

Critical Edition of the Valmiki Ramayana

Valmiki Ramayana, like the Mahabharata, is so popular throughout the world, especially in India, that many ancient narrators tried their poetic genius to thrust or include some of their own verses-shlokas- in the body of these National Epics. They were very cautious to insert such verses in keeping with the context or situation, with a view to enhancing the characters of certain persons or personalities.

Such inclusions or insertions or technically called the interpolations have increased the trouble of the scholars to know or fix the exact extent of the V.R. or Mbh.

This situation compelled the scholars to undertake the tedious task of critically editing such voluminous works to arrive at the possible originally composed V.R.

Many attempts were made by Indian as well as Foreign scholars to arrive at the exact text of the V.R.-as must have been envisaged by Maharshi Valmiki-by removing such additions etc.

As everybody knows,there are two main geographical divisions of India,viz.the Southern and the Northern.Since V.R.was very popular,scholars from both the areas had their own versions, stories, anecdotes, popular beliefs etc.about the happenings or incidences in V.R. In keeping with this tradition,some scholars brought out the Version popular in North and others tried their hands on the Southern Version. All these attempts were made,based entirely on the available data in Manuscripts, written or couched in different scripts and scattered in various places through out the length and breadth of India.

All such efforts were considered and this academic race or competition almost came to an end,when during 1951 to 1975,the Oriental Institute,Baroda-established by the visionary Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III of Baroda(now,Vadodara),brought out the Authentic Critical Edition of the Valmiki Ramayana.

The Process of Critically Editing a Text of such a magnitude involves the following steps:

(1) Collecting all the available manuscripts, written in a variety of scripts and belonging to or available in all parts of India and the neighbouring countries.

(2) Arranging them as per the Northern and Southern tradition.

(3) Comparing their readings in keeping with the Contexts.

(4) Omitting certain portions- shlokas, passages etc - that do not suit the particular context or are irrelevant.

(5) It helps us reach a version or patha which could be nearer the original patha as composed by Valmiki.

On most important thing about the Constituted Text-prepared on these lines-is that it gives a big jolt to some of the famous or popular beliefs of the masses; e.g.the episode of the Lakshmanarekha, the verses नाहं जानामि केयूरे, जननी जन्मभूमिश्च etc.that have crept into the modern versions of the Ramakatha.

I may point it out here that the Baroda Critical Edition gives more importance to the readings from the manuscripts from the South rather than the Northern version. Moreover, the Pure Patha of Ramayana is found from the Southern region. The most important thing or fact is that six out of the seven Commentators of the V.R. are from the Southern India, consolidating the point.

Another point to be noted is that the Critical Edition is for the class of scholars and the general or popular editions are for the general public at large, which is more sentimental than critical in outlook.

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