RESEARCH ARTICLE

TRANSCREATION AS TRANSLATION AND CREATION:
A STUDY BASED ON RAMAYANA INTERPRETATIONS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This article has two objectives. The first objective is to add emphasis to a class of literature, such as *Ramcharitmanas* by Tulsidas and Kamban's *Iramavataram*, which stand somewhere between source texts (Valmiki's *Ramayana*) and translations, slightly below original works and far above translations. With a focus on the epic, the article examines and clarifies the mechanics of cultural textual flow. The second step entails examining the transcreational process that gives rise to these writings in order to determine its authenticity and define its boundaries.

THE CONTEXT OF STUDY

India boasts one of the world's oldest civilizations. It encompasses a diverse range of religions, dialects, customs, and cultures. Its myths date back to the dawn of civilization, and their origins are unknown. Vedas, epics, Puranas, and Upanishads are all rich in Indian mythology. India has a lengthy history, and the Vedas, Puranas, and epics are examples of its literature. These works discuss legendary stories that are deeply rooted in Indian consciousness. These myths and legends assist us in returning to forgotten culture, traditions, and beliefs, demonstrating that mythologies have a strong influence on culture.

The word 'Myth' comes from the Greek word 'mythos,' which literally means 'story.' Legends, Gods, Goddesses, heroes, and supernatural beings all play a vital role in this story. Myth is defined as "specific accounts concerning Gods and superhuman beings and extraordinary events or circumstances in a time that is altogether different from that of ordinary human experience" (Smith: 793). The origin of myths is inextricably linked to religious ceremonies, and consequently evaluates religious stories. Classical thinkers and mystics concocted these legendary stories to explain the nature of existence and the notion of right and wrong. Myths portray a society's culture, intelligence, and religious views, as well as customs and beliefs. According to *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms,* myths are "stories of unascertainable origins or authorship accompanying or helping to explain religious beliefs" (Childs 2006: 46).

Epics play a significant role in the development of culture. They have a unique style of delivering narratives because they are generally based on oral tradition. Each narrator has the right, if not the obligation, to recount the story in their own unique way, emphasizing favorite scenes, illuminating ethical implications, and providing light entertainment.

> … in a social milieu where the vast majority of the audience of traditional literatures are not literate, traditional texts must make heavy use of devices that maximize memorability. Among these devices are iteration, formulaic composition, simple metrical forms preferably subject to musical or quasi-musical recitation, copiousness, heavy use of epigrams and sentential, hyperbole and tales of wonder. (Goldman 1990: 7-8)

The two Indian classic epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, have been translated into numerous languages and styles over the years. Each variation has a particular variety, atmosphere, and flair. A.K. Ramanujan claims that, "in India and South-East Asia, no one ever reads the Ramayana or the Mahabharata for the first time. The stories are there always and already" (44). The Ramayana is regarded as an important piece of Indian literature and has been replicated, reinterpreted, and revised, resulting in over 200 different Ramayana interpretations.

> The Ramayana is the portrait of a consciousness hidden from it; or, one might say, of an identity obscured, and only occasionally, in brilliant and poignant flashes, revealed to its owner. The problem is one of forgetting and recovery of anamnesis: the divine hero who fails to remember that he is God, comes to know

himself, at least for brief moments, through hearing (always from others) his own story. (Shulman 1994: 93)

The beautiful epic poem, the Ramayana is widely attributed to the sage Valmiki who wrote it in Sanskrit Language. It is undoubtedly regarded as the Aadi Kavya, or the first poem, and each Indian locality has its own adaptation of the classic, and it has a strong influence on the minds and ideas of the locals. It appears in numerous languages, in multiple of versions and interpretations. With so many versions of Rama's exploits available today, Valmiki's Sanskrit epic poem is only one more among them. However, experts believe that Valmiki's *Ramayana* is the most renowned and significant of all the stories.

> Like any other monumental work of literature, the Ramayana has always functioned on a variety of levels. Through the millennia of its popularity, it has attracted the interest of many kinds of people from different social, economic, educational, regional and religious backgrounds. It has, for example, served as a bedtime story for countless generations of Indian children, while at the same time, learned sastrins, steeped in the abstruse philosophical, grammatical and metaphysical subtleties of classical Indian thought, have found it a subject worthy of their intellectual energies. (Goldman 1990: 41)

TRANSCREATION

The term "transcreation" refers to a hybrid of translating and creation. It concentrates on translating content for a specific audience. Translation is the process of changing one language into another, whereas transcreation is the process of changing the spirit of a text from one culture to the other. A reinterpretation of a text in a different language that emphasizes the psychological impact of the mood, structure, and personality is known as transcreation. It is a technique that gives the translator the ability to change or modify text or literary fragments. Such extreme flexibility is made conceivable by the fact that translations are not performed on individual words, phrases, or even longer chunks of text. The entire text is translated during transcreation since it lends itself to revision, reinterpretation, and re-creation.

Mona Baker writes in her introduction, 'One of the most fascinating things about exploring the history of translation is that it reveals how narrow and restrictive we have been in defining our object of study, even with the most flexible of definitions'. Every language has cherished, re-textured classics. Transcreated compositions that emerge side by side with source texts in the intended context need naming and in-depth research. They justify inclusion in the broad category of translations, and more mainly in the intracultural version

The task of transcreating Valmiki's *Ramayana* is both fascinating and intimidating. From its likely oral roots to penned scripts and now published books, the Ramayana seems to have had an ancient legacy of circulation. The narrative is both continuous and creative, related to its mythological origins including its actual multiform, credit to the numerous reinterpretations and generic versions of the core plot.

Ramayana of Valmiki and its reinterpretations constitute strata within the wider culture of Rama tales which have spread throughout the millennia. It dates back to the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. It is 24,000 verses long and depicts interpersonal responsibilities. The epic is important to India's cultural sensitivity and has inspired several other nations, including Indonesia, Nepal, Thailand, and Cambodia. Several Indian languages, as well as civilizations outside India, have their own versions of Rama's exploits. The later narrative grapples with Rama's strange behavior and the different narrative tactics used to vindicate him. "To some extent, all later Ramayanas play on the knowledge of previous telling: they are meta- Ramayanas" (Ramanujan 46). Such ethnic adaptations, which are rife with local symbolism, traditions, and practices, are popularly known of the interpreter. Thus, South India has Kamban *Ramayana*, the Northern states have Tulsidas' *Ramcharitmanas*, and so on—Kamban, and Tulsidas signifying the individual translators.

Ramcharitmanas and *Iramavataram* are two well-known interpretations of the Ramayana, respectively. Kamban's *Ramayana* was penned in Tamil in the 12th century, at the dawn of the Bhakti movement, and Tulsi's Ramcharitmanas was composed in Awadhi in the 16th century, at the height of the Bhakti movement. Both versions are not simply translations of Valmiki's *Ramayana*, but rather transcreations of it. They've taken the story's framing and reimagined it to create a unique piece. The work is essentially 'original', despite the fact that the plot framework, the characters, and the key events are nearly identical to those in numerous older writings. The plot's basic structure hasn't changed

significantly, but the author has rewritten it with a lot of finesse and creativity. Only the figures present qualities are expanded; no new characters are formed. The handling of the narrative, modifications and deletions, meticulous depiction of the figures, the rich ethics hidden in the plot's happenings, the suitable conversations of the characters, and the selected language of their poems has provided the epic a new dynamic. As a result, there are many changes to this tale and it is portrayed from a far different viewpoint from the source. This effectively changes the plot of the story. The entire aspect, grandeur, and grace, shift and transform when viewed from a different perspective. Even if the mountains are in the exact same location, the perspective changes in a spectacular way.

In order for the new text to emerge, the source text serves as its central component. A new text is created as a result of the author's intellect working on it, his words expressing it, and the addition of information, feelings, and specifics that best serve his aims. As the revised text acquires shape, the process of adding, removing, combining, and shaping set in flow a number of new meanings, which come to a different equilibrium. In the Ramayanas of Valmiki, Kamban, and Tulsidas, there are parallels and differences. Though the later Rama stories follow in the footsteps of the Valmiki version but still retain a fresh essence.

In his essay "Three Hundred Ramayanas," which was included in Richman's edited collection of *Many Ramayanas*, Ramanujan made reference to the phenomena of later works linking to earlier texts in different ways and preserving ties among themselves. Each new Ramayana is a 'crystallization',

according to Ramanujan, which compares the Ramayana legacy to a reservoir of signifiers that includes story, place, characters, and other elements. He claims,

> 'These various texts not only relate to prior texts directly, to borrow or refute but they relate to each other through this common code or common pool. Every author, if one may hazard a metaphor, dips into it and brings out a unique crystallization, a new text with a unique texture and a fresh context.' (p. 46)

Each author chooses a selection of facts that are exceptionally appropriate to his objectives from among the multitudes of existing interpretations of a given story. The work is substantially transformed by changing the text and texting methods. The epic was written in shloka format by Valmiki. Tulsidas used the chaupai format, while Kamban used the stanza format. There are seven Kandas in the Ramayana of Valmiki; 'Bala Kanda', 'Ayodhya Kanda', 'Aranya Kanda', 'Kiskinda Kanda', 'Sunder Kanda', 'Yuddha Kanda' and 'Uttara Kanda'. Tulsidas also penned it in seven Kandas, with the exception that 'Yuddha Kanda' was replaced with 'Lanka Kanda'. However, Kamban, on the other hand, has authored six cantos, excluding the 'Uttar Kanda'.

According to Valmiki's *Ramayana*, King Dasaratha had 350 wives, with Kaushalya, Kaikeyi, and Sumitra being the three most prominent. However, these were the only spouses mentioned in the *Ramcharitmanas* and the *Iramavataram*.

Kamban constructs a fascinating love scenario; when Rama and Sita initially encounter one another in the park. Tulsidas, likewise, portrays Sita and Rama's encounter in the garden area in great detail. In both the versions it is regarded as love marriage because Rama and Sita got attracted to each other before their marriage, whereas Valmiki, on the other hand, never mentions such an event.

There is no mention of Sita's swayamvar in Valmiki's version, and it was a simple union; similarly, there is no reference to the swayamvar in Kamban's edition, but the wedding depicted is full of glitters with the presence of Gods and goddesses. 'Kings arrived, Brahmins assembled, as did lovers of music; wandering minstrels, handmaids galore and those appointed to mark time… Kings, sages and gods, and maidens with swan-like gait filled up that matchless hall, making it resemble the golden Meru' (p. 43). Tulsidas, on the other hand, claims that Rama and Sita married on the basis of swayamvar.

> On the occasion of Sita's selection of her Husband had assembled numerous princes, each one of who was a great champion than the other(s), but not one of them could stir Siva's bow and all the mighty heroes failed… Sri Rama, the jewel of Raghu's race, snapped the bow without the least exertion even as an elephant would break the stalk of a lotus…. (p. 238-239)

There is no passage in Valmiki's *Ramayana* that describes Sita being protected by any kind of Lakshman-Rekha. Kamban also, has not provided any details about the protective line. Tulsidas, however, is the one who originates the classic Lakshman-Rekha story. The shelter where Sita was there is surrounded by Lakshman's protection in *Ramcharitmanas* which would protect Sita from

outside creatures. 'He entrusted her to the care of all the sylvan gods and deities' (p. 571).

Ravana physically forces Sita out from the hut in Valmiki's story and the *Ramcharitmanas*, however in Kamban's narrative, Ravana destroyed Sita's hermit, mounted it on his Vimaan and travelled to Lanka without contacting her. 'Remembering the curse upon his head if he ever touched an unwilling woman, the sinner hefted with his shoulders the earth on which the hut stood' (p. 145)

The real Sita was captured in the *Ramayana* and *Iramavataram*, and the fire ordeal was performed to test Sita's innocence. Contrary, Sita's illusion was taken in Tulisdas's *Ramcharitmanas*, and the fire ordeal was simply a ruse to reclaim the genuine Sita, who was handed over to Lord Agni by Rama before these episodes even occurred.

Sita (it will be remembered) had been previously lodged in fire. Sri Rama now sought to bring her back to light….with her thought fixed on Lord Rama, Janaki entered the flames as though they were cool like sandal-paste, exclaiming "Glory to the lord of Kosala, whose feet are adored by the great Lord Siva with the purest devotion!" Both her shadow-form as well as the social srtigma was consumed in the blazing fire; but no one could know the secret of the Lord's doings. Even the gods, Siddhas and sages stood gazing from the celestial regions. (p. 769-770)

In Kamban's possession, the setting of Surpanakha's and Rama's encounter has changed as well. According to Valmiki, she grew insane after meeting Rama, and her love ran deep. He describes that she was ugly, with a large tummy and evil eyes. Her hair was of a dark reddish tone. She was of mature age. Her body image was terrifying. She was overflowing of nefarious intentions and nasty language. To win Rama's affection, she appeared herself as a Rakshasi and stood before him. This portrayal makes one wonder how Rama was able to have a lighthearted discourse with such an unattractive Rakshasi. Kamban departs somewhat from the concept and captures the situation nicely. Surpanakha arrived in the shape of a 'lovely damsel in distress, walking gently and sweetly with the stride of a swan and a peacock with the sole purpose of seducing Rama's heart' (107).

Rama is unaware that he is a manifestation of Lord Vishnu in Valmiki's *Ramayana*. The Gods descend after the battle and inform him of his identity. In *Ramcharitmanas*, Rama already knew he was an incarnation of Lord Vishnu who had come to earth to end the rakshas' cruelty.

Every version has a unique ending. According to Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Rama accomplishes his earthly journey by immersing himself in the river Saryu after being grieved by the loss of Sita and Lakshman. *Ramcharitmanas*, on the other hand, concludes suddenly without delving into detail about the events in 'Uttarkanda' as related by Valmiki. The birth of Rama and Sita's twin boys, Luv and Kusa, brings the story to a close. There is no mention of Sita's disappearance or Lakshman's suicide. In the Kamban *Ramayana*, on the other hand, there is no mention of Sita's exile or the birth of her children, and it concludes with Rama bidding Angada, Hanuman, Guha, and Vibhishana goodbye.

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By dissecting what he reads, each Ramayana reader constructs his own version of the story. His interpretation is independent and equal to that of the original creators, who dissected the story in its entirety as well as in specific scenes, personalities, and connections. The conventional editions, preconceptions are adjusted and amended in these interpretations. Inconvenient ethical ambiguities in the characters have been introduced, removed, painted over, or abridged in subsequent Ramayana renditions.

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