

12

Gemmed narratives: Jewelled peacetime tales of Rāma's exile and Rāvaṇa's domicile as alternative afterlife anticipations in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*

Shubha Pathak

Abstract

While sworn enemies Rāma (Kosala's rightful ruler) and Rāvaṇa (Laṅkā's unrighteous usurper) clash in climactic epic fashion, their most striking existential contention occurs away from the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*'s battlefield. Each sovereign experiences rest expressed in relation to precious stones to anticipate his ultimate fate. Hence, Rāma leaves his jewelled ancestral capital, Ayodhyā, to live in forest exile on Mount Citrakūṭa, whose rich mineral deposits he likens to gems and whose serenity fosters the equanimity necessary to attain *mokṣa*. Indeed, Rāma eternally is released from reincarnation when he and his younger brothers merge in a heavenly realm with the divine preserver whom they have incarnated partially, Viṣṇu. Divine destroyer Śiva's devotee Rāvaṇa, however, keeps reincarnating—first, earning heavenly and hellish terms on dying by Rāma's hand in battle. Moreover, evanescent Rāvaṇa's rebirth bondage is betokened by his repose

within his stolen jewelled residence, as witnessed by sylvan Hanumān, who, with his fellow simians, will burn the whole island stronghold. Scrutinising the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s figurative and literal gembed features thus reveals its immediate inter-sectarian polemics emblematic of the non-Weberian *nivṛtti* (otherworldliness)/*pravṛtti* (thisworldliness) dynamics seen previously to animate the contemporaneous *Vyāsa Mahābhārata*.

Introduction

Most *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* readers remember, as that poem's most pivotal episode, the epic's outsized battle between Rāma (half of divine preserver Viṣṇu reborn in human form to defend the universe, including his hereditary kingdom, Kosala, from encroaching unrighteousness) and Rāvaṇa (embodiment of that *adharmā* as *rākṣasa* [demon] monarch of island stronghold Laṅkā and harasser of the world's human rulers and Rāma's wife, Sītā).¹ Far more consequential, however, for the soteriological courses that the poem plots for those opposed characters are their experiences of resting, away from the battlefield, that are couched in terms concerning gems. Rāma relinquishes the physical jewels encrusted in the walls of his ancestral capital, Ayodhyā, once he is exiled to forested Mount Citrakūṭa, where he figuratively finds gems in mineral caches and where he philosophically concentrates on cultivating the equanimity that he will need when he and his younger brothers merge with their originary deity to attain *mokṣa*. But such liberation from reincarnation is not available to divine destroyer Śiva's devotee Rāvaṇa. Relegated to rebirth after earning a term in heaven for dying while warring with Rāma and a term in hell for tormenting Sītā and others, Rāvaṇa persists in being imprisoned by his physical existence, having been observed already, by forest ape Hanumān, while resting in the jewelled palace that he had seized and that would blaze with the remainder of his island when torched by Hanumān and his fellow primates. In Rāma's metaphorical and Rāvaṇa's literal experiences with jewels in their respective settings, the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s primarily Vaiṣṇava authors vent their tensions with Śaivas by relying on the inter-sectarian dichotomy between non-Weberian *nivṛtti* (otherworldliness) and *pravṛtti* (thisworldliness) seen simultaneously in the primarily Vaiṣṇava *Vyāsa Mahābhārata*.

1 All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

Vaiṣṇava *nivṛtti* and Śaiva *pravṛtti* in the primary Sanskrit epics' inter-sectarian mediations of non-Weberian otherworldliness and thisworldliness: Micromosaic and macromosaic interpretative methods

The exaltation of Rāma over and above Rāvaṇa through the former's liberation and the latter's transmigration in the *Rāmāyaṇa* realises implicitly a distinction drawn explicitly in the *Mahābhārata*. Indeed, as both poems were assembled by mainly Vaiṣṇava *brāhmaṇa* (priestly) collectivities mostly between the Maurya (c. 320 – c. 185 BCE) and Gupta (320 – c. 500 CE) empires (Goldman and Goldman 2017: 63; Fitzgerald 2006: 259), the epics' authors approached dissimilarly their common dichotomous topics. The Sanskrit terms for them, *nivṛtti* and *pravṛtti*, are defined primarily in the *Mahābhārata*'s didactic books (12–13), being discussed as such neither in that epic's battle books (6–9) nor in the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s seven *kāṇḍas* (sections) (Bailey 2005: 581).

In summary, the pair of terms parasol disparate areas of mortal endeavour. The second term, *pravṛtti*, referring to 'active life in the social world', entails a 'system' of 'ritual ... obligation[s]' that are incumbent upon people belonging to the various '*varṇa*[s]' ('classes') and *āśramas* (life stages) 'organiz[i]n[g]' 'the ancient Indian ... cosmos as well as ... society'—a system that 'centr[es]' on *yajña* (the 'Vedic' fire 'sacrifice'), the main mode of 'reciproc[al]' exchange employed by 'humans' making offerings and 'gods' accepting them and bestowing rewards in return within the *saṃsāric* cycle (Bailey 2005: 593–604). The first term, *nivṛtti*, designating the 'renunciation of life in the social world', involves the 'attainment of liberation' from that cycle and thus 'is synonymous with absence of rebirth', '*mokṣa*[.] ... [a] condition of being beyond time'—such 'permanen[t]' release being realised through the experiential acquisition of *jñāna* (esoteric 'knowledge') by meditating on Vedic texts (Bailey 2005: 593–603).

As shorthands for these two conceptual nexuses, I, a historian of religions, employ two English terms, 'otherworldliness' and 'thisworldliness', that emerge from Weberian sociologist Reinhard Bendix's (1977) study of Hinduism's portrayal by polymath Max Weber (1864–1920). As considered by the latter thinker, in the view of the former, 'the average Hindu' retained

‘interest in this world’, even as Hinduism itself evinced ‘otherworldliness’ (Bendix 1977: 195). The word ‘world’ here refers to *saṃsāra* (the round of birth, death and rebirth), Hindus’ emphases on which differed historically by births into brahmin and non-brahmin statuses. For non-brahmins, who persisted simply in completing ‘the ritual duties of everyday life’ and thereby possessed ‘souls ... thought to endure [individually] throughout the recurrence of births and deaths’, that ‘immutable world order consisting of the eternal cycle of rebirths’ was inescapable. But brahmins could ‘aim ... to get away from the world of the senses and passions and to create a state of quiescence that would bring release from th[at cyclical] bustle of life and a union with the Divine’ (Bendix 1977: 176–78, 193).

Weber concomitantly dichotomised Hindu divinity, distinguishing ‘a personal God’ (as exemplified by ‘a personal God-Father [*Praj(ā)pati*] ... thought to have created the world in all its diversity’) and ‘an impersonal Divine Being’ (instantiated as ‘Brahman, ... a magical world potency transcending all finite things on earth and in heaven’), while linking the former (as a recipient of ritual offerings) to ‘this world’ of *saṃsāra* but the latter (as the desired destination in meditative strivings) to the ‘other world’ of *mokṣa* (Bendix 1977: 177). Yet, Weber’s twofold theology is inadequate to the sectarianism expressed in the primary Sanskrit epics, which collapses that divinity distinction.

Happily, however, the intraconnected nature of the epics’ simultaneously thisworldly ‘personal’ and otherworldly ‘impersonal’ chief deity is reflected better by the corrective that Indologist Greg Bailey (2005: 582, 585) sets forth while inquiring into the ‘high[ly] ... Vaiṣṇava’ *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan*’s chapter-long disquisition on *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* in *Mahābhārata* 12.327. While cataloguing the terms’ appearances herein, Bailey (2005: 593–604) identifies, in relation to the remainder of the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan*, corresponding ‘role[s]’ that ‘Viṣṇu’ plays—first, ‘as the god who sustains and reaps the rewards of sacrificial activity, ... a symbol of an active commitment to the socio/economic world’, and therefore makes possible other gods’ ritual participation and, by implication, their other functions (such as Prajāpati’s creation); and, second, as ‘renunciation’’s origin ‘synonym[ous]’ with *kṣetrajāña* (the soul, *ātman*, as it fully knows its field of operation) because of being Brahman.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, too, Viṣṇu acts in both capacities, letting half of himself be reborn as human Rāma to quell the threat, to his kingdom and cosmos, of demon Rāvaṇa, and absorbing the Ayodhyan and his brothers when they enact their reincarnation liberation (which is available to them and, as will

be discussed below, their fellow exceptional non-brahmins because of their directly divine origins). Nevertheless, apprehending the extents of the idea duo's inter-sectarian dimensions in the primary Sanskrit epics necessitates a different method. Whereas Bailey assembled many fragments of lexical evidence largely from a single *Mahābhārata* chapter into a detailed image of a related programmatic Vaiṣṇava metaphysical episode, I will piece together the distinct outlines of alternative Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva afterlife trajectories symbolised by an array of gemstone references in antagonists' opposed moments of repose in three *Rāmāyaṇa* chapters (2.88–89 and 5.8) and illuminated by relevant events across all seven of that epic's sections. While Bailey's micromosaic method provides a keen god's-eye view of divine existence encapsulated in its most key terms, my macromosaic method affords a glimpse of the entire vista within which human eschatologies diverge when the ideas behind those words are put into contrasting practices. The tendentious picture that ensues monumentalises enduring difference.

Before showcasing the contrasting flashes of Rāma's and Rāvaṇa's afterlives shimmering in these enemies' ornamented moments of living rest, I have a couple of caveats. First, when presenting those portents encoded in metaphorical and literal gems, I implement the sequences of tenses that grammatically ensue then. For clarity's sake, I place in present tenses the central episodes of soteriological concern, to emphasise these incidents' immediacy and importance. Consequently, I discuss preceding and succeeding narrative events in past and future tenses. In so doing, however, I am not making truth claims about those epic occurrences' actual historical or eventual predictive values. Any theologising in my study's subsequent two sections should be ascribed to the predominantly Vaiṣṇava *Rāmāyaṇa* poets themselves, not to me. Second, my focused metaphysical lapidary inquiry is not aspiring to survey every epic gem attestation. Such an overscrupulously inclusive study, in the service of dutiful exhaustiveness if not analytical precision, would weigh unduly many a turned stone that should have remained backgrounded, besides obscuring the salient concepts at hand. Rather, I exercise hermeneutical discretion to highlight those jewel portrayals of most ultimate significance to understanding the subtle inter-sectarian polemics that so permeate certain settings of the epic text as to go undetected and undiscerned. I turn now to the first such setting set, rendered cynosural by its gem mentions indexing Rāma's transition from courtly opulence flush with actual faceted jewels (as signalled by solid single underlining) to sylvan banishment strewn merely with suggestions of unhewn gemstones (as conveyed through dashed underlining).

From regal citadel to exilic hill-forest: Rāma's peaceful progression from physical polished to figurative rough gems

The *mokṣa*-focused portion of my macromosaic depicting the epic's alternative afterlives for mortals departs from Rāma's royal home, happenings at which composed the backstory of the epic hero's central gembedded experience. Rāma, son of divine king Indra's human ally Daśaratha, initially lived a life of luxury, for Daśaratha's capital, Ayodhyā—recalling Indra's city, Amarāvati—was ornamented with gemmed residences (*Rām* 2.9.9, 1.5.15). Rāma receives his greatest reward, though, while preparing to make whole the divine half of Viṣṇu that he incarnates (1.17.6). Even in seeming penury after being exiled to Daṇḍaka's wilds—a transition requiring Rāma to adopt an ascetic lifestyle and thus give up all earth wealth—he establishes his ashram on pleasant Mount Citrakūṭa, which plentifully provides the roots and fruit that constitute his entire diet there (2.10.28; 2.31.30; 2.50.11–14, 20; 2.48.34; 2.88.26; 2.48.15).

Still more salient than the mountain's status as a source of physical sustenance is Citrakūṭa's condition as a font of spiritual attainment. Sage Bharadvāja identifies the holy hill as housing talented mendicants, implicitly linking with religious insight the delightful sights on all Citrakūṭa's sides and explicitly linking with right thinking the sight of Citrakūṭa's summits (*Rām* 2.48.25, 27). Rāma clarifies for Sītā how such spiritual perspicacity arises. Initially, he explains, seeing the wondrous mountain loosens previous attachments. Hence, in its presence, he no longer feels the stings of having been driven out of Kosala and having been separated from his beloved people there (2.88.1–3). Rāma's sorrows dissipate in faces of Citrakūṭa's crags, made variegated by their multifarious minerals (2.88.5–6, 20). Although this prince signals the potential expensiveness of some of the mineral veins by likening them in luminescence to the choicest of gems (2.88.5d), the colourful mineral-laden mountain's greatest worth remains as a symbol of life's totality. Home to all manner of animals, plants, blooms, fruits and freshwater (2.88.4ab, 16bc, 7–10, 21, 16ac, 25d, 13), Citrakūṭa, whose entities compose an entire universe writ small, supplies a foretaste of freedom from rebirth's round. Thus, events around this transcendence-tending mountainous terrain form the main story of Rāma's gembedded interactions in my macromosaic section tracing his epic's liberation representation.

Mokṣa's first hypothetical connoisseur here is Sītā—seen already as Rāma's ideal devotee. Since she and Rāma consummated their matrimony, she has had him forever in her heart, displaying double the love for him that he has had for her and ornamenting him as the prosperity goddess Śrī embellishes Viṣṇu (*Rām* 1.76.11, 14–16, 18). The divine couple is evoked on Citrakūṭa as Rāma interacts with Sītā, assuming that accompanying him on that mountain of numerous, various discernible perceptual wonders elicits her bliss. Rāma specifies such happiness's source by observing that woods dwelling amounts to rulers' nectar and conduces to their post-mortem success. Thus, he suggests his own afterlife outcome to be actualised by his own celestial ascent in the extremely attentive Śrī's company (2.88.18–19, 7.99.6ab). Her presence on their way heavenward will be fitting, for she, identified with Viṣṇu's wife Lakṣmī (aka Padmā), already will have been born on Earth as Sītā (6.105.25a), who by then will have merged with her originary deity, as Rāma will on attaining Heaven (7.100.6, 10), as the ideal couple models *mokṣa* (Pathak 2014: 49, 144n.8).

Rāma and Sītā, in anticipation of their reincarnation liberation, undergo *mokṣa* metaphorically while dallying by nearby Mandākinī River. The couple's activities here and at the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s end consequently correspond. More precisely, circumstances surrounding the Mandākinī riverside sights that Rāma shows to Sītā signify events to transpire around when he is released from embodied existence, and there are seven sets of such significations pointing toward the end of my *Rāmāyaṇa* macromosaic's *mokṣa*-centred part—this finale furnishing the forestory of Rāma's embedded acts.

First, the summary statement of Rāma's reportage to Sītā refers to this prince as the Raghu lineage's magnifier (*Rām* 2.89.19), a station that Rāma symbolically will relinquish while preparing for his final earthly journey. In his possessions' disposition, he, the current sovereign, will transfer enough materials to his twin sons, Kuśa and Lava, so that they will have in their respective kingdoms (Kosala and Uttarakosala) many gems, significant riches and contented, successful populaces (7.97.17–19).

Second, Rāma himself recommends that he and Sītā focus on Citrakūṭa in favour of Ayodhyā and on the Mandākinī rather than the Sarayū, directing her to consider the mountain and its river as the city and its river (*Rām* 2.89.12, 15). Rāma will make a similar mental adjustment at his life's end as he forsakes his Ayodhyan palace and all intermediate means of refreshment for the Sarayū's sacred waters at least 20 kilometres away (7.99.5, 7.100.1).

Third, Rāma's ultimate immersion will be patterned on his earlier Mandākinī submersions. He enters the river to bathe with thrice-daily ritual regularity and adheres to an ascetic fruit-and-root dining regimen. Likewise quelling Rāma's desires to reside in Ayodhyā and to preside over its surrounding kingdom is his accompaniment by Sītā and his younger brother and other ideal devotee, 'prosperity-increasing' (*lakṣmivardhanaḥ*) and 'prosperity-endowed' (*lakṣmisampanno*) Lakṣmaṇa, who, since his boyhood, has been attached deeply to and diligently has served his eldest brother, Rāma (*Rām* 1.17.15d, 1.17.17a, 2.89.17, 1.17.15c–17). Indeed, the devotee duo—obedient Lakṣmaṇa and compliant Sītā—delights Rāma, who by this time has urged Sītā to dive into the river with him in the manner (or, better, womanner) of a female familiar and to go below its lotuses (2.89.16, 13–14). Key qualities of these subservient though regal family members will resurge in the scene of his terminal journey to the Sarayū. Rāma's retinue then will include not only Padmā, Sītā's divine source whose name connects etymologically with the word *padma* (lotus), but also Modesty and Resolve (7.99.6)—attributes that Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa, respectively, will exhibit when proceeding to their own deaths, whose methods Rāma's suicide will combine.

For her part, Sītā will have fulfilled Rāma's request that she display her fidelity to him amid the world before his palace door, entreating—with her eyes lowered, her face turned down and her cupped hands joined, opened and extended in supplication—the earth goddess to inter her for single-mindedly focusing all her romantic attention on Rāma. The goddess, having birthed Sītā from a furrow, will have acknowledged Sītā's faithfulness to Rāma by embracing her and by sharing her unexcelled comprehensively gemmed celestial throne for their descent into Rasātala (the fourth of seven subterranean regions). Sītā's bewildering earth entry will have been seen by all creatures and will have been cheered by all the scene's people and sages (*Rām* 7.88.4; 7.84.5; 7.88.9–10; 1.65.15, 14; 7.88.11–13; 7.App. I.13.1; 7.88.20; 7.App. I.13.1–2). Still, for maintaining her modesty in face of her separation from Rāma by Rāvaṇa, Sītā (whose final resting place will not have been the earth deity's jewelled seat) will reunite with Rāma in her heavenly form, as Śrī (Pathak 2014: 144n.8).

Like Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa will have attained *mokṣa* soon before Rāma will do so. Reputedly resolute Lakṣmaṇa's execution will have been necessitated by the embodiment of Kāla (Time/Death) as an ascetic gravely conditioning his urgent conference with Rāma, about Rāma's ultimate fate, on the pain of death for anyone else accessing this discreet meeting. Certainly, the

extenuating circumstance of choleric sage Durvāsas's threat to curse the entire sovereignty and most of its dynasty's present and next generations in the absence of an immediate audience with Rāma will have warranted his commuting of Lakṣmaṇa's capital sentence for interrupting Rāma and Kālā's colloquy to placate the imprecation-prone sage. Nevertheless, the condemned yet condoned prince will have evinced resolve not just in accepting his permanent banishment instead but additionally in exacting himself the penalty originally stipulated for his offence (*Rām* 7.93.1–2, 15; 7.94.13; 7.95.1–2, 6–9; 7.96.1, 3, 12–15). On 'quickly exit[ing]' (*tvaritaḥ prāyāt*) Rāma's palace and heading to the Sarayū, Lakṣmaṇa will have performed, on its banks, *prāya* (yogic self-starvation), prompting Indra to carry him, in his human body, to heaven for his Viṣṇu merger (7.96.14c, 15–18).

Like Lakṣmaṇa, Rāma will proceed to the Sarayū and thereupon will unite with Viṣṇu. Yet, Rāma's *mokṣa* will begin once he ascends to heaven himself and is entreated by divine creator Brahmā to reassume Viṣṇu's form. More specifically, Rāma will walk toward the river, will transport himself to Brahmā's celestial realm and—in his human body—will combine (together with his other younger brothers, Bharata and Śatrughna) with the fieriness tantamount to Viṣṇu, whom Brahmā will equate with Brahman, the universal reality (*Rām* 7.100.5–7, 10, 17). Thus, Rāma will resemble Sītā in requiring the presence of a natural element (water in his case, earth in hers) and the company of at least one relative (for him, Bharata and Śatrughna; for her, her birth mother, the earth goddess) to revert from reborn (Rāma, Sītā) to born (Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī) divinity.

The fourth feature of Rāma's Mandākinī tour for Sītā that prefigures his *saṃsāra* liberation is the enactment of quotidian rituals by ascetics. Some of these seers, as scheduled, bathe daily in the river waters, while others say solar prayers (*Rām* 2.89.6–7). The latter practitioners' performances metonymically represent the Vedic texts that will trail Rāma on his heavenward trek, which themselves will be embodied by the *brāhmaṇas* (priests) reciting them, and will include the Gāyatrī mantra—the sun invocation uttered by boys of ancient Indian society's top three classes (*kṣatriyas* [warriors] and *vaiśyas* [commoners], in addition to *brāhmaṇas*) on initiation into Vedic studenthood and repeated regularly thereafter (7.99.8abd, 9cd). Moreover, the Mandākinī's ritual bathers symbolically reveal the synecdoche encoded in the 'sacred-watered Sarayū' (*sarayūṃ puṇyasalilām*) epithet supplied on Rāma's arrival at the opening of the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s closing chapter (7.100.1c), for what will have rendered the latter river inviolate by then will have been its

continual religious use by similar sages. Additionally, the bathing seers and the praying seers whom Rāma sees at the Mandākinī respectively betoken the great mundane sages accompanying him as he makes his way to the Sarayū and the great celestial sages attending his heavenly ascension there (7.99.9, 7.100.2–3).

Rāma's ensuing transcendence of reincarnation is forerun by a fifth image cluster involving the Mandākinī River, where the wind rustles flowers from the shoreside trees, and their blossoms blown into big aerial bursts and down onto the water's centre, where they float to and fro, make Citrakūṭa (the Peak Appearing Extraordinary) look as if it is dancing (*Rām* 2.89.8acd, 10, 8b). Similarly, a wind-dispersed bloom profusion will rain down at the Sarayū River and, as Rāma goes close to the water shortly before his *mokṣa* moment, the air will resonate with trumpet centums and will throng with *gandharvas* (the handsome, heavenly song-makers) and the lovely *apsarās* accompanying them (7.100.4–5).

The sixth link between his future release from the saṃsāric cycle and his current survey of Mandākinī marvels connects the fluvial and celestial biomes. Microcosmically pure-watered, shiny-shored Mandākinī and its immediate environs encompass myriad birds and other animals, fruitful and flowering trees and 'achieved' demidivine creatures called Siddhas (*Rām* 2.89.9abd, 3–5, 9cd). Macrocosmically the utterly pure holiest heaven, Brahmaloḥa (where Rāma will free himself to reunite with Viṣṇu), will feature all manner of supernatural beings, such as divinities beginning with Sādhya² and including exceptional avians; the neighbouring Sāntānika (Pertaining to Extending) and Santāna (Extending) realms will receive all the mobile and sessile creatures that bodily will have touched the Sarayū with Rāma; and—fittingly, given that Viṣṇu, as Brahman, comprises all entities—the creatures that were reborn on Earth with Rāma (such as apes and demons) and that, too, had immortal sources will coalesce with them after shedding their earthly bodies in the Sarayū and thereby will accomplish *mokṣa* shortly after Rāma (7.100.11–14, 16–17, 23, 18–19, 24).

The emotional valences of the abovementioned transcendence instances are portended by a seventh nexus of associations, in which Mandākinī exuberances are preparatory for confirmatory Sarayū *jouissances*. At the Mandākinī, Rāma maintains that every person witnessing the waters,

2 Their name, To Be Achieved, likely ties etymologically to that of the Siddhas, since the verbal root *sidh* '[a]ppears to be a weakened form of' the verbal root *sādh* (Whitney 1997 [1885]: 187).

the thirsty animals—among which apes as well as regal lions and elephants number—that purposefully arrive on the scene and the thoroughly flowering trees that decorate it obtain relaxation and contentment.³ At the Sarayū, on whose shores flowers will shower (*Rām* 7.100.1–5), all Ayodhyans (among them, various palace associates) and all apes,⁴ having thrilled at the opportunity to devote themselves to pursuing Rāma at his peregrination's end (7.99.10–18), where waters will be within sight, will ascend to heavens. Like Rāma, Bharata and Śatrughna will go to Brahmaloṇa, will be released from *samsāra* there by recombining with Viṣṇu and will go on to experience bliss by thus becoming one with Brahman, which will overarch the other deities' happy reactions to Viṣṇu's reunification; the remaining Ayodhyans will soar to the adjoining Sāntānikas in celestial chariots, having delighted at immersing themselves in the Sarayū and having left their human bodies there first; and the correspondingly contented, submerged and decorporated apes will arrive at heavenly destinations to revert to the divinities from whom they descended, as described earlier (7.100.1, 10, 13, 16, 21, 20, 18, 24).

Present at the different points of the Sarayū sojourns and their associated endpoints will be demons, some of whom will shadow Rāma on his way waterward and ultimately will merge with the divine beings from whom they issued and thus will be liberated from rebirth, while others of whom already will number among the holiest heaven's divine denizens, all of whom will revere Viṣṇu, who—as Brahman—will overspread them all (*Rām* 7.99.18; 7.100.24, 12–13, 11, 7). The possibility of *mokṣa* on ascension to heaven is foreclosed, however, to Rāma's antagonist, Rāvaṇa, who instead must transmigrate forever because he follows the wrong god. Along the way, Rāvaṇa moves from earthly wealth (as evidenced by explicitly perceptible gems, references to which are doubly underlined) to unearthly deserts (as manifested by implicitly intangible jewels, whose construals are dottedly underlined).

3 *Rām* 2.89.18, with the necessary substitution of *paśyan* ('witnessing') for *ramyām* ('delightful') in 2.89.18a made in all 15 *Rāmāyaṇa* 2 manuscripts reflecting the epic's less conservative northern recension.

4 I read at *Rām* 7.99.15, with the Telugu-script manuscript T₃, *snātāḥ pramuditāḥ sarve br̥ṣṭāḥ puṣṭāś ca vānarāḥ | dṛptāḥ kilikilāśabdaiḥ sarve nāmam anuvratāḥ ||* ('All the apes—having bathed and rejoiced, having delighted and thrived, and having gone wild in their cries of jollity—demonstrated their devotion to Rāma.') instead of *snātāḥ pramuditāḥ sarvaḥ br̥ṣṭapuṣṭam anuttamam | dṛptam kilikilāśabdaiḥ sarvaḥ nāmam anuvratam ||* ('Every entity—having bathed and rejoiced, having delighted and thrived unexcelled, and having gone wild in its cries of jollity—demonstrated its devotion to Rāma.'), as in the main text of the critical edition's seventh volume.

From simian incursion to soldierly termination: Rāvaṇa's bellicose passage from literal terrestrial to spiritual celestial and infernal jewels

While Śaiva Rāvaṇa is not connected as directly to his deity, Śiva, as is Vaiṣṇava Rāma, semi-incarnating Viṣṇu, to his divinity, that demon's devotion defined him. His identifying story—part of the backstory of the epic villain's central gembedded encounter in my macromosaic's *saṃsāra*-centred section—unfolded as the demon, named Daśagrīva at birth, was stopped when attempting to take his palatial aerial chariot, Puṣpaka, toward Mount Kailāsa. More specifically, the demon monarch was warned away unhesitatingly from the mountain, during Śiva and his wife Pārvatī's lovemaking, by Śiva's powerful ape-faced attendant, Nandin, whose simian appearance elicited Daśagrīva's condescension and amusement. Incensed, Nandin cursed Daśagrīva, who foolhardily had emitted laughter in the manner of a resounding raincloud, and his fellow demons to be killed by apes similarly strong as valorous Nandin (*Rām* 7.9.25; 7.16.3, 7–8, 12–15).

Undeterred, Daśagrīva moved to uproot the mountain, leading Śiva to push down on it mischievously with his big toe and to pin the demon's arms underneath the immense stone. The aggrieved Daśagrīva, on the advice of his astounded councillors, appeased Śiva by praising him with a variety of calming hymns while prostrating himself before him and howling for a millennium. Gratified by the Laṅkan sovereign, Śiva freed him, dubbing this demon 'Rāvaṇa' (Roaring) both because he had shouted out in anger and pain once pinned and because the fear that he had instilled in other beings had caused them, too, to cry out (*Rām* 7.16.17–18, 20–24; 7.317* 3–10⁵; 7.16.25–28). Rāvaṇa, having been granted by Śiva as well a guarantee against being killed by supernaturals, confidently proceeded to harass highly heroic human kings wherever he roamed all over the world, slaying those who stood up to him and sparing those who prudently surrendered before he could mount full-scale attacks on them (7.321* 1–10⁶, 7.16.31, 7.322*⁷).

5 This passage is found in 17 of the 20 *Rāmāyaṇa* 7 manuscripts representing the epic's more conservative southern recension.

6 This passage appears in 13 of the 20 *Rāmāyaṇa* 7 manuscripts representing the epic's southern recension.

7 This passage occurs in 17 of the 21 *Rāmāyaṇa* 7 manuscripts representing the epic's northern recension.

Yet, Rāvaṇa's tendency to extend his dominion was longstanding, his want for universal sovereignty having as its kernel his prior, local landgrab. It was rooted in his childhood, when his half-brother, wealth lord Kubera, visited via Puṣpaka, of which he was the original owner. His ostensible resplendence encouraged the then Daśagrīva's mother, the demoness Kaikasī, to urge her young son to work to be like his illustrious semi-sibling. In response to Kaikasī's prodding, Daśagrīva enviously vowed to equal or excel Kubera expeditiously (*Rām* 7.9.31–36).

By then, the could-be role-model already had had a storied career. Born Vaiśravaṇa (son of brahmin sage Viśravas, son of brahmin sage Pulastya, son of Brahmā), this paternal great-grandson of the most well-known Hindu creative deity had engaged in asceticism for millennia, winning from Brahmā supremacy over wealth, the concomitant position as the fourth World Protector, sun-bright celestial vehicle Puṣpaka and status equivalent to that of the 30 primary divinities collectively (*Rām* 7.3.7, 1; 7.2.4; 7.3.10, 15, 17–18). Next, Kubera had moved to gold-and-lapis-gated Laṅkā, had repopulated it with demons to replace those of old who had vacated it when threatened by Viṣṇu and had ruled happily over the newer set of citizens far more content than their panicked antecedents (7.3.24–25, 27–29).

Daśagrīva, bidding to parallel or surpass Kubera, similarly was emboldened by a boon from their paternal great-grandfather, Brahmā. To have the latter god confer impermeability by supernatural beings to him, Daśagrīva (Ten-Necked) performed austerities for 10,000 years, sacrificing one of his 10 heads after each thousand-year span except the last. Also restored to wholeness by the generous god, Daśagrīva stood then in good stead for his conqueror future (*Rām* 7.10.15, 17, 19–20b, 10–12; 7.9.25; 7.10.20c–22).

He first turned his hungry eyes toward his half-brother's abode. The demons displaced from there—led by Daśagrīva's maternal grandfather, Sumālin, whose bright gold earrings had made him look like a dark raincloud and whose glimpse of Kubera's Puṣpaka flying by had incited him to urge his daughter, Kaikasī, to unite with Viśravas and to bear their highly frightful, 10-headed demon son (*Rām* 7.9.1–3, 8, 15, 17–18, 21–22, 25)—implored newly booned Daśagrīva to take over Laṅkā and to reopen it to its erstwhile residents (7.11.1, 3, 7–9). At their behest, Daśagrīva sent a messenger to ask Kubera to cede the city to him without conflict; and Kubera, on their father's recommendation, abandoned Laṅkā and took his demon subjects to Mount

Kailāsa to create a city on another Mandākinī River, enabling Daśagrīva to lord over Laṅkā and to restore it to its prior inhabitants, who likewise looked like dark rainclouds (7.11.20–23, 30, 34–35, 37, 41, 39–40).

Subsequently, Daśagrīva constantly vexed divine beings and wrathfully hacked wonderful celestial parks, provoking Kubera to intervene via envoy to reprove Daśagrīva for his destructive ways and to disclose both his own 800-year worship of Śiva (who, satisfied, now was his ally) and all the gods' deliberation over a countermeasure to kill Daśagrīva (*Rām* 7.13.8–9, 11–12, 16–19b, 21, 25–26, 29, 31–32). Utterly irate, Daśagrīva interpreted Kubera's intervention not as evidence of brotherly love, but as an affront entailing the flaunting of Śiva's friendliness to the wealth deity (7.13.33, 35). Therefore Daśagrīva angrily killed Kubera's messenger; warred, with his forces, against Kubera and his on Kailāsa; and, by committing such aggression, troubled his demonic ministers (7.13.38; 7.14.1–3, 7).

Once Daśagrīva perforated Kubera's capital's gate (a portal composed of gold and dappled with lapis and silver), one of Kubera's warders wrested the gemmed gate from its place, flung that barrier at the invader and hit him with it. Impervious to this assault thanks to Brahmā's boon, Daśagrīva, with the same gate, smashed his opponent, who, effectively having been cremated by that demon, disappeared (*Rām* 7.14.21–24). This sight set Kubera's frightened forces to flee and to enter rivers and caverns, leaving their commander to engage Daśagrīva in head-to-head mace combat after averring that the wayward demon would be compelled to hell (7.14.25; 7.15.23, 13–14, 21). Nonetheless, Daśagrīva employed his demonic illusory capability without compunction, along with his heavy weapon, to clock and fell Kubera, who would be revived by the divinities overseeing his stores. Meanwhile, Daśagrīva appropriated thought-controlled Puspaka—with its auric pillars, lapidary entries, pearl-woven caparison and wishedly fructifying trees—as his success's spoil (7.15.26–31). Assuming ownership of Kubera's vehicle reinforced Daśagrīva's link to Laṅkā, Kubera's former capital, which—like Puspaka—had structures of gold, was gated with gems, was encircled in white and contained trees fruiting as desired (3.46.10–11, 12cd).

The episode more keenly betokening Rāvaṇa's afterlife destinations is preceded by certain pivotal conditions. The event catalysing his soteriological causal chain, his abduction of Sītā via a knocked-down Puṣpaka knockoff,⁸ was countered collectively in Kiṣkindhā, domain of ape king Sugrīva, semidivine son of sun god Sūrya and thus distant cousin (many times removed) of Solar Dynast Rāma (*Rām* 1.16.19; 1.1.8; 1.5.3, 6). To aid this ally in regaining Sītā from Rāvaṇa, the primate ruler deputed his principal minister, Hanumān, to conscript a large army of simian armies (4.35.4, 7; 4.36.1; 5.45.16; 4.36.9, 16, 33–34; 4.37.24, 27, 29cd, 33). Sugrīva then tetra-directionally sent out his head generals, with their troops, to find Sītā (4.44.7–8). The group led by his nephew Aṅgada and including Hanumān travelled south and learned of Sītā's Laṅka location (4.40.1, 5, 2b; 4.57.22). Hanumān, son of wind god Vāyu and shapeshifting ape princess Añjanā, grew huge to make the at least 1,300-kilometre leap from the northern to the southern shore of the southern ocean to reach Laṅkā, but regained his regular size before landing (4.65.8–10b, 17–18; 4.135.6* 3, 8⁹; 5.1.10, 40, 126; 4.57.23; 4.63.4; 5.2.3, 5; 5.1.185, 187–88). After sunset Hanumān miniaturised himself to dog size to find Sītā in Rāvaṇa's residence; amazedly gazed at the city's golden gates—with their lapis-lined recesses and with their gems, crystals, and pearls—mosaicked with jewels, pinnacled with smelted gold and blanchd brilliantly with silver; and beheld Laṅkā's assemblage of gold-and-lapis-netted dwellings suggesting lightning-covered, bird-flecked monsoon clouds (5.2.45, 5.126*¹⁰, 5.2.46ef, 5.3.8–9, 5.6.1).

In Hanumān's eyes, moreover, attention-grabbing golden Puṣpaka, looming like a lofty cloud, was tantamount to Rāvaṇa's might and anticipated both this monarch's lonesome on his throne and the figures that this ruler and his wives would strike while reclining in their beds (*Rām* 5.6.5, 7), as detailed below—both of the king's modes of posing centring scenes of him (at rest and work) that Hanumān would undertake to observe. The vehicle's simultaneous likenesses to a terranean heaven—encompassing not only an intricate earth topped with ranging mountains topped with extending trees

8 While Rāvaṇa's return ride was destroyed by the royal vulture Jaṭāyu in his unsuccessful effort to rescue Sītā, whom Rāvaṇa flew himself to Laṅkā, the demon's ill-fated battle vehicle—despite being drawn by goblin-visaged donkeys and driven expressly by a charioteer—was described as being controlled telepathically, jewelled, aerial and palatial, like Puṣpaka (*Rām* 3.47.18–19; 3.49.10–15; 3.50.12; 3.52.11; 3.33.4–7; 3.40.6–7; 3.30.14; 3.46.6; 3.53.29–30; 5.6.5–8, 11; 6.109.9–10; 7.3.18; 7.15.29–31).

9 The latter lines occur in all 14 *Rāmāyaṇa* 4 manuscripts corresponding to the epic's southern recension and, respectively, in six and three of the 18 *Rāmāyaṇa* 4 manuscripts corresponding to the epic's northern recension.

10 This passage appears in all 13 *Rāmāyaṇa* 5 manuscripts reflecting the epic's southern recension.

topped with opened flowers, but also a fourfold menagerie comprising 1) birds crafted from lapis and from silver and coral, as well as lovely-beaked birds whose playfully crooked wings of floral coral and aureal decor seemed to be witnessed by love god Kāma; 2) snakes variegated with different precious substances; 3) fine-bodied horses of various kinds; and 4) blue-lotus-leaf-bearing elephants bedecked with lotus filaments and associated with lotus-bearing, lotus-pond-located Lakṣmī (*Rām* 5.6.9, 12ab, 13, 12cd, 14)—in radiance and bejewelledness and Rāvaṇa in electrically lustrous cloudiness suggested that he would attain celestial experience by dint of his forcefulness (5.6.6ab, 8, 11, 5cd, 7ab).

Yet, Kāma's and Lakṣmī's respective indirect and direct presences in Puṣpaka's jewelwork each intimated the chariot's contemporaneous appropriateness and inappropriateness in Rāvaṇa's possession. Kāma's (Desire's) evocation by Puṣpaka's courting ornate birds implied that the deity presided over its owner Rāvaṇa's happy love life with his many desirable wives desirous of his affections (*Rām* 5.7.66–67). But Kāma apparently would influence Rāvaṇa to be besotted with Sītā after attempting to employ his exalted chariot's simulacrum to abduct her, even though she would remain unwilling to give in to his advances (5.18.6, 5.19.4, 5.20.41). As a consequence, the demon king would seem to be extremely distant from Lakṣmī, whom Sītā incarnated, despite the divinity's immanence in the Ayodhyan princess, much as his mother, when a maiden, had looked like the goddess but had lacked her emblematic lotus (7.9.2). Nevertheless, Lakṣmī was evidenced otherwise in Rāvaṇa's Laṅkā, in whose moats floated red and blue lotuses (5.2.14). And Rāvaṇa's use of Puṣpaka—with its jewelled tribute to that prosperity goddess—perhaps had contributed to the ornateness and capaciousness of his cherished personal assembling hall, whose studded stairflights, gilded latticework, crystal-inset floors, ivory-inset coins, pearl, coral, silver and gold decorations, and countless gemmed pillars were beheld next by Hanumān (5.7.18–20).

Hanumān's aforementioned encounters with Rāvaṇa's city's ornamented entities were portentous for its inhabitants. The following day, after having destroyed the Aśoka Grove, having ripped a gilded pillar from Rāvaṇa's residence and having employed that support's centum of sides to execute a centum of immense palace-sanctuary sentries, exceedingly powerful Hanumān would allow himself to be captured by other Laṅkan demon opponents in order to obtain an audience with their king; would see his heavily jewelled palace; would present himself as Sugrīva's messenger; and would see

the enthroned, lustrous Rāvaṇa in all his adorned glory (*Rām* 5.12.1; 5.16.1; 5.41.1, 11, 14–15; 5.46.45, 55, 59; 5.47.14, 9, 2–3, 7–8). Sitting on finely cushioned, clear crystal embellished with jewelled joints, the vigorously energetic demon king would be compared repeatedly to a raincloud and likened to thickened eyeblack; would be crowned with valuable, glittering gold layered with enmeshed pearls; would be decked with precious gemmed golden ornaments attached with diamond clasps and appearing to be the stuff of dreams; would be dressed in very expensive silk and swathed in ground red sandalwood; would be endowed with sturdy arms bearing close-fitting armlets and shining bracelets, anointed with the best ground sandalwood, and approximating five-headed snakes (presumably because of Rāvaṇa's thick fingers); and would be glistening with his dectet of frightening-looking, bright-fanged, handsome, red-eyed, heavy-lipped, overgrown heads like Mount Mandara's summits when overrun by myriad predators (5.47.9, 14, 7bcd, 7a, 2–4b, 8, 5–6). For his part, prudent Hanumān, once his malefactor captors blazed up his oil-infused tail and paraded him around the city to their self-made shouting din accompanied by conch-shells and kettledrums, would defer to his maternal and paternal heritages—first, expanding to mountain size and then shrinking instantaneously to minuscule again to free himself from his bonds; and, second, burning and razing the great, golden-netted, pearl-and-gem-constructed, sanctuary-containing Laṅka dwellings to the ground with the aid of the wind (5.51.8, 16, 36; 5.52.6–11), which would be as fierce here (as a flame fanner) with Rāvaṇa's subjects as it had been and would be gentle (as a flower showerer) with Rāma's followers on Citrakūṭa and near Ayodhyā.

Still worse for Laṅkā would be its last conflagration, engineered and executed by simians. Their sovereign, Sugrīva, would command the strongest, fastest apes to inflame Laṅkā toward the end of the war waged by Rāma and Rāvaṇa (*Rām* 6.62.1, 3); and those torchbearers would do so after sunset (6.62.4, 6), establishing a temporal resemblance to Hanumān's nocturnal scouting of the city, if inverting the bejewelled opulence that he witnessed. The bright mountains formed by the demons' jewelled and coral-embellished homes virtually (or, worse, viciously) scraping against the sun (with their glittering, elevated apartments, aureate lunar and demilunar decorations and porthole windows trimmed with gems of many types)—after kindling, resounding with clinking ornaments and being upended—would disintegrate into cinders (6.62.14cd, 13cd, 12dc, 13a, 14b, 17).

The symbolism of the Laṅkan structures' incineration would be illuminated by a pertinent simile pair. Toward the disintegration narrative's fore, the kindling residences would be compared, from afar, to Himālayan craigs fluorescing with herbed forests. At that splintering account's rear, the city's blazing main gate, sundered and scattered by Rāma's arrows, would be paralleled to Himālayan centrepiece Mount Kailāsa's crest (*Rām* 6.62.6ad, 18, 30). On one significative level, the Himālayan references would strengthen Laṅkā's prior connection to Kailāsa resident Kubera, whom Rāvaṇa, reasserting his demon ancestors' claim to the city, ousted nonviolently, but the honouring of whose right to the Trikūṭa Mountain capital probably would have permitted his more peaceable rule to continue (7.6.14ab, 7.3.27–29). On another meaning-bearing level, the Himālayan mentions would possess Vaiṣṇava valences, suggesting the evanescence of the supremacy of Kailāsan Lord Śiva and his demon followers when Viṣṇu's human manifestation and his simian allies exercise their might. The aggressive, fiery displays that the apes would make while fighting by Rāma's side in peaked Laṅkā would be far war cries from those primates' ultimately tranquil, happy pursuit of the Ayodhyan ruler toward riverine access to heaven and saṃsāric release away from his city.

Rāvaṇa's afterlife outcomes are encoded most tellingly as Hanumān observes the bedecked Laṅkan monarch in his bejewelled bed, which founds the main story of his gembded (in)activity featured in my macromosaic's *saṃsāra*-concentrated representation. Crystal-constructed and gem-ornamented, the pre-eminent bed resembles both the kind of celestial couch that a heaven-bound person can expect and the ornamented crystal throne that Hanumān will witness waking Rāvaṇa occupying (*Rām* 5.8.1, 5.47.9). Sleeping, red-eyed Rāvaṇa likewise looks like a raincloud (5.47.14, 5b, 7d; 5.8.9bcd, 5cabd, 6cd); is crowned with shining gold and gleaming pearls (5.47.2, 5.8.23abc);¹¹ is decorated expensively (5.47.3c, 5.8.8b); has been bedaubed with ground red sandalwood (5.47.4b, 5.8.6ab); has substantial arms encircled with gold bracelets and other ornaments, plastered with the best ground sandalwood, and similar to pentacephalous serpents (5.47.8; 5.8.13, 16ab, 17, 16d); and can be compared to Mount Mandara (5.47.5–6, 5.8.7). Yet, fittingly, that mountain's nature in this repose-related context differs. Here, the Mandara full of woodland flora corresponding to the sleeping Rāvaṇa also is at rest, in contrast to the active Mandara teeming with predatory fauna to be seen in

11 Indeed, the phrase *kāñcanena virājatā* ('with shining gold') occupies the same metrical position at 5.47.2b as at 5.8.23b.

comparison to the alert Rāvaṇa. In addition, that inert Mandara is invoked as a comparative standard for the Rāvaṇa compassed by celestial adornments. This metonymic mention of heaven, in concert with certain other of Rāvaṇa's atmospheric attributes in his slumber's description, accents a correspondence set between that demon ruler and his somewhat similarly Śaiva maternal great-grandfather, Sukeśa (7.5.5).

Son of demon couple Vidyutkeśa and Sālakaṭaṃkāṭā, Sukeśa, at his Mandaran birth, was as bright as lightning. But the infant, shining like the autumn sun, cried like a shouting raincloud once his mother forgot him shortly after birthing him and forsook him to have sex with his father. Fortunately for forgotten, forsaken son Sukeśa, however, Śiva, astride his bull vehicle and accompanied by Pārvatī while crossing the sky, spied the crying demon-child and accelerated his ageing until he was as old as his mother. Furthermore, Śiva granted to Sukeśa both immortality and a sky-flying city. Taking pride in these awards, the undying, airborne demon traversed the universe. Before his thoroughgoing journey, Pārvatī ensured that no other demon spawn would suffer his plight, by transforming demonesses into beings who simultaneously would conceive and bear children who instantaneously would age to become their mothers' contemporaries (*Rām* 7.4.22–29, 31, 30).

One such suddenly ageing demon-child was Daśagrīva, born with fiery bright hair nominally recalling his maternal great-great-grandfather, Vidyutkeśa (Lightning-Haired) (*Rām* 7.9.22). Even though time elapsed between Daśagrīva's birth and Kubera's fateful visit with their family via Puṣpaka, Daśagrīva's impetuosity, in aspiring to best his elder half-brother, may reflect this younger sibling's relative immaturity psychologically, if not physically. After exploiting his near-immortality from Brahmā to wrest sky-scaling Laṅkā from Kubera and arrogating Kubera's aerial palace on Mount Kailāsa, Daśagrīva was detained there by Śiva's attendant Nandin—who normally assumed a bull's form and, in spite of his ape face, accordingly was addressed as Cow Lord (*gopate*) (7.16.18d)—to prevent any interference with Śiva and Pārvatī's coitus. Nonetheless, the abovediscussed demon essayed to dislodge the mountain, inclining reclining Śiva to weigh down Daśagrīva's arms and to cause him to cry out in pain, which caused others to cry out in fright. As rewards for the soon-to-be Rāvaṇa's thousand-year obeisance, the god bolstered Brahmā's boon to the demon and thereby enabled him to extend his campaign for world dominion to human kings earth-wide.

Further signalling the similarities between Sukeśa's and pre-Rāvaṇa's early lives are similes emphasising the shared luminary imagery in the limnings of past, prone infant Sukeśa and present, recumbent adult Rāvaṇa. He has the appearance of a raincloud threaded by lightning bolts because of his gold-woven clothes and sparkling earrings, and thereby is reminiscent of raincloud-resembling and lightning-like baby Sukeśa (*Rām* 5.8.6cd, 5abd; 7.4.26d, 24b). And this cloudlike child's ruddy autumn-sun luminescence and his status as a maternal grandson of Saṃdhyā, the goddess personifying twilight, are recapitulated in Rāvaṇa's ground-red-sandalwood coating making him akin to a cloud rouged in the twilight sky (7.4.26bd, 22–24; 5.8.6).

Rāvaṇa's figurative cloudiness connects him in repose both to his enthroned awake self and to the most memorable vehicle through which he has been exercising his will. Hence, in his gemmed bed, he seems similar to a lightning-charged raincloud; on his gemmed throne, he simultaneously will be resplendent unlimitedly and raincloudy; and, in his gemmed chariot, he was housed in a car like a large cloud having an attractive gold lustre and peerless prettiness—a palatial conveyance whose loveliest of women rendered it as luminous as a raincloud lit by lightning strikes (*Rām* 5.8.5abd, 6cd; 5.47.14; 5.6.5, 7).

Also, Puṣpaka's pretties were analogous to Rāvaṇa's striking wives, who likewise shine. More precisely, their pulchritudinous, lunar visages luminesce, and their earrings and bracelets glitter with diamond-and-lapis-inset gold (*Rām* 5.8.29abd, 32, 31). While these sleeping women are draped over their ardent husband's lap and arms and around his feet at night, one of his consorts—appealing, gilded-complexioned Mandodarī—rests alone on an impressive bed separated from the others (5.8.30bd, 28, 48, 46). Her position as chief queen is apparent both in her 'brilliant' (*śubhe*) bed (which matches Rāvaṇa's, which 'brille[s]' [*śuśubhe*], in its attractiveness) and in her pearl-incorporating ornaments (which parallel Rāvaṇa's pearled crown) (5.8.46b, 12ab, 47ab, 23abc; 5.47.2). Additionally, of all Rāvaṇa's queens, only she possesses such exceptional loveliness that she, gleaming with it, seems to bejewel his magnificent palace (5.8.47cd).

Mandodarī's distinction from her co-wives is warranted well, since she, particularly, is key to comprehending her husband's ultimate fates, whose elliptical account forms the forestory of his gembedded positioning—the closing tableau of my macromosaic's saṃsāric tract. Those destinies will follow on Rāvaṇa's death at Rāma's hands. Once the future Kosalan sovereign

will have shot the current Laṅkan monarch through the heart with an arrow, the threatening, refulgent Rāvaṇa will perish and will fall earthward from his chariot (not thought-steered, airborne Puṣpaka, but a vehicle driven simply by a charioteer and made for land battling) (*Rām* 6.116.82ab; 6.97.14, 17, 20–21; 6.93.27). Rāvaṇa's bereaved, fearful demon soldiers will retreat to Laṅkā, and their ape adversaries joyfully will announce Rāma's triumph and Rāvaṇa's expiry (6.97.24–25).

Even in death, Rāvaṇa will appear as in life. As his demoness widows happen on his body, it will look, as at birth and on his throne, like piled eyeblack (*Rām* 7.9.22b, 5.47.7a, 6.98.6d). The pained women, before closing their laments over Rāvaṇa, will mimic certain of the positions that they occupied while sleeping around him, clutching his body's various parts, such as his feet (6.98.11, 7–8). Still, Rāvaṇa's distressed senior queen will command individual attention during her mourning as during his bevy's nights with him (6.99.1–2).

She will exert the additional privilege of opining about Rāvaṇa's subsequent destinations. She will open her analysis by ascribing his death to his overreaching Sītā-seizing (*Rām* 6.99.14–17). Sītā's abduction was emblematic of Rāvaṇa's problematic pattern of wanting and obtaining what he should not necessarily have had. All too aware of this tendency, his own half-brother, Kubera, relegated him to the hell-bound (7.15.21). But the airborne chariot that Rāvaṇa wrenched from Kubera, that reflected its new owner's potency and that resembled the terrestrial celestial signified that Rāvaṇa had sufficient might to make right in his afterlife (7.15.29, 5.6.5c–6b). Mandodarī will suggest as much as she cites Rāvaṇa's celebrated prowess (6.99.23ab). Weighing this much-touted martial skill (which Rāvaṇa will have evinced until his own end in battle) against his sheer disregard for the decorum normally ordering his society (which—including his lead wife—will have judged him harshly for harming Sītā, whom he should have esteemed), Mandodarī will conclude that the deceased demon will have proceeded suitably in light of his laudability as well as in dark of his culpability (6.99.24ab). That Rāvaṇa's spiritual journey will have at least two termini will be implied by his corpse's very exterior. His soulless body will continue to seem as celestial as in his jewelled snoozing and ruling, with his golden clothes and radiant bracelets highlight(n)ing his raincloudiness (5.8.5a, 6cd, 5d, 13a;

5.47.14cd, 8c; 6.99.25ab).¹² With Rāvaṇa's skin reddened with blood instead of ground sandalwood, however, his mortal shell will be perceived as infernal, even as he appears as if asleep (5.8.6ab, 5.47.4b, 6.99.25de). What likely will be eternal for Rāvaṇa's soul, then, will be its traversing of different realms, never to settle in one permanently and never to merge with a single divinity.

Conclusion

The disparate lots of epic protagonist Rāma and epic antagonist Rāvaṇa are mapped as these characters dilatorily depart from the paths to their ultimate struggle. Nonetheless, the pair remain counterposed in (pre)views of their diverging afterlives. Rāma's gembedded narrative, consisting in mountainous mineral glints hinting at their richly diverse environs, readily disconnects from the actual jewels of its courtly backstory to attend instead to a liberatory, riverine forestory ahead. Contrastingly, Rāvaṇa's gembedded narrative, composed of myriad precious stones weighing down their pleasure-keen wearers, only sketches its forestory's transmigratory realms, in favour of staying firmly tethered to the sizeable, contested jewelled materials of a considerable backstory pre-enacting inexorable recurrent rebirth's turmoil. Rāma's and Rāvaṇa's differently oriented ornamented main stories, the creations of poets primarily seeking to promote devotion to Viṣṇu above all other immortals, do not adequately accommodate the corresponding loyalty to Śiva as an admirable theological option. Rather, those epic authors leave the latter task to later mythographers, the outlines of whose efforts—I hope—will appear in the theoretical interpretative mosaics offered by my scholarly sectarianism-investigator successors.

References

Primary text

Bhatt, G.H., and Shah, U.P. (eds). (1960–75). *The Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa*. [7 vols.] Baroda, India: Oriental Institute.

12 In fact, nearly the same compounds, *jīmūtasamkāśaṃ* and *-jīmūtasamkāśaḥ* ('like a cloud'), occur in analogous metrical positions in 5.8.5a and 6.99.25a.

Secondary texts

- Bailey, Greg. (2005). Contrasting ideologies in the Nārāyaṇīaparvan (chapter 327 and the definitions of *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*). In Ramkaran Sharma (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Indian Wisdom: Prof. Satya Vrat Shastri Felicitation Volume. Volume 1*, pp. 581–606. Delhi: Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan.
- Bendix, Reinhard. (1977). Society and religion in India. In *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait*, pp. 142–99. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Fitzgerald, James L. (2006). Negotiating the shape of ‘scripture’: New perspectives on the development and growth of the *Mahābhārata* between the empires. In Patrick Olivelle (ed.), *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 BCE to 400 CE*, pp. 257–86. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195305326.003.0011.
- Goldman, Robert P., and Goldman, Sally J. Sutherland. (2017). Introduction to *Uttarakāṇḍa*. In Robert P. Goldman and Sally J. Sutherland Goldman (trans. and eds.), *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient India. Volume 7*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Pathak, Shubha. (2014). *Divine Yet Human Epics: Reflections of Poetic Rulers from Ancient Greece and India*. Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, Trustees for Harvard University.
- Whitney, William Dwight. (1997 [1885]). *The Roots, Verb-Forms and Primary Derivatives of the Sanskrit Language (A Supplement to His Sanskrit Grammar)*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

This text is taken from *Visions and Revisions in Sanskrit Narrative: Studies in the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas*, edited by Raj Balkaran and McComas Taylor, published 2023 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/VRSN.2023.12