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RAMÁYANA
BOOK ONE
BOYHOOD
BY VALMÍKI



Translated by

ROBERT P. GOLDMAN

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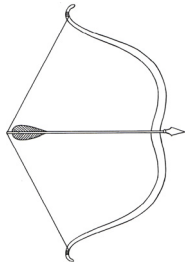
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CANTOS 2–4
THE CREATION OF POETRY

2.1 NĀRADASYA TU tad|vākyaṃ śrutvā vākya|viśāradaḥ
pūjayām āsa dharm'|ātmā saha|śiṣyo mahā|muniḥ.

Yathāvat pūjitas tena deva'|rṣir Nāradas tadā
āprṣtv" āiv' ābhyanujñātaḥ sa jagāma vihāyasam.
Sa muhūrtaṃ gate tasmin deva|lokaṃ munis tadā
jagāma Tamasā|tīraṃ Jāhnavyās tv avidūrataḥ.
Sa tu tīraṃ samāsādya Tamasāyā mahā|muniḥ
śiṣyam āha sthitaṃ pārśve dṛṣtvā tīrtham Akardamam.

2.5 «Akardamam idaṃ tīrthaṃ Bharadvāja niśāmaya
ramañīyaṃ prasann'|āmbu san|manuṣya|mano yathā.
Nyasyatāṃ kalaśas tāta dīyatāṃ valkalaṃ mama
idam ev' āvagāhiṣye Tamasā|tīrtham uttamam.»

Evam ukto Bharadvājo Vālmīkena mah"|ātmanā
prāyacchata munes tasya valkalaṃ niyato guroḥ.
Sa śiṣya|hastād ādāya valkalaṃ niyat'|ēndriyaḥ
vicācāra ha paśyaṃs tat sarvato vipulaṃ vanam.
Tasy' ābhyaṣe tu mithunaṃ carantam anapāyīnam
dadarśa bhagavāṃs tatra krauñcayoś cāru|niḥsvanam.

2.10 Tasmāt tu mithunād ekaṃ pumāṃsaṃ pāpa|niścayaḥ
jaghāna vaira|nilayo niśādas tasya paśyataḥ.
Taṃ soṇita|parīt'|āṅgaṃ veṣṭamānaṃ mahī|tale
bhāryā tu nihataṃ dṛṣtvā rurāva karuṇāṃ giram.
Tathā tu taṃ dvi|jaṃ dṛṣtvā niśādena nipātitam
rṣer dharm'|ātmanas tasya kāruṇyaṃ samapadyata.

WHEN THE GREAT and eloquent sage had heard his 2.1
words, the righteous man and his disciples did Ná-
rada great honor. After the divine seer Nárada had been
duly honored by the sage, he took his leave and, receiving
it, flew off into the sky. Once Nárada had departed for the
world of the gods, the sage went after a while to the bank
of the Támasa river, not far from the Jáhnavi, the Ganges.
Upon reaching the Támasa riverbank, the great sage spied
a bathing spot that was free from mud and spoke to the
disciple who stood beside him. “Bharad-vaja, look at this 2.5
lovely bathing place so free from mud. Its waters are as lucid
as the mind of a good man. Set down the water jar, dear
boy, and give me my bark-cloth robe, for I will bathe here
at this excellent bathing spot of the Támasa.”

Addressed in this fashion by the great Valmíki, Bharad-va-
ja, always attentive to his *guru*, gave him his bark-cloth robe.
Taking the bark-cloth from his disciple’s hands, he walked
about, his senses tightly controlled, looking all about him
at the vast forest. Nearby, that holy man saw an inseparable
pair of sweet-voiced *krauñcha* birds wandering about. But 2.10
even as he watched, a Nisháda hunter, filled with malice
and intent on mischief, struck down the male of the pair.
Seeing him struck down and writhing on the ground, his
body covered with blood, his mate uttered a piteous cry.
And the pious seer, seeing the bird struck down in this
fashion by the Nisháda, was filled with pity.

Tataḥ karuṇa|veditvād «adharmo ’yam iti» dvijah
niśāmya rudatīm krauñcīm idaṃ vacanam abravīt.
«Mā niśāda pratiṣṭhāṃ tvam agamaḥ śāsvatīḥ samāḥ
yat krauñca|mithunād ekam avadhīḥ kāmā|mohitam.»

- 2.15 Tasya’ āivaṃ bruvataś cintā babhūva hṛdi vīkṣataḥ
śok’|ārtēn’ āsya śakuneḥ, «kim idaṃ vyāhṛtaṃ mayā?»

Cintayan sa mahā|prājñāś cakāra matimān matim
śiṣyaṃ c’ āiv’ ābravīd vākyaṃ idaṃ sa muni|puṃ|gavaḥ:
«Pāda|baddho ’kṣara|samas tantrī|laya|samanvitaḥ
śok’|ārtasya pravṛtto me śloko bhavatu n’ ānyathā.»
Śiṣyas tu tasya bruvato muner vākyaṃ anuttamam
pratijagrāha samhṛṣṭas tasya tuṣṭo ’bhavad guruḥ.

So ’bhiṣekaṃ tataḥ kṛtvā tīrthe tasmin yathā|vidhi
tam eva cintayann artham upāvartata vai muniḥ.

- 2.20 Bharadvājas tataḥ śiṣyo vinītaḥ śrutavān guroḥ
kalaśaṃ pūrṇam ādāya pṛṣṭhato ’nujagāma ha.
Sa praviśy’ āśrama|padaṃ śiṣyeṇa saha dharma|vit
upaviṣṭaḥ kathāś c’ ānyāś cakāra dhyānam āsthitaḥ.

Ājagāma tato brahmā loka|kartā svayaṃ prabhuḥ
catur|mukho mahā|tejā draṣṭuṃ taṃ muni|puṃ|gavam.
Vālmīkir atha taṃ dṛṣṭvā sahas” ōttḥāya vāg|yataḥ
prāñjaliḥ prayato bhūtvā tasthau parama|vismitaḥ.
Pūjayām āsa taṃ devaṃ pādy’|ārgḥy’|āsana|vandanaiḥ

Then, in the intensity of this feeling of compassion, the brahman thought, “This is wrong.” Hearing the *krauñcha* hen wailing, he uttered these words: “Since, Nisháda, you killed one of this pair of *krauñchas*, distracted at the height of passion, you shall not live for very long.” And even as he stood watching and spoke in this way, this thought arose in his heart, “Stricken with grief for this bird, what is this I have uttered?” 2.15

But upon reflection, that wise and thoughtful man came to a conclusion. Then that bull among sages spoke these words to his disciple: “Fixed in metrical quarters, each with a like number of syllables, and fit for the accompaniment of stringed and percussion instruments, the utterance that I produced in this access of *shoka*, grief, shall be called *shloka*, poetry, and nothing else.” But the delighted disciple had memorized that unsurpassed utterance even as the sage was making it, so that his *guru* was pleased with him.

At last the sage took the prescribed ritual bath at the bathing spot and, still pondering this matter, went back. His disciple, the obedient and learned Bharad-vaja, took up his *guru*'s brimming water pot and followed behind him. The sage, who knew the ways of righteousness, entered his ashram with his disciple, seated himself and began to discuss various other matters, still lost in profound thought. 2.20

Then the mighty four-faced lord Brahma himself, the maker of the worlds, came to see the bull among sages. Seeing him, Valmíki rose quickly and without a word. He stood subdued and greatly wonderstruck, his hands cupped in reverence. Then he worshipped the god, offering water for his feet, the welcome offering, a seat and hymns of praise.

praṇamya vidhivac c' âinaṃ pṛṣṭv" ânāmayam avyayam.

2.25 Ath' ôpaviśya bhagavān āsane param'ârcite

Vālmīkaye maha"rṣaye saṃdides' āsanaṃ tataḥ.

Upaviṣṭe tadā tasmin sāksāl loka|pitā|mahe

tad|gaten' âiva manasā Vālmīkir dhyānam āsthitaḥ.

«Pāp'âtmanā kṛtaṃ kaṣṭaṃ vaira|grahaṇa|buddhinā

yas tādṛśaṃ cāru|ravaṃ krauñcaṃ hanyād akāraṇāt.»

Śocann eva muhuḥ krauñcīm upaślokam imaṃ punaḥ

jagāv antar|gata|manā bhūtvā śoka|parāyaṇaḥ.

Tam uvāca tato Brahmā prahasan muni|puṃ|gavam:

«śloka eva tvayā baddho n' âtra kāryā vicāraṇā.

2.30 Mac|chandād eva te brahman pravṛtt" êyaṃ sarasvatī

Rāmasya caritaṃ kṛtsnaṃ kuru tvam ṛṣi|sattama.

Dharm'âtmano guṇavato loke Rāmasya dhīmataḥ

vṛttaṃ kathaya dhīrasya yathā te Nārādāc chrutam.

Rahasyaṃ ca prakāśaṃ ca yad vṛttaṃ tasya dhīmataḥ

Rāmasya saha Saumitre rākṣasānāṃ ca sarvaśaḥ.

Vaidehyās c' âiva yad vṛttaṃ prakāśaṃ yadi vā rahaḥ

tac c' âpy aviditaṃ sarvaṃ viditaṃ te bhaviṣyati.

Na te vāg anṛtā kāvyē kā cid atra bhaviṣyati

kuru Rāma|kathāṃ puṇyāṃ śloka|baddhāṃ mano|ramām.

2.35 Yāvat sthāsyanti girayaḥ saritaś ca mahī|tale

tāvad Rāmāyaṇa|kathā lokeṣu pracariṣyati.

Yāvad Rāmasya ca kathā tvat|kṛtā pracariṣyati

tāvad ūrdhvam adhaś ca tvam mal|lokeṣu nivatsyasi.»

When he had made the prescribed prostration before him, he asked after his continuing well-being. Once the holy lord was seated in a place of honor, he motioned the great seer Valmíki also to a seat. But even though the grandfather of the worlds himself sat there before him, Valmíki, his mind once more harking back to what had happened, lapsed again into profound thought: “That wicked man, his mind possessed by malice, did a terrible thing in killing such a sweet-voiced *krauñcha* bird for no reason.” Grieving once more for the *krauñcha* hen, given over wholly to his grief and lost in his inner thought, he sang the verse again right there before the god. 2.25

With a smile, Brahma spoke to the bull among sages, “This is a *shloka* that you have composed. You needn’t be perplexed about this. Brahman, it was by my will alone that you produced this elegant speech. Greatest of seers, you must now compose the entire history of Rama. You must tell the world the story of the righteous, virtuous, wise and steadfast Rama, just as you heard it from Nárada, the full story, public and private, of that wise man. For all that befell wise Rama, Saumítri, the *rákshasas* and Vaidéhi, whether in public or private, will be revealed to you, even those events of which you are ignorant. No utterance of yours in this poem shall be false. Now compose the holy story of Rama fashioned into *shlokas* to delight the heart. As long as the mountains and rivers shall endure upon the earth, so long will the story of the *Ramáyana* be told among men. And as long as the story of Rama you compose is told, so long will you live on in my worlds above and below.” 2.30 2.35

Ity uktvā bhagavān Brahmā tatr' āiv' āntar|adhīyata
tataḥ sa|śiṣyo Vālmīkir munir vismayam āyayau.

Tasya śiṣyās tataḥ sarve jaguḥ ślokaṃ imaṃ punaḥ
muhur muhuḥ prīyamāṇāḥ prāhuś ca bhṛśa|vismitāḥ:
«Sam'ākṣaraiś caturbhir yaḥ pādair gīto maha"r|ṛṣiṇā
so 'nuvyāharaṇād bhūyaḥ śokaḥ ślokatvam āgataḥ.»

2.40 Tasya buddhir iyaṃ jātā Vālmīker bhāvit'ātmanāḥ:
«kṛtsnaṃ Rām'āyaṇaṃ kāvyam īdṛśaiḥ karavāṇy aham.»

Udāra|vṛtt'ārtha|padair mano|ramais
tad" āsya Rāmasya cakāra kīrtimān
sam'ākṣaraiḥ śloka|śatair yaśasvino
yaśas|karaṃ kāvyam udāra|dhīr muniḥ.

3.1 ŚRUTVĀ VASTU samagraṃ tad
dharm'ātmā dharmā|saṃhitam
vyaktam anveṣate bhūyo
yad vṛttaṃ tasya dhīmataḥ.

Upasprśy' ṍdakaṃ saṃyañ muniḥ sthitvā kṛt'āñjaliḥ
prācīn'āgreṣu darbheṣu dharmen' anveṣate gatim.

Janma Rāmasya sumahad vīryaṃ sarv'ānukūlatām
lokasya priyatām kṣāntiṃ saumyatām satya|śīlatām,
Nānā|citrāḥ kathās c' ānyā Viśvāmitra|sah'āyane
Jānakyās ca vivāhaṃ ca dhanuśaś ca vibhedanam,

3.5 Rāma|Rāma|vivādaṃ ca guṇān Dāśarathes tathā
tath" ābhiṣekaṃ Rāmasya Kaikeyyā duṣṭa|bhāvatām,
Vyāghātāṃ c' ābhiṣekasya Rāmasya ca vivāsanam

When the holy lord Brahma had spoken in this fashion, he vanished on the spot, and the sage Valmíki and his disciples were filled with wonder.

Then all his disciples chanted that *shloka* again. Delighted and filled with wonder, they said over and over again: “The *shoka*, grief, that the great seer sang out in four metrical quarters, all equal in syllables, has, by virtue of its being repeated after him, become *shloka*, poetry.” Then the contemplative Valmíki conceived this idea: “Let me compose an entire poem, called the *Ramáyana*, in verses such as these.” 2.40

And thus did the renowned sage with enormous insight compose this poem which adds to the glory of the glorious Rama, with hundreds of *shlokas* equal in syllables, their words noble in sound and meaning, delighting the heart.

AND SO IT CAME ABOUT that the righteous man, having learned the entire substance of that story, exemplary of righteousness, the tale of wise Rama, sought to make it public. First the sage sipped water in the prescribed fashion. Then, seated on *darbha* grass with the tips pointed east and cupping his hands reverently, he sought through profound meditation the means of access to this tale. 3.1

Rama’s birth, his great strength and kindness to all, the people’s love for him, his forbearance, gentleness and truthful nature, the various other marvelous stories told on the journey with Vishva-mitra, Jánaki’s wedding, and the breaking of the bow, the dispute between the two Ramas and the virtues of Dasha-rathi, Rama’s consecration and Kaiké-yi’s wicked nature, the interruption of the consecration and the banishment of Rama, the king’s grief and lamentation 3.5

rājñah śoka|vilāpaṃ ca para|lokasya c' āśrayam,
 Prakṛtīnām viśadaṃ ca prakṛtīnām visarjanam
 niśād'ādhīpa|saṃvādaṃ sūt'ōpāvartanaṃ tathā,
 Gaṅgāyās c' ābhisaṃtāraṃ Bharadvājasya darśanam
 Bharadvāj'ābhyanujñānāc Citrakūṭasya darśanam,
 Vāstu|karma|niveśaṃ ca Bharat'āgamaṃ tathā
 prasādanaṃ ca Rāmasya pituś ca salila|kriyām,
 3.10 Pāduk'āgry'ābhiṣekaṃ ca Nandigrāma|nivāsanam
 Daṇḍak'āraṇya|gamaṃ Sutīkṣṇena samāgamam,
 Anasūyā|samasyām ca aṅga|rāgasya c' ārpaṇam
 Śūrpaṇakhyās ca saṃvādaṃ virūpa|karaṇaṃ tathā,
 Vadhaṃ Khara|Triśīrasor utthānaṃ Rāvaṇasya ca
 Mārīcasya vadhaṃ c' āiva Vaidehyā haraṇaṃ tathā,
 Rāghavasya vilāpaṃ ca ḡdhra|rāja|nibarhaṇam
 Kabandha|darśanaṃ c' āiva Pampāyās c' āpi darśanam,
 Śarbaryā darśanaṃ c' āiva Hanūmad|darśanaṃ tathā
 vilāpaṃ c' āiva Pampāyām Rāghavasya mah'ātmanaḥ,
 3.15 Ṛṣyamūkasya gamaṃ Sugrīveṇa samāgamam
 pratyay'ōtpādanaṃ sakhyaṃ Vāli|Sugrīva|vighram,
 Vāli|pramathanaṃ c' āiva Sugrīva|pratipādanaṃ
 Tārā|vilāpa|samayaṃ varṣa|rātri|nivāsanam,
 Kopaṃ Rāghava|siṃhasya balānām upasaṃgraham
 diśaḥ prasthāpanaṃ c' āiva pṛthivyās ca nivedanam,
 Aṅgulīyaka|dānaṃ ca ṛkṣasya bila|darśanam
 prāy'ōpaveśanaṃ c' āiva Saṃpāteś c' āpi darśanam,
 Parvat'ārohaṇaṃ c' āiva sāgarasya ca laṅghanam
 rātrau Laṅkā|praveśaṃ ca ekasy' āpi vicintanam,

and his departure for the next world, the dejection of the common people and their abandonment, the conversation with the Nisháda chief and the return of the charioteer, the crossing of the Ganges and the meeting with Bharad-vaja, the arrival at Mount Chitra-kuta on the instructions of Bharad-vaja, the building of and dwelling in a hut and the coming of Bhárata, the propitiation of Rama and the funeral libations for his father, the consecration of the wonderful sandals and the dwelling in Nandi-grama, the journey to the Dándaka forest and the meeting with Sutíkshna, the encounter with Anasúya and her presentation of the ointment, the conversation with Shurpa-nakha and her disfigurement, the slaying of Khara and Tri-shiras and the setting out of Rávana, the destruction of Marícha and the abduction of Vaidéhi, the lamentation of Rághava and the death of the vulture king, the encounter with Kabándha and arrival at Lake Pampa, the encounters with Shábari and Hanumán, and the lamentations of great Rághava at Lake Pampa, the journey to Rishya-muka and the meeting with Sugríva, the engendering of confidence, the alliance, and the battle between Valin and Sugríva, the slaying of Valin and the installation of Sugríva, the lamentation of Tara, the agreement and the settling in for the rainy season, the anger of the lion of the Rághavas, the marshalling of the troops, their being dispatched in all directions and the description of the earth, the giving of the ring, the discovery of Riksha's cave, the fast until death and the encounter with Sampáti, the ascent of the mountain and the leap over the ocean, the entry into Lanka by night and the solitary

- 3.20 Āpāna|bhūmi|gamanam avarodhasya darśanam
 aśoka|vanikā|yānaṃ Sītāyās c' āpi darśanam,
 Abhijñāna|pradānaṃ ca Sītāyās c' āpi bhāṣaṇam
 rākṣasī|tarjanaṃ c' āiva Trijaṭā|svapna|darśanam,
 Maṇi|pradānaṃ Sītāyā vṛkṣa|bhaṅgaṃ tath" āiva ca
 rākṣasī|vidravaṃ c' āiva kiṃ|karāṇāṃ nibarhaṇam,
 Grahaṇam vāyu|sūnoś ca Laṅkā|dāh' |ābhigarjanam
 pratiplavanam ev' ātha madhūnāṃ haraṇam tathā,
 Rāghav' |āsvāsanam c' āiva maṇi|niryātanaṃ tathā
 saṃgamaṃ ca samudrasya Nala|setoś ca bandhanam,
- 3.25 Pratāraṃ ca samudrasya rātrau Laṅk" |āvarodhanam
 Vibhīṣaṇena saṃsargaṃ vadh' |ōpāya|nivedanam,
 Kumbhakarṇasya nidhanaṃ Meghanāda|nibarhaṇam
 Rāvaṇasya vināśaṃ ca Sīt" |āvāptim areḥ pure,
 Vibhīṣaṇ' |ābhiṣekaṃ ca Puṣpakasya ca darśanam
 Ayodhyāyās ca gamaṇam Bharatena samāgamam,
 Rām' |ābhiṣek' |ābhyudayaṃ sarva|sainya|visarjanam
 sva|rāṣṭra|rañjanaṃ c' āiva Vaidehyās ca visarjanam,
 Anāgataṃ ca yat kiṃ cid Rāmasya vasu|dhā|tale
 tac cakār' |ōttare kāvyē Vālmikir bhagavān ṛṣiḥ.

- 4.1 PRĀPTA|RĀJYASYA Rāmasya Vālmikir bhagavān ṛṣiḥ
 cakāra caritaṃ kṛtsnaṃ vicitra|padam ātmavān.
 Kṛtvā tu tan mahā|prājñāḥ sa|bhaviṣyaṃ sah' |ōttaram
 cintayām āsa, «ko nv etat prayuñjīyād iti?» prabhuḥ.
 Tasya cintayamānasya maha" |rṣer bhāvit' |ātmanaḥ

deliberations, the arrival at the drinking ground, the view 3.20
of the women's quarters, the arrival at the *ashóka* grove, and
the meeting with Sita, the giving of the token of recognition
and Sita's speech, the threats of the *rákshasa* women and
the dream-vision of Tri-jata, Sita's giving of the jewel and
the breaking of the trees, the flight of the *rákshasa* women
and the slaughter of the servants, the capture of Vayu's son
Hanumán, and the wailing at the burning of Lanka, the
return leap, and the seizure of the mead, the consolation of
Rághava and the presentation of the jewel, the encounter
with the ocean and the construction of Nala's bridge, the 3.25
crossing of the ocean and the siege of Lanka by night, the
alliance with Vibhíshana and his revelation of the means of
destruction, the death of Kumbha-karna and the slaying of
Megha-nada, the destruction of Rávana and the recovery of
Sita in the enemy's citadel, the consecration of Vibhíshana
and the acquisition of the chariot Púshpaka, the journey to
Ayódhya and the meeting with Bhárata, the celebration of
Rama's consecration and his dismissal of all his troops, his
pleasing the kingdom and his sending away Vaidéhi— all
of this did the holy seer Valmíki render into poetry. Even
those events which had not yet befallen Rama on earth were
rendered in the latter portion of his poem.

IT WAS AFTER Rama had regained his kingdom that the 4.1
holy and self-controlled seer Valmíki composed this entire
history in such wonderful words. When the wise master had
finished it, including the sections dealing with the future
and final events, he thought, "Who should perform it?"
And as the great contemplative seer was pondering this,

agr̥hñītāṃ tataḥ pādaḥ muni|veṣau Kuśī|Lavau.
 Kuśī|Lavau tu dharmajñāu rāja|putrau yaśasvināu
 bhrātarau svara|saṃpannau dadarś' āśrama|vāsināu.

4.5 Sa tu medhāvināu dr̥ṣṭvā vedeṣu pariniṣṭhitau
 ved' |ōpabr̥mhaṇ' |ārthāya tāv agrāhayata prabhuḥ.

Kāvyam̐ Rāmāyaṇam̐ kṛtsnam̐ Sītāyās caritam̐ mahat
 Paulastya|vadham ity eva cakāra carita|vrataḥ.

Pāṭhye geye ca madhuraṃ pramāṇais tribhir anvitam
 jātibhiḥ saptabhir yuktaṃ tantri|laya|samanvitam.

Hāsyāśṅgāra|kāruṇya|raudra|vīra|bhayānakaiḥ
 bībhats' |ādi|rasair yuktaṃ kāvyam etad agāyatām.

Tau tu gāndharva|tattva|jñāu sthāna|mūrccana|kovidau
 bhrātarau svara|saṃpannau gandharvāv iva rūpiṇau.

4.10 Rūpa|lakṣaṇa|saṃpannau madhura|svara|bhāṣiṇau
 bimbād iv' ōddhṛtau bimbau Rāma|dehāt tath' āparau.
 Tau rāja|putrau kārtsnyena dharmyam ākhyānam uttamam
 vāco vidheyaṃ tat sarvaṃ kṛtvā kāvyam anindītau.
 R̥ṣiṇām̐ ca dvi|jātīnām̐ sād̥hūnām̐ ca samāgame
 yath' |ōpadeśam̐ tattva|jñāu jagatus tau samāhitau
 mah' |ātmānau mahā|bhāgau sarva|lakṣaṇa|lakṣitau.

Kusha and Lava, in the guise of sages, came and touched his feet. He looked at the two glorious brothers, Kusha and Lava, who lived in his ashram, for they were sons of the king, familiar with the ways of righteousness, and had sweet voices. Perceiving that they were well grounded in the Vedas and had excellent memories, he accepted them as students of Vedic exegesis. 4.5

A man who always fulfilled his vows, he taught them the whole of this great poem, the *Ramáyana*, which is the tale of Sita and the slaying of Paulástya. It is sweet both when recited and when sung in the three tempos to the seven notes of the scale, and it is eminently suitable for the accompaniment of both stringed and percussion instruments. The two disciples sang the poem, which is replete with all the poetic sentiments: the humorous, the erotic, the piteous, the wrathful, the heroic, the terrifying, the loathsome and the rest.

The brothers, beautiful as *gandhárvas*, had beautiful voices and were well versed in the *gandhárvas*' musical art. They were expert in both articulation and modulation. Gifted with beauty and auspicious marks, they spoke with sweet voices. Like twin reflections they seemed, born of the same image, Rama's body. That unsurpassed tale is exemplary of righteousness, and so the two blameless sons of the king learned the entire poem by heart. And when they had done so, the two great and gifted men, who understood its essence and were marked by every auspicious sign, sang it as they had been instructed, with single-minded concentration before assemblies of seers, brahmans and good men. 4.10

Tau kadā cit sametānām ṛṣiṇām bhāvit'ātmanām
āsinānām samīpa|sthāv idam kāvyam agāyatām.

Tac chrutvā munayaḥ sarve bāṣpa|paryākul'ēkṣaṇāḥ
«sādhu sādhv ity!» tāv ūcuḥ paraṃ vismayam āgatāḥ.

- 4.15 Te prīta|manasaḥ sarve munayo dharmā|vatsalāḥ
praśaśamsuḥ praśastavyau gāyamānau Kuśī|Lavau:
«Aho gītasya mādhyamaṃ ślokānām ca viśeṣataḥ!
cira|nirvṛttam apy etat pratyakṣam iva darśitam.»

Praviśya tāv ubhau suṣṭhu tadā bhāvam agāyatām
sahitau madhuraṃ raktaṃ saṃpannaṃ svara|saṃpadā.
Evaṃ praśasyamānau tau tapaḥ|ślāghyair maha"rṣibhiḥ
saṃraktataram atyartham madhuraṃ tāv agāyatām.
Prītaḥ kaś cin munis tābhyām saṃsthitaḥ kalaśam dadau
prasanno valkalaṃ kaś cid dadau tābhyām mahā|yaśāḥ.

- 4.20 Āścaryam idam ākhyānaṃ muninā saṃprakīrtitam
paraṃ kavīnām ādhāraṃ samāptaṃ ca yathā|kramam.

Praśasyamānau sarvatra kadā cit tatra gāyakau
rathyāsu rāja|mārgeṣu dadarśa Bharat'āgrajaḥ.
Sva|veśma c' ānīya tato bhrātārau sa Kuśī|Lavau
pūjayām āsa pūj"ārḥau Rāmaḥ śatru|nibarhaṇāḥ.
Āsīnaḥ kāñcane divye sa ca siṃh'āsane prabhuḥ
upopaviṣṭaiḥ sacivair bhrātr̥bhiś ca paraṃ|tapaḥ.
Dṛṣṭvā tu rūpa|saṃpannau tāv ubhau vīṇināu tataḥ
uvāca Lakṣmaṇam Rāmaḥ Śatrughnaṃ Bharataṃ tathā.

Now on one occasion the two sang the poem in the presence of some pure-minded seers who were seated in an assembly. When the sages heard it, their eyes were clouded with tears and filled with the greatest wonder, they all said to the two, “Excellent, excellent!” All the sages, glad at heart and loving righteousness, praised Kusha and Lava as they sang, for they were worthy of praise: “Ah, the sweetness of the singing and especially the poetry! Even though this all took place so long ago, it is as though it were happening before our very eyes.” 4.15

Then the two of them together, entering fully into the emotion of the story, sang it with the full range of notes, sweetly and with feeling. Praised in this fashion by those great seers, who were themselves to be extolled for their asceticism, they sang more sweetly still and with still greater feeling. One sage there, delighted, gave them a water jar. Another, a man of great renown, gave them a bark-cloth mantle. This wondrous tale that the sage told and that he completed in perfect sequence is the great source of inspiration for poets. 4.20

Now it happened that on one occasion the elder brother of Bhárata saw there those two singers who were being praised everywhere on the roads and royal highways. And Rama, the destroyer of his enemies, brought the brothers, Kusha and Lava, to his own dwelling, where he honored them, for they were worthy of honor. Then lord Rama, chastiser of his foes, seated on a heavenly throne of gold with his ministers and brothers sitting nearby, looked at the two beautiful youths with their lutes and spoke to Lákshmana, Shatru·ghna Bhárata. “Let us listen to this tale, whose 4.25

- 4.25 «Śrūyatām idam ākhyānam anayor deva|varcasoḥ
 vicitr'ārtha|padaṃ samyag gāyator madhura|svaram.
 Imau munī pārthiva|lakṣmaṇ'ānvītau
 Kuśil|Lavau c' āiva mahā|tapasvinau
 mam' āpi tad bhūti|karaṃ pracakṣate
 mah"ānubhāvaṃ caritaṃ nibodhata.»
 Tatas tu tau Rāma|vacaḥ pracoditāv
 agāyatām mārga|vidhāna|saṃpadā
 sa c' āpi Rāmaḥ pariṣad|gataḥ śanair
 bubhūṣay" āsaktamanā babhūva ha.

words and meaning alike are wonderful, as it is sweetly sung by these two godlike men. For although these two sages, Kusha and Lava, are great ascetics, they bear all the marks of kings. Moreover, it is said that the profound tale they tell is highly beneficial, even for me. Listen to it.”

Then, at a word from Rama, the two of them began to sing in the full perfection of the marga mode. And right there in the assembly, even Rama, in his desire to experience it fully, gradually permitted his mind to become enthralled.

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Valmiki's RAMÁYANA is one of the two great national epics of India. The first book, "Boyhood," introduces the young hero Rama and sets the scene for the adventures ahead. It begins with a fascinating excursus on the origins and function of poetry itself.

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