

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND OF THE AUTHOR

Śri Sundareśa Śāstri, the author of Sundara Rāmāyaṇa was the grandson of Śri Venkateśvara of Kauśika Gotra¹. The latter had a daughter and two sons. The eldest son was Śri Rājagopālan who was highly esteemed for his good qualities². The second son of Śri Venkateśvara was Subrahmaṇya who was also held in high respect, ^{and one} who developed ascetic qualities³. He married Jānakī belonging to Śrīvatsa Gotra who hailed from the family of an erudite scholar who was said to have written a commentary on Vyākaraṇa Mahābhāṣya⁴.

THE BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Śri Sundareśa Śāstri, the author of Sundara Rāmāyaṇa was born to Śri Subrahmaṇya and Smt. Jānakī in the year 1891. He hailed from Tirugokarṇam⁵, Pudukoṭṭai District, Tamil Nādu. He is said to have composed this work by the grace of his Guru⁶.

Śri Sundareśa Śāstri had his education at Pudukoṭṭai under great preceptors like Śrī. Rāmacandra Gaṇapaṭhi and Śri Sāmā Gaṇapaṭhi, who were profound Vedic scholars. Bābu Dikṣita, son of Nārāyaṇa Dikṣita, was his disciple. His other disciples were Tambu, Rāmu and

Rāju. Śri Sundareśa was an erudite scholar. It appears that he was conferred the title 'Āśukavi' by Śri Candrasekharāendra Sarasvati, Paramācārya of Kañci. He was a receipt of grants from the Govt. of India. He was honoured by Sṛingeri Śāradā pīṭha.

Sundareśa was working as an 'Āgama Śāstri' in the Araikāsu Sri. 'Bṛhadāmbal' Temple of Thirugokarṇam⁷. He had two sons and two daughters. He lived in 'Nemattāmpaṭṭi', 18 Km away from Kāraikudi in Śivagañgai district and 27 Km away from Pudukottai. He had mastered the Vedas, Śāstras etc., in his childhood. He was very much interested in ancient heritage and Hindu culture. He was well versed in the Śāstric way of learning. He was very much interested in teaching Vedas and Sanskrit to poor children. He was the repository of all good qualities which gained him admiration and respect from his relatives, friends and neighbours. He led a simple life with a philanthropic attitude. He could compose poems spontaneously. He had no mastery over English language, and this was much resented by him for he felt that his works would have been appreciated and become popular, had they been rendered into English. He was the pillar behind the success of many people. He passed away in the year 1978 at the age of 87⁷.

THE SUNDARA RĀMĀYAṆA

The Sundara Rāmāyaṇa in seven cantos with 1209 verses, composed in ^{the} 20th century, is the condensed version of the original Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa. The author Sundarēśa has also rendered a Tamil translation of the entire work. This work gives a comprehensive survey of Rāmā's story, fulfilling the features of an interesting Kāvya. It appears that the author has named this work appropriately to echo the name of the author, at the same time giving tribute to the work as a 'beautiful' composition.

This work abounds in many figures of speech. It epitomizes Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa mostly through the verses couched in a long metre Śārdūlavikrīḍita. It is highly informative through allusions appropriately brought into the context. The narration of the story is original, quick and successive, taking the essence of every Sarga of the original Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa. Touching expressions, lucid style, employment of figures of speech with appropriate emotions and sentiments make this work an appreciable narrative Kāvya. In short, this acts as an exemplar to epitomize a voluminous work like the Rāmāyaṇa without sacrificing the spirit and beauty of the original.

Sundarēśa composed other works viz., 'Śiva Parākrama, Mahāmāyī stotra and Sīthalāṣṭaka. Excepting Māhāmāyī stotra, the

other two works are available. Śri Śiva Parākrama written by the author is classified under five sections called Ālaya Pañca Ratna, Abhiṣēka Pañca Ratna, Saundarya Dēvi Sapta Ratna, Kailāsanātha stuti and Nityānusandhāna. The author begins his work with his salutations to Gaṇapati and Sarasvati.

In Ālaya Pañca Ratna, he praises the temple whereⁱⁿ, the main goddess is Saundarya Nāyakī, the spouse of Kailāsanātha. He invokes her blessings in this section. In the Abhiṣēka Pañca Ratna, through five verses, he describes ~~about~~ the consecration of Kailāsa^{nātha} temple. In Saundarya Dēvi Sapta Ratna, through seven verses, he describes the beauty of the goddess. Kailāsanātha stuti of 64 verses, epitomizes 64 līlas with beautiful śabda and arthālañkāras. Nityānusandhāna is the prayer by the author to Lord Vināyaka, Subrahmanyā, Sarasvatī, Nandikeśvara, Dvārapālakās, Maheśvara, Gowrī, Naṭaraja, Somāskanda, Dakṣiṇāmūrthi, Lingodbhava, Mahāviṣṇu, Mahālakṣmi, Śrī Śayyalayesvara, Durga Candikeśvara and Śri Bhairavā. ~~And~~ ^{He} ends this work by meditating on Nāgatirtha.

Yet another work Sītalāṣṭakam by the author, serves as a remedy to people ailing from dangerous diseases like small pox and chicken pox. The verses hail Goddess Māriamman, a village deity, and aid people to seek Her blessings, pleading her to bestow all goodness and

happiness to mankind.

Before proceeding to analyse Sundara Rāmāyaṇa the merit of Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa is brought to mind and a brief survey of the works on the Rāmāyaṇa is made in the following paragraphs.

THE GLORY OF VĀLMĪKI RĀMĀYAṆA

Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa has endeared the hearts of generations of people from time immemorial. This epic poem holds a unique place in the literary history of the world. No poem, ancient or modern, has sunk so deep into the hearts and lives of so many successive generations of men and women, as the Rāmāyaṇa. It is a synthesis of all the Śāstras. It is another Veda and revelation of ultimate truths. It is a gospel for the world at large.

The assertion of the poet that as long as the mountains and rivers exist on earth, till then the Rāmāyaṇa shall also shine gloriously, is no exaggeration.

“ यावत् स्थास्यन्ति गिरयः सरितश्च महीतले ।

तावत् रामायणकथा लोकेषु प्रचरिष्यति ॥ ”

It is one of the best epics that educates the right code of conduct and morals to be adopted in life. It has remained a constant and personal source of inspiration down the centuries, to men of letters in

all the regional literatures in India. Śrīmad Rāmāyaṇa is one of the best epics from which we learn a lot of things useful to the correct way of living. Thus Rāmāyaṇa is not just an epic, but a national fountainhead of all legendary lore and ideal ethical conduct, which has grown with the people like the Indian Banyan with countless roots and branches, in the imagination of men of letters of all regions.

A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE WORKS ON THE RĀMĀYAṆA

The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmiki is unrivalled as the supreme epic of India and is deemed as a great epic of the world. It ranks as the first classical poem of Sanskrit and is well known as the Ādi Kāvya. This literary masterpiece enjoys the unique appellation of Ādi Kāvya, not only on account of its antiquity, but also because of its extraordinary poetic merits.

This great epic has been repeatedly storming the heads of so many poets, who after having improvised the Rāmāyaṇa by interpreting, adapting and suiting it to their imagination, updated the Rāmāyaṇa according to the times, reflecting the society of different periods. Their genius of poetic rendering with different modes of expression, ornamentation and style etc., have given birth to many independent works with their thoughts and ingrained the theme of the

Rāmāyaṇa that has withstood the sands of time, even to this day the upcoming authors of the future. The following are some of the works based on the statements made above.

Aḍbhuta Rāmāyaṇa: This is otherwise called Aḍbhutottara Rāmāyaṇa and is attributed to Vālmīki, the story of Sītā, and traces her previous birth. The main purpose of Aḍbhuta Rāmāyaṇa is to present the Sākta religion and philosophy. Sītā is made the central character here and identified as divine forms like Śakti, Maheśwarī and Durgā. Her glory is described on the model of Vibhuti Yoga of Gita and is made to act like Mahākāli. On killing Rāvaṇa, she is described as dancing on his body in the ferocious form of Śakti. Certain important changes are also made in the structure of ^{the} Rāmāyaṇa story. This text narrates the story of the origin of Sītā.

Sītā is said to be the daughter of Rāvaṇa. Two Rāvaṇas are also envisaged here. Of them, the one known to us through Vālmīki, has only ten faces. But his elder brother mentioned here has a thousand faces. It was this Rāvaṇa who was destroyed by Sītā, who assumed the form of Kāli. When Rāma was unable to vanquish the Rāvaṇa who had a hundred heads, it was Sītā who finally killed Rāvaṇa.

Sītā's marvellous acts performed while killing the elder Rāvaṇa

justify the title of this work as 'Aḍbhuta Rāmāyaṇa'.

Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa : It is an extract from the Brahmānda purāṇa narrated by Vāyu. It holds the tenet that Rāma is a manifestation of the supreme spirit and Sītā is identified with Lakṣhmī, 'a type of nature'. Parameśvara describes this Rāmāyaṇa to Pārvati. It is loaded with many subtle thoughts and ideas.

As the very title suggests, it has a philosophical orientation. Much of its philosophy is drawn from the Bhāgavata. Bhakti is given utmost importance here. Rāma is described as the role model of Kriṣṇa in Bhāgavata. The intention seems to be to popularise the worship of Rāma as widely as that of Kriṣṇa.

The Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa is known to have influenced Kabirdas and Tulasi Das considerably. Therefore, although the story of the Rāmāyaṇa is narrated here, it is made up of devotional hymns and prayers addressed to Rāma. The text is in seven kandas of the seven names as in Vālmiki Rāmāyana, but the narrative is very brief.

Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa : In this version, misdeeds start much earlier than abducting Sītā. Rāvanā carries Kausalyā to Laṅkā on learning that her marriage with Dasaratha is proposed and the son born to them would kill him. Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa explains the ticklish events of the Rāmāyaṇa. While Vālmiki's Rāmāyaṇa is filled with serious events, the

Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa introduces a number of pleasant events, justifying its name. Philosophical and moral advice have also been incorporated in this work.

Vāsiṣṭha Rāmāyaṇa: Also called Jnāna Vāsiṣṭha, this is said to have been composed by Vālmīki himself, as an appendage to the Rāmāyaṇa and originally taught by Vaśiṣṭha to Rāma. It consists of six chapters, explaining the best means of attaining true happiness. Just as Arjuna was confused at the time of battle, Rāma was in a sad state of mind on returning from the yatra. To eradicate Rāma's grief, Viśvāmitra and Vaśiṣṭha imparted philosophical wisdom to him. This is called Yogavāsiṣṭha or Jnāna Vaśiṣṭha. This Rāmāyaṇa was instructed to Sage Bharadwāja by Vālmīki.

Mūla Rāmāyaṇa describes the importance of Hanūman. This is read much by the followers of Śri Madwa. **Śatakōti Rāmāyaṇa** is an ancient work of Vālmīki with hundred crores of verses, divided into nine lakh Kandas and nine hundred lakh Sargas.

Agniveśya Rāmāyaṇa: The important factors of Rāmāyaṇa are classified into years, months, days as in the Almanac. **Sangraha Rāmāyaṇa** is composed by Nārāyana Pandit. It does not differ much from the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa. **Sridhara Rāmāyaṇa:** The author of this Rāmāyaṇa is 'Sridhara Swamigal' who also wrote a commentary on

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam. It is filled with rare stories that have been narrated for generations and that which are not found in the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa.

Mantra Rāmāyaṇa: This is a work by 'Lakṣmanarya'. Rāmācharita in the form of 156 Ṛgveda mantras as recited by Sage Nārada to Vālmīki forms the substance of this work. The popular Bāla Rāmāyaṇa of Rājaśekhara etc., also is worth noticeable.

Manju Rāmāyaṇa: (Pub. By Sri Nadathur Ammal Trust, Vadavur, Tamil Nadu 1984). Villur Srinivasa Raghava composed this work. The Manju Rāmāyaṇa in 243 verses epitomises the entire Rāmāyaṇa in selective metres. This work is of the 20th century. The Manju Rāmāyaṇa, as its name indicates is a sweet or charming work.

Rāmāyaṇakathāsara is a brief narrative of the Rāmāyaṇa in seven Kāndas, each Kanda in a different metre, by Subbaya Śāstri. **Taṭvasangraharāmāyaṇa** of Rāmābrahmānanda in seven adhyayas, mentions the story of Rāmāyaṇa, but adds many incidents not found in Vālmīki's work. **Vālmīkibhāvadīpam** is an interpretation in verse, of the spiritual significance of the story of Rāmā. It has been written by Anantācārya. **Vasiṣṭoṭṭararāmāyaṇa** is not fully extant. The 12th chapter named Sītā Vijayam containing a legendary account of the vanquishment of the hundred-headed Rāvaṇa by Sītā.

Saṭyopākhyāna narrates the history of Rāma, illustrated with a variety of stories not found in the Rāmāyaṇa. It is said to have been originally imparted to Mārkaṇḍeya by Vālmīki, and then by him to Vyāsa, by Vyāsa to Sūta and finally narrated by Sūta to Ṛṣis in the forest of Naimiśa.

Āsecanaka Rāmāyaṇa: - The author of this Rāmāyaṇa is late Brahmasri Subrahmaṇya Sūri (20th century). Also known as Rāmāyaṇāryā, it is a short and sweet poem in Āryāmetre. The peculiar feature of this work is that the first three pādas of each śloka narrate the story and the fourth pāda embodies the moral suggested by the incidents contained therein. The poem opens with the Nārada's interview with Vālmīki and not a single event has been omitted in the story.

Sundara Rāmāyaṇa (ii) : - It is a strange coincidence that there is another work under the title "Sundara Rāmāyaṇa" written by Sundarā Sāstri^{er}, available in print. The author belongs to ^{the} 20th century. The author is a Rāmabhakta, a talented poet, steeped in Vālmīki's language and ideas. His poem is conceived in the spirit of an artistic act of worship. The verses are composed in Upajāti metre. This work also is noted for its simplicity. There are about fourteen sargas.

Rāmācariṭra or Rāmāyaṇa is a long work in prose and verse,

based on the Rāmāyaṇa of Hemācārya. It differs considerably from the work of Vālmīki.

Popular Rāmāyaṇas in other languages

Tulasidas Rāmāyaṇa: This is otherwise known as ‘Rāmācharita Mānas’. This is a popular work in Hindi, comprising seven cantos.

Jaina Rāmāyaṇa: This was written in the Magathi language by a Jain poet ‘Hemachandracharya’. It differs totally from the Vālmīki

Rāmāyaṇa. **Bhāskara Rāmāyaṇa:** This is a work in Telugu by the poet Bhāskara. It contains complicated imageries, and is of high vocabulary.

Molla Rāmāyaṇa ^A woman named ‘Molla’ composed this work in Telugu language. **Bhauddha Rāmāyaṇa:** It is a part of various Buddhist works such as the Granta of ethical values-‘Dhammapadam’, by Lord Gautama Buddha.

Kamba Rāmāyaṇa: Just as Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa is considered supreme in Sanskrit, so is Kamba Rāmāyaṇa in Tamil. It is sung by the divine poet Kamba Nāṭṭālwār. He has composed this work after ^a ~~the~~ thorough study of various puranas and works on Rāmā. His version differs from Vālmīki’s in several aspects.

Rāmāyaṇa theme in Sanskrit Kāvyaś

Here are some of the popular works dealing with Rāmāyaṇa theme

Kālidāsa's Raghuvamśa, a Mahākāvya that describes in 19 cantos, the history of great monarchs of Ikṣhvāku dynasty, from Dilīpa to Agnivarṇa. In five cantos from 10-15, the story of Rāma's life is recounted.

Bhaṭṭi's Kāvya in 22 sargas deals with the Rāmāyaṇa story. **Kṣhemendra's Rāmāyaṇa Mañjarī** is an epitome of the Rāmāyaṇa.

Rāmāyaṇaṭātparya nirṇaya, **Rāmāyaṇaṭātparya Sangraha**, **Bharataśṭava**, **Rāmāyaṇa Sāra Sangraha** and **Rāmāyaṇa Sāraśṭava** are the Mahā Kāvyaś written by Appaya Dīkṣita.

Gadya Kāvya

Praṭivāḍi Bhayankara Annangarācārya's Rāmāyaṇa Daṇḍaka is a prose work describing the story of Rāma.

Poems written on the Rāmāyaṇa by various authors

Rāma carīṭra by **Raghunātha**, **Kalyāṇa Rāmāyaṇa** by **Śeṣakavi**, **Bhadrādri Rāmāyaṇa** by **Vīrarāghava**, **Uḍāra Rāghava** by

Caṇḍisūryakavi, Rāma Kathāsudhoḍaya by Śrīśaila Śrinivāsa, Rāmāmṛta by Venkaṭaraṅgā, Raghuvīravarya carita by Tirumala Kona yārya, Daśānanaḍha by Yogindranātha and Raghuvīra cariṭa by Sukumāra are all poems based on the Rāmāyaṇa.

Sūrya caṇḍrādi vamsavaṭaraṇa by Maharaja Udayar III of Mysore (1857) is a Lagu Kāvya that relates 100 episodes each, from the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata. His work **Rāmāyaṇa Kathā Puṣpamanjarī** is also based on the Rāmāyaṇa. **Subrāmaṇya Sūriās Rāmāvaṭārā** is also a citra kavya adopting to the Rāmāyaṇa theme to music. **Puruṣoṭṭama Kaviraṭṭaās Bālarāmāyaṇa**, a comprehensive work of Gīta, Nāṭya and Nāṭaka is based on the Rāmāyaṇa. **Bhojaās Rāmāyaṇa campū** is a very popular work. It is based on ^{the} exquisite story of Rāmāyaṇa, and the composition with blended melody of prose and verse in it, has the charm of royalty in it. **Rāmāyaṇa campū** is another work written by a poet Sundaravallī.

Kuśa Lava Campū by Venkaya Sudhi, Rāmacaṇḍra Campū by Rāmacaṇḍra, Sītā Campū by Guṇḍu Ramaswami Śāstrin, Rāmacampū by Bandla mūdi, Uṭṭara Campū by Brahma paṇḍita, Campū Rāghava by Āsṷi Anantācārya, Ramābhiṣeka by Devarājaḍeśika, Sītā Vijaya by Ghartāvatāra, Māruṭi Vijaya by Raghunātha, Ānjaneya Vijaya by Nṛsimha, Kākusṭha Vijaya by

Vallisahāya are some of the campūs based on the theme of Rāmāyana.

Rāmāyana themes in Dramas (Nataka)

The **Ādikāvyaodaya** is a drama written by Y. Mahālinga Śāstri in ten acts belonging to the prakarana which deals with the origin of the Rāmāyana.

Bhavabhūti's Uṭṭara Rāma Caritya describes in seven acts, the story of Uṭṭara Kāṇḍa of Rāmāyana, that is, the abandonment of Sītā, her residing at the hermitage of Vālmīki, the birth of Kuśa and Lava and finally the union of Sītā and Rāma. His other work **Mahāvīra Carita** describes in seven acts, the life of Rāma as a warrior. The plot follows the Rāmāyana, with slight variations, ^{and} shows Rāma's heroism in relief.

Bhāsā's Pratimā Nāṭaka begins with the banishment of Rāma to the woods and the miserable condition of Daśaratha leading to his death. Bharata infers the death of his father from the statue of his father erected in the house. The play begets its name from this incident. Another work of his **Abhiṣeka Nāṭakam**, deals with Kiṣkindhā, Sundara and Yuddha Kāṇḍas. It begins with the fight with Vāli and continues until the fall of Rāvaṇa and Sītā's entry into fire.

Venkatesā's Rāmacandroḍaya relates the story of Rāma in the Yamaka style.

Murāri's Anargharāghava in seven acts is an elaborate play on the story of Rāmāyaṇa. For his merit and eloquence he has been called Bāla Vālmīki.

Jayadeva's Prasanna Rāghava is a drama in seven acts, embracing the story of Rāmāyaṇa. The author has introduced several alterations to the original story, to give to his work an extraordinary dramatic effect.

Rāmabhaya Dikṣita's Jānakī Pariṇaya is a popular drama.

Rāmāyaṇa Nāṭakā by **Someśvaradeva**, **Sīta Rāghavā** by **RāmapāṇI vāda**, **Mudita Rāghavā** by **Sālā Kṛṣṇa**, **Amogha Rāghavā** and **Abhinava Rāghavā** by **Kṣīra swāmin**, **Sītananda** by **Tātācārya**, **Janakajā nandana** by **Nṛsimha**, **Kuśa Lava Vijaya** by **Venkata Kṛṣṇa**, **Ānjaneya Vijaya** by **Bhāṣyakāra**, **Rāmarājyabhiṣeka** by **Vīrarāghava**, **Prandhābhirāma** by **Venkaṭanātha**, **Kṛtya Rāvaṇa**, **Jānakī Rāghava**, **Rāmābhinanda**, **Vālivadha**, **Chalita Rāma**, **Nirḍoṣa Naśratha**, **Mārica vanciṭaka**, **Māyapuṣpaka** and **Abhirāma Rāghava** by **Anapotanāyaka** are other works that dwell on the theme of the **Rāmāyaṇa**.

Many prominent writers like **Weber**, **Jacobi** etc., have written commentaries on Rāmāyaṇa. The Rāmāyaṇa has spread far beyond the frontier of India and has fired the imaginations of scholars, especially,

those belonging to the 19th and 20th centuries.

Vālmīkihr̥dayam is a commentary by **Ahobilē**. **Dharmākūtam** is a splendid critique on the Rāmāyaṇa. **Rāmāyaṇanvayī** is a commentary by **Rangācarya** of **Kidāmbi** family. **Rāmāyaṇa-bhūṣanam** is a commentary by **Prabalamukunḍasūri**. **The story of Rāmā in Tibet** by **J.W. DE. Jong**. **The Rāmāyaṇa in the Philipines** by **Jawn. R. Fransisco**, **Rāmākathā** in the World Litt. By **Satya Bhūṣanverma**, **The Rāmāyaṇa Literature in Arabic, Persian and Urdu** by **Ramlal Nabhvi**, **Rāmāyaṇa in Nepalese Arts** by **Gokul Sinha**, **Rāmāyaṇa Tradition in South East Asia** by **K.S. Srinivasan**, **The Literary version of the Rāmā Story in Malay** by **S. Singaravelu**, **Rāmāyaṇa in Śrī Laṅkā** by **C.E. Gode Kumbure**, **The Rāmāyaṇa in South East Asian Sanskrit Epigraphy and Iconography** by **Jean Fillozat**, are the works that bring out the extent to which the Rāmāyana has pervaded all over the world.

CHAPTER I

NOTES

1. कौशिककुलमणिदीपो द्विज आसीद्वेङ्कटेश इति धीमान् कविवंशः ।
गङ्गास्नानपवित्रः क्षीरफलाश्रयुत्सृजन्नशनभुक्तिम् ॥ (S.R. Text Appendix)
2. तत्सुतयोर्यो ज्येष्ठश्चेष्टगुणोपास्यरा जगोपालः ।
पुत्रीं पुत्रौ लब्ध्वावान्तं मेने पुनर्गृहिण्याप्तिम् ॥ (Ibid)
3. सून्वोस्तस्यकनीयान्सुब्रह्मण्योधनो विरक्तमनाः ।
धननिर्जित धनपाला वैश्या आर्चन्नभिमत सिद्धयैयम् ॥ (Ibid)
4. श्रीवत्सगोत्रजाता तत्पत्नी जानकी सतीवसती ।
व्याकृति भाष्यव्याख्या कृद्वंश्य सुमति सत्कन्या ॥ (Ibid)
5. गोकर्णाभिजनेन सुन्दरबुधा वाल्मीकिसंबोधित
श्रीरामायणसंग्रहरचितो विद्वन्मनः कर्षति ।
बालानां सुखबोधकस्सुरुचिरोऽलंकारवृत्तादिभिः सौशब्देन च
कालिदासकवितासादृश्यमभ्यश्नुते ॥ (Ibid)
6. सुन्दरएतामकुरुतगुरुकृपया ॥
7. The above facts are discerned from Mrs. Gowri, who is the
daughter-in-law of the son of Sundarésa