sorrow which seems in all probability to be just similar to the method of observing<sup>rv</sup> sorrow in the society of the present day<sup>3</sup>. Here in this stanza it is suggested that if

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1. nūnam mamāṅgānyacirād anāryaḥ  
 śāstraiḥ śitais chetsyati rākṣasendraḥ /  
 tasminnanāgacchati lokanāthe  
 garbhasthajan̄tor iva śalyakṛntaḥ // V.28.6.
  2. Kasmāt sa daṇḍakāraṇye bhrūṇaheva vivāsitaḥ /  
 II.72.45 cd.
  3. Kadā śo kamimam ghoram maithilīviprayogajam /  
 sahasā vipramokṣyāmi vāśaḥ sukletara<sup>m</sup>yathā //  
 VI.5.21.

sorrow is to be observed the person should put on black garments and we do see the people doing the same thing i.e observing the sorrow by putting on black garments in the present age. Among the ladies in Gujarat this is observed most strictly in cases of woman who has just lost her husband. There are also other cultural and social references which allude to almost all the <sup>walks</sup> ~~works~~ of life. So in that way these similes provide for us great and sound basis for social and cultural investigation as to the then conditions in the age of Rāmāyana.

From the point of view of the structure of similes, it must be said that the similes of all types <sup>and Arthi</sup> ~~Srauti~~ are found in the Rāmāyana. Of course the types of similes and other figures have been classified by later writers on poetics and it can be said that the author of the Rāmāyana might not have definite set principles of the science of poetics before him. Yet it is a fact that almost all the kinds of similes are found in the Rāmāyana. There is nothing astonishing in this because never in the beginning <sup>of</sup> ~~of~~ literature it is a case that there are rules and literary works are framed according to them. On the contrary the rules are framed on the basis of a close study of the literary works. So it is quite natural that the author of the Rāmāyana uses almost all the types of similes except some few like similes based on the kyan and kyac forms of the sanskrit grammar, which must have been developed by the later writers

on the Alaṅkāra and accepted as similes proper by them.

Thus the similes in the Rāmāyana are <sup>a</sup>very important part of the epic and the <sup>it</sup> study is quite beneficial. The epic has influenced so many writers who flourished in the centuries that followed it, not only that but it has also influenced the society at large. For literary reference it is quite sufficient to refer to Mr. M.V. Iyengar who observes<sup>1</sup> "Homer's similes are famous in literary discussion in the West. They are great and worthy of all praise. For other qualities Vālmiki's similes deserve to be as famous. In literary discussion in India, Kālidāsa is held to be the paragon of simile-makers. This admiration of Kālidāsa's simile is quite justified but we have to remember that he was nourished in his poetic life by Vālmiki." The authors and dramatists, whom Vālmiki has influenced are many and Kālidāsa, the paragon of the makers of similes is at the top of that great and long list, and that ~~much~~ <sup>true</sup> is only with reference to the classical Sanskrit literature. But the Rāmāyana as it is a cherished and the most endeared epic of the whole nation, it has also influenced the poets and authors of the literatures of different regional languages; and as far as the similes are concerned it is quite justified to conclude<sup>d</sup> that the epic has influenced them in the matter of similes also.

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1. The poetry of Vālmiki by Mr. M.V. Iyengar pp. 199-207

Bangalore 1950.

For the influence in the matter of social structure, the general behaviour and life of the people at large nothing more need be said as the epic has been so lively and so interwoven in our life that the famous characters and incidents expressions and images described in it do not seem to us dead things belonging to the past but we feel them breathing with full life, as the matters being experienced in our day to day experience. The influence of the similes of the Rāmāyana is again evident in the life and people of our age, and that is the very link which unites us with the glorious past.