

"I like Sita best because she is beautiful and brave. The whole story is very exciting and full of adventure." Samira, 11



RAMAYANA

Rama is the embodiment of righteousness, honour and valour – the perfect man and the ideal king of Kosala.

Rama's stepmother Kaikeyi longs to see her son Bharata crowned king, and persuades King Dasaratha that Rama, the rightful heir, should be sent into exile for fourteen years. Rama's beautiful and devoted wife Sita, and Lakshmana his inseparable half-brother, both choose to accompany him.

Rama, Sita and Lakshmana live happily in the forest until the demon king Ravana is told by his sister that Sita is the most beautiful princess in the world. He decides to kidnap her, and lures her away to his kingdom in the south. Rama and Lakshmana must rescue Sita, and call on the great monkey army, led by the warrior Hanuman, to help them find her.

Rama uses his time in exile to learn the true meaning of devotion and loyalty, but will the lessons earn him the reward he deserves?



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Valmiki

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Retold by Prema Jayakumar
Illustrated by K. R. Raji



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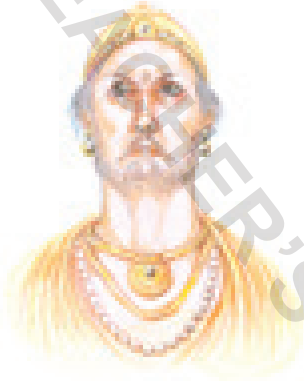
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THE CHARACTERS



Dasaratha

The virtuous but sorrowing king of Kosala wanted sons and heirs, so why does he agree to banish his beloved eldest son Rama to the forest?

Kaikeyi

King Dasaratha's favourite wife has helped him fight many battles. Why does she now demand exile for Rama, and the kingdom for her son Bharata?



Rama

Beloved of the people of his kingdom, Prince Rama embodies virtue in human form, yet he has to face exile and the loss of his wife Sita. How can fate be so cruel?



Sita

A beautiful princess, Sita marries Prince Rama and accompanies him in exile to the forest. Must her faithfulness be rewarded by abduction and torment?



Ravana

The brave and powerful 'demon king' of Lanka. What prompts him to kidnap Sita, and so bring about his own death and the downfall of his kingdom?



Lakshmana

Rama's devoted younger brother accompanies Rama and Sita in their exile. Will he defeat heroic Indrajit in the final battle?



Hanuman

Hanuman is the embodiment of valour, devotion and loyalty. Will he be able to find Sita, hidden in the vastness of Lanka?





RAMAYANA

Kosala, ruled by King Dasaratha, was a peaceful and prosperous kingdom in the north of India. There was no city on earth like its capital, Ayodhya, where justice, wealth, virtue and happiness abounded. King Dasaratha had three wives – Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra – all regal and graceful in bearing. Yet a shroud of melancholy hung over the royal household, for the king and his wives had no sons. Dasaratha did not have an heir.

‘Perform a special yagna to please the gods, Dasaratha,’ advised the royal counsellor, ‘and you will be blessed with gallant sons.’ The sacred fire was lit, and the yagna began. The flames leapt high and the chanting grew louder, smoky fragrance filling the air.

The gods in heaven assembled to watch and bless the king. His request for sons was worthy, but their minds were elsewhere.

From the fortress city of Lanka far to the south of Kosala, the 'demon king' Ravana threatened the peace and safety of the whole earth.

The gods went to Lord Brahma, the creator of the universe, to seek his divine help. 'Save us from the evil Ravana and his divinely-granted powers. No god or demon can slay this fiend.'



Brahma replied, 'Maybe he cannot be slain by god or demon, but vain Ravana has no protection from mere mortals. He can be slain by a man. We will seek help from Lord Vishnu, the preserver of the universe.'

Vishnu agreed that it was time to intervene to rid the earth of this demon, and decided that – as his seventh avatar – he would be born to King Dasaratha and his wife Kausalya. As their son Lord Rama, his life's work would be to destroy evil and restore dharma.



In Ayodhya the yagna came to an end. The gods were pleased and blessed Dasaratha with four sons. Kausalya gave birth to Rama. Kaikeyi, whom Dasaratha favoured most, gave birth to Bharata. Sumitra gave birth to twins, Lakshmana and Satrugna.

Back in time

Ramayana and *Mahabharata* are the two epics that united India long ago, when geographically the country was divided into small kingdoms. The influence of *Ramayana* is immense – even the kings of Cambodia were named Rama I, Rama II and so on, and its capital was called Ayuthya. The Hindu dancers of Bali in Indonesia still dance the story of Rama and Sita today.

Ramayana is considered the first poem in Sanskrit, and the sage Valmiki who wrote it the first poet. The date of the poem is rather uncertain, though it has been placed tentatively between 500 and 100 BCE. It is composed in very simple yet beautiful language, using the simplest of Sanskrit metres.

Hindus believe that Lord Vishnu will descend on earth as ten avatars to destroy evil and preserve dharma. He has assumed nine avatars so far, Lord Rama being the seventh. The tenth is yet to come.

The hero and anti-hero in this story are very interesting. Rama is the embodiment of virtue, but his decisions often cause sorrow even to those dear to him. Ravana, the demon king who is the villain, is not painted solely in dark colours. He is valiant, facing certain death with fortitude and even heroism. His courage and devotion greatly pleased the gods, Lord Brahma and Lord Siva.

Major places and festivals

- Ayodhya, in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, is believed to be the birthplace of Lord Rama. Temples dedicated to Lord Rama, Lakshmana, Sita and Hanuman have existed here for many centuries.
- The Rama Setu or 'Rama's Bridge', a chain of low islands in the Indian Ocean between India and Sri Lanka, is believed by many to be the bridge built by the monkey army to reach Lanka to rescue Sita. Geologists believe it to be the remains of an ancient land connection.