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"Once upon a Time..." the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Traditional Tales

"Once upon a time there was a prince called Rāma..." There is no need to continue with the story. So firmly is it rooted in all forms of artistic expression, at all social and intellectual levels, and employed by all religious persuasions, in South Asia and beyond, that it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that over one-fifth of the world's population imbibes Vālmīki's work with its mother's milk. Not an exaggeration, certainly, but nonetheless not quite accurate. In actual fact, few people are introduced to Rāma by Vālmīki's Sanskrit; the vast majority, for obvious reasons, come to know him by way of one of the vernacular adaptations of the *ādikāvya*, helped perhaps by the wordless versions retold in sculpture, painting, or performance. A valuable collection of detailed information about tribal versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* gathered in the Proceedings of a symposium held at Guwahati in 1988 lies waiting to be analysed.[1] This all-pervasive tradition is so vast and so varied that I cannot hope to deal with it comprehensively in one paper, so rather than merely listing retellings, I intend to pick out a few by way of illustration — traditional narratives rather than literary works — exploring the uses to which Vālmīki's material has been put and the purposes and consequences of significant changes. I group these versions into three categories: firstly, tales whose primary purpose is to narrate the Rāma-story, in whole or in part, for its own sake; secondly, those with some different purpose, where an episode from the *Rāmāyaṇa* is introduced as an illustration; and thirdly, tales unconnected with the Rāma-story, which yet have absorbed some influence from it in the form of episodes, motifs or names, or have themselves influenced later tellings of the Rāma-story.

The process of adaptation and even slanting began the second time the *ādikāvya* was recited for even the Sanskrit poem attributed to Vālmīki

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[1] K.S. Singh and B. Datta (eds), *Rama-katha in Tribal and Folk Traditions of India*, Anthropological Survey of India/Seagull Books, Calcutta 1993.

is accepted by most scholars to be not one but many.[2] The crucial feature distinguishing the tellers who developed Vālmīki's story in Sanskrit from those of the vernacular tradition has nothing to do with style or content as such: it lies in their approach to the text. After the very first stages, when they did enjoy a limited flexibility, the Vālmīkian poets could add material, but had no freedom to omit or suppress anything,[3] whereas the vernacular tellers re-composed the tale, using only as much of the original as suited their individual purpose. To regard these more limited narrations in a negative light, as abbreviations or even corruptions of Vālmīki's original, is to risk obscuring the techniques employed in re-fashioning the structure, and may well lead to misinterpretation of their composers' aims. The opposite danger is to assume that a free-standing re-composition of Vālmīkian material which presents a different picture from Vālmīki's, for example the *Dasarathajātaka* or the Jain tellings, must *ipso facto* be based on an independent tradition. I know of no version of the Rāma-story in any form which can justify belief in any non-Vālmīkian or pre-Vālmīkian source, and see no reason not to credit Vālmīki's heirs with some measure of the creative impulse which conceived the original story, a creative impulse leading in many widely-divergent directions, as each of these vernacular redactors pursued his own aims.[4] The choice of episodes, as much as the handling of them, gives important clues to these aims: as the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* developed from its origins as a heroic romance — a story — into a religious epic, devotional redactors such as Kampaṉ and Tulsīdās chose not to use elements from the *Uttarakāṇḍa* which might have produced an image of the hero that seemed harsh and incompatible with the gracious beneficence they sought to convey. Tellers in village settings, however, and in tribal societies outside mainstream Hinduism, continued to enjoy tales of Rāma's doings as stories in the traditional mould, stories which did not necessarily command overwhelming reverence for Vālmīki's hero: Rāma's pre-eminence could be diminished or even eclipsed by other characters, especially Hunamān and Sītā, but also by Lakṣmaṇa and by Rāma's sons.

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[2] The name Vālmīki is a convenient fiction. I use it to denote the author of the earliest layer of material preserved in the Critical Edition (*The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki*, G.H. Bhatt and U.P. Shah (gen. eds), 7 vols, Oriental Institute, Baroda 1960–1975); some scholars use it to denote later layers, either the whole of the Critical Edition text, or even one specific later recension. To avoid confusing the reader any more than necessary, I normally use the Vālmīkian forms of proper names, as they are not always easy to recognise in their vernacular forms.

[3] M. Brockington, *The Process of Growth of Rāmāyaṇa: Why? and Why not? a Workshop Report*, in: M. Brockington and P. Schreiner (eds), *Composing a Tradition: Concepts, Techniques and Relationships*, Proceedings of the first Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas, August 1997, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Zagreb 1999, pp. 111–120.

[4] For an interesting and relatively objective account of how the Rāmlīlā can be re-composed to promote specific political and social issues, see P. Richman, *A Diaspora Ramayana in Southall, Greater London*, "Journal of the American Academy of Religion", vol. 67, 1999, pp. 33–57.

A number of versions that do make use of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* develop the episode in which Rāma discovers the sons he has never known, Kuśa and Lava. The gentle pathos of the *Uttarakāṇḍa's* poets, who had revealed the boys' identity by having them heard at a horse-sacrifice singing the exploits of Rāma, is given vivid, dramatic definition by redactors more concerned with action, and the boys are arrested and recognised when they steal the sacrificial horse or attack its guardians; other, bolder, variants, realising that the sons of Rāma, even in their youth, must be made too mighty to be captured so easily, have the boys unknowingly fight their father himself, with recognition of their parentage coming when they prove able to defeat the hitherto never-conquered Rāma. The fight can be traced back to Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāmacarita* (early 8th century), and is found in many subsequent Sanskrit and vernacular versions.[5] Some versions collected among tribal peoples take this episode to extreme lengths: Rāma swoons or is even killed in the encounter, and recognition comes when Sītā has her husband revived or magically restored to life.[6] The episode occurs in literary versions too: the Hindi poet, Keśavdās (? 1555–1617), in his *Rāmcandracandrika* (1601, better known as *Rāmcandrikā*), has the three brothers and finally Rāma killed by the boys, then restored to life by the power of Sītā's chastity; in the Kāśmīrī *Rāmāyaṇa* by Divākara Prakāśa Bhaṭṭa they are restored to life by means of life-giving *amṛta*, thanks to Vālmīki's prayers to Śiva.[7] In southern India a sculpted frieze on the minor shrine at the fifteenth-century Rāmacandra temple at Vijayanagar (rare in portraying the events of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*) shows the boys fighting and killing Śatrughna and Bharata (but not Rāma himself), then Jambavān and Hanumān, despite the general reverence for Hanumān in this area, traditional site of Kiṣkindhā. There is no indication whether any of the heroes survive or are revived.[8] The idea that the god of high-caste Hindus was nevertheless not all-powerful was attractive to low-caste groups. Dr Mary Searle-Chatterjee has recorded this episode among Balmikis in Birmingham. As thinking people who do not share Indologist scholars' pre-suppositions about textual history they draw what seems to them

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[5] For details, see W.L. Smith, *Variants of the Kuśalavopākyāna*, in: F. Josephson (ed.), *Categorisation and Interpretation*, Meijerbergs arkiv för svensk ordforskning 24, Meijerbergs Institut, Göteborg 1999, pp. 107–123, and G.H. Roghair, *The Epic of Palnāḍu: a Study and Translation of* Palnāṭi vīrula katha, *a Telugu Oral Tradition from Andhra Pradesh, India*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1982, pp. 297, 360.

[6] Singh and Datta, op. cit., p. 78 (Bhojpuri), p. 201 (Karbi), p. 241 (Tai-phake); W.L. Smith, op. cit., pp. 122–123 (Assamese and Oriya).

[7] I am grateful to Danuta Stasik for information on these two texts (personal communication, January 2001).

[8] A.L. Dallapiccola et al. (eds), *The Ramachandra Temple at Vijayanagara*, Manohar, New Delhi 1992, pp. 97–98; A.L. Dallapiccola, *The City of Vijayanagara: Kishkindha, the Monkey-Kingdom*, in: V. Dehejia (ed.), *The Legend of Rama: Artistic Visions*, Marg Publications, Bombay 1994, p. 61. I am grateful to Prof. Dallapiccola for helpful discussions on the sculptural material.

the inevitable implication: this episode does not appear in the standard Sanskrit texts, therefore, they say, it must have been deliberately suppressed for sectarian reasons.[9]

The version of the Rāma-story published over one hundred years ago by Susette T a y l o r, told to her at Sehore, near Bhopāl, by her elderly Hindu *ayah*, who had apparently heard it in that region, can act as an example of the techniques of creative transmission [quoted in Appendix to this article].[10] It is brief, and of necessity so selective that attention should be concentrated less on what the teller has chosen to omit than on what she has chosen to use. Despite its brevity, it is clear that at some stage in its transmission one of its tellers knew a longer version, for the name of the twins' mother, Sumitrā, has been conflated with that of Rāma's charioteer Sumantra (a minor character in V ā l m ī k i 's story, who finds no place in this or many other retellings) to produce Samantra as the mother of Lakshman.[11] The process of selection has led to a striking redistribution of proportions, with only the first part of the story (the intrigues leading to the exile) developed, and the rest briefly summarised; yet a detailed new episode, not found in V ā l m ī k i, prefaces the whole.

Evidence is strong that the earliest *Rāmāyaṇa* was a carefully-planned, tightly-constructed work concentrating on narrative action, to which new episodes, lyrical elaborations and moral debates were added over a long period, obscuring the lines of the original.[12] Most scholars agree that at first the poem told virtually nothing of Rāma's life before Daśaratha's decision to make him his heir, and nothing at all after the triumphant return to Ayodhyā; it is also highly likely that the episode in which the dying king recalls the curse of the hermit parents and the reason for it (2,57–58) is a late interpolation. It is ironic to note that while retaining the original scope, in returning to the earlier narrative style and methods the author of T a y l o r 's version has achieved his aims by choosing to develop and integrate into the construction such a late passage. The

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[9] I am grateful to Dr S e a r l e - C h a t t e r j e e for sharing this information with me in a personal communication. One of her informants (a leading member of the Balmiki temple) explained "People have deliberately left out his [V ā l m ī k i 's] last chapter in which Ram was defeated, even killed, by his sons with the support of V a l m i k i... Nectar brought him back to life again". Another significant remark by the same informant, "Ram was never seen as a god in V a l m i k i 's *Ramayana*" is accurate and perceptive, and rarely found outside scholarly circles.

[10] S.M. T a y l o r, *Servan* and *The Rescue of Sita*, "Folk-Lore", vol. 6, 1895, p. 399 and vol. 7, 1896, pp. 83–88.

[11] That Śatrughna has become a full brother of Bharata is of minimal significance, and is shared with a large number of retellings.

[12] For the linguistic arguments, see J.L. B r o c k i n g t o n, *Righteous Rāma: the Evolution of an Epic*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1985; for literary studies see M. B r o c k i n g t o n, *The Art of Backwards Composition: Some Narrative Techniques in Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa*, and *The process of Growth of the Rāmāyaṇa: Why? and Why not? a Workshop Report*, in: M. B r o c k i n g t o n and P. S c h r e i n e r, op. cit., pp. 90–110, and pp. 111–120 respectively.

death of Servan leads directly to the boon,[13] but this has involved modifying the means by which he is killed. All other versions I have yet come across have the king shoot the boy in appropriate *kṣatriya* fashion, so this one must have been devised by some teller to whom the perils of agriculture sprang more naturally to mind than they would to a warrior. King and parents alike remain unaware of what has happened, which also absolves Daśaratha from a little of the guilt of causing their death; there is no need for a curse and therefore for a confrontation, or for any indication that the trio have become ascetics on their unexplained journey.

Similar tales are found in Buddhist sources, Sanskrit, Pali and other vernaculars, which appear to have been adapted from the *Rāmāyaṇa*,[14] though they are not set in a *Rāmāyaṇa* context, the king is given a different name, and the boy (unnamed in the *Rāmāyaṇa*) is there called Śyāma[ka]/Sāma. The Buddhist versions supply a detailed account of the ascetics' lives (but they have lived in the forest for many years, and the son has been born there) and end with the king's offer to serve the parents in place of their son being rendered unnecessary when they use their accumulated merit to revive the boy.

In its *Rāmāyaṇa* context, the episode has become a firm favourite. The tellers have not pursued the Buddhist line of development, which would be hard to reconcile to its purpose in the epic. It is the son, rather than his parents, who becomes the dominant figure, renowned more for his filial piety in carrying his parents about the country in a *banghi* or *kāvaṛ* than for his relevance to Rāma's exile. He is now named variously Śrāvaṇ, Sarvan or (as in T a y l o r 's tale) Servan, with his story sometimes associated with the Śrāvaṇī festival and also alluded to as well-known in performances of the Rajasthani Pābūjī epic.[15] The history of Servan's marriage may have been developed in a popular culture which wondered why the young man had no wife, and so supplied the story: it is not confined to T a y l o r 's version but also reported by Jean-Luc C h a m b a r d, though he gives no details of the wife's cruelty. C h a m b a r d 's youth, unlike V ā l m ī k i 's, is specifically a *brāhmaṇ*, and he and *S m i t h* both report that the trio are on a pilgrimage to the

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[13] Cf. the eighteenth-century *Rama Thagyin* of U Aung P h y o from Myanmar, where this episode is integrated into Rāma's birth-story; J.L. B r o c k i n g t o n, op. cit., p. 304.

[14] See *The Mahāvastu*, J.J. J o n e s (tr.), 3 vols, Pali Text Society, London 1952, vol. 2, pp. 199–218, and *Sāmajātaka*, in: E.B. C o w e l l (ed.), *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, vol. 6, 1907, E.B. C o w e l l and W.H.D. R o u s e (tr.), pp. 38–52, or R. Č i č a k - C h a n d (ed., tr.), *Das Sāmajātaka*, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, Bonn 1974. The literary image of the three persons killed by a single arrow (*Rāmāyaṇa* 2,57.25, *Mahāvastu*, op. cit., pp. 203, 211) is more likely to have originated in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the Buddhist resolution of the story seems unlikely to have suggested the sombre outcome of the *Rāmāyaṇa* version.

[15] J.-L. C h a m b a r d, *Les trois grands dieux à la porte du roi Bali: la tradition orale d'un village et notre image de l'hindouisme populaire en Inde du nord*, "Puruṣārtha", vol. 18, 1995, pp. 242–244, J.D. S m i t h, *The Epic of Pābūjī: a Study, Transcription and Translation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991, pp. 313–315.

Gaṅgā, but the link with the wife's ill-treatment is still weak. The tendency to develop the boy's character to the exclusion of his *Rāmāyaṇa* function is exemplified in publicity for an exhibition at the Swaminarayan Mandir in London, where Śrāvaṇ is portrayed as a major inspirational figure for his indomitable filial piety in carrying his parents on the pilgrimage they wish to make, a role which has apparently been divorced from any connection with Daśaratha or the *Rāmāyaṇa*; no mention is made of his death, or of his wife.[16] From Rajasthan to South India the *banghi* provides a distinctive visual image, useful to illustrators needing to identify the episode, which may well have increased the motif's popularity.[17] Most arrestingly, it is given an emphatic place at the beginning of the *Rāmāyaṇa* frieze carved on the inside of the enclosure wall of the fifteenth-century Rāmacandra temple at Vijayanagar, with the added detail that the parents are still in the *banghi*, left unaccountably hanging in a tree, when Daśaratha tells them of the accident; no doubt this modification made identification of the scene easier. The sculptor has made no attempt to suggest any reason for the journey.[18] Anna D a l l a p i c c o l a tells me that the episode figures prominently as the opening episode of puppet *Rāmāyaṇas* in that area.

T a y l o r's re-created story also functions as an origin myth: the tragic accident turns the *banghi* to stone, and it is still to be seen, we are told, at Pachmari (in the Mahādeo hills, about 112 km south east of Bhopāl). The prestige of the Rāma-story is frequently used to validate such origin myths; another example occurs in Karbi tradition where, before breaking the bow at Sītā's *svayaṁvara*, Rāma warns the onlookers to take care; those who ignore the warning are maimed in the ensuing earthquake: "This is the reason why there are lame, blind and deaf people on earth, according to Karbi traditional belief."[19] Indian indentured labourers in Mauritius used the Rāma-story to explain the island's creation and name, linked to the death of Mārīca.[20]

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[16] *Swaminarayan Bliss* 23.5, 2000, special issue on Shree Swaminarayan Mandir, London, Swayamprakashdas (ed.), pp. 11–12.

[17] For illustrations see C h a m b a r d, op. cit., p. 243, J.D. S m i t h 1991, op. cit., p. 315, and the Pābūjī *paṛ* in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (1985.20; the scene is on the top row, second from the right, of the detail reproduced in J.C. H a r l e and A. T o p s f i e l d, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Ashmolean Museum Publications, Oxford 1987, p. 72). I am grateful to the museum staff for their courtesy in enabling me to study the *paṛ*.

[18] Illustrated at D a l l a p i c c o l a 1994, op. cit., p. 69; see also D a l l a p i c c o l a 1992, op. cit., pp. 85–86, 148; for Cōḻa examples see V.K. M o h a n, *Art and Architecture of the Telugu Cōḻa Temples*, Kaveri Books, New Delhi 1996, pp. 174–176, where the boy is called Munikumāra; cf. *Annual reports of the Mysore Archaeological Department for the year 1934*, Pt II, Study of Ancient Monuments, Government Press, Bangalore 1936, pp. 37–38, for what is presumably the same scene on the east wall and south door of the Hoysaḷa Mallikārjuna temple at Basarāḷu, 65 km to the north of Mysore.

[19] S i n g h and D a t t a, op. cit., p. 192.

[20] P. R a m s u r r u n, *Folk Tales of Mauritius*, Folk Tales of the World 14, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi 1982, pp. 1–4, *Birth of the Pearl Island*.

The most striking characteristic of the rest of Taylor's tale is the slightness of the interest shown in the figure of Rāma: he demonstrates neither moral grandeur nor physical pre-eminence. Lakṣmaṇa is his equal, and Hanumān his superior. Only actions contributing directly to the story are retold, with no explanation of motives and no lyrical elements. The boon is the physical consequence of Servan's death, not a moral one, and the exile leads straight on to the abduction, with the narrative line kept clear of even such major events as the plan to name Rāma as heir, the death of Daśaratha, the interventions of Sūrpaṇakhā and Mārīca, and the alliance with the Vānaras; the warning to Sītā and the magic circle are not taken from Vālmīki, but shared with many popular re-tellings.[21] This concentration on action rather than character leads to modification of the sentence of exile: it is pronounced by Daśaratha himself, with reluctance but without great debate, and executed without public display. Here an unexplained discrepancy arises: the exile is initailly said to be permanent, but the trio return to Daśaratha's kingdom at the end. This is probably sheer thoughtlessness on the part of the teller, whose work does not benefit from the revision process available in the written tradition; the mention of Sītā's captivity as eleven years in length (rather than the several months of Vālmīki's narration, following a long period of wandering in the forest) suggests that the teller had some such fixed term in mind. Deliberate, however, is the remodelling of the ending. By transposing the events narrated in Vālmīki's *Sundara* and *Yuddha kāṇḍas*, the author has been able to re-create a climax which leaves Rāvaṇa alive and makes Hanumān the hero of the whole piece.

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The technique of selective re-composition used in Taylor's version to produce a *Rāmāyaṇa* that is brief yet full and coherent is needed to an even greater extent when an extract from the epic is used within the framework of another piece. The *Dasarathajātaka* is primarily a parable, using not so much the *Rāmāyaṇa* as the figure of Rāma to point its moral — that it is unwise to grieve too deeply at the death of a father.[22] Some of its puzzling anomalies can be explained by considering the problems facing its adapter. Firstly, it is obvious that all events in Vālmīki's tale after the arrival of Śūrpaṇakhā until the triumphant return are entirely inappropriate to illustrate self-control and failure to grieve at the loss (actual or potential) of a loved one; accordingly, only the first part of the story has been used,[23] ending with a brief mention of Rāma's righteous

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[21] Examples are given by J.L. Brockington, op. cit., pp. 256–259.

[22] *Dasarathajātaka*, in: E.B. Cowell (ed.), *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's former births*, Cambridge University Press, vol. 4, Cambridge 1901, W.H.D. Rouse (tr.), pp. 78–82.

[23] The presence in other early Buddhist versions of the Rāma-story of familiar elements missing from the *Dasarathajātaka* (J.L. Brockington, op. cit., pp. 262–263) supports the view that the Jātaka version is a deliberate selection and does not preserve a pre-Vālmīkian variant.

rule from the end of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, its splendour as a conculsion enhanced by transposing to there the wedding of Rāma and Sītā from its original place before the exile, a device which also contributes to the tauter narrative frame demanded by the smaller compass. By making the trio full siblings, the author incongruously retains the familiar and romantic picture of the gallant princess sharing the hardships of forest-life in the only way he now can with propriety, but primarily this must be seen as an attempt to adapt the old story to the demands of the moral: Dasaratha's daughter-in-law cannot be expected to grieve as deeply for his death as his daughter. The subsequent wedding may be a careless reversion as much as evidence for the reality of brother-sister marriages. While the adapter chooses to soften the crime of Bharata's mother, who does not ask for Rāma's exile, he is required by his moral to produce a wholly positive image of Dasaratha: accordingly, the king refuses to grant the promised boon, kingship for Bharata, and advises his sons to leave court for the forest in a clumsy but well-intentioned attempt to protect them in case their stepmother should try to have them murdered. Here the adapter runs into the problem of time-scale, but at least solves a question which is not satisfactorily explained in the Vālmīki version. The reason why Rāma is now told to return to take up the kingship, here after twelve years, is that soothsayers predict that period as the length of Dasaratha's life, and it is the king's premature death (after only nine years, pining for his elder sons) that prompts Bharata to seek out Rāma and ask him to return. If Rāma and Sītā are not to be long past the normal age for marriage on Rāma's return, the trio must be quite young at the time of exile, though old enough to be able to fend for themselves; but at the time of Dasaratha's death Bharata must be old enough to seek them out, and there is a considerable age difference between him and his half-siblings (between him and Rāma at least): Dasaratha, unlike his Vālmīkian counterpart, is effectively monogamous, with only one chief queen at a time, and mourns for a long period after the death of his first consort, mother of Rāma, Lakkhaṇa and Sītā, before replacing her with the wife who bears him Bharata. The claiming of the boon is therefore brought forward (Bharata is only seven years old at the time, rather than adult as in Vālmīki), while Dasaratha's death is delayed to allow the child time to grow up. Dasaratha is king, not of Ayodhyā but of Vārāṇasī (a more natural setting for a Buddhist tale), and the regency is handled with the naïve literalism characteristic of the folk narrative genre: Rāma's sandals are no longer a symbol that Bharata is acting with Rāma's authority, but themselves act as Rāma's regent. Symbolism and imagery have been superseded by crude magic. Moral issues are clear-cut and simple — simplistic, even: Dasaratha has no inhibitions about breaking his word and refusing to make Bharata his heir, and actions are determined without tortuous internal debates or dialogues. The part of the Rāma-story found in the *Dasarathajātaka* shows all the signs of having been adapted to fit its purpose by a thoughtful but unsophisticated author, and while the adaptation has not been made with complete success, for Gombrich to

condemn it as "a slight and careless piece of satire",[24] is surely to miss the point. If the author were merely intent on satire or even mockery, and did not take the tale seriously, why should he have chosen to use it as an exemplum?

Rāma's moral example still provides support at times of stress or difficulty. In a situation of fraternal tension, Morris C a r s t a i r s reports the pious remark, "My big brother, I have to respect him like a father; and he has to take care of his younger brothers, just like Ram Chandarji did with Latchman'" but adds significantly, "Yet in their family, to my knowledge, quarrels were frequent."[25] When Indian families settle in Britain, and traditional values become vulnerable, the old stories can still command respect. In a study of the attitudes of young British Hindus presented to the Seminar on the Sanskrit Tradition in the Modern World held at Newcastle-on-Tyne, May 2000, Eleanor N e s b i t t reports the case of a young man taking up his responsibilities as head of the family on his father's death who clearly drew strength from linking his situation directly with that of Rāma; N e s b i t t then speculates on the role to be played by school Religious Education lessons in becoming mediators of the traditions now that the more conventional sources of story-telling are less immediately available. In India, even the game of Snakes and Ladders can be used to inculcate moral values; Vasudha N a r a y a n a n describes a version sold outside temples in South India where some of the 'snakes' are labelled with the vices of Rāvaṇa, including lust and pride.[26] These three diverse examples of the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s enduring role as an exemplar of good behaviour all pre-suppose wide current knowledge of the ancient tale, even if the role of 'singer' is now sometimes played by comic-strip books and television soap-operas.

Not all evocations of the Rāma-story are solemn: A.K. R a m a n u j a n re-tells two such examples. The first, a Telugu tale collected in Haidarābād in 1988, pokes fun at an ignorant man who sleeps through successive recitations of the story but ends up despite his folly being made wise by it. The other, known from several South Indian languages, displays no moral purpose at all, as the trickster Tenali Rāma irritably responds to importunate demands to retell the *Rāmāyaṇa* with what must be the two shortest recitations on record (in English translation, seven and sixteen words); the *ādikāvya* has been reduced to the status of a stand-up comedian's one-line gag.[27] It fares very differently in a tale of the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, *Story of Mrigankadatta* [quoted in Appendix

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[24] R.F. G o m b r i c h, *The Vessantara Jātaka, the Rāmāyaṇa and the Dasaratha Jātaka*, "Journal of the American Oriental Society", vol. 105, 1985, p. 436.

[25] G.M. C a r s t a i r s, *The Twice-Born: a Study of a Community of High-Caste Hindus*, Hogarth Press, London 1968, pp. 113–114.

[26] Internet list 'Religion in South Asia', 30 May 2000.

[27] A.K. R a m a n u j a n, *Folktales from India: a Selection of Oral Tales from Twenty-Two Languages*, Pantheon, New York 1991, repr. Penguin Books, India, New Delhi 1993, pp. 55–56, *What happens when you really listen*, and pp. 57–58, *Tenali Rama's Ramayana*.

to this paper].[28] Here the author felt safe in assuming not only detailed knowledge of the *Rāmāyaṇa* but sufficient reverence for its atmosphere for him to be able to introduce repeated allusions to it into an unrelated tale as a stylistic device; his evocation of the events of the legendary past creates a mood of mystery and awe, as the hero on his quest leaves behind the familiar and penetrates deeper into the world of the Other, but as a practical guide for the traveller to reach his destination, the ostensible purpose of the passage, its usefulness is severely limited. The simile "as if to save from slaughter those deer that were still left alive", so foreign to the spirit of the earliest Rāma-story, is an interesting attempt to accommodate the material of a bygone age to the beliefs of a much later generation: to V ā l m ī k i, Rāma had been a mighty human warrior and skilled hunter; to this adapter, he is a benevolent deity.

Another *Kathāsaritsāgara* tale indirectly evokes the Mārīca episode by linking a wondrous golden bejewelled deer, the playmate of two beautiful maidens, with the Rāma-story in general and the *rākṣasas* Indrajit and Vibhīṣaṇa in particular;[29] the adapter obviously cannot identify this deer with Mārīca, whom everyone knows to have been killed, but the association with Vibhīṣaṇa, Rāma's ally and virtuous successor to his brother Rāvaṇa, guarantees, as it were, its respectability: this deer is a good fairy, not an evil one.

The Rāma-story became a firm favourite throughout Southeast Asia,[30] and a Laotian version of the *Pañcatantra* makes amusing use of it to support both sides of the same argument about whether the frogs should allow a snake to approach their pond.[31] In the first case, it is again the story of Daśaratha's incautious killing of the hermit boy which is used; its value as a warning against hasty action has almost totally eclipsed the original purpose of the epic as a whole, for Rāma is scarcely mentioned and his standard career cannot be reconciled with this exemplum. Daśaratha chooses Bharata as his successor, there is no dispute, and it is Daśaratha who takes Sumitrā and Lakṣmaṇa to live in the forest, where all three die in an innovative ending which parallels the death of the three ascetics that caused it. Care has again been taken to excuse Daśaratha as far as possible, for the accident occurs when he is strenuously attempting to do the hermits a service they have themselves requested, rather than arbitrarily hunting as in the original. As in V ā l m ī k i, however, the hermit parents are more prominent than their unnamed son, and the adapter makes no mention of any previous history (unlike Taylor's informant). He does though

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[28] N.M. P e n z e r (ed.), *The Ocean of Story: Being C.H. Tawney's Translation of Somadeva's Kathā Sarit Sāgara*, 10 vols, Sawyer, London 1923–1928, repr. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1968, vol. 7, pp. 162–173 (passage quoted from p. 166).

[29] P e n z e r, op. cit., vol. 9, pp. 2–33, part of *Story of King Vikramāditya* (pp. 8, 9, 28–31 [quoted in Appendix to this paper]).

[30] J.L. B r o c k i n g t o n, op. cit., pp. 287–306.

[31] L. F i n o t, *Recherches sur la littérature laotienne: contes*, "Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient", vol. 17, no. 5, 1917, pp. 84–115 (p. 101 [quoted in Appendix to this paper]).

name the mother of Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna as 'Sumātā', yet another variant on the earlier Sumitrā. To press his case, the hypocritical snake slily returns to the standard story and harnesses the prestige of Rāma himself, who did not reject the virtuous Vibhīṣaṇa when he had defected from his brother's side, and the frogs are at last disastrously unable to resist this challenge to imitate the god's example.

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I now come to my third category, a brief examination of the inter-action between the *Rāmāyaṇa* and a number of completely unconnected tales, both indigenous and international. In the living traditional epic of Pābūjī studied by John Smith, the leading characters are regarded as re-incarnations of Lakṣmaṇa, Rāvaṇa, Śūrpaṇakhā and the Goddess,[32] although the plot and characterisation have little in common with the *Rāmāyaṇa*; the association, emphasised by the depiction of *Rāmāyaṇa* characters on the *paṛ* or backcloth which accompanies the performances, gives the semi-historical legend of the Rajasthani brigand a cosmic significance. The singer's own summary of the *Rāmāyaṇa*[33] itself constitutes a significant traditional version, in which it is Lakṣmaṇa who kills Rāvaṇa (his prowess gained by celibacy and abstinence from food[34]). This innovation had been introduced into Jain versions as early as the third century A.D. to avoid imputing violence to Rāma,[35] but the doctrine of *ahiṁsā* could have posed no problem to Pābūjī's narrators; the motif was used instead to explain the tragic ending, in which Pābūjī is killed by Jindrāv Khīcī (re-incarnations of Lakṣmaṇa and Rāvaṇa respectively), in revenge for Rāvaṇa's death and the mutilation of Śūrpaṇakhā. It may be that the prestige of Rāma himself was so great that even these Rajput singers felt inhibited about assigning such a death to his re-incarnation. This semi-historical legend is believed by its singers to be broadly true, although a cross-generation episode in which Pābūjī kills Rāvaṇa (in a raid on Laṅkā to capture Rāvaṇa's camels as a wedding-gift for Pābūjī's niece, Kelam) is recognised as false and explained by the bards as a metaphor.[36]

The frequent allusions to the Rāma-story found in oral tales testify to the completeness with which the epic has penetrated Indian culture. The very casualness with which a teller can introduce the simile "You are sleeping like

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[32] For Sītā as an incarnation of the Goddess in the fifeenth-century Śākta Sanskrit *Adbhutarāmāyaṇa* and later works, see J.L. Brockington, op. cit., pp. 255–256, 259.

[33] J.D. Smith 1991, op. cit., pp. 92–93.

[34] For the similar motifs in the *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* and in the versions by Kṛttibās (Bengali), and Raṅganātha (Telugu), see J.L. Brockington, op. cit., pp. 254, 276–277.

[35] J.L. Brockington, op. cit., pp. 267–268.

[36] J.D. Smith 1991, op. cit., pp. 83–84.

Kumbhakaran",[37] or "Ramchundra, son of Draupadī" can become the hero of a tale with no other reference to either epic,[38] emphasises the reliance placed by the tellers on this knowledge, which they can use to confer status on their own work with no need for explanations. In a tale like *The Farmer and the Money-Lender*[39] the connection is so superficial that it cannot be determined whether the reference to 'Ram' is to the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as such, or rather to the benevolent deity; that the farmer's ignorance of Ram's identity can be exploited to comic effect confirms the universality of this knowledge. *The Daily Measure*, an origin tale from Assam on the impossibility of cheating fate,[40] relies for its full effect on slightly greater knowledge of the epic. It functions satisfactorily on a superficial level, but gains richer comic depth when the foolish householder and his irritable wife are equated with Rāvaṇa and his family.

This process of penetration can be traced with more certainty in international tale types (that is to say, in tales with a common outline collected in several countries). One which shows considerable influence from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and has itself exercised influence on later vernacular *Rāmāyaṇas* is *The Two Brothers* (AT/TR 303[41]). The detailed mechanics of this association are too many to deal with here, and have already been studied;[42] one salient feature is an episode where Hanumān is again exalted at the expense of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, the Mahīrāvaṇa episode incorporated into many vernacular *Rāmāyaṇas* and studied in particular by William S m i t h and Dieter K a p p.[43] So firmly did an

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[37] K.A. S e e t h a l a k s h m i, *Folk Tales of Tamil Nadu*, Learners Press, New Delhi 1997, (rev. and simplified form of first edn, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi 1969), p. 75.

[38] Frere, no. 4 *Truth's Triumph*, in: *Old Deccan Days*, pp. 55–71; *Hindoo Fairy Legends*, pp. 38–49.

[39] F.A. S t e e l and R.C. T e m p l e, *Wide-Awake Stories: a Collection of Tales Told by Little Children, Between Sunset and Sunrise, in the Panjab and Kashmir*, Trübner, Bombay 1884 (pp. 215–218), republished as *Tales of the Punjab Told by the People*, Macmillan, London 1894 (pp. 203–206), repr. Bodley Head, 1973 and 1984 (pp. 137–139), reprinted J. Jacobs, *Indian Fairy Tales*, Nutt, London 1892, repr. Dover Publications, New York 1969, pp. 152–155; collected from a Jaṭṭ boy in Rohtak.

[40] B.E.F. B e c k et al. (eds), *Folktales of India*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1987, pp. 240–241.

[41] Sometimes known as *The Twins*. AT and TR numbers refer to the tale types identified in A. A a r n e and S. T h o m p s o n, *The Types of the Folk-Tale*, "Folklore Fellows' Communications" 184, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, Helsinki 1961, and in S. T h o m p s o n and W.E. R o b e r t s, *Types of Indic Oral Tales: India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, "Folklore Fellows' Communications" 180, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, Helsinki 1960, respectively.

[42] M. B r o c k i n g t o n, *The Rāmāyaṇa and the Folk Tale The Two Brothers*, in: G. P o l l e t (ed.), *Indian Epic Values: Rāmāyaṇa and its Impact*, "Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta" 66, Peeters, Leuven 1995, pp. 11–20 (adapted and augmented as *The Indic Version of The Two Brothers and its Relationship to the Rāmāyaṇa*, "Fabula", vol. 36, 1995, pp. 259–272).

[43] See especially W.L. S m i t h, *Mahīrāvaṇa and the Womb Demon*, "Indologica Taurinensia", vol. 10, 1982, pp. 215–222, and *Two Nepalese Versions of the Mahīrāvaṇa Tale*, in: S. L i e n h a r d (ed.), *Change and Continuity: Studies in the Nepalese Culture of the Kathmandu Valley*, Edizioni

analogue of this episode become fixed as the opening of South Asian variants of *The Two Brothers* that it ousted the older form which had been brought to India from Europe, and indeed the Indic type was reflected back again, appearing in ever-attenuating form in variants collected in Iran, Greece and the Balkans. Variants of the same tale collected in North Africa (and also in Italy, though none in South Asia) show a different opening episode which, it can be argued, is modelled on the relationship of Daśaratha's sons.[44]

The distinctive feature of *The Dragonslayer* is that, after the hero has slain the dragon to whom a princess was to be sacrificed, a low-class impostor claims the bride and kingdom as prizes; he buttresses his claim by showing a trophy cut from the dead dragon, but is unmasked when the hero shows a smaller trophy which must have been cut off earlier.[45] This international tale is frequently incorporated into the European form of AT 303, but is also found as an independent tale; only the independent form has been collected in South Asia. Paul B o d d i n g collected a variant of this tale from the Santals in which the role of the hero is given jointly to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa.[46] Though no mention is made of *Rāmāyaṇa* events or other characters, it is clear that these are envisaged as the actual heroes of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (not just as namesakes) and the story interpolated into the period of forest wanderings; consequently, the ending has had to be modified, for the monogamous Rāma and celibate Lakṣmaṇa of post-Vālmīki tradition could not be expected to claim the prizes. A slightly altered form of this tale from Rawalpindi was published by R.C. T e m p l e;[47] although the hero is not Rāma, he proves himself in a similar way, by shooting

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dell' Orso, Turin 1996, pp. 379–385; also D.B. K a p p, *Zwei Anspielungen auf die Mahīrāvaṇa-Sage: Śivapurāṇa 3.20.34 und Padumāvatī 394–395*, "Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens", vol. 32, 1988, pp. 91–102, and the literature they cite; also J.L. B r o c k i n g t o n, op. cit., p. 278, S.V. S h a s t r i, *The Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa and the Thai Ramakien: a Study in Comparison*, "Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bombay", vol. 70, 1995, pp. 134–144 (pp. 138–139), and S.L. N a g a r, *Mahīrāvaṇacaritam in Indian paintings*, Parimal Publications, Delhi 1996; for an interesting variant adapted into the Kīcaka episode of the *Mahābhārata*, see J.D. S m i t h, *Worlds Apart: Orality, Literacy, and the Rajasthani Folk-Mahābhārata*, "Oral Tradition", vol. 5, 1990, pp. 9–10.

[44] M. B r o c k i n g t o n, *The Relationship of the Rāmāyaṇa to the Indic Form of The Two Brothers and to the Stepmother Redaction*, in: L. H o n k o et al. (eds), *The Epic: Oral and Written*, Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore 1998, pp. 139–150, where a full listing of all variants of TR 303 can also be found.

[45] AT/TR 300; see also H. J a s o n, *Types of Indic Oral Tales: Supplement*, "Folklore Fellows' Communications" 242, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, Helsinki 1989.

[46] P.O. B o d d i n g, *Santal Folk Tales*, 3 vols, H. Aschehoug, Oslo 1925–1929, vol. 2, pp. 284–288; for text, see Appendix to this article; for the popularity of *Rāmāyaṇa* heroes among the Santals, see ibid., pp. 280–281, and for a similar episode incorporated into an unrelated tale see ibid., pp. 289–315.

[47] R.C. T e m p l e, *The Legends of the Panjāb*, 3 vols, Trübner, London 1884–1886, vol. 1, pp. 17–20 (rewritten as *How Raja Rasālu Killed the Giants*, in: S t e e l and T e m p l e, op. cit., 1884, pp. 258–262/1894, pp. 245–249/1973, pp. 167–169).

an arrow through seven objects at once (here they are seven griddles sheltering seven *rākṣasas*; in Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* 4,11.47–12.5 they are seven *sāla* trees).

Faithful John (AT/TR 516) is the familiar tale of the servant who saves his master from disaster despite being warned by talking birds that his actions will lead to his being turned to stone; disenchantment comes when the master sacrifices his own son and sprinkles the stone with his blood, the child being then miraculously restored to life. As in Europe, many variants have been collected in South Asia.[48] Modifications in the details of some tales, although not at all surprising or noteworthy taken in isolation, when viewed as a whole suggest an association with the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the minds of the tellers; the basic stories remain quite distinct. The two heroes (a young king and his protective minister in the King and Ramanujan/Kincaid variants, master and servant in Ramanujan/Elwin) become inseparable companions (Crooke, Day, Penzer), born at the same time to childless parents in the Frere and Dames tales; the servant's devotion is expressed in most variants by his keeping watch all night over the prince and his bride on their wanderings through the forest (reminiscent of Lakṣmaṇa's traditional role). Frere's variant takes the process much further: the two heroes are named Rama and Luxman (and it may not be by coincidence that Rama's father is here called Chandra, Rāmacandra having become a common way of referring to Rāma); in keeping with the greater prominence attached to Lakṣmaṇa in modern tradition, Luxman the minister's son, not Rama, is uniquely in this variant made the hero of the birds' prophecy. Most significantly, the ending is considerably modified to give a much more positive, gracious image of the prince: his ministerpretation of his friend's action leads to self-abnegation rather than to the usual murderous rage (the rage is transferred to a more excusable childhood quarrel, which in this

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[48] E.g. M. Frere (ed.), *Old Deccan Days*, Murray, London 1868, pp. 72–86; 3rd edn titled *Hindoo Fairy Legends* (*old Deccan days*), 1881, repr. Dover Publications, New York 1967, pp. 50–59 (from the Deccan); Ramanujan, op. cit., pp. 4–5 (from the Baiga; retold from V. Elwin, *Folk-Tales of Mahakoshal*, Oxford University Press, London 1944), and pp. 312–318 (from Sind; retold from C.A. Kincaid, *Folk-Tales of Sind and Guzarat*, Karachi 1925, pp. 45–54 [I have been unable to verify this reference]); W. Crooke, *The Prince and His Faithful Friend, the Son of the Wazīr*, "Indian Antiquary", vol. 21, 1892, pp. 185–189 (from Mirzapur); L. King, *Panjab Folktales, 14: The King and His Faithful Minister*, "Folk-Lore", vol. 37, 1926, pp. 84–89 (from Panjab); M.L. Dames, *Balochi Tales, 13: The Prince, the Goatherd, and Naina Bai*, "Folk-Lore", vol. 4, 1893, pp. 285–302, (from Baluchistan); L.B. Day, *Folk-Tales of Bengal*, Macmillan, London 1883, pp. 17–52, *Phakir Chand* repr. Subarnarekha, Calcutta 1999 (from Bengal); Penzer, op. cit., vol. 3, pp. 28–32. The ending is modified in the Penzer variant to avoid the need for the sacrifice of a child, and in the Dames variant the child is not resuscitated, the point of that tale being to ask which character has made the greater sacrifice. P.C. Roy Chaudhury records a different tale type which uses the motif of child sacrifice to cure a man punished by leprosy, the form of the motif more familiar from Europe (*Folk Tales of Rajasthan*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi 1972, repr. Learners Press, New Delhi 1997, pp. 72–79, *The Value of the Spoken Word*).

variant is instigated by a jealous queen aided by an old woman; Dames's variant, another with this motif, lacks the jealous queen); there is no question of Rama and his wife sacrificing their child, or of Luxman demanding or accepting such a terrible means of release, for disenchantment occurs when the child accidentally touches the statue, a touch which the parents have anxiously sought to procure. This modification may not be due entirely to Miss Frere's squeamishness: King's variant also baulks at deliberate sacrifice, for the boy is accidentally cut while his father hesitates in his resolve to kill him, and the minister is disenchanted without the need for the child's death. Whether the association with the *Rāmāyaṇa*, so evident in Frere's variant, exercised a conscious or a sub-conscious influence on its teller, and whether it was felt by the tellers of the other variants, are questions which must remain open.

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The foremost impression I have gained from studying these vernacular tales featuring the Rāma-story is of the skill, care and even with which most authors have approached their task; the chief lesson I draw is that their production should be viewed, not as adaptations, summaries or even corruptions to be judged according to what of Vālmīki's version they omit, but as re-creations, as independent compositions in their own right. The criterion should not be how closely they reproduce the original, but how well they achieve their own individual objectives.

Questions raised in my mind can be grouped under two main headings:

1. What do these tales tell us about their authors and the background against which they composed their re-tellings?

2. What is a traditional tale? — or even, what is tradition?

A complete answer to either of these sets of questions is beyond the scope of this paper, but in the context of question 1 something may be gleaned from a further look at Taylor's version in the light of one crucial set of factors, the identity of the transmitter and the teller, and the nature of the audience: this is a good example of a woman's tale. The first audience we know about was a little girl, and the first teller was a woman, her grandmother; that audience then became the teller, and the final audience was not merely a woman, but a woman of superior status to the teller (Taylor, the collector): hence the delicacy with which Sītā's relationship to Rāvaṇa is handled. Far more revealing is the fundamental attitude of the tale — the lack of interest in fighting and killing typified by its very title (*The Rescue of Sita*, not *Rāma's Revenge on Rāvaṇa*), and the shifting of blame away from women characters where a male teller would naturally place it (the initiative in pressing the boon on Kaikeyī is taken by Daśaratha, himself largely blameless of Servan's death, Kaikeyī is a reluctant opportunist, not a schemer, and there is no role for a Mantharā or a Śūrpa-

ṇakhā). Each tale, of course, has its own own teller, with a different set of aims and interests, all of which must be explored before we can claim to judge the results.

The unexpressed assumptions of the tellers and their audiences are rather more difficult to assess. When something is not said, it may be because it is not known, or because it is too well known to need saying. Are the casual references — the similes, the names of *Rāmāyaṇa* heroes given to unrelated characters — merely formulaic and stereotyped, are they used unthinkingly and heard without any understanding of the wider connotations? There can be no single answer to this question, and I am prepared to accept that some of the figures of speech are no longer meaningful, but on the whole I am inclined to believe that unexplained allusions are more likely to have been included with affective intent and to indicate the vitality of the tradition not its fossilisation; it is the need for detailed explanation that betrays its decay. When an author illustrates his work with an episode from the *Rāmāyaṇa* he is tacitly relying on the prestige of the older work to enhance his own, and it seems to me more likely than not that he expects his audience to have some knowledge of the full version. A seven--word summary is funny only if the audience knows that the original can seem interminable.

When the status of secondary characters such as Lakṣmaṇa and Hanumān is increased (perhaps as a reflection of local cults), does that necessarily indicate that Rāma's prestige is correspondingly reduced? Or does the lack of prominence in fact indicate that Rāma's prestige is so great that it is taken for granted (as in the portrayal of the *roi fainéant* in the western European later Arthurian stories, where the king is eclipsed by his knights, who perform all the exploits)? Is the prestige indeed so great that only the secondary characters are accessible enough to have their stories developed? Is the tendency a sign of irreverence, or of reverence? Perhaps we should do better to substitute the concept of 'familiarity' for the concept 'lack of reverence'.

As for my second question, can these tales help us to define the term 'traditional'? If by 'traditional' we mean 'antiquated, irrelevant, unchanging, unchangeable, learned and repeated by rote', the answer is a clear No. A traditional tale is above all living, and the role of the teller is crucial. He employs old material, certainly, but only where it contributes to what he wants to say today. The process is almost totally different from the transmission of texts such as the Vedas, where the words themselves are learned by heart and repeated for their own sake, whether anyone understands them or not. Oral tales are learned, of course, but in terms of their content, and especially of the motifs of which they are composed, not just their wording; they are transmitted by a combination of memorisation and re-creation. It is also important to remember that these tales do not exist in isolation; teller and audience alike will have more than one tale in mind at a time, and the motifs or just the names found in one tale may migrate from one story to another. Tradition is emphatically not something

which cannot be changed: on the contrary, it is something which must be changed and remain relevant if it is to survive. Nor is it a case of abandoning the old in favour of the new. The fluidity of tradition is enhanced by its stability, and *vice versa*. Elements of 'old' and 'new', or 'reverence' and 'irreverence' are not so much in opposition as in creative tension, mutually supportive; each gains from the other, and it is the intertwining of the two disparate strands by a creative author that makes the genre so fruitful.

APPENDIX[49]

S.M. Taylor, *Servan* and *The Rescue of Sita*, "Folk-Lore", vol. 6, 1895, p. 399 and vol. 7, 1896, pp. 83–88.

7, pp. 84–85. *Servan* There was once a good man who, as his parents were poor and old, had them to live with him. But his wife grudged the old people their food, which she had to cook; so she went to the potter and bade him make her a cooking pan with a partition in the middle. This the potter did; and ever afterwards this wicked woman used to cook the rice in sour buttermilk on the one side and in sweet fresh milk on the other, and she always gave the old people the buttermilk side. One day Servan came home earlier than usual from his bath, and as the old folk were hungry he took the rice off the fire and doled some out to them, chancing upon the good side of the pan. The poor old parents thus found their food much better than other days, and, greatly relishing it, called down the blessings of God upon their son. "Surely this is the same as you always have" cried he, surprised. "Oh no!" replied they, "our food is always sour." Servan's wife, who just then came in, angrily cried out, "We all eat out of the same pot." But Servan's suspicions were roused, and he examined the pot, and discovering the trickery was so angry with his wife that he led her into the jungle and there left her. Then he put his old parents in a banghi [n.1.][50] and carried them away, they were so thin and light. He thus entered into the country of a rajah called Jesrat. This rajah was so particular about his water that he guarded his tanks very jealously, allowing no beasts to drink in them. Now the old folks, exhausted by their journey, clamoured for water, so Servan put them down and went to fetch them some. And just as he was reaching over the tank the rajah, who happened to be near and took him in the dark for a wild animal, struck him on the head with a bamboo and killed him. The poor old parents cried out all night for their son, and the next day died for want of food and drink, and the banhgi turned into stone and is still to be seen at Pachmari. [n.2] As to Servan's murderer, Jesrat, soon after the deed he felt a sharp pain in one of his fingers. A splint from the bamboo had pierced the flesh, and the place festered and hurt him very much.

7, pp. 85–86. *The Rescue of Sita* [n.3] Now the Rajah Jesrat had three wives: Kassila, who had a son called Rāmā; Kakahi, who had two boys, Churat and Bhurat; and Samantra who had one son, Lakshman. Jesrat's finger was so painful

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[49] Proper names are here given exactly as found in the source quoted.
[50] Collector's notes; see after the second story.

that in order to try and draw out the splint his three wives took it in turn to suck the place, each keeping awake several hours in the night to perform this office. And when Kakahi, his second wife, was sucking, the splint came out, and the rajah experienced much relief and fell asleep. The next day he was very pleased, and bade Kakahi ask for whatever she would like and he would grant her wish. Kakahi at first replied that she had diamonds, pearls, and gold, and in fact all she cared for already. But upon being pressed by her husband she at last said, "I should like the sons of your other wives, the youths Rāmā and Lakshman, to be driven away into the jungle, and only my two boys to be reared up and kept in the palace." At this the rajah grieved greatly, but as he had given his word to grant her wish he agreed it should be done. One evening when Rāmā and Lakshman returned home together from a two days' chase they were refused admittance into the castle, and told they must forever remain outside its walls. Then Rāmā (he was married) called his wife Sita to come with him, and with his brother Lakshman returned to the jungle, where they made their abode. The two youths hunted all day long, leaving Sita hidden in their jungle home — not without warning her against a great giant, Ravan, who was always roving about the jungle in search of mischief. They made her promise not to talk to anybody when they, her protectors, were away, and never to move outside a certain mark. But one day Ravan disguised himself as a joghi, [n.4] and coming to Sita begged of her some fruit. She told him of her promise to her husband, so that she could not step outside the mark to give him fruit. Then the joghi fetched a log and set it on the mark. "Now you can cross", said he. This Sita did, and was immediately seized and carried off by the giant. Greatly grieved were the two brothers upon their return to find Sita gone. They guessed this was the deed of Ravan, and followed in his track by means of shreds and scraps of Sita's clothes which had been caught by the leaves and brambles as she was carried away. Next a little kite whom Ravan had attempted to kill called out to them from above their heads and gave them directions how to find the giant. At last they came to Ravan's country. Here Sita was kept prisoner for eleven years. She was treated by the giant as a daughter, and not unkindly; but she wanted to get away to her husband. And all these years there was great fighting between Ravan and his giant friends and Rāmā and Lakshman. At last god Hanumān came to help the brothers. He was so strong he could root up whole trees and throw them about, and he would then turn himself into a tiny squirrel, to the astonishment of the giants upon seeing this little animal the only visible author of such fury. Unfortunately the giants succeeded in catching Hanumān and the brothers, and the former they decided to put to death. They were setting about this when the god cried out, "Oh! that is not the way. You must collect a lot of cotton wool, soak it in oil, put it round us in a ring, and then set fire to it". This the giants did, but the cotton had scarcely begun to burn when Hanumān caught up the two brothers and Sita, and with one great bound leapt outside the circle of cotton and ring of gazing giants and took them back to Jesrat's kingdom.

Collector's Notes

1. A bamboo crossing the shoulders like a yoke, from which at either end there hangs a basket by long cords, the whole resembling a large pair of scales. I have seen a native carry two children in a banghi.

2. Hill station for Central India and the Central Provinces.

3. An episode of the Rāmāyaṇa. Jesrat = Dasaratha, Kassila = Kausalya, Kakahi = Kaikeya, Samantra = Sumitra.

4. A Hindu religious mendicant.

N.M. Penzer (ed.), *The Ocean of Story: Being C.H. Tawney's Translation of Somadeva's Kathā Sarit Sāgara*, 10 vols, Sawyer, London 1923–1928, repr. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1968.

KSS XII, ch. CII, no. 163. *Story of Mrigankadatta*, Penzer, vol. 7, pp. 162–173.

vol. 7, p. 166. When that good young ascetic heard this, he said: "Only a kos distant from this place is a spot called Panchavati, and not far from it was the hermitage of the hermit Agastya, who with small effort cast down from heaven the haughty King Nahusha; where Rāma, who by command of his father took up his dwelling in a forest, accompanied by Lakshmana and his wife Sītā, long waited on that hermit; where Kabandha, who guided Rāma to the slaughter of the Rakshasas, proceeded to attack Rāma and Lakshmana, as Rahu does the sun and moon, whose arm, a yojana in length, Rāma felled, so that it resembled Nahusha in his serpent form come to supplicate Agastya; where even now the Rakshasas hearing the roaring of the clouds at the beginning of the rainy season call to mind the twanging of the bow of Rāma; where the aged deer, that were fed by Sītā, beholding the regions deserted in every direction, with eyes filling with tears, reject the mouthful of grass; where Mārīcha, who brought about Sītā's separation from her husband, assumed the form of a golden deer and enticed away Rāma, as if to save from slaughter those deer that were still left alive; where, in many a great lake full of the water of the Kaveri, it appears as if Agastya had vomited up in driblets the sea that he swallowed. Not far from that hermitage, on a tableland of the Vindhya, is a stronghold..."

KSS XVIII, chs. CXX–CXXI, no. 171 *Story of King Vikramāditya*, Penzer, vol. 9, pp. 8–30.

vol. 9, pp. 8–9. ...we saw two maidens of singular beauty... and they were making a young toy-deer, which, though of gold and studded with jewels to represent spots, possessed life, dance in front of them. ...

vol. 9, pp. 28–31. While she was saying this, the two maidens that we had seen in the sea came there with the deer; one had a body white as the moon, the other was dark as a priyangu; so they seemed like Gaṅgā and Yamuna returned from worshipping the ocean, the monarch of rivers. When they had sat down, I put this question to the Yakshi: "Goddess, who are these maidens, and what is the meaning of this golden deer?" When the Yakshini heard this, King, she said to me: "Anangadeva, if you feel any curiosity about the matter, listen, I will tell you..." Such are the facts with regard to these maidens; now hear the history of the deer.

Jayanta and the Golden Deer

Indra had a beloved son named Jayanta. Once on a time, when he, still an infant, was being carried about in the air by the celestial nymphs, he saw some princes in a wood on earth playing with some young deer. Then Jayanta went to heaven, and cried in the presence of his father because he had not got a deer to play with, as a child would naturally do. Accordingly Indra had a deer made for him by Visvakarman, of gold and jewels, and life was given to the animal by sprinkling it with nectar. Then Jayanta played with it, and was delighted with it, and the young deer was continually roaming about in heaven.

In course of time that son of Rāvaṇa, who was rightly named Indrajit, carried off the young deer from heaven and took it to his own city Laṅkā. And after a further period had elapsed — Rāvaṇa and Indrajit having been slain by the heroes Rāma and Lakshmana, to avenge the carrying off of Sītā, and Vibhīshaṇa having been set upon the throne of Laṅkā, as King of Rakshasas — that wonderful deer of gold and jewels remained in his palace. And once on a time, when I was taken by my husband's relations to Vibhīshaṇa's palace on the occasion of a festival, he gave me the deer as a complimentary present. And that young heaven-born deer is now in my house, and I must bestow it on your master. ...

In the morning ...the two heavenly maidens ...and the young deer arrived there, ...that Yakshini appeared, accompanied by her husband, and said to King Vikramasakti and to me: "You must tell your master [Vikramāditya] ...and you must also request him, as from me, to marry these two god-framed maidens, and to look upon them with favour, and to cherish this deer also, for it is a present from me."

L. F i n o t, *Recherches sur la littérature laotienne: contes*, "Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient", vol. 17, no. 5, 1917, pp. 84–115.

p. 101. 9. *Histoire de Dasaratha*

Le roi Dasaratha étant à la chasse rencontre un ermitage, où vivent un ermite avec sa femme, tous deux aveugles, et leur fils qui les nourrit. Le roi s'informe des

désirs de l'ermite, et celui-ci se plaint des éléphants qui viennent constamment saccager et souiller l'étang voisin. Le roi se met à l'affût sur un arbre, d'où il tire nuit et jour sur les éléphants. Une nuit, s'étant endormi, il est brusquement réveillé par un bruit de pas sous son arbre: il décoche une flèche et tue le fils de l'ermite qui allait puiser de l'eau. Le roi, désolé de son erreur, essaie de consoler les deux vieillards; mais ils meurent de chagrin.

Dasaratha, affilgé de ne pas avoir de fils, supplie le ciel de lui en accorder un: il en obtient quatre. La première reine Kosayadevî enfante Rāmarājakumāra; la seconde reine Kekayadevī, Bharatarājakumāra; la troisième reine Sumātā a deux fils, Lakkhaṇarājakumāra et Sataghnarājakumāra. Le roi, après avoir choisi comme successeur Bharata, s'en va dans la forêt avec la reine Sumātā et son fils Lakkhaṇa: ils y meurent.

Le serpent reproche aux grenouilles de ne pas suivre l'exemple du roi Rāma, qui fit bon accueil à un suppliant.

10. *Histoire de Rāma*

Lorsque Rāvaṇa eut enlevé et conduit à Laṅkā la princesse Sītā, il eut une violente querelle avec son frère Piphek (Vibhīṣaṇa), qui s'enfuit et se réfugia auprès de Rāma. Celui-ci le reçut bien et, après sa victoire, le mit sur le trône à la place de Rāvaṇa. [...]

P.O. Bodding, *Santal Folk Tales*, 3 vols, H. Aschehoug, Oslo, 1925–1929, vol. 2, pp. 284–288, no. 62, *Rakas ar ḍo̲m reak; The ogre and the Dom.*

[Editor's Notes
vol. 2, p. 283: Ogre = rākṣasa
vol. 2, p. 301: The ḍo̲m caste is one of the lowest of the Hindu social system.]

vol. 2, p. 285. Ram and Lokhon were going about hunting; they were killing very big big animals; they were also killing ogres. In olden times there was such a multitude of ogres, they were absolutely devastating the country; it was fortunate that Ram and Lokhon were born, so that they killed and annihilated the ogres from the land.

Once when they in a certain place had killed an immensely big ogre, they cut off with their weapons the claws of the ogre and went away somewhere. Accidentally a Dom was passing there with a lota full of water on his way to the fields; he came suddenly to the place where the ogre had been killed, just as if he knew of it. He suddenly caught sight of the ogre, lying there so immensely large. Now the Dom did not know that Ram and Lokhon had killed the ogre; he thought he was lying down there. So he very quietly put the lota with water down and lifting up a very big stone he carried this to the spot and threw it down on the

ogre's body. The ogre did not move the least; so the Dom again brought a stone in his arms; this time also he threw it at the ogre with great force; still he did not move at all.

He then understood that he was dead. The Dom then in great joy ran home and brought a tremendously large knife, and with this he also cut off the claws that Ram and Lokhon had left part of.

He knew before that if anybody killed the ogre and brought his claws, the king would give such a person his daughter in marriage and give him a part of his kingdom: for this reason the Dom very eagerly cut off the claws, and coming to his house he beat his wife and all his children and drove them out; his drums he also threw out and away on the field.

Thereupon he took the ogre's claws to the king; but although he saw these, the king did not believe his story; he said: "These are not the claws of an ogre that you have killed, because the claws are not entire: somebody, whoever it may be, has cut off and taken away the tips of the claws".

When he heard this, the Dom said: "No, raja saheb, I myself have killed him: so give me your daughter and a part of your kingdom". Hearing this the king said: "Yes, quite so; I shall give my daughter, and I shall also give part of my kingdom; but wait; I must first investigate the matter".

The king commenced to make enquiries; as they carried these on for him, they found very far away two young men called Ram and Lokhon; these two brought the claws with them and showed them to the king, and seeing these the king became very glad; but the Dom he drove away.

The Dom returned to his own house and called his wife and children to him, and the same drums of his he also brought back. Formerly, you know, he wanted to have the princess; but as the king did not believe his story, he did not give him his daughter either; on the contrary, he drove him away from his place.

The king asked Ram and Lokhon: "Look here, you two ogre-killers, what will you have? let me know this". They answered: "We shall not have anything; we have come only to show you these". The king thereupon with joy in his heart sent them away, and they went.

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