



## Forests and Trees of Scriptures: An Intersection in the Ramayana

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### Abstract

*This paper seeks to embrace how the forests and trees educationally play a pivotal role to shape the life of both the wild and the civilized ones. They are related to each other, though separately counted and evaluated in their life span. The beauties of the forests and trees are praised everywhere, as a hub for teaching and learning concept. They are alike to be a quiet form of teacher and pupil. And they serve them being as an abode of thoughts in both sadness and happiness. The place of the forests and the trees is highly important for the sustainable development of human beings. This tale and its essence are significant for us. There are lives life-stories in the scriptures like the Ramayana. No wildwoods, no life or a life-story. It is for this reason that the role of trees and forests is glorified since the time immemorial. Simply put, killings and other acts of violence happen in the forest. However, studying the texts related to forests and trees will enrich the wellbeing of the body and the mind. Forests protect us from the spread of fatal diseases and natural disasters. Thus, this paper implores for protecting the trees and forests for the continued existence of humanity on Earth. This is necessary to avoid the suicidal calamity for human beings.*

**Keywords:** forests and trees, a role concept, scriptures, the Ramayana, ecosystem on earth

### Background

Scriptures like the Ramayana is the Hindu allegory full of moral and political intersection. It reveals the narratives of the adventures of heroic or legendary figures in an epic form. This is also an epic poem which wraps symbols and metaphors concerned with education. But why the less people know the value of it has been a perennial for generation to generation. Particularly, it derives from ancient oral tradition, whose symbols naturally depict different meanings and mysteries. The pinpoint of these symbols and metaphors relates natural life, whose beauties cover both world and their elements together.

### Portrayal of issues

The epic poem, the ancient Sanskrit Ramayana portrays the life journey of Lord Rama, a major deity of Hinduism. Tulasidasa reiterates, "Lord Rama is the seventh and one of the most popular avatars of Vishnu. In the Rama-centric traditions of Hinduism, he is considered the Supreme Being." (5). Once upon a time, he lived in forests for fourteen years. Among the four princes, Rama, the eldest son of King Dasharatha, was to be crowned in the royal palace of his father-king. In pursuit of his lust, the father-king Dasharatha was bound with one of his three queens, named Kaikeyi, who made him promise to crown the son named Bharat

from her own lineage. Meanwhile, Rama would be remaining in the exile for fourteen years. Before they are being as a conjugal life, the King Dasharath had promised Kaikeyi, the stepmother of Rama and mother of Bharat, who would be King of Ayodhya during the exile of Sri Rama., the lineage son of Koushalya. In the very marital consent, G. T. Garratt further remarks that due to Kaikeyi's demands, "Rama starts his journey and experiences numerous adventures in the forests" (35). Having no any causes and effects, Rama obliged to his father's consents with his stepmother, Kaikeyi. He left for exile: "along with his ideal brother, Lakshmana, and ideal wife Sita, because both show their high regards and respects to their beloved Rama" (24) at the time of ascetic sates and positions. King Dasharatha went ahead to his second queen Keikeyi's order and left his breath in the anguish of his beloved son Rama while he was in exile. His education in exile was imposed by the lust of his father, King Dasharatha.

In their exile, they endure severe adventures during the forest life. They are kept unknown to the human relations during the years of the exile. However, they fall in the phantom of Ravana, the highest evil spirit of all the five vices. Shurpanakha, the sister of Ravana attempts to tempt Rama, the handsome human personality. Directly Rama ignores her because she irritates and so he chops the nose off

her face on the same spot in the forest. The wounded scene of Shupanakha shocked Rama on a big deal. Immediately, Rama decides to grip his wife Sita for the revenge of his sister. The trouble begins in the Ravana's forests. In this regard, Robert King remarks that the belief: "that everything, like the forest, is alive on this planet symbolizes, that it is dangerous to harm the children of nature" (24). The Ramayana, an epic poem, shows that Rama rescued his wife back from Ravana's grip. Later, Rama brutally kills him, as the hero character in the narrative where Rama displays the proof of victory over the five vices.

Forests disclose the story of both benefit and loss in the Ramayana when Kaikeyi plans to set for the exile, King Dasaratha commits an injustice with his loyal son, Sri Rama. However, the sacred forests globally bring positive repercussions for the entire humanity. For instances, Rama smashed numberless giants and demons along with Ravana during his exile in the forests. Through the bow of Sri Rama those wild beasts and demons received purgatory in the dense forests from their sins committed in their previous lives. The exile of Sri Rama proves a combination of the sustainable roles-development between the forest and the remorse of wild creatures for their re-generation and salvation.

In the Hindu tradition, the trees and forests are the definite essentiality for myths, society, economics, physical and psychological growth, environment, devotional beliefs and admiration, natural world. It is, for instance, that trees and forests are the highest sample of kindness as the woods dispense their all privileges to other like their, shadows, leaves, flowers, fruits, roots, braches, bark and trunk. Human beings share their fates, fortune and virtues with thier trees and forests. They are acknowledged as the significant donors for their shade and shadow which everyone feels its needs. So happens with Rama like the fruits of trees and forests offer his virtues and knowledge to humanity and makes them free from the bondage of demons like Ravana. In the similar fashion, King quotes, "It is believed that trees and forests are vested with holy features and their adoration will affect the well-being of those who worship them and makes no harm to nature without a purpose" (42). The species of trees have certain rules and customs in the society. For instance, the Banyan tree, in the Hindu myths, portrayed as a place of arrogance. The saints and sages disclose the significance of the trees among which the Banyan tree directly is mentioned in the translated verse of Lariviere, Richard:

Then Ráma, that his friend might know  
His strength unrivalled, grasped his bow,  
That mighty bow the foe's dismay,—  
And on the string an arrow lay.  
Next on the tree his eye he bent,  
And forth the hurtling weapon went.  
Loosed from the matchless hero's hold,  
That arrow, decked with burning gold,  
Cleft the seven palms in line, and through  
The hill that rose behind them flew:  
Six subterranean realms it passed,  
And reached the lowest depth at last,  
Whence speeding back through earth and air  
It sought the quiver, and rested there.  
Upon the cloven trees amazed,  
The sovereign of the Vánars gazed. (Chapter XII, book IV)

The living beings are full of symbols in the poetic forms, which are highly conceivable. According to Richard Lariviere's version, Lord Krishna gives an image to Arjuna dream among all trees: "I am the Pippla tree which highlights the greatness of this tree and its significance in our scriptures" (75). But the previous value of woods and forests is violated in the modern age. Nowadays, they are unpredictably being deprived of human activities. Human beings are getting apart from the forests despite their being indispensable resource of energy system for human health and wealth too. Today, the human beings need of an arboreal knowledge to enhance the environmental education, which would specify the importance of ecology on earth. The exile of Rama's journey enlightens us about the significance of forests and nature, respectfully.

Mad elephants that wander through  
The forest wilds, could they subdue,  
And with their furious shout could scare  
Dead upon earth the birds of air.  
So were the sylvan chieftains formed;  
Thousands on thousands still they swarmed.  
These were the leaders honoured most,  
The captains of the Vánar host,  
And to each lord and chief and guide  
Was monkey offspring born beside? (Chapter XVI, book I)

Unconditionally, trees and forests represent here as a symbol of life, shelter and generosity in the exile of Rama's journey. They also become a horror full place demons rule and regulate in it. It is a highly dangerous territory to enter there where the devil, Shupanakha and her brother Ravana, the demon are the dangerous episode of the Ramayana, which wraps an erratic companion with the forest animals who assist Rama to bridge the gap between mankind and nature. In this regard, Lariviere reveals "forests as a context of both either the symbols of danger or safety of life" (65). These both symbols are the pure arboreal elements based on good and evil spirits, quench in the forest trees. Shastri mentions: "After about ten years in the forest with her husband, Princess Sita is kidnapped by the Titan Ravana, and taken by him to his capital, Lanka" (79), which is now the modern Ceylon.

Lord Rama crossed the river and reached the Taraka forests, which lies at Anga province junction of the Ganga and Sarayuga rivers. *Green Message: The Evergreen Messages of Spirituality, Sanskrit and Nature* are a noted site in the Buxar district of Bihar. Ram Prasad Shastri, in the dark forest of Taraka – Chapter-24, reveals, "Taraka Forest is the place where Sri Rama killed demoness Taraka, stayed for a night and received divine weapons from sage Vishwamitra the next day" (75). Furthermore, the forest trees display a very horrible and uninhabited place, occurred in the existentiality of both wild and humanity.

Sri Rama reached the Taraka forest after crossing the river at Anga province (which is the confluence of rivers Ganga and Sarayu). The forest appeared to be very horrible and uninhabited. It was fraught with fearful predators, vultures and crickets. The trees and forests embrace Dhava, Ashvakarna, Arjuna, Bilva, Tinduka, Patala and Badari trees. Sri Rama enquired about the forest education from his teacher, sage Vishwamitra.

The role of forests is highly appreciated in the episode of the Ramayana in which the Rama's exile that portrays forests as a place of insightful virtues. Thus, forests draw the true nature of

creatures life, in which forests symbolizes both either good or evil dispositions of humanity. Rama's mission tried to uncover this nature and realize the source of life, which is latent in all living beings. The forest is the best environment to realize the essence of true life amid the most living objects, according to Indian mythology, which believes that every creature has a soul.

#### Canto XXVIII. *The Dangers Of The Wood*

Thus Sítá spake, and he who knew  
His duty, to its orders true,  
Was still reluctant as the woes  
Of forest life before him rose.  
He sought to soothe her grief, to dry 5  
The torrent from each brimming eye,  
And then, her firm resolve to shake,  
These words the pious hero spake:  
"O daughter of a noble line,  
Whose steps from virtue ne'er decline, 10  
Remain, thy duties here pursue,  
As my fond heart would have thee do.  
Now hear me, Sítá, fair and weak,  
And do the words that I shall speak.  
Attend and hear while I explain 15  
Each danger in the wood, each pain.  
Thy lips have spoken: I condemn  
The foolish words that fell from them.  
This senseless plan, this wish of thine  
To live a forest life, resign. 20  
The names of trouble and distress  
Suit well the tangled wilderness.  
In the wild wood no joy I know,  
A forest life is nought but woe.  
The lion in his mountain cave 25  
Answers the torrents as they rave,  
And forth his voice of terror throws:  
The wood, my love, is full of woes.  
There mighty monsters fearless play,  
And in their maddened onset slay 30  
The hapless wretch who near them goes:  
The wood, my love, is full of woes.

### The forests and trees in modern literature

Trees and forests in literature play a role of sustainable development. Charles de Lint's novel, *Forests of the Heart* portrays, "his protagonists confess that they have been attracted to trees since their early childhood, and they still cherish or rediscover that connection later in their lives" (15). Forests and trees protect diversity. They prevent degeneration of nature and climate. They play a role to reduce poverty and unemployment in underdevelopment countries. They promote inter-dependence between man and nature. They prevent climate change.

What should be done to protect the beauties of forests? They should be taken as a place of human survival. Government should make strategic plan to protect natural resources like trees and forests. United Nations Conference resolution should be implemented by rich and poor countries. Rich countries should compensate the poor countries by providing financial assistance.

### Forests in history and literature

Forests and trees have been mentioned in ancient scriptures like the Bible, the Gita, the Ramayana and other scriptures too. They are the place of sanity. Myths and fairy tales develop the role of the

forests that illustrate the liminal nature of one's abode and destination of journey. Many writers and scholars have referred to forests in their works highlighting the role of forests in human life. For instance, Dante's *Inferno* reveals, "the hero lost in the dark forests" (75). Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Young Goodman Brown* represents the Puritan's ideas of the forests – "as the abode of evils, are the shocking truths in the community" (45). Robert Frost's *Stopping by Woods on a Snowing Evening*, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet*, The Romantics Poets like Wordsworth, P. B. Shelley, John Keats, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, in which: "Hogwarts lies near the forbidden forest inhabited by all sorts of magical creatures" (47). Kipling's *The Jungle Books* unravels, "the knots of song that keep the Jungle Law!" (11), in the Night-Song in the Jungle.

The forest education for Vicente Riva Palacio, a Mexican writer, who portrays in his story, namely, "The Good Example," in which Don Lucas its main character: "stopped, startled and amazed, upon sighting a flock of parrots flying by nearh trees and chanting in unison ba, da, fa, ga, ja; be, de, fe, ge, je. And behind the flock, flying majestically, there was "Perico," who, while passing his master, turned his head and cheerfully said: "Don Lucas, I have a school now" (101). The domestic bird flew to the dense forest from the school of his master and opens a school for the wild birds and began to teach them as his schoolmaster instructs the school children. The story composed by Rava Palacio gives a lesson that the thrust or need for education also influences other creatures like birds and animals, whether they live in the forest or somewhere else.

### Ecosystem on the earth

As per the ecosystem, trees and forests should be preserved for the life of animals and species. Distorting forests is the destroying habitats of wild animals. Extinction of any animal directly impacts human life. Today, Sara Maitland remarks, "The deep connection between the forests and the core stories has been lost; fairy stories and forests have been moved into different categories and, isolated, both are at risk of disappearing, misunderstood and culturally undervalued, 'useless' in the sense of 'financially unprofitable'" (18). But trees and forests, in the past, were embraced by tales and myths. Today, people should have these following benefits of the forests, are mentioned herewith.

Longevity of any human life depends upon the quality of forests. Forests are important because they are the storehouse of all scientific and natural medicines. Several diseases can be cured by the natural products herbs and medicine available in the jungle. We cannot imagine human life in the absence of the wildwoods. So, preventing deforestation is necessary for healthy and long life of humanity as well as for sustainable development. We should acknowledge the wildwoods make us know the natural calamities are the results of the habitat extinctions on the earth. Human beings are all in all to take either a vital role into preserving the literature of the forest or the role into destroying the forests on the surface of the earth. Wildwoods are the vital necessities for the habitats of all creatures on the earth. They are interdependent facets and elements of the universe. They are responsible to each other action, life and death. The human beings should more uniquely maintain as a form of the two-sides of a coin, otherwise the extinction being lost of the forests and trees will spoil the existence of environment as well as climate from the surface of the earth.

## Conclusion

The role of a tree is highly appreciated in the epic of the Ramayana. According to the history of the Ramayana, the King-Monkey Hanuman, taking a tiny shape of monkey, without any noise crawled down the tree, handed Rama's ring to Sita and took her ring as a sign of exchange at the Ashoka Batika of the demon Ravana. Hanuman respects the beauties of the Ashoka Batika of Ravana and thinks to move forward. Hanuman, the King of the Jungle Monkeys in a tiny shape, offers his presence to Sita and tells her to carry away with him. But Sita's faith of habitat to the wild creature brings Rama to rescue her from the insanity of Ravana's myopic interest. While Hanuman as a tiny form of monkey was talking fruitfully to Sita, Ravana, the demon god fruitlessly threatened Sita to handover herself to him within two months, otherwise stake her body and "mince her limbs with steel for his morning feast. The deity nature of Sita was enriched with the habitats of trees and forests, whose wildness elements provide her nutrition to remain alive in the demon sphere of Lanka.

The subjugation of the demons god Ravana made Rama triumph over the restoration of Sita along with Ayodhya the resort of ecosystem. The people of the Kingdom of Lord Rama were highly cooperative, rich, happy and prosperous to uplift the ecology between the nature of forests and the creatures together. Later on, a rumor regarding Sita's a long stay in Lanka broadened all over. She faced the caress of the forests demon in the custody of Ravana. Before the fourteen year of compensation of the sorrow and wound in the exile, Rama ungratefully resends her to the exile of the forests where they had happily lived together in their exile.

The conquest made, the demon destroyed, and Sita restored, Rama returned in triumph to Ayodhya, and assumed the duties of governance. The city was prosperous, the people were happy, and for a time all went well. It was not long, however, before whispers concerning Sita's long abode in Lanka Ceylon spread abroad, and someone whispered to Rama that a famine in the country was due to the guilt of Sita, who had suffered the caresses of the demon while in captivity in Ceylon. Forgetful of the trial by fire, forgetful of Sita's devotion to him through weal and woe, the ungrateful Rama immediately ordered her to go to the forest where they had spent together the happy years of their exile.

Alone! The unhappy Sita herself trailed to the ecofriendly forests without a talk under her breath. She, cracked with grief in her body and spirit, reached the haven of Valmiki, where Sita gave birth to twin sons, Lava and Kica. She nurtured them with the sustainable assistance of the hermit in the forests. The kind hermit Valmiki was the boys' teacher who cared to grow them successful, strong and handsome persons in the eco-friendly forests.

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