

The World of Valmiki

A compilation

Introduction

Valmiki's Ramayan is a multi layered work. The top most layer is about the physical world which he was familiar with and which he could imagine with verisimilitude. The next layer is the story of Rama, which appeals to anyone who likes a good story. The third layer is as a work of literature, appreciated by an aesthete. The fourth layer is as a didactic work teaching moral conduct and dharma. The innermost layer is as a work of spirituality and religion.

In what follows I only concentrate on the outer most layer, and if you consider it so, "the rind of Ramayana". Even rind has some uses!

By Valmiki I mean the one who composed Ramayan in Sanskrit, or if you like, Valmiki the poet. If Valmiki makes a reference to a city, it would be foolish not to believe that the city existed during his time or had existed before his time. It would not be very rational to believe that he foresaw future and referred to a city which had not yet been built. We could definitely say that the city existed by the time of Valmiki. If we have other ways of fixing the date of the city it helps us to fix the date of Valmiki. Or, if we have other ways of fixing the date of Valmiki, we could say that the city flourished at his time. It is also possible that the mention of the city is an interpolation done by some mischievous poet who meddled with what Valmiki wrote! What you would finally accept will depend on other external facts which help to fix the date of Valmiki or the date of the city precisely or any fact which proves that the mention of the city is an interpolation. This is a job which a researcher has to do.

What is being attempted here is merely a compilation of all such verses in Valmiki which speak of places, peoples, their mores, customs, cultures and their corpus of knowledge. It also attempts to compile all references to flora and fauna mentioned by Valmiki. In other words, this lists the manner in which Valmiki has attempted to portray what he actually saw, heard or read about the physical world of his time. Hence the title, "The world of Valmiki." However this compilation does not cover description of battles, much of which belongs to the realm of Valmiki's creativity. For the benefit of those who may not be familiar enough with Sanskrit to understand the original in Sanskrit, I have provided a simple translation in English which does not claim to be exact or very correct.

Over a period of several years, as I did my daily "Parayan" of Valmiki, I noted down these. What I have collected is basically from the Gorakhpur edition. My

collection therefore possibly carries any mistakes and interpolations that exist in the Gorakhpur edition. I have not checked with the critical edition of Ramayan which I am informed is accessible on the internet. It is, therefore possible that some of the verses do not find a place in the critical edition.

This collection has remained dormant for at least a decade if not more. I would be foolish to believe that I am the first to do this type of compilation on Ramayan, although I have yet to come across such a compilation. Now I am somehow feeling propelled to publish this compilation for what it may be worth through the digital media.

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