

Some of the Major Differences  
between the Thai Rāmakīrti and the Indian Versions of the  
Rāmāyaṇa

Chirapat Prapandvidya

Sanskrit Studies Centre

Silpakorn University Bangkok Thailand

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As evidenced by few bas-reliefs depicting some scenes from the Rāmāyaṇa at the temple of Phimai (Vimāya)(cir. 11<sup>th</sup> century CE), 60 km east of the city of Nakhon Ratchasima, Nakhon Ratchasima Province, northeastern Thailand, Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa must have been known to the people of the period in the region. It is interesting to note that the Rāmakīrti composed by King Phra Buddhayodfachulālok or King Rāma I (1782-1809) of Chakri dynasty, differs to some extent from the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa. The following are the major differences:

### 1. The Previous Life of Thosakanth (Daśakaṇṭha=Rāvaṇa)

On Mount Kailāsa, Nandaka, a certain demigod, was given the charge of washing the feet of the gods who came to pay homage to Ísvara (Śiva). He became the object of constant pranks of those gods who pat on his head or pulled his cheeks or plucked his hairs until his head became bald. He was very anguish about his plight hence he asked Lord Śiva for a boon. Lord Śiva granted the boon to him that whomever he would point his finger at would instantly drop death. He became so puffed up with his newly

acquired power and played havoc to gods and men. Gods approached Lord Śiva to help. Lord Śiva asked Viṣṇu to destroy Nandaka. Viṣṇu appeared as beautiful celestial nymph before Nandaka who became enamored with the nymph. Viṣṇu in disguise expressed his reciprocal feeling on condition that Nandaka must beat her in a dance contest. He agreed and danced imitating her dance movement. In the course of the dance the nymph pointed her finger at one of her leg. Nandaka, following the movement, caused his leg to be broken by his own finger, then Viṣṇu turned back to his original form. Nandaka rebuked Viṣṇu for his adopting unfair means to destroy him. Viṣṇu before slaying him told him that in the next life he would be born as human being with one head and two hands and would kill him who would be born with ten heads and twenty hands. Thus Nandaka was reborn as Daśakaṅṭha and Viṣṇu incarnated as Rāma (SSP:10-11).

This episode in Thai Rāmakīrti is evidently the inclusion of the story of Bhasmāsura in the Śivalīlāmṛta in Marāthī (Mani:127).

## 2. The Birth of Sītā

When King Thosarot (Daśratha) requested Sage Kalaihot (Ṛṣyaśṛṅga) to perform the rite for getting his heir, a being appeared out of the sacrificial fire holding a tray of 3 divine sweet balls, the fragrance of which went as far as Lanka, the capital of Thosakanth. Montho (Mandodarī), Thosakanth's queen, had a strong desire to eat the sweet ball. So Thosakanth sent Kākanāsura (Skt.-Kākānana-Asura), a demoness, to bring the sweet-meat for her. She took the form of a crow and flew to Ayodhya but she succeeded in stealing only one half of a sweet ball.

Montho eat the sweet-meat and became pregnant. She, later, gave birth to a girl who was actually the incarnation of Lakṣmī, Goddess of Fortune. As soon as she was born the child cried out “destroy the whole race of the demons; destroy the whole race of the demons.” After learning from Phiphek (Bibhīsaṇa), the astrologer about the destructive consequences indicated by the ominous cry, Thosakanth decided to discard the baby by putting it in a casket and letting it float along a river. The casket containing the child was found by Sage Chanok (Janaka) who was the king of Mithilā but left the throne to practice austerity. Thinking that the baby should not come in the way of his practice of the austerity he buried the casket with the baby and prayed gods to protect it. After sixteen years the sage decided to return to his kingdom and wanted to take the baby with him. He ploughed the whole ground to find the baby and he found a full grown beautiful girl. He named her Sītā as she was found from the furrow (Sītā) and adopted her (SSP:24-6).

The birth of Sītā in the Thai Rāmakīrti is thus faintly similar to the accounts given in the Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Kamba Rāmāyaṇa, Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa and the Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa (Mani:721-2).

According to Dasaratha Jātaka, Rāmapaṇḍita, Lakkhaṇa and Sītā were children of King Dasaratha of Banares. They were sent by the king to live in the forest for twelve years for their own safety after he conferred the throne to Bharata, son of his second queen. After twelve years Rāmapaṇḍita returned to Banares, claimed the throne and took Sītā as his queen (Malalasekera:1066).

The stealing of the sweet ball or pāyāsam by Kākanāsura does not occur in the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa (See Rajagopalachari: 3).

### 3. The episode of Rāmasūn (Rāmāsura)

At a spring time in heaven gods and goddesses celebrated the season with great merriment. Maṇimekhalā, a goddess of the ocean, who had a fabulous gem, also came there. Rāmasūn, a demon with unparalleled power, who was also on his way to heaven, saw the goddess playing with the gem. He wanted to possess the gem himself. He, therefore, chased the goddess to snatch away the gem but in vain.

He threw the axe at her but she playfully dodged the axe with the help of the fabulous gem. Till today the chasing is going on. As a result of the throwing of the axe and the playful moving of the gem the flashing and thundering phenomena take place.

At that time a god named Arjuna was also on his way to heaven. Seeing him, frustrated Rāmasūn, caught hold of Arjuna and threw him at Mount Meru causing it to tilt to one side. Ísvara (Śiva) asked all powerful beings to put it back to its original position. When the effort of others came fruitless he asked Kākās, the original named of Phālī (Vālin), and Sugrīb (Sugrīva) for help. Both of them were successful in restoring the Mount Meru.

Rāmasūn, here, is evidently Paraśurāma and Arjuna is Kārtavīryājuna, king of Hehaya dynasty who had thousand hands and ruled

Mahiṣmatī on the Narmadā river. As a result of the curse by Sage Āpava, his thousand hands were chopped off by Paraśurāma (See Mani: 393-5).

#### **4. The episode of Phālī's capturing Thosakanth.**

Phālī (Vālin) is told in the Thai Rāmakīrti as having captured Thosakanth. This is how the story goes.

Aṅgada, Phālī's son, at the age of ten, was taken to a river and was let to play there alone. At that time Thosakanth came there and knowing that he is Phālī's son decided to kill the boy. He, thus, turned himself to a huge crab and hidden under water waiting for the opportunity to kill the boy. The monkey soldiers who were around noticed that there was a huge crab. They tried to capture it but in vain. They informed Phālī who came to the spot. Seeing Phālī the crab turned back to his real form and fought with Phālī. Thosakanth was eventually captured and kept as captive for seven days becoming the laughing stock and insult of all the monkeys (SSP:22). In the Uttara Rāmayaṇa, in a similar manner, Rāvaṇa was captured in a fight by Kārtavīryārjuna on the bank of the Narmadā (Mani:394).

#### **5. The episode on the birth of Onkhot (Aṅgada)**

Montho (Mandodarī) was originally a frog living on the milk of four ṛṣis' cows. One day a Nāginī, female serpent, secretly discharged her venom in the milk with the intention to kill the four ṛṣis. In order to save their life the frog jumped into the bowl of milk and died. The ṛṣis brought her back to life by turning her into a beautiful woman to show their gratitude to her noble deed and then presented her to be the maid of Goddess Umā. Thosakanth, after restoring, on Śiva's request, Mount Kailāsa which was

tilted to one side as a result of Virulhaka (Virūḍhaka)'s throwing his snake upavīta (sacred cord) at it, to its normal position, asked Śiva for Umā to be his wife. Śiva had to give her to him. Thosakantha, however, found her body to be too hot that he had to carry her to Lanka over his head. Viṣṇu, on his effort to obstruct the act of Thosakanth, turned himself into an old man planting a tree upside down. Thosakanth told the old man how foolish he was. The old man told Thosakanth that he was more foolish as he was taking a woman with hot body who would burn the whole race of the demons. He asked Tosakanth to ask Śiva for Montho instead. He did according to the old man's advice. While carrying Montho flying, he passed over the palace of Phālī (Vālin).

Phālī challenged him for a fight. Tosakanth lost in the fight and had to yield Montho up to Phālī. Tosakhan later asked his preceptor, Aṅgada, to ask Phālī to return Montho to him. Phālī agreed and returned Montho but by that time Montho was already pregnant. Sage Aṅgada had to remove the foetus of Montho and put it in the womb of a she-goat. At the time of delivery the sage took the baby out from the goat's womb, named it Aṅgada and returned it to Phālī.

## **6.The episode of Benyakāy**

When the monkey army of Rāma was camping on the seashore preparing to cross the sea to Lanka Thosakanth wanted to deceive Rāma that Sītā was death. He asked Benyakāy (Sanskrit-Pañcakāya), Bibhīsaṇa's daughter, to transform herself to be Sītā and to act as dead body floating in the river near Rāma's camp. On seeing the dead body of Sītā, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa lamented greatly.

When he saw Hanumān he became angry thinking that Hanumān's burning of Lanka was the instigation that prompted Thosakanth to take Sītā's life. At that time Hanumān observed with keen eyes that the body floated upstream he knew immediately that the body was fake one. Consequently he burnt the body to test whether the dead body was real. Benyakāy flew away but Hanumān followed and caught her. Hanumān courted her, and intimate relation followed. As a result a son was born of Benyakāy. He was named Asuraphad (SSP:61-2; Shastri:222-3).

## 7. The episode of Suvaṇṇamacchā (Sanskrit -Suvarṇamatsyā)

From Tosakanth's sexual relation with a fish, a daughter with half top part of beautiful girl and lower part of fish was born. He named her Suvaṇṇamacchā (Sanskrit-Suvarṇamatsyā)

At the time when Rāma built a bridge to Lanka Tosakanth ordered his daughter and the school of fish under her leadership to remove all the building materials thrown into sea by the monkey army with the intention to obstruct the construction of the bridge. Hanumān dived into the sea to find out the cause of the disappearance of the building materials. He found the mermaid and courted her. It ended up with the intimate relation between the two. As a result a son was born without the knowledge of Hanumān.

He was brought up by Maiyarāb (Maiyarābṇ=Mahirāvaṇa), king of Pātāla, the nether world, who named him Macchānu (Skt-Matsyā+hanu).



He found his real father when Hanumān went to Pātāla to rescue Rāma who was carried away while he was asleep by Maiyarāb to Pātāla and kept in an iron cage (SSP: 63-4;Shastri:223).

## 8.The episode of Maiyalāb (Mahirāvaṇa)

Thosakanth, during his fight with Rāma, sought the help of his relative Maiyarāb, who is the king of Pātāla. He was possessed of all magical power learnt from his preceptor, Sumedh Muni, who helped to remove the heart of Maiyarāb, turned it into a bee and hid it in Mount Trikūṭa. He, thus, virtually immune to death. Maiyarāb used herb and his magical power to make everybody in Rāma's army including Rāma himself deeply asleep in spite of the fact that the pavilion where Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa was kept in the mouth of Hanumān. Maiyarāb carried Rāma to Pātāla and kept him in an iron cage.

Hanumān, after being freed from the effect of Maiyarāb's magic, went to Pātāla to rescue Rāma, passing through various obstructions on the way. He met his son, Macchānu, who guarded at the outpost to Pātāla. Hanumān, with the help of Philākuan, Maiyarāb's elder sister, who told him the secret about Maiyarāb invulnerability, succeeded in slaying the demon and rescuing Rāma (SSP:63-70).

The episode does not exist in the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa but it does in Krittibasī Rāmāyaṇa (Sil: p.711).

From the internal evidence cited above it can be concluded that Thai Rāmakīrti which was composed in poetical form by King Rama I of Chakri dynasty incorporated materials from various sources, keeping Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa as the core of the story.

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