# All Things to all Men — and Women: Rāma transcreated

*Mary and John Brockington*

## The Tale of Rāma the Human

In origin, the Rāma story is a simple tale of the triumph of 'good' over 'evil': to preserve his father's integrity, a virtuous warrior prince agrees to the demand of a stepmother to live in the wilderness with only one brother and his wife, Sītā, to accompany him;[1] while there, his wife is abducted by a fearsome monster, Rāvaṇa, to be liberated by Rāma with the aid of a vast army of monkeys and bears. To transcreate the story, verbally or visually, has been the aim of tellers ever since it was first composed, probably in about the fifth century BCE. Each new telling bears testimony to the popularity and vitality of the earliest form of the story — a form which still cannot be determined with absolute certainty.[2]

   Each new telling has been different: different in purpose, in means of transmission, in language, in cultural and religious context. To have succeeded, each telling has also had to be distinctive, a transcreation even if only to a limited extent: there would have been simply no point in producing an exact repetition of the work of all previous tellers — even if it was known. Yet throughout these transcreations, the basic form of the story as first composed in the Sanskrit *Vālmīkirāmāyaṇa* (*VRm*) cannot be altogether lost: in whatever way the details are realised, it cannot be 'The story of Rāma' if Sītā is not abducted, and Rāvaṇa punished.

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[1] We offer this article in tribute to Paul Dundas, outstanding Jain scholar, and our long-standing friend and colleague, who died as it was about to be completed.

[2] See Brockington and Brockington 2006. Our names in references will henceforth be abbreviated to 'JLB' and 'MB'. Abbreviations for other texts used are listed in the Bibliography. We are grateful to Eva De Clercq and her colleagues for inviting John (a Sanskritist), and me (Mary, a narrativist), to contribute to this long-awaited conference, not as Jainologists (which we certainly are not) but in the hope that some of our long experience tracing the Rāma story as a whole from its secular origins in India through a bewildering series of transcreations, in many differing cultural contexts, may be helpful.

The chief characteristic of the Rāma story from its very conception has been its obvious popularity; how else could it have survived? Why should generations of audiences crave repeated performances of a story they had already heard? Identifying as many as possible of the huge number of these transcreated versions and then listing those building blocks that make each narrative distinctive is the first task of a vast project we have been engaged on for many years; our results so far can be consulted online on the Oxford Research Archive (ORA).[3]

Tellers who sought to enhance their own prestige and income by introducing what they considered 'improvements' to the old tale used a variety of means: stylistic elaboration of the existing narrative, especially at points of highest tension; introduction of new characters and new episodes (often duplicating existing ones); or inventive explanations of what seemed to be anomalies in the received text. The earlier tale had been built on a succession of surprises (MB 2012), but centuries of repetition meant that audiences now knew what the outcome was to be, and tellers preferred to concentrate on selected episodes of what had now become a long-drawn-out narrative (MB 2007). Eventually, the 5-*kāṇḍa* ('5-book') text was supplemented by material now grouped in a preliminary Book 1, the *Bālakāṇḍa*, and in a final Book 7, the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. The dating of these later parts of the *Vālmīkirāmāyaṇa* is difficult to determine with any precision; what is clear is that many of the episodes found only in the two additional Books were inserted over a considerable span of time. The questions raised by this process of continual renewal are full of interest and challenging to answer: where did each change come from? why was it made? and what effect did they have on the understanding of the narrative underlying future versions?

## *Transcreations*

Tellers of course worked within the changing pattern of society, and were influenced by the developing religious culture. Gradually, the heroic romance took on the narrative form of an epic, featuring Rāma as an avatara of Vishnu, and later still as God himself. As this transformation was still in process, composers working in different genres took note of

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[3] Development and spread of the Rāma narrative (pre-modern), freely available at http://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:8df9647a-8002-45ff-b37e-7effb669768b, or search Oxford Research Archive > Brockington, Rāmāyaṇa; henceforth cited as ORA. The 'Narrative Elements' folder contains detailed text references to works alluded to in this article, too many to be cited here in detail.

the story's popularity, and began to harness it to their own purposes. Not surprisingly, it was reproduced in the Vaishnava Puranas, but there it was already so well known to the faithful that it usually needed to be repeated in outline only, with few details and few innovations. Composers of the Shaiva Puranas found their task much less simple. Evidently the Rāma story was too popular to be ignored, so inventive means (not always convincing) were found to accommodate it without diminishing Shiva's supremacy (MB 2018). Other faith groups, Buddhists and Jains, also felt unable to ignore it, and the results of some of their attempts to accommodate it to their own purposes will be explored in some detail below.

Dramatists too, such as Bhavabhūti, Murāri and Rājaśekhara, worked within the culture of their time, and respected the bare plot outline they had inherited, rearranging it where necessary (sometimes in startling ways) to meet the demands of their genre. But in an attempt to increase the tension of the now well-known narrative, they chose to portray their once mighty characters as the frequent butt of illusions and deceptions that no doubt amused their sophisticated court audiences but tended to recast the respected characters in an unflattering light; few of such innovations joined the tradition (MB 2020).

Many of the most valuable texts for tracing narrative development are visual; that is to say they are not presented verbally — in written or spoken words (JLB 2020; 2021). Carved sculptural friezes are fixed and relatively durable, so may convey information about dating and location that is more reliable, and often earlier, than manuscripts that have been much used and stored in conditions that make them an easy prey to climate and insect attack, and so have been repeatedly recopied (JLB 2018b). Exceptions are provided by manuscript paintings illustrating written texts, often (but not exclusively) of the so-called Vālmīki version of the *Rāmāyaṇa,* in a local recension (MB and JLB 2013; JLB 2018a; JLB 2019; JLB 2022); as costly and ostentatious works of art they have usually remained safe in the possession of the family of their patron until relatively recently.

The popularity of the old story was by no means confined to continental India; many of the earliest transcreations into a local vernacular, both Brahmanic and Buddhist in form, have been found in Central Asia, Tibet, and Southeast Asia. The existence of a thriving and creative Rāma tradition in Java is revealed by the *Rāmāyaṇa Kakawin* (OJ *Kakawin*; 2nd half of 9th or early 10th century), an Old Javanese rendering partly based on Bhaṭṭi's Sanskrit *Rāvaṇavadha* (6th–7th century), but also incorporating many unfamiliar elements; at much the same time, the

spectacular sculptural friezes at Prambanan depict a different Rāma story-line, largely Vālmīki-type,[4] whose source in Java has not yet been traced. The much more divergent *Hikayat Seri Rama* (written in Malay, a language widely current in medieval Java) seems to represent a flour-ishing independent local tradition.[5] Some effects of this change of locus will be mentioned later.[6]

Within India itself, transcreations of the traditional narrative contin-ued to be produced, but were often overshadowed by substantial tellings in the vernacular languages; this development meant that in the popular mind "the *Rāmāyaṇa*" came to mean "the story as told by Kampaṉ, or by Tulsīdās, or by Kṛttibās" or whoever wrote in the local vernacular; and these versions all show their own distinct characteristics; some are virtu-ally rewritings of an extant Sanskrit text,[7] others are more independent or more creative. When similar innovations occur at much the same date both in local vernacular and in mainstream Sanskrit texts, it can be an intriguing but almost insoluble problem to determine the direction, if any, of transmission; too often the possibility of individual creativity is dismissed in favour of undefined and ill-understood "folk tradition". Nonetheless, within or outside India, whether recognising their Indian roots or ignorant of them, all narrators retained at least a recognisable, indispensable, minimum of the original plotline.

So much material still awaits detailed analysis that this article can touch on only a few sample topics: firstly, the effect of various transcre-ations on our understanding of the character of Rāma himself and of the role of Sītā, and then on the transference of episodes between different faith groups.

## *Rāma*

The composer of this tale founded his original narrative on the warrior hero's fierce loyalty to his family (father and brothers), interwoven with his passion for Sītā — twin concepts that have remained constant

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[4]   For relatively accessible reproductions of these much-discussed reliefs, see Saran and Khanna 2004: 38-78.

[5]   A valuable detailed summary of the *HSR* is provided by Alexander Zieseniss (1928); see also Barrett 1963.

[6]   See pp. 30-31 and 41-42.

[7]   For instance, Eẓuttaccan's *Attiyātuma Rāmāyaṇa* follows the Sanskrit *AdhyRm* closely. On the other hand, the *ĀnRm* can more realistically be thought of as a vernacular *Rāmāyaṇa* composed in Sanskrit.

throughout the long life of the story; it is society that has changed, and necessitated revision of the way those concepts are realised.

The human Rāma was portrayed as a good warrior; he did what he had to do to achieve his aims. Soon, though, the good fighter came to be seen also as a good (*i.e.* moral) man, and some of his deeds raised uncomfortable ethical questions: for instance, should he, or should he not, have killed Vālin, or the female monster, Tāṭakā? Rāma's pragmatic behaviour in respect to Vālin in the earlier narrative is tacitly excused in the later First Book, the *Bālakāṇḍa*, when he is instructed to kill Tāṭakā by his sage-tutor Viśvāmitra (1,23.24—25.15).

A much more fundamental narrative element is Rāma's passion for Sītā, a passion repeatedly demonstrated by the *Vālmīkirāmāyaṇa* poets in overtly sexual imagery (*e.g. inter alia* 4,1 and 4,27). He loved and missed the comfort of his wife ('his dark darling'), and he was overjoyed at regaining her. In the Last Book, the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, this passion comes to the fore. How could the now Ideal King be expected to take Sītā back into his household — and into his bed — after she had lived with Rāvaṇa for so many months? Rāma has no qualms about fulfilling his long-thwarted desire with Sītā as soon after their return to Ayodhyā as his new duties permit, but when Sītā quickly becomes pregnant, he immediately realises with horror the consequences that will ensue: consequences for the dynasty when the legitimacy of any sons conceived would be questioned, and consequences for the good governance of society as a whole. He must renounce Sītā, but remain celibate himself. Such are the concerns of the first and seventh books of the *Vālmīkirāmāyaṇa*.

Eventually, perhaps as much as seven or eight centuries after the original hero's first appearance, a major change was introduced into the tradition, although there is hardly any trace of it in the *Vālmīkirāmāyaṇa* itself. The good man, the human Rāma, came to be presented as divine, first as an avatara of Vishnu, eventually as the god himself, as he remains to this day to many Indians. This change in nature was accompanied by a change in the purpose of his birth. Earthly concerns, such as the preservation of his father's integrity, and the rescue of Sītā, were no longer paramount. His real purpose was nothing less than to rid the three worlds of the devastating threat now posed by Rāvaṇa, a threat much aggravated by the *Uttarakāṇḍa* account of the *rākṣasa* rampage against the *devas* (*VRm* 7,1–29). When the hero of the tale about a villain who could only be defeated by a human was transcreated into a god, and the original heroic romance became transcreated into a cosmic epic, the transcreators faced formidable narrative problems.

Vālmīki's human Rāma, touched by the fate of the heroic bird Jaṭāyus, treated his corpse with all the honour due to a human warrior; his prayer that his martyred friend should reach the highest heaven clearly indicates his own subservience to some greater authority (*VRm* 3,64.29–35). Defeated enemies he simply dispatches to Yama's abode, although he does insist that Rāvaṇa's corpse should receive due respect from the *rākṣasa's* resentful brother Vibhīṣaṇa (*VRm* 6,99.42).

When the Rāma of medieval India had become not only divine, but benign, contact with him automatically conferred equal benefit on anyone, whether his worshippers or his opponents; even those he killed were no longer sent to Yama's abode, but to heaven. During the final battle, Rāvaṇa, of course, must continue to be killed, even in Jain versions: is this not a crucial part of the story?[8] Other defeated Jain *rākṣasa*s however benefit indirectly from Rāma's benevolence by being allowed to take initiation as Jains.[9] Even so, the exigencies of the radical Jain transcreation demand that the killing be carried out by Lakṣmaṇa, and that both victor and villain should go to hell as a result, where their enmity continues.[10] In the Khotanese Buddhist version, cast in the form of a Jātaka perhaps as early as the ninth century, retribution for Rāvaṇa's crimes is less savage, and more in tune with the purposes of its genre: Rāvaṇa is spared when he surrenders to the Bodhisattva, begs for his life, and promises tribute, learning to live according to *dharma* (Bailey 1940–42: 570–71).[11]

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[8]  In some of the more highly developed (not to say aberrant) versions less dependent on Indian norms, this necessity was not felt so strongly. Some Malay and Javanese tellings interpret Rāvaṇa's defeat in terms of an inverted form of the international motif of the departed culture hero still living beneath a mountain (Th 1955–58: A571.1), posing an ever-present threat to contemporary society (Malay *HSR* 1928: 57,59/1963: 92-93,95 and *HMR* 1933: 128-29; Javanese *Serat Kanda*: Stutterheim 1925: 79, Saran and Khanna 2004: 139). In the Sinhalese *Rāvaṇa Katāva* of perhaps the seventeenth century Rāvaṇa is not killed but lives on in the ruins of his old citadel (Henry 2023: 61-67 and 207-47).

[9]  *Inter alii* Indrajit and Kumbhakarṇa (V*PC* 1990: 75; Raviṣeṇa 2008: 78.14-34,81-82; 80.126-30,136-38); Rāma, Sītā and other members of the winning side also eventually take initiation.

[10]  Puṣpadanta, *Mahāpurāna*: Kulkarni 1990: 154-68; Hemacandra 1954: 10.245-61; Pampa 1882: 16.70. Gregory Clines points to the difficulty Jain adapters experienced in accommodating the personality attributed in the *VRm* to the kshatriya Lakṣmaṇa — impetuous, violent and quick to anger — to his Jain *vāsudeva* counterpart (Clines 2022: 98-100). The pull of the established narrative is too strong; Lakṣmaṇa's role can only be reworked to a limited extent, and he, like Rāvaṇa, must go to hell.

[11]  This Mahāyāna telling stands in stark contrast to the reworkings attached (often rather loosely) to Jātaka frameworks in Theravāda-influenced Southeast Asia, with their increased violence and harsh Rāma. For instance, in one Lao telling Rāvaṇa

But when the human Rāma was accorded divine status, tellers were faced with a great narrative problem: it had been known for centuries that Rāvaṇa could not be killed by a god, but only by a human. At first this difficulty was countered unsatisfactorily by claiming that Rāma the man did not know of his identity with Vishnu, but by the time of the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* (perhaps the fifteenth century) this pretence had been dropped altogether; not only Rāma, but all other characters, recognise him to be Vishnu in person. Rāvaṇa's motivation is in consequence completely changed: now he abducts Sītā solely in order to be killed by Rāma/Vishnu and reach the god's heaven (*AdhyRm* 1985: 6,10.56–61; 11.79–89); he actively seeks death by engaging Rāma in battle, provoking him with every semblance of hostility. The universe is safe, but Rāvaṇa is rewarded by union with Vishnu and the vengeful Rāma is now benevolent. Logic has never been paramount in the Rāma narrative, but it has no place at all in the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*.

This benevolent view of Rāma was not, however, universal: the view of Rāma transmitted and indigenised in Southeast Asian tellings long before the growth of his bhakti-influenced portrayal within India, is that of an authoritarian monarch, in no way benign, but quick-tempered and harsh, even towards Sītā and his greatest friends. Shocking though his behaviour may seem to us, we must recognise it as merely a different expression of his overmastering passion for his beloved Sītā (JLB and MB 2016b).

## Sītā

As for the Indian Sītā, the deification of Rāma entails profound and contradictory changes in her portrayal. As long as Rāma remains human in the *Vālmīkirāmāyaṇa* she remains either similarly human, Janaka's natural-born daughter, or his earth-born foundling, finally achieving her apotheosis when she is vindicated as pure and received back into the earth by her divine mother, Earth (*VRm* 7,88).[12]

In later adaptations she also becomes an epic goddess, Śrī or Lakṣmī, wife of Vishnu, with the paradox that her role now rarely achieves the prominence it enjoyed in the traditional heroic tale. The abduction episode is redundant. It cannot be discarded, but arguably the most

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is not only killed, but carried to hell, where he suffers for a long time (Sahai 1996: II,303).

12 In the few episodes where Rāma is identified with Vishnu, only at *VRm* 6,105.25 does Sītā appear as 'Lakṣmī'.

emotionally affecting component of the earlier tradition has been down-graded to become a mere pretext for the extermination of Rāvaṇa and other *rākṣasa*s. Early audiences heard her resistance to Rāvaṇa's threats and blandishments with a mixture of trepidation, admiration and relief, the more cynical amongst them wondering why her captor allowed her to escape his lust for so long; when later audiences now knew the outcome, and tension could no longer be maintained, they realised that Sītā's life and chastity could be preserved, not by her own efforts, but by the curses on Rāvaṇa of Nalakūbara and Vedavatī (*VRm* 7,17.1–28; 7,26.41–45). Vālmīki's stalwart Sītā now suffers without cause, for she is never in any real danger; indeed, her greatest danger is yet to come — from her beloved and devoted husband.

Sometimes Sītā does not even suffer at all: it is not she who is abduct-ed, but a specially created substitute. The episode where she enters fire after her rejection by Rāma, to be returned by Agni as a testimony to her purity (an episode arguably incorporated late into the narrative, but now firmly established in the tradition), provided a rare opportunity for tellers to consolidate the new narrative, by extending the fire-motif for-wards to just before the abduction.[13] Apparently, the earliest occurrence of this innovation is in a *Kūrma Purāṇa* passage praising the power of chaste women such as Sītā: seeing the disguised Rāvaṇa and realising what he intends, she turns to the household fire and prays to many gods for protection. In order to bring about the destruction of Rāvaṇa (rather than out of pity for the imperilled woman), Agni then creates an illusory Sītā for Rāvaṇa to abduct, and takes the real Sītā to safety within the fire, to be returned to Rāma after his victory, when the illusory Sītā enters the fire and is consumed by it.[14]

By about the fifteenth century this motif had been particularised, with Sītā specifically entrusted to or safeguarded by Agni in the *Brah-mavaivarta Purāṇa*, the *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa*, and the Malayāḷam version by Eẓuttaccan (*BVP* 1984–85: 2,14; *ĀnRm* 2006: 1,12.10; Eẓuttaccan vol. 1, p. 18). In several texts it is Rāma himself who instructs Sītā to avoid the danger from Rāvaṇa, warning that the predatory *rākṣasa* will approach her as a mendicant; she should avert the danger by creating a counterfeit of herself and hiding within fire in the hermitage for a year (*AdhyRm*

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[13]   As so often, it is not always possible to distinguish between material fire '*agni*' and the anthropomorphised deity Agni in the references, if indeed any distinction exists.

[14]   *KūP* 1981-82: 2,34.111-27 (7th-9th century), supported by allusions at *MBhāgP* 1983: 42.30 and the Orīya poet Baḷarāmadāsa's *Jagamohana Rāmāyaṇa* 3.15.1 (both from the 15th to 16th centuries). The *BVP* (1984-85: 2,14) and the *DBhāgP* (1988?: 9,16.31-48) follow the *KūP* in having Agni create the substitute. All datings of Purāṇic material should be treated as uncertain.

1985: 1,1.38; 2,1.39; 3,7.1–4; *ĀnRm* 2006: 1,7.104–15; Eẓuttaccan, *Aranya Kandam*). Whatever the details of the substitution, it is this *chāyā* Sītā who suffers the emotional and physical torments of the traditional abduction; more importantly, it is the substitute who incurs the pollution of Rāvaṇa's touch and the suspicion engendered by her lengthy imprisonment in the grounds of Rāvaṇa's palace.

Once Rāvaṇa is dead and the "real" Sītā is safe, the substitute is redundant; so, one would expect, is the so-called "fire ordeal" episode where Sītā's chastity had been vindicated to her suspicious husband, for now he has always known the truth. Skilful tellers are able to retain this high point in the narrative by linking the two features, with the substitute entering the fire, while it is the "real" Sītā who is restored by Agni (*BVP* 1984–85: 2,14; *DBhāgP* 1988?: 9,16.31–48). In the *Kūrma Purāṇa* the unfortunate substitute is burned, but a more merciful teller in the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* has her instructed by Rāma and Agni to practise asceticism in order to be reborn as Draupadī (*KūP* 1981–82: 2,34.129–37; *DBhāgP* 1988?: 9,16.49–53).

Several other ways are devised to prevent Rāvaṇa's touch polluting Sītā (in reality, to preserve Rāma from pollution by contact with a polluted wife). Kampaṉ, and the author of the Sanskrit *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, simply make the abductor lift the hut with Sītā in it, complete with a huge mound of earth.[15] In other cases, the disguised Rāvaṇa deceives Sītā into entering his chariot voluntarily. This motif is used by tellers both of the Hindu and the Jain (Vimalasūri-based) narrative structure, and dramatised hilariously by Śaktibhadra (*NarSP* 49.81–86; *BṛDhP* 19.49; Guṇabhadra 1990: 117–28; Puṣpadanta 1990: 154–68; Śaktibhadra 1984: III, 32–33).

The *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa* has an even more creative deception that strips Rāma as well as Sītā of all emotional reaction to their separation, endured after both the abduction and her later banishment. In the first case, Rāma instructs her to transform herself into the three *guṇas*. As *rajoguṇī* she enters fire for protection. As *tamoguṇī* she remains in Pañcavaṭī to ask for the deer, and to delude Rāvaṇa into abducting her (*ĀnRm* 2006: 1,7.67–68+89–90; 4,3.52–54). Astonishingly, as *sattvaguṇī* she resides in Rāma's left limbs, so that he is never deprived of her presence; during the monsoon delay, the *sattvaguṇī* is once discovered by Lakṣmaṇa in company with Rāma, disappearing hurriedly back into her husband's left side in a way that it is hard not to characterise as farcical

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[15] Kampaṉ 1988: *paṭala* 8, 74/3490, 75/3491, 81/3497, 91/3507 [pp. 231-35]; Kampaṉ 1996: p. 247, recollected by Sītā to Hanumān at pp. 389 and 432; *AdhyRm* 1985: 3,7.51-52.

(*ĀnRm* 2006: 1,8.74–75). After vindication by Agni, the now redundant three forms reunite, preserving the narratively unnecessary fire-episode more-or-less intact, both to reassure the fictive audience of Sītā's virtue, and not to deprive the real audience of an element they consider indispensable to the tradition (*ĀnRm* 2006: 1,12.11). Even more shockingly, before the pregnant Sītā is subsequently banished from Ayodhyā, she is again instructed by Rāma to transform herself into two *guṇas*, so that one may remain in his left side; Rāma, uxorious but monogamous, confesses that he lacks sufficient self-control to remain celibate during the five-years-long absence prescribed for her pregnancy and nursing period (*ĀnRm* 2006: 5,2.33—3.7–50). In this respect, the moral fibre of the god seems more human and less awe-inspiring than that of the former man. Yet the incongruous luxury with which he arranges that Sītā shall spend her stay in Vālmīki's hermitage can surely be scant compensation for the exposure of his beloved wife to the gossip of a washerman and the lies of the still-malicious Kaikeyī, to which he allows her to be publicly subjected; but these calumnies have become elements of the tradition, not lightly to be discarded.

Rāma had attracted much sympathy through previous centuries for his devastating grief, and exuberant poets had exercised their talents on portraying his sorrow and despair. Is all this to be wasted now that he *knows* his beloved is safe — crucially now both safe and chaste? Rāma the god still needs a plausible excuse to pursue Rāvaṇa and exterminate the *rākṣasas*, so he continues to lament the fictitious abduction; in the changed religious climate, it is now even more important for him to be protected from the possibility of the contamination that he will incur if he accepts back a wife whose purity is open to suspicion. So he is made to continue to lament, and to continue to persecute his poor wife.

This attitude also affects his relationship to his brothers. When the human Rāma was transcreated into the Hindu God Vishnu, the family structure of the inherited narrative — four Dāśarathis, two almost equal in status, each with a supporter equal in prowess but subordinate in status — was maintained, but could be accommodated to the new circumstances in theory only. Vishnu is repeatedly said to assume a fourfold incarnation as Daśaratha's son, but parity of esteem between the four quarters is absent: Lakṣmaṇa is not taken into Rāma's confidence about the substitute Sītā or about the three-*guṇa* Sītā. But what can readers and audiences think of a man who leads an army of voluntary supporters, including his trusting younger brother, through the rigours and terrors of a war, on a false pretext? The integrity on which his whole life as a

man had been based has in these cases been replaced by cold-hearted deception now that Rāma is God and has a cosmic mission to fulfil.[16]

Other faith groups, not bound by the constraints of the Hindu setting, feel able to present a different view of the brothers' relationship. In the ninth-century Buddhist Khotanese Jātaka, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa act as a joint incarnation of the Buddha, even to sharing a polyandrous relationship with Sītā (Bailey 1940–42: 564, 571; Emmerick 2000). Most Jain tellers, following the tradition set by Vimalasūri, attempt to reverse the brothers' status, making Lakṣmaṇa take the lead, but rightly baulk at the idea of transcreating him into the husband of Sītā.

Outside the domestic context of the bedtime story, we know by name of only two women transmitters of the narrative, Mollā and Candrāvatī.[17] Yet the female perspective is not missing, and Rāma's martial image suffers badly in a few shakta-influenced works, where the conqueror of Rāvaṇa is powerless before a new, even more fearsome ally; the situation poses no problem: Sītā fights and kills this new enemy (*ĀnRm* 2006: 7,4—6; *Adbhuta Rm* 2001: 23; *JaiBh* 2017: II, 44—47). On the more personal level, in the Kashmiri version by Prakāśa Rāma, it is Sītā the wronged wife who assumes considerably greater moral stature and greater power than her husband when she refuses to return to court at Ayodhyā after he has banished her; the Lord of All the Earth is reduced to banging at the locked door of her forest hermitage, pleading with her to let him in (Prakāśa Rāma 2001: 131–37).[18] Light-hearted dramatists, secure in their court patronage, had evidently had no compunction about attributing a gullible nature to Rāma as he is repeatedly deluded by ludicrous counterfeits conjured up by his enemies. But the Rāma, humbled and humanised by the wife he still passionately desires in such an unexpected, yet realistic, reversal of fortunes, presented in a narrative largely based on devotional hymns, reflects a much more serious development.

## *Transference of Episodes*

Dividing the material relating to the still developing Rāma story according to genre, language, or especially religion, is a helpful way of starting

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[16]  Problems associated with this change of genre are discussed more fully in MB 2023.
[17]  Mollā in Telugu and Candrāvatī in Bengali (Dev Sen 1997; Candrāvatī 2013).
[18]  Adrian Plau demonstrates the development of Sītā's independent nature in Jain narratives (Plau 2020). The theme of her post-banishment independence is widely and vigorously developed in many of the SE Asian tellings.

to handle its complexity, but is a process continually impeded by a great deal of overlap between the categories. On the other hand, elements of the narrative shared and developed by different faith groups can reveal much about the fluid boundaries between these groups; it may be that we should think more in terms of geography.[19] Again, we can focus on only two sample occurrences, one found in Buddhist transcreations, the other in Jain.[20]

Buddhists clearly welcomed the Rāma story; within India and Sri Lanka narrators such as Aśvaghoṣa and the creator of the *Lalitavastara* drew freely on it to elaborate Siddhārtha's early life (Aśvaghoṣa, *Buddhacarita* 2008; *Lalitavistara* 1884–92); individual episodes are used in much-modified form as exempla in the Jātakas.[21] A particularly striking case is the story of the ascetic boy shot by Daśaratha in the *Vālmīkirāmāyaṇa*, which develops its own identity in Buddhist sources as the *Sāma* or *Śyāma Jātaka*. Closely related textually, these tales yet diverge fundamentally in purport and outcome, and were developed independently in inverted form.[22] Nonetheless, one detail (absent, significantly, in the context of transcreation, from the original form in both traditions) indicates the strength of the relationship, in Buddhist, Hindu, and secular practice up to the present day. That detail is the idea that the boy carried his parents in baskets suspended from a shoulder pole, on a pilgrimage. Just how or when this episode entered the narrative is not absolutely clear, but it seems likely that it is the visual realisation of a remark in a Buddhist verbal narrative that when the family were on the move the boy helped his frail, blind parents through difficult terrain, seen painted in its Buddhist form at Ajaṇṭā.[23] This *Sāmajātaka*

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[19]   For information on Jain treatments of the Rāma story in Karnataka, see Kumari 1992.

[20]   The many further examples of episodes developed both in Brahmanic and in Jain traditions that would repay investigation include:
Rāma contributing to the abduction by welcoming the disguised Rāvaṇa to their hermitage before leaving Sītā in his charge.
Sītā being deceived by her abductor into entering his chariot unpolluted by his touch.
Jaṭāyus being sent to heaven by Rāma.
Sītā being tricked into portraying a likeness of Rāvaṇa, inciting Rāma to banish her. Mandodarī's startlingly complex career, comprising, in different narratives, transformation from a frog or toad; her featuring in the familiar international motif of the husband tricked into unintentionally giving his wife away as a reward for her suitor's music; her many husbands (Shiva, Daśaratha, and Vālin, besides Rāvaṇa), and consequential fantastic mothering of Sītā, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Śatrughna and Aṅgada in addition to her *rākṣasa* sons.

[21]   *Jātakas* 1895-1907: e.g. *DasarathaJ* 461; *JayadissaJ* 513; *SambulāJ* 519; *VessantaraJ* 547.

[22]   Occurrences listed and examined in detail at MB 2010.

[23]   Verbal text: Haribhaṭṭa 1976. Ajaṇṭā wall painting, Cave 17 (last quarter 5th century AD): line drawing in Schlingloff 2011: 1,146 and 3, fig. XVII.28.5.

innovation was soon adopted back into the Rāma story, where it became firmly embedded as an example of filial piety, found in verbal texts from the *Gautamīmāhātmya* (*BrP* 123.44) onwards, in narrative friezes, and in paintings (fully explained at MB 2010). In some areas the boy now has a moral status equivalent to that of Rāma himself, if not surpassing it, as at the Swaminarayan Temple at Neasden, in London.

Reverence for the pious boy carrying his parents is not limited to adherents of either faith. A man born in Mumbai confessed to me that as a child he had disliked this tale, assuming that his parents expected him to imitate the boy's example; he is a Parsee. Similarly, a roadside poster photographed in 2010 in Gujarat exhorting all people to care for their parents reinforces the point with an illustration of the boy with the shoulder pole (JLB and MB 2010: 52, fig.6).

No full-scale Buddhist *Rāmāyaṇa* is known from within South Asia, but versions of the Rāma story have been carried to Central Asia and to Tibet, and received with great enthusiasm throughout most of SE Asia, often in Buddhist form. Clearly, little difficulty was found in accommodating the avatara concept to that of the Bodhisattva. As it became indigenised and the link with India was largely lost, narrators were no longer subject to audience understanding and expectation as operating within India; the storyline diverged in all but the bare essentials more widely (and more wildly) the further it was carried from India (JLB and MB 2016b).

## The Role of Jain Transcreations

The most startling of the pre-modern transcreations, and the most relevant to this volume, is the series set in train by the Jain Vimalasūri. Within India, by contrast to the Buddhists, Jains had felt forced to adopt a much more radical policy to combat the growing popularity of the Brahmanic versions; they produced completely rewritten versions that mostly bear only minimal resemblance to the Vālmīki plotline. Yet developments within the Hindu narrative tradition indicate a considerable degree of interplay between the two faith groups at the popular level.

The most prominent example is the portrayal of Śambūka, the shudra ascetic beheaded by Vālmīki's Rāma for disregarding the restrictions of his varna. It first appeared in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, the final section of the Rāma narrative then current, where the duties and problems of a human

sovereign intent on serving the interests of his people are explored.[24] By the time the group of versions we now regard as 'the *Vālmīkirāmāyaṇa*' was completed, Rāma was considered divine, but the transcreation of king into god can be detected in only a few widely-separated passages dispersed throughout the text.[25] The narrative of the majority of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, in common with the rest of the text, retained its kshatriya ethos, but the popular conviction identifying Rāma with Vishnu that now overlay the whole story led to several of Rāma's actions as king being misinterpreted and judged unduly harsh. The execution of Śambūka became unpopular, and where it was retained it was modified in accordance with the later idea of death at Rāma's hands granting the victim immediate access to heaven (e.g. Bhavabhūti 2007: II, 70–93; Kālidāsa 1928/2016: 15.53; *ĀnRm* 2006: 7,10.50–122). The episode is omitted in this form from the Jain transcreations, to be replaced by an ascetic of the same name, similarly beheaded while performing penance.[26]

Superficially, little seems to link the two victims. The Jain Śambūka is a *rākṣasa,* son of Śūrpaṇakhā, the power he seeks is temporal, not spiritual, and his death is not a judicial execution but an accident; his careless assailant is not Rāma, but Lakṣmaṇa (unsurprisingly, since it is he who fulfils the lead role in many of the Jain adaptations). The very incongruities and divergences of the two narratives, coupled with the obvious contradictions of theological attitude displayed, raise the suspicion that the Jain version is indeed intended to mimic the Vaishnava. The episode has been moved from close to the climax of the Brahmanic story to a prominent position in the centre of the Jain, in a clear attempt to replace the mutilation of Śūrpaṇakhā as the motivation for revenge and pivot for the abduction and its consequences. In its full form the distasteful mutilation episode does not feature in the Jain transcreations based on Vimalasūri's *Paümacariya*,[27] although hints do

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[24]　*VRm* 7,64-67. Śambūka's development is rigorously studied by Aaron Sherraden (2019); We are grateful to the author for a copy of his work. See also De Clercq 2016a.

[25]　Notably *VRm* 1,14—16; 6,47.104-15; 6,105; 7,27.16-19; 7,94-100. The identity may perhaps (but not necessarily) also lie behind the narrative at 1,73—75, where Rāma defeats Vishnu's previous avatara, Rāma Jāmadagnya (later better known as 'Paraśurāma'), thereby taking over his opponent's status.

[26]　Nevertheless, all memory of the original episode was not lost; Svayambhūdeva presents a much modified analogue of its starting point, with none of the objectionable consequences of varna status or miraculous resurrection, when a faithful servant of Rāma takes to asceticism on the death of his son (2002: 85.4-6; the relevant point in the narrative has not yet been reached by De Clercq in her ongoing translation, 2018—23).

[27]　There are also instances in Saṅghadāsa's *Vasudevahiṇḍi* 1990: 1,14 (mutilated by Rāma), dated by Esposito (2012: 20n.1) and by Dundas (personal communication,

remain; nevertheless, her role as ultimate instigator of the abduction is not completely abandoned.[28] The unfortunate ascetic is now made to be her son; to motivate the intermediate episode of Khara's vengeful attack on the culprit, he is frequently son also of Khara, traditionally her brother, but now her husband (*VPC* 44; Raviṣeṇa 44.1–24; Hemacandra 1954: 5.411–60), so the whole family relationship is regularly modified, and the opportunity to compose a romantic back story of the marriage exploited by Jains from Vimalasūri onwards. Where some hints of the mutilation remain in the narrative,[29] the lust for Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa that traditionally precipitates it is not only narratively redundant but an incongruous immediate sequel to her grief for her son.

What is particularly striking about this episode is the frequency with which it has been incorporated from the Jain transcreations into texts of the Hindu narrative tradition, verbal and visual, mostly vernacular, composed in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra, Orissa, and Gujarat — areas of strong Jain influence,[30] and also in several Southeast Asian versions.[31] Ironically, so firmly established had the Jain-type Śambūka episode become in these non-Jain sources that the idiosyncratic Sanskrit *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa* includes both the Hindu and the Jain forms of the episodes.[32] It seems that theological differences can easily be ignored in the interests of a good story.

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2nd August, 2012) to about the 5th century. The motif also appears in Hariṣeṇa's *Bṛhatkathākośa* 1990 (mid 10th century); both texts follow the *VRm* more closely than does Vimalasūri, and are recognised as having established divergent traditions (JLB and MB 2016a: 165).

[28] She is given a new, but still important, role at this point in the creative remodellings by Guṇabhadra and Puṣpadanta (Kulkarni 1990: 117-28 and 154-68 respectively).

[29] At *VPC* (44), followed by Raviṣeṇa (44.18-21), she is made to claim — untruthfully — that she has been molested by Lakṣmaṇa; Svayambhūdeva presents the lie more credibly by making her scratch her own breasts (2023: 37.3-7).

[30] Vernacular versions that basically retain the Jain narrative structure derived from Vimalasūri include those by Abhinava Pampa (1882, Kannaḍa) and Bālak (Plau 2018, Brajbhāṣā). Versions based on the *VRm* yet incorporating the Jain Śambūka episode include the *ĀnRm* (2006, Sanskrit); the *Raṅganātha Rm* and the *Bhāskara Rm* (2001 and 1988 respectively, Telugu); Narahari's *Torave Rm* and Battaleśvara's *Kauśika Rm* (2004 and 1980 respectively, Kannaḍa); Eknāth's *Bhāvārtha Rm* (2019, Marāṭhī); and the *Mahābhārata* by Śaraḷa Dāsa (Sherraden 2019: 150, Orīya).

[31] *Serat Kanda* (Javanese), *HMR* and *HSR* (Malay), and *Rāmakien* (Thai); significantly for the transmission of these Southeast Asian derivatives, none of them utilises a Jain narrative structure.

[32] *ĀnRm* 2006: 1,7 and 7,10 respectively. The Marāṭhī poet Eknāth included the Jain-type Śambūka episode in his uncompleted *Bhāvārtha Rm*; after his death his grandson Mukteśvar added an *Uttarakāṇḍa* containing a traditional *VRm*-type episode (Sherraden 2019: 135-38).

Mention has already been made of the value of sculptural friezes for information about the reception of the underlying verbal text at particular dates. A listing by JLB of Hindu temple friezes 40 pages long contains not one example of the sensitive issue of Rāma's execution of the shudra.[33] What is found, on at least nine Hindu temples and on one well, in friezes generally presenting the traditional Rāma narrative, is panels depicting the Jain-type Śambūka.[34] The one at the Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa temple, Hosahoḷalu, shows Śūrpaṇakhā reacting in horror at discovering his headless corpse before she is disfigured by Lakṣmaṇa, and one found at the Amṛteśvara temple, Amṛtapura, incorporates into the mutilation scene the tiny figure of an ascetic. Another, at the Rāmacandra temple, Vijayanagara, is more puzzling: it shows Lakṣmaṇa decapitating two ascetics in a hut (a location robbing the episode of all suggestion that the killing could have been an unfortunate accident) followed by Śūrpaṇakhā's wild grief (Dallapiccola and others 1992: 88, block 27, figs 83–84). The panel may possibly point to some relationship with the only written accounts we have met where Śambūka has a brother (Raviṣeṇa's, Hemacandra's and Pampa's); this brother, Sunda, however takes no part in Śambūka's ascetic practices. Late in the nineteenth century, the Gujarātī writer Girdhar also places the victim — with no mention of a brother — in a 'bamboo hut' (Girdhar 2003: 143–49).

## *Vimalasūri and the* Vālmīkirāmāyaṇa: *Cross-Fertilisation and Dating*

The amount of interplay between the later Brahmanic and Jain traditions revealed by these and other examples raises pertinent questions about the extent — and indeed the direction — of the original transcreative process. When did Vimalasūri undertake to reveal the 'correct' form of the *VRm*, now 'corrupt' according to Jain belief (*VPC cantos* 2—3)? And what was the nature and content of his Brahmanic exemplar at that date?

The date of Vimalasūri has long been a matter for debate among Jain scholars, with suggestions put forward of first, second, third and fifth

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[33] See in our ORA material: 'Ancillary material' > 'Further notes (visual)' > 'Sculptural representations – listing'. See also Dallapiccola 2016a: 97-101 on wall-paintings and hangings in South India.

[34] Hoysaḷa temples at Bēlūr, Haḷebīd, Basarāḷu, Hosahoḷalu, Jāvagallu, Somnāthpur and Amṛtapura; Vijayanagara-style temples at Puṣpagiri and the Rāmacandra temple at Vijayanagara; well no. 1, Sirivāḷ.

century A.D. The dating of the *VRm* is similarly unclear:[35] while we can contribute no evidence that can be considered 'hard' for dating its later parts, in our opinion it is fair to suggest that the *Uttarakāṇḍa* had reached its current form no earlier than about the third century.

As a contribution to both debates, we propose that episodes shared by these traditions demonstrate incontrovertibly that Vimalasūri's work drew — not merely on the *VRm,* rather than *vice versa* — but on arguably its very latest parts, including the long passage now inserted at the beginning of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* narrative, where Agastya fills out many details of Rāvaṇa's and Hanumān's early exploits (*VRm* 7,1—34). This passage may be as late as the fourth century, and, unlike almost all other parts of the *VRm*, it is permeated by the assumption that Rāma is an avatara of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa;[36] this may be the factor that finally prompted the Jain religious tradition to produce their own counter-blast to a narrative that had already been in circulation for at least nine hundred years.

To allow for a reasonable period of transition, the *VPC* can therefore hardly be earlier than the fourth century, or even as late as the fifth. Such a date would also reduce the puzzling gap between Vimalasūri and his own seventh-century adapter, Raviṣeṇa.

A few examples of the many episodes transcreated from the *Uttarakāṇḍa* should demonstrate the process. Vimalasūri is careful not to present Rāvaṇa as a moral or as a physical failure: when he meets Arjuna Sahasrabāhu the humiliating outcome is reversed and Rāvaṇa is the victor, although the narrative outline is similar (*VRm* 7,32—33; *VPC* 100). The episode where Agastya's arrogant *rākṣasa* king is defeated by Shiva when he tries to move Kailāsa is recomposed to remove the god's participation; his part is played by Vālin, who no longer persecutes Sugrīva but is given a positive role as a devout Jain (*VRm* 7,16; *VPC* 9). The Indra/Ahalyā/Gautama encounter has to be completely remodelled to demote both the deva and the sage: the episode is not based on the *Bālakāṇḍa* version, but is a remodelling of Agastya's *Uttara* reconstruction, where Ahalyā has been created as a paragon of beauty by Brahma, and the offence of the thwarted suitor is a humiliating physical attack on the lawful husband (*VRm* 1,47.14–32; *VRm* 7,30.21–27; *VPC* 13).

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[35] Discussion of the issues involved is planned for ORA 'New Beginnings, Old Material', ch. 4.

[36] Ironically, Vimalasūri's efforts to eliminate as far as possible all references to Brahmanic ascetics such as Agastya led him to excise the whole framework of these episodes. The episodes themselves are dispersed throughout his text; for locations see ORA 'Narrative Elements' *sv* 'Rāvaṇa: early exploits' or 'Hanumān'.

Hanumān, also magnified in Agastya's narrative, is another *Rāmāyaṇa* hero to attract Vimalasūri's attention. He is evidently already too high in popular esteem to be demoted, so his role receives a romantic new, and moral, birth-story. His sexuality is mentioned, although it is not stressed in either base text; only later does his celibacy become an issue in the Brahmanic *Rāmāyaṇa* (*VRm* 7,35—36; *VPC* 16—17, 50; *VPC* 19, *VPC* 52).[37] Such transformations are an integral part of Vimalasūri's purpose.

Other modifications are utilised to serve different purposes. When a twin brother for Sītā, with a highly complex back story, is inserted, Vimalasūri seizes the opportunity to include a *svayaṃvara* determined when Rāma, unnecessarily, wins a bow-test: Janaka had already promised Sītā to him as a reward for his aid in battle, replacing the *Bālakāṇḍa* version. Evidently the bow motif, with no Brahmanic connotations, was now too popular to be lost (*VRm* 1,65—66; *VPC* 27—28).

Not all modifications are so easy to explain. In the *Uttarakāṇḍa* account of the rejection and exoneration of Sītā, the crucial factor is the legitimacy or otherwise of her sons; only if she is demonstrably pure can they inherit their father's kingdom. At this point in the development of the narrative, we are encouraged to think only of the appealing innocence of the sweet little boys, learned from their pious foster-father Vālmīki, whose word alone can confirm the truth to Rāma; their recognition presents a romantic, even saccharine emphasis, followed by Kālidāsa in the fourth or fifth century (*VRm* 7,84—86, reworked slightly at *VRm* 1,4; *Raghuvaṃśa* 15.33). By the early eighth century a more realistic approach is taken by Bhavabhūti in his *Uttararāmacarita*, clearly sensing that the *VRm's* dear little twins would have little chance of matching Rāma's example of sovereignty without some martial training. Throughout the subsequent Rāma tradition the motif of recognition by valour — that only Rāma's sons could be capable of defeating Rāma himself in battle — assumes increasing precedence, with the recognition by singing motif retained only sporadically.

Several centuries before Bhavabhūti, Vimalasūri had introduced a similar innovation into the Jain tradition: Rāma's sons, brought up to a kshatriya lifestyle in a Jain king's palace, are aggressive and eventually resentful. To some extent this new characterisation was inevitable, as he made every effort to reduce the role of Brahmanic sages in his anti-*VRm* reconstruction; Vālmīki and the hardships of the ascetic life were eliminated, and Sītā was given comfortable refuge by king Vajrajaṅgha

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[37]  In the late 18th-century Thai Ramakien, by contrast, Hanumān is famed for his promiscuity.

to bring up her sons in his capital, in a context where recognition and acceptance through the singing of the *VRm* was inconceivable. The grown boys had married and conquered many lands before being incited by the ever-mischievous Nārada to make war on Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, which they do in spectacular fashion, proving their identity by their ability to slaughter (*VPC* 9799).

Whether this one motif could be an example of very early back-formation, with Vimalasūri's 'corrected' Jain transcreation then being 're-corrected' and incorporated into the still-existent post-Vālmīki tradition, is far too easy a supposition to be in any way plausible in the absence of credible evidence. We can only suggest that, in this one case, Vimalasūri has created a kshatriya narrative more in line with the original concept of the *VRm* than did its *Uttarakāṇḍa* continuator.

The Jain transcreation may however throw some light on a much more involved episode (or set of episodes) too complex to be fully unravelled here, concerning the ending of the *VRm* at several different points in its structural development.[38] Hints can be detected, though not completely confirmed, that the earliest form preserved in the *VRm* for the vindication of Sītā's conduct in captivity was some oral proclamation by the gods,[39] recalled by Rāma at 7,44.6–8. This form of vindication would still have contributed to a satisfying emotionally and dramatic conclusion to the whole *VRm* as it then existed. Once the core text detailing Sītā's banishment and vindication by Vālmīki was added in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* and before the much later creation of Rāma's final triumphant return to heaven as an avatara of Vishnu (*VRm* 7,97—100), his unquestioning acceptance of his sons' legitimacy, and his grief at Sītā's unyielding disappearance into the care of her mother Earth, would have formed an equally dramatic and emotionally appropriate further reversal of expectations to complete this new transcreation (*VRm* 7,87—89). At a later point still, Sītā's *Yuddhakāṇḍa* vindication was then overlaid by her fire-suicide and return by Agni, unblemished in character and body (6,104; 106), followed even later by the divinisation of both Rāma and Sītā at *VRm* 6,105.

Vimalasūri's treatment bears striking analogies to this putative reconstruction. After the defeat of Rāvaṇa, Sītā's purity receives divine attestation, and the loving couple are joyfully reunited; but after they return to Ayodhyā, Rāma becomes suspicious and banishes her, eventually agreeing to accept her back on condition of a public fire-demonstration of her

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[38]   See ORA 'New Beginnings, Old Material', ch.4 (in preparation).
[39]   See ORA 'New Beginnings ...', ch.2 'Evidence from the *Rāmopākhyāna*', p.17.

chastity. Sītā reproaches Rāma but submits to the condition, although he cannot bring himself to meet her face to face; Sītā enters the fire, her innocence confirmed when the fire is transformed into its opposite state, water, but she remains naturally resentful, refuses the now-repentant Rāma's offer of reconciliation, and takes Jain initiation (*VPC* 76, 94, 101—2).

The direction of supposed borrowing can still not be specified incontrovertibly; arguably, Vālmīki's purification by fire could have been transcreated from Vimalasūri's, or *vice versa*. In opposition to the proposal that this is a case of the former process, we can only offer the suggestion that the Jain attempted vindication by water is a rather clumsy rebuttal of the smear on Sītā's virtue — indeed a parody — of the impressive declaration appropriately pronounced by the God of Fire, in answer to Sītā's prayer as she enters the flames at 6,104.24; but this is a value judgement, and research into the details of transmission are unlikely ever to be able to prove how much Vimalasūri or Saṅghadāsa actually did know of the *VRm* text now presented in the Critical Edition when they committed themselves to minimising any such divine participation in the action.

## The Transcreation Process: Value and Values

The value of studying the transcreation process has been to reveal scanty but significant evidence enabling us to give clearer definition to the relationship between the seminal Jain authors, Saṅghadāsa and Vimalasūri (see n. 27), and the latest episodes incorporated into the *VRm*. By doing so, it has defined the parameters of dating both narrative traditions more clearly.

Throughout the two and a half thousand years since the outline of the Rāma story was laid out so carefully, new elements have continued to be freely incorporated. Generations of tellers have accommodated their narratives to newly prevalent mores, to new genres, and to the demands of new media of presentation, however clumsily implemented and incompatible with the received narrative they might be. Yet these transcreators have always been faced with one unavoidable constraint: the basic form of the story, however much it may have been submerged by later accretions, could not be altogether lost. 'Good' must triumph over 'evil'; Sītā must still be abducted; Rāvaṇa must be defeated. So why should so many new tellers continue to bother with creating their own versions? This simple tale of the triumph of 'good' over 'evil' must

have been considered a very good story, to continue to exert such an irresistible pull on narrators and audiences alike.

 But that very simplicity of structure and purpose is a trap: the concept of transcreation is not a licence to distort. Rāma's nature can be changed; Rāvaṇa's moral status may be raised; to develop Sītā's submissive role out of all recognition is allowable; but the traditional, universal definition of 'good' and 'evil' must not be perverted; if it is reduced to nothing more than 'our side' versus 'your side', the hero will no longer be Rāma. Whether or not this danger applies also to transcreations of other ancient texts is beyond the competence of the authors of this article to determine.

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