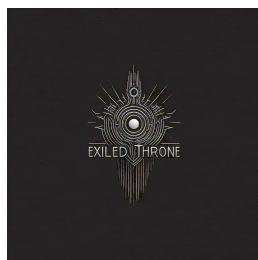


ANIL BAHUMAN

Heartbreak: Story of Sita

Throne in Exile Series



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Anil Bahuman asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

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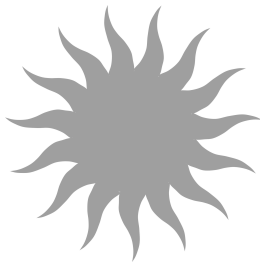
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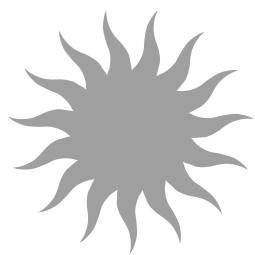
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*To Bhavbhuti the great playwright of the 8th Century, the
Ramayana minimalist, whose work is a conversation starter, a
reminder that stories in our epics remain relevant today. A call to
action for young people: We all have a part to play, to question
things, to fight for the future we want.*



Rama glanced at her whenever a beautiful object caught his eye. Every tint of the sky, every shape of a flower or bud, every elegant form of a creeper reminded him of some aspect or the other of Sita...

-R.K. NARAYAN, THE RAMAYANA



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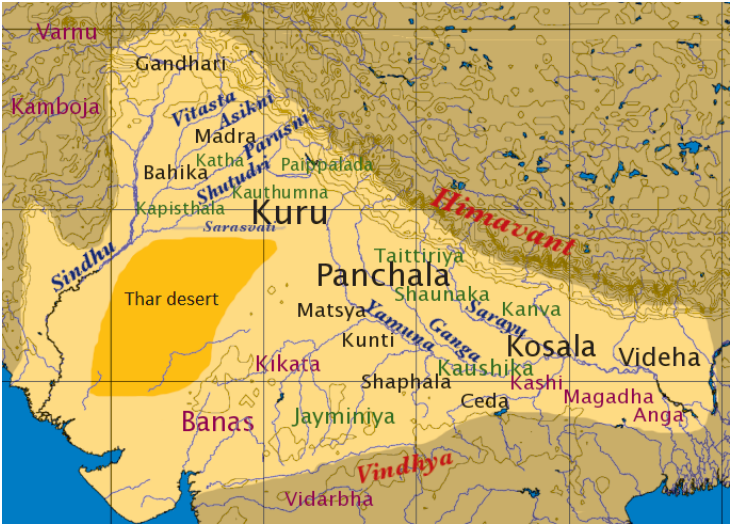
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Aryavarta



A few centuries before the birth of the Buddha (Source: Wikimedia Commons, https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Vedic_India.png)



Today's Ayodhya

(Source: Wikimedia Commons,

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayodhya>)

Prologue

As the epic tale of the traditional Ramayana concludes with the crowning of Ram and Sita, a fresh chapter unfolds...

Close to the End of an Era (*Treta Yuga*)

The sun hovers in the late afternoon sky, casting long, dappled shadows across the courtyard steps that lead to the temple gate. A sea of people dressed in the traditional flowing garments of northern Aryavarta—loose dhotis, intricately patterned sarees, and light, brightly colored turbans—gather, their eyes fixed expectantly on the dwar, the great door that leads to the inner sanctum. Guards hold their positions at the entrance, their spears gleaming in the sunlight.

Near the front row, a young peasant girl clutches a dried leaf scroll, its edges curled with wear. She cranes her neck, pushing through the adults, eyes wide with hope as she gazes at the drawing of the royal couple on the throne. Unable to go any further, she pulls up the scroll and her fingers trace the face of the crowned queen, Sita, with awe.

Within the temple's innermost sacred chamber, petals of marigold and jasmine form the shape of Ganesha ¹ near the ceremonial altar, the air thick with the scent of *yajna*² fire and burning ghee and the *rajapurohit*³ chanting mantras that

resonate deep within the walls, the cadence weaving centuries of tradition into the moment. The soft crackle of the *yajna* fire fills the room, its warm light dancing across the faces of two people closest to the fire, adorned in regal silks embroidered with gold. One of them is Queen Sita, whose eyes glisten with a blend of humility and quiet strength.

They both lean forward to offer ghee into the fire, the flames rising to receive their prayer. After the mantras subside into silence, their eyes meet briefly, a quiet understanding passing between them. In King Ram, her husband, she sees a calm expression that hides the responsibility of leadership.

Rajpurohit Vashisht declares the completion of the *yajna* and invites the rishis and nobles seated on wooden mats to take a break while the *yajna* offerings are distributed. Following the completion of all formalities, everyone takes their seat and Vashisht stands and addresses the small audience in the inner sanctum.

‘Our King and Queen fight for us and for Koshala. They show us the righteous path. With strength and wisdom, Ram and Sita protect us from the dark powers that seek to undermine it. Yesterday, in a grand ceremony, Indra, Agni, and Soma crowned them as king and queen. May they—Ram, like the Sun, and Sita, like the Moon—illuminate our path. As a strong and righteous leader, let Rama guide us and protect us from harm. Let Sita, with her pure heart and unwavering devotion, bring peace, prosperity, and happiness to us.’

After a brief silence, having concluded the Ganesh *yajna*, Vashisht steps aside. Ram and Sita rise, touching his feet in respect. He blesses them with a smile before leaving the altar. Arundathi, the royal guru, steps forward, her eyes soft with pride. ‘Come, *Rajan, Rajani*. It has been a long wait for our

people to finally see you. Many traveled large distances and camped here last night.'

Meanwhile, outdoors, as guards from the inner sanctum appear, a murmur spreads through the crowd like ripples on water. The guards straighten as Ram and Sita step into the sunlight, led by Rajguru Arundathi. The crowd's chant begins as a hum—'*Dharmo Rakshati Rakshita*⁴'—gaining volume and energy as soldiers hold their ranks to maintain order.

Ram and Sita ascend the stage to get a full view and bow to the people, their presence drawing cheers. The rishis seated on the dais incline their heads with folded hands. The crowd below the stage presses forward, straining for a better view as more people take stage. Family: Kaikeyi, Bharath, Mandovi, Lakshman, Urmila, Shatrugnya, Shruti and allies: Hanuman, Sugreev, Vibhishan and Mandodari.

Everyone offers a silent namaste to the gathered rishis, a gesture of unity.

Sita takes a few steps forward, absorbing the scene of gathered humanity beyond the dais, their eager eyes and hands full of devotion. Kaikeyi moves beside Ram, her expression guarded as if calculating the next move. The crowd erupts again, chanting, 'Ram Sita Ram.'

Sita's visibly stirred at their affection, and she waves—a gesture that makes the crowd roar louder. A murmur of awe ripples through them as she steps off the wooden mat, closer to the common people. A silence falls, deep and expectant. Her smile, warm and radiant, lights up her face, and the crowd responds, their chant morphing into a reverent cry: '*Matra Sita, Matra Sita, Matra Sita*.'

The guards shift uneasily as the throng surges. More soldiers

move in to keep the ranks, their faces tense. Kaikeyi leans towards Ram, speaking under her breath, eyes sharp. Ram moves forward, gently taking Sita's hand in a gesture that's both protective and commanding. He leads her back, their steps deliberate. Sita glances back at the crowd, worry etching her brow, before turning to follow her husband.

On the ground, among the feet of the moving crowd, the dried leaf scroll lies forgotten, trampled, its drawing of the royal couple smudged and torn. The girl's face lights up as she finds it again and picks it up immediately. Her hands tremble as she tries to erase the dirt and straighten the wrinkles, but the scroll has split in two, leaving the king and queen in separate pieces.

Introduction

Haven't read the Ramayana? No problem! A concise summary and a glossary of italicized terms are included at the **end of this book** to help you navigate the epic tale that serves as a prequel to this novel.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Royal Family of Koshala (Raghukul):

- **Ramachandra (Ram/Rama):** King of Koshala, son of Dashratha and Kaushalya.
- **Lakshmana (Laksh/Laksha/Soumitra):** Prince of Koshala, son of Dashratha and Sumitra.
- **Bharata:** Prince of Koshala, son of Dashratha and Kaikeyi.
- **Shatrughna (Shatru):** Prince of Koshala, son of Dashratha and Sumitra.
- **Kaikeyi:** Queen-in-Chief, step-mother of Ram, mother of Bharath.
- **Kaushalya:** Queen of Koshala, mother of Ram.
- **Sumitra:** Queen of Koshala, mother of Lakshmana and Shatrughna.

Royal Family of Videha:

- **Sita:** Princess of Videha, adopted daughter of King Janaka and Queen Sunayana.
- **Janaka:** King of Videha.
- **Mandavi, Urmila, Shrutakirti:** Princesses of Videha, sisters of Sita.

Others:

- **Vashisht/Vashishta:** Sage, Raj Purohit, Guru of Ram and his family.
- **Arundhati:** Rajguru, Wife of Sage Vashisht, Guru of Ram and his family.
- **Sumantra (Sumant):** Charioteer—and advisor—of Ram.

Places:

- **Ayodhya/Saket:** Sage, Raj Purohit, Guru of Ram and his family.
- **Chitrakut/Chitrakoot:** Ram and Sita's first place of exile
- **Amarkan/Amarkantak:** Town of Valmiki's residence
- **Madhupura:** Ancient site of the modern town of Mathura

SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

1. **Prelude of Koshala** – Introducing the land and its tranquil melodies before the symphony of events begins.
2. **Golden Serenade** – Capturing the peaceful yet poignant evening in Saket, infused with the warm glow of sunset.
3. **Discord in the Chamber** – A night of tension and hushed conversations, like an off-key note in a familiar tune.

4. **River Rhapsody** – The journey on the river echoes with a rhythm both haunting and beautiful, hinting at what's to come.
5. **Sunset Sonnet** – Lakshman observes from the palace above as the sun sets, each shadow like a note in a somber song.
6. **Discordant Accord** – A clashing of ideals that briefly finds resolution, the strained harmony like an unresolved chord.
7. **Harmony in Greens** – Kaikeyi's arrival brings a vibrant energy, like a sudden shift in tempo.
8. **Nocturne of Sita and Ram** – A quiet, intimate moment shared between Sita and Ram, a duet under the night sky.
9. **Ink and Echoes** – In her chambers, Sita pens her thoughts as echoes of past conversations linger like a soft refrain.
10. **Bassline of Unease** – Lakshman feels a tense undercurrent as he watches Ram, the low hum of uncertainty filling the room.
11. **Chorus of Sisters** – Sita and her sisters gather, their shared love and concern like harmonizing voices in a heartfelt chorus.
12. **Final Cadence** – As Sita and Ram part ways in the gardens, the final notes of their shared melody hang in the air, signaling an end and a beginning.

I

Koshala

In the legend of ancient Aryavarta, before empires rose to prominence, Koshala stood as a gem among the northern kingdoms. Nestled beneath the sacred Himalayas, its capital, Saket, was a peaceful and prosperous city on the banks of the sparkling Sarayu River. To Koshala's east lay Videha and to its west, the kingdom of Matsya.



1

Prelude of Koshala

Three Months after being crowned King and Queen⁵

The *Samiti* building lay opposite the royal palace, its towering structure imposing against the dusky sky. Known for its well-crafted halls, each served a distinct purpose: one chamber for legal petitions, another for trade councils, a third for foreign emissaries. Tonight, however, the Council Hall—a quiet space often reserved for the most private matters of the state—held only two figures. No courtiers lingered outside, no advisors murmured in the shadows, just the soft hum of torches flickering against the stone walls, casting their glow upon the polished floor.

As the first stars came out in the oppressive heat of November, Kaikeyi, the Queen-in-Chief of Koshala, slumped on the worn cushion of the sofa, her face a map of worry etched deep by time. The lines around her once-sparkling eyes, now dulled with age, had deepened, carving ridges between brow and cheek. With apprehension blooming beneath the surface, her usually rosy skin, once the color of ripe summer peaches, had

paled to a weak rose. Her lips, thin and normally pressed in a firm line of determination, trembled a bit, a silent prayer escaping them in a sigh that rustled the loose strands of her silver hair. Her hands, gnarled with years of hunting, riding and labor, twisted the fabric of her sari, a nervous habit betraying the regal facade she presented to the world.

Watching King Ram, her stepson and her most loyal subject, his silhouette framed by the open balcony beyond, she straightened, a flicker of resolve replacing the worry in her eyes. The conversation she had prepared for, a discussion that danced delicately on the precipice of cultural norms and personal desires, would demand the very best of her. Asking Ram to abandon and separate from his wife, after a year of her captivity, a concept more foreign than a winter snowstorm in their sun-drenched capital, required huge tact. The weight of this word, 'abandon,' settled heavy on her tongue. It resonated not with separation, but with a sense of duty shirked, a family fractured. The very opposite of what Ram and Sita stood for in the eyes of the people.

And after the news of Queen Sita's pregnancy, a blessing shrouded in a veil of complication, it would be difficult. The soft curve of Sita's belly, a promise of new life blooming within, was a stark reminder of the consequences. *Yes, she thought, her gaze hardening with a steely glint, this would be difficult.*

Am I up to it?

A lifetime of navigating the choppy waters of family dynamics, of brokering peace and understanding in Aryavarta, where there often was none, rose within her.

This is not the first time I have dealt with delicate situations, where the truth, like a culinary herb, needed to be delicately seasoned to avoid bitterness.

She would soon find out, she decided, a silent prayer forming on her lips, if her well of wisdom still held enough water to quench this firestorm.

She dropped her voice to a hush, barely audible above the crackling and hissing of fire torches.

'It's not just whispers anymore, Ram,' she said, darting her eyes towards the carved doorway as if fearing an eavesdropper.

'There are pronouncements, pronouncements tinged with malice. They speak of a stolen princess in the palace gardens at Lanka, of hushed meetings by the Ashoka tree...of favors granted to her captor.'

Ram's brow furrowed, a storm brewing in his otherwise calm demeanor.

'Who dares?' he growled, his voice a low rumble that sent a tremor through the room. 'Who would spread such vile lies about my wife?'

Kaikeyi placed a frail hand on his, her touch a beacon of calmness midst the rising tempest. 'Their names matter little, my child. The poison is in the gossip themselves. They fester, growing stronger with each retelling, until even the most loyal hearts begin to question.'

She sighed, the load of her responsibility creasing her brow further.

'A baby, a son especially, carries immense weight in our lineage. But a child born under a cloud of suspicion... that, my Ram, could fracture the very foundation of our reign. *Raghukul* is in danger. Now from the inside and outside.'

A flicker of pain crossed Ram's face at Kaikeyi's declaration. She knew it wasn't a denial, not truly. It was a desperate clinging to the ideal he'd constructed, a world where love and obligation intertwined. Back in Lanka he had demanded a fire

trial; so these were not figments of her malicious imagination.

A hesitation flickered in his eyes, a tiny ember that threatened to blaze into a firestorm of resistance. Good, she thought, let the uncertainty take root. Doubt is a seed that blooms best in fertile ground.

She remained silent, letting the burden of unspoken untruths settle in the opulent room, watching.

‘She is innocent,’ he muttered.

Ram’s gaze, usually steady and confident, darted around the chamber, searching for something, anything, to validate his words. Deep down, he would know her sentiments held a sliver of truth. That Ravan, the master magician, must have duped the attractive Sita in her vulnerable state, perhaps even taking Ram’s form and preyed on her, at least once. Yet, for him to acknowledge that would shatter the fragile peace he had built within himself.

He needs time, she realized, watching the play of emotions across his face. Time for the seed to grow, to take root. *I must be patient. The gardener who forces the bloom often destroys the fruit.*

‘Perhaps,’ Kaikeyi finally said, her voice a gentle rasp, ‘we should discuss this further when your heart is calmer, when reason can guide your thoughts.’

This is not a dismissal, but a postponement, a chance for both of us to navigate the treacherous terrain that lays ahead.

With a slow, deliberate movement, she rose to her feet, ensuring she betrayed none of the emotional agitation she felt within. Leaning forward, she pressed a kiss to his forehead; the gesture imbued with a lifetime of love and an unspoken plea for understanding.

Then, with a rustle of silk and a faint sigh, she turned and left

the room, leaving Ram alone with the storm brewing inside him and the echo of her declaration hanging in the air.

* * *

Having exited the building, Kaikeyi walked outside on the dimly lit promenade and then over to the palace corridor and up the indoor helical stairs that led to the first floor of the West side of the palace. With a sigh of relief, she dismissed her attendants, eager to be alone with her thoughts. Her opulent chamber echoed with emptiness as she sank onto her bed, the soft thud of her sandals on the floor resonating through the silence. She reached up to remove the long hairpin, opening up her silver tresses with her hands, and lay down, using her tortoise shell *kankatika* to spread out her hair like the vibrant feathers of a dancing peacock.

The exile has to be swift, the journey uneventful. To protect what Ram cannot see, I will make a tough choice that only a queen's heart can bear.

The people of Koshalā called Sita the ideal queen and woman! Didn't they know she was not even the offspring of Janak? An adopted daughter is made the queen and the more eligible daughter, bold and high spirited Mandovi is not!

Its my duty to correct this imbalance, only then can I claim victory.

Mandovi was pregnant, yes, and if she gave birth to a boy, she, Kaikeyi, would educate him to take his rightful place as heir and protector of *Raghukul*, something Sita's idealistic values could not. If Sita had a male child who was fit to rule, she would ensure that the heir came back to Saket, but Sita did not. Mother and child would be better off separated.

Plotting Sita's exile isn't just a power play, it is a necessity.

In the Kingdom of Magadh, new metals were said to gleam with untold strength, a discovery that, in the wrong hands, could pierce even the finest armor. What if such forces turned their gaze westward, and Koshala found itself defenseless? Only a ruler of shrewd mind and sharp wit could withstand what the changing times would demand.

Of late, Ram's decisions had grown bolder, and less dependent on her counsel. *Consulting the rajpurohit and deciding to change the name of their capital from Ayodhya to Saket without discussing with me first!*

Kaikeyi had watched as her plans for Koshala's endurance were edged aside, replaced with naïve choices—idealistic at best, reckless at worst.

She had urged Ram to seize the fruits of his Lankan victory, to perform the *Ashwamedha* yajna and proclaim himself *Chakravartin*—the undisputed emperor of Aryavarta, and prepare to challenge any kingdom that dared resist. A bold move to solidify Koshala's power. But Sita, ever the voice of restraint, had turned his attention instead to the struggles of the common harvest, to mending fields over fortifying borders. Kaikeyi saw in this the seeds of weakness, a path that led not to strength but to squandered opportunity.

His trust in Sita's vision, a rule based on principles, a softer 'Ram Rajya,' had taken root like weeds in a well-tended garden, disturbing the soil of her hard-won legacy.

Sita's presence in the palace embodied a gentler rule, one of leniency and compassion that seeped into Ram's decisions like water into stone, softening the edges of his strength. Ram had chosen Sita to lead the delegation to Kashi and no doubt Sita would use her charm with the King there, and might even succeed. Sita's soft power had its supporters in Ram's court

and Kaikeyi had, more than once, admired Sita's tact. But the King of Vatsa? How could Sita win over that chameleon with no cunning? And Magadh?

These virtues were the very qualities that invited danger, for they lulled the kingdom into a false sense of security, leaving it unguarded against the ambitions of their enemies. How long, she wondered, before such tenderness weakened Koshala's resolve entirely, rendering even the stoutest hearts unprepared for the challenges that lay ahead?

An old memory clawed at Kaikeyi, dragging her back to a moment of profound betrayal. The memory of that morning returned with startling clarity. *Senani* Rudrashura—her mentor, her friend, the man she had loved in quiet, unspoken ways. The man who had urged her to believe that strength could sometimes be found in trust, in alliance, in opening one's heart. Rudrashura had stood beside her father, urging the king to consider a peace treaty with Sindhu. The neighboring kingdom, weary of war, had extended a hand of friendship, and Rudrashura had taken it as a sign of promise, a path to securing their borders without further bloodshed. Kaikeyi, too, had seen hope in his words, believing that perhaps trust and strategy could coexist. She had let herself believe in it because she believed in him.

But that belief had cost her dearly.

She was seventeen, standing at Kekaya's palace gates, her heart racing as the dejected soldiers returned. But instead of seeing *Senani* Rudrashura, the man she loved with silent devotion, she saw a bundle wrapped in Kekaya's colors, carried by two weary men.

Desperate, she demanded answers. 'What happened to the *Senani*?'

The soldier's voice, thick with sorrow, cut her like a blade. 'He's gone, princess. Betrayed by Sindhu—despite the treaty.' He paused, as if bracing for his next words.

'The final blow... came from his own brother, Amatya, a mercenary for Sindhu.'

The world spun. Rudrashura had believed in peace, in trust, and it had cost him everything. His own blood had turned traitor, severing bonds Kaikeyi once thought unbreakable. Her father's voice echoed in her memory: 'To trust is to hand another the blade that can end you.'

In that moment, Kaikeyi hardened. She buried her love, her belief in the strength of loyalty, and embraced a new truth: strength alone could protect the heart.

To trust or love openly was to invite ruin.

Her heart became a fortress, her resolve unyielding. She would rule without sentiment or vulnerability, for only strength could secure her future and shield her from the treacherous weakness of trust.

The raspy sound of a bird brought her back to the present.

There was no room for softness in this world; her will would be the blade that cut away weakness.

Sita's naivety has already taken a heavy toll. It had almost killed Lakshman. How could she allow herself to be duped and kidnapped by Ravan? It had cost Ram a war and aged him years, etching worry lines onto his once youthful face. How could a woman so easily deceived, hope to protect a legacy like the *Raghukul Suryavanshi* dynasty?

The answer was simple: she couldn't.

Oh, yes—Ram had tried to cast her aside in Lanka, but Sita, always the dutiful wife, clung to him like a shadow, weaving a grand spectacle of that fire trial to earn his sympathy. If only

she had stepped away then, spared him her endless devotion,
none of this would be necessary now.

Only in Sita's absence could Raghukul's true strength rise.

Further Reading

OTHER RAMAYANAS

1. **Kamban Ramayana**—Also known as *Kamba Ramayanam*, this Tamil epic by Kamban is a lyrical retelling of the Ramayana, blending devotion and Tamil culture. Written in the 12th century, it introduces unique local elements and vividly portrays emotions. Kamban's poetic brilliance and spiritual depth made it a cornerstone of Tamil literature. R.K. Narayan's book (in epigraph) is based on this.
2. **Tulsidas' Ramcharitmanas**— A 16th-century Hindi retelling by Tulsidas, *Ramcharitmanas* is revered for its devotional essence, written in Awadhi dialect. It focuses on bhakti (devotion) and portrays Ram as an incarnation of Vishnu. Accessible to the masses, it remains one of the most widely read and celebrated versions of the Ramayana in North India.
3. **Krittivasi Ramayana**— Written by Krittibas Ojha in 15th-century Bengal, this Bengali adaptation is a devo-

tional yet locally flavored rendition of the Ramayana. It incorporates folk traditions and regional influences, making it a cultural treasure. The work brings out human emotions while retaining the essence of Valmiki's narrative.

4. **Kuvempu's Sri Ramayana Darshanam**— A Kannada epic poem by the 20th-century poet Kuvempu, *Sri Ramayana Darshanam* reimagines the Ramayana with philosophical depth and modern insights. It emphasizes universal values like justice, dharma, and love, blending poetic beauty with profound existential themes, earning Kuvempu the Jnanpith Award.
5. **Adhyatma Ramayana**— A Sanskrit devotional version emphasizing the spiritual and philosophical aspects of the Ramayana, this 14th-century work is part of the *Brahmanda Purana*. Focused on bhakti and Advaita Vedanta philosophy, it portrays Sita and Ram as divine manifestations of Shakti and Vishnu.
6. **Ezhuthachan's Adhyathmaramayanam Kilippattu**— A Malayalam adaptation of the Adhyatma Ramayana by Ezhuthachan in the 16th century, this version is written in a lilting parrot-song (kilippattu) style. It is a foundational text of Kerala's spiritual and literary traditions, blending devotion with rhythmic, simple language.
7. **Adbhuta Ramayana**— Attributed to Valmiki, this lesser-known Sanskrit version focuses on the mystical and extraordinary aspects of the Ramayana. It highlights Sita's divine powers and her transformation into Mahakali to defeat the demon Sahasrakavacha. This version presents a more feminist and esoteric perspective of the Ramayana.
8. **Bhavabhuti's Uttara Ramacharita**— A Sanskrit play

by Bhavabhuti from the 8th century, *Uttara Ramacharita* explores the emotional aftermath of the Ramayana, focusing on Ram and Sita's separation and reunion. Known for its poignant and dramatic narrative, it delves deeply into human emotions, dharma, and the complexities of relationships.

9. **Bhavabhuti's Mahaviracharita**— Another Sanskrit play by Bhavabhuti, *Mahaviracharita* focuses on Ram's early life, covering events from his boyhood to his marriage with Sita. Written in the 8th century, it portrays Ram as a divine hero (*mahavira*) while blending poetic beauty with philosophical reflections on dharma and valor.
10. **Mizo Ramayana**—Known as *Rama's Story* among the Mizos of Northeast India, this oral tradition reimagines the Ramayana within a tribal and regional context. The characters and events are adapted to fit local customs, showcasing Ram as a hero with strong ties to the community's cultural values, reflecting their unique worldview.
11. **Phra Lak Phra Lam**—The **Thai version** of the Ramayana, called *Ramakien*, is an epic rooted in Southeast Asian culture and mythology. It emphasizes elements of Thai traditions, artistry, and martial values. The story blends the core Ramayana narrative with local adaptations, and its influence is vividly depicted in Thai classical dance, art, and temples.
12. **Reamker**— The **Cambodian version** of the Ramayana, *Reamker* (meaning 'Glory of Rama'), is an intricate adaptation blending Hindu and Buddhist traditions. It emphasizes moral lessons, dharma, and karma while incorporating Cambodian cultural elements. Known for its artistic influence, *Reamker* is prominently depicted in

Khmer dance, drama, and temple carvings like those at Angkor Wat.

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6. Valmiki. (Translated by Goldman, R. P., & Goldman, S.). (1984-2017). *The Ramayana of Valmiki: An Epic of Ancient India* (Vols. 1-7). Princeton University Press. A scholarly, annotated translation, offering a detailed analysis of the

FURTHER READING

Ramayana's literary, historical, and cultural significance.

English translations of Tamil, Kannada, Bengali, Thai, and other versions of the Ramayana mentioned above are available online—both free and in e-bookstores. However, consider purchasing from a local bookstore if the price difference is not too much. Supporting local stores or your local library or bookclub not only strengthens your community but also offers the chance to explore, discover or stumble upon regional adaptations or rare editions.

Ramayana Summary

VALIMIKI RAMAYANA IN A NUTSHELL

Scholars say that there are at least 300 different Ramayanas written. The Valmiki Critical Edition version is:

Dasharatha, the ruler of Ayodhya, has four sons through his three queens: Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata, and Shatrughna. Rama, the eldest and most virtuous, is chosen to succeed his father as king. After marrying Sita, a princess from a nearby kingdom, Rama's future appears bright. However, events take a dramatic turn when Kaikeyi, one of Dasharatha's wives and Bharata's mother, reminds the king of a promise he once made to her.

Exploiting this promise, Kaikeyi demands that her son Bharata be appointed as king while Rama is exiled to the forest for fourteen years. Though deeply saddened, Dasharatha feels compelled to honor his word. Rama, ever obedient and noble, accepts his fate without question. He sets off into exile, accompanied by his loyal wife, Sita, and devoted step-brother, Lakshmana.

During their time in the wilderness, they cross paths with Surpanakha, a *rakshasa* demoness who falls in love with Rama. When Rama rejects her advances and she turns hostile toward Sita, Lakshmana retaliates by severely disfiguring her. Furious and humiliated, Surpanakha flees to her brother Ravana, the powerful ruler of Lanka, and tells him of Sita's beauty.

Ravana, motivated by both revenge and desire, devises a cunning plan to kidnap Sita. Disguising himself as a mendicant, he abducts her and takes her to his kingdom. Rama, devastated by Sita's disappearance, embarks on a quest to find her. With the help of the vanaras (monkey warriors), including their leader Hanuman, they discover Sita's location in Lanka.

Hanuman manages to reach Sita, offering her reassurance that Rama is coming to rescue her. After gathering his allies, Rama leads an army to build a bridge to Lanka, resulting in an epic confrontation with Ravana. After a fierce battle, Rama slays Ravana, liberating Sita from captivity.

Despite rescuing her, Rama feels compelled to address doubts about Sita's chastity due to her time in Ravana's palace. Sita endures a mythological walk-through-the-fire to prove her innocence, emerging safe, which symbolizes her chastity. With their fire-trial ordeal behind them, Rama and Sita return to Ayodhya, where Rama takes his rightful place as king, and Sita as queen.

For a full list of reference books on the Ramayana, see Further Reading

Glossary

(Indian Sanskrit to Approximate English Equivalent)

1. Aam—Yes in Sanskrit.
2. Aryaputra—A respectful term used to address a noble or royal man, often meaning ‘son of a noble family.’ Arya, a shortened form, is a common name in modern India.
3. Ashwamedha—A royal ritual where a consecrated horse roams freely; if stopped, it signals a challenge, leading to war. It signifies the king’s power and imperial ambition.
4. Chakravartin—A ‘universal ruler’ or emperor, a king whose authority is widely recognized and extends over multiple territories, symbolizing ideal and righteous rule.
5. Dandakaranya—A vast forest region in ancient India, associated with exile. It is where Ram, Sita, and Lakshman lived during their 14-year banishment.
6. Dharmo Rakshati Rakshitah—‘Dharma protects those who protect it.’ This Sanskrit phrase is often used to emphasize the importance of righteousness and moral principles.
7. Ganga—The sacred river Ganges, worshiped as a goddess in Hinduism.
8. Jaggery—A traditional dark-brown Indian sweetener made from unrefined cane sugar. It has a rich, molasses-like flavor and is considered healthier than refined

- sugar. It's used in many Indian dishes and has medicinal properties.
9. Gopal—Protector of cows, which were considered a source of wealth in this period.
 10. Janasthana—A forested region in the Ramayana, located near modern-day Nashik, Maharashtra. It is the site of pivotal events during Ram's exile where he fought a war.
 11. Kachahasta hair—Thick, long, and radiant hair characterized by its health and vitality, often considered a sign of beauty and strength.
 12. Kakshya—The upper deck, room, or chamber.
 13. Kangula mudra—A specific hand gesture or symbol used in spiritual rituals or meditations.
 14. Kantaka—"Thorn" or 'spike,' once used to control elephants. Now a symbol of obstacles or difficulties that limit freedom or progress.
 15. Karmaphala—The result or consequence of one's actions, reflecting the belief that every deed leads to corresponding outcomes, whether positive or negative. Translates to 'the fruit of one's actions'.
 16. Koshala—An ancient kingdom in northern India, associated with the city of Ayodhya.
 17. Matra—Mother.
 18. Matsya—One of the ancient kingdoms or regions; the westernmost part of India overlapping with the current state of Gujarat.
 19. Neti—No in Sanskrit.
 20. Pani merchants—Nomadic traders in ancient India, often viewed with suspicion by locals. Though linked to water bodies, they were primarily known for long-distance trade and played a significant role in the economy despite

their outsider status.

21. Pitra—Father.
22. Pongee/Pungi—A musical instrument used by snake charmers, made from a gourd, producing captivating melodies to attract snakes. Snakes can't hear, and have been trained to be 'charmed'.
23. Pranams—A gesture of deep respect, often involving bowing or prostrating, common in Indian culture.
24. Prayaschita—Atonement or penance performed to seek forgiveness for one's sins or wrongdoings, often involving rituals or spiritual practices.
25. Purohit—A priest or officiant in Hindu rituals, responsible for performing ceremonies and conducting religious rites.
26. Pur-rathas—War chariots, traditionally used in ancient Indian warfare.
27. Rajan—Means 'king' or 'ruler' in Sanskrit. Rajani is Queen.
28. Rajguru—The royal spiritual advisor or teacher to a king or royal family.
29. Rajpurohit—The chief priest of a kingdom, responsible for performing important rituals.
30. Raghukul—The royal lineage of King Rama, part of the Suryavanshi dynasty.
31. Rakshasha—A demon or malevolent being in Hindu mythology and legend, often depicted as an antagonist in epic tales, representing chaos and destruction.
32. Saket—Another name for the ancient city of Ayodhya, meaning a place of peace or heaven.
33. Samiti chamber—A meeting room or assembly hall where royal councils or discussions are held; the lower house or

House of Commons.

34. Saraswati—A goddess of wisdom, learning, and the arts in Hinduism; also a river mentioned in ancient texts that dried up.
35. Sarayu—A sacred river flowing near Ayodhya that joins the Ganga.
36. Senani—A military commander or general.
37. Sheesham—A type of hardwood tree, native to India, used for furniture and construction.
38. Suryavanshi—The solar dynasty, a royal lineage descended from the sun god Surya, which Ram belongs to.
39. Swadharma—One's personal duty or righteous path, according to their role in life, as guided by the principles of dharma.
40. Vrajapati—The lord or ruler of a region or community who protects the village or town.
41. Videha—The kingdom where Sita and her sisters grew up with the capital Mithila, associated with Nepal and Champaran area of Bihar.
42. Vritra—A demon of drought in Hindu mythology and legend, often depicted as an obstacle to rain and abundance, eventually defeated by Indra.
43. Yojana—Ancient Indian unit of distance.
44. Treta Yuga—The second of the four yugas (epochs) in Hindu cosmology, following Satya Yuga and preceding Dvapara Yuga. Treta Yuga is marked by a slight decline in righteousness and an increase in human flaws compared to the previous era. It is famously associated with the Ramayana, as it is the period when Lord Ram ruled Ayodhya, embodying the ideal of dharma (righteousness).

During this era, humans were taller and lived longer than in later yugas, and society was still largely guided by noble principles. The name ‘Treta’ comes from ‘three,’ indicating that three of the four legs of dharma were intact, unlike the complete harmony of Satya Yuga.

Notes

PROLOGUE

- 1 Ganesha, also known as Ganapati or Vinayaka, is one of the most widely worshipped deities in Hinduism. Recognized by his elephant head, Ganesha is the remover of obstacles and the god of wisdom, intellect, and new beginnings. Traditionally, he is invoked at the start of any new venture—be it a career, project, or even a wedding ceremony—to ensure success and remove hindrances along the way. Prevalent even today.
- 2 Yajna, in Hindu tradition, is a sacred ritual of offering and sacrifice performed to honor deities, maintain cosmic order (*rita*), and seek blessings. It involves offerings like ghee, grains, or wood into a consecrated fire, accompanied by Vedic chants. Yajnas symbolize selfless actions and devotion, often conducted during significant life events or festivals. The fire represents purity, while the offerings signify surrender and gratitude, making it a bridge between humans and the divine.
- 3 The chief priest of a kingdom, responsible for performing important rituals.
- 4 ‘Dharma protects those who protect it’

PRELUDE OF KOSHALA

- 5 The Valmiki Ramayana usually ends with the crowning ceremony of Sita and Ram.

GOLDEN SERENADE

- 6 Mithila was known for its Dharma Studies and application to court law. The main gurus were Yajnavalkya and his teacher, Uddalaka Aruni. Uddalaka, with his cosmopolitan opinions, was a man of the future. For these reasons, Kuru-Pandalas (region of western Ganga) looked down upon people of Koshala and Mithila (region of eastern Ganga). This is apparent when you read the arguments between these regions that survive to this day. Since Dashrath, Ram’s father was Janaka’s friend, we

can speculate that Janaka had a large influence on 'Ram Rajya', making it more just than the book of Manu Smriti.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yajnavalkya_Smriti

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uddalaka_Aruni

DISCORD IN THE CHAMBER

- 7 in certain specific scenarios, drought can indirectly lead to increased salinity:

Saline Intrusion: In coastal areas, reduced river flow during droughts can allow seawater to intrude further upstream, increasing the salinity of river water.

Increased Evaporation: As water levels decrease, the concentration of salts in the remaining water can increase due to evaporation. This is more common in enclosed bodies of water like lakes and reservoirs.

Reduced Dilution of Salt: In areas with naturally saline soils, reduced river flow can lead to high salt runoff into the river, raising salinity levels.

I had the salty soil of the Kutch area in mind.

- 8 The Saraswati was a river as important as the Ganga, as it is mentioned several times in the Rigveda. Over the centuries, it is believed that it turned dry. Some people speculate that it continues today as the modern Ghaggar river.

SUNSET SONNET

- 9 It is said that Ravan's son, Indrajit, was more powerful than Ravana himself.

DISCORDANT ACCORD

- 10 A 'universal ruler' or emperor, a king whose authority is widely recognized and extends over multiple territories, symbolizing ideal and righteous rule. After his great-grandfather had become the Chakravartin, the pressure was on Ram since his father(Dashrath) and grandfather(Aja) had not.

BASSLINE OF UNEASE

- 11 Lavanasura could only be killed by a special arrow—as long as he was not wielding his own trident—that made him undefeatable. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lavanasura>



About the Author

Tech Executive and Storyteller

I'm a Mumbai-based tech executive and fiction writer. For the past four years, I've blended my professional background and passion for storytelling to write a novella part-time. I delved into themes of introspection and resilience. My favourite blends of tea without milk are peppermint and chamomile that I diffuse. Writing comes as a Pavlovian response.

Writing Profile

I write two online newsletters—about a post a month—one focused on fiction and another on technology's societal impacts, with a focus on AI. I also mentor intermediate-level fiction writers through the Ink and Quill Collective in India.

Unique Experiences

20 years spent living on the IIT (Indian Institute of Technology) Bombay campus, surrounded by pristine nature, people who loved the good things in Indian culture and professionals working in advanced technology labs, fostered a unique

environment for creative thinking. I had earlier(1999-2002) worked in the US at Georgia Tech's Advanced Technology Development Center on wireless tech, MIT Media Lab on 3D printing tech, and the AI Center at the University of Georgia on natural language processing, machine learning and genetic algorithms.

I began my return from Atlanta to India living in a tiny village in India for work. The six months (2002) at Vigyan Ashram, a school for dropouts, I spent teaching 3D printing, doing research and writing grant proposals turned out to be a turning point (more about it later). Inspired by the life led by my sponsors in Mumbai, I declined a fully paid admission into a computer-science PhD in the US . Instead I led (2003-2013) a tech-based, for-profit social venture (business in the CSR sector) that provided communications software to over 1 million farmers, connecting Agri-institutions (esp. farmer outreach centers) across the country requiring lots of rural travel working for IIT.

At Jio (2013-), I have spent a decade contributing to competitive app development and technical innovations, with several projects either showed at Reliance AGM (Annual General Meeting) or made revenue (contributing 1/5th of total revenue of one e-commerce vertical), providing offerings to the 100s of million users using Jio Apps.

This Work

Throne in Exile is a novella I began writing in 2020, inspired by my deep dive into the *Ramayana* and its retellings. After four years of development, I released a 90-minute audiobook series to a global audience of creative professionals in September 2024.

Memorable Experiences

One of my most memorable experiences was living six months in Pabal, a small village in Maharashtra, where I learned invaluable lessons about simplicity and community, which influenced the themes in *Throne in Exile*.

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Poll for Sequels: <https://warli.substack.com/p/poll-for-sequels>

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