2.18 Historical Importance of the legend of Rāmāyana. रामायण
(The journey of Rama)

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ABSTRACT

Rāmāyana was the first classical Sanskrit epic of India. It is the work of Valmiki. According to scholars this legend was turned into a poem in the 4th century B.C. This consists of 24,000 Sanskrit stanzas. It is far shorter than the Mahābhārata. Rāmāyana relates the adventures of Rāma who went to Daṇḍakaranya together with his brother Lakṣamana and wife Seeta. There are diverse regional versions of the Rāmāyana written by various authors in India. Indian tradition regards the Rāmāyana as part of their history. Valmiki’s Rāmāyana has been traditionally divided into seven cantos (kandas) dealing with the life of Rāma from his birth to his death.

1. Bala kanda
2. Ayodhya kanda
3. Aranya Kanda
4. Kiskindya Kanda
5. Sundara Kanda
6. Lanka Kanda
7. Uttara Kanda

Chroniclers in Sri Lanka had not included the story of Rāmāyana into Sri Lankan history. For this we can identify two reasons.

1. Defeat of Rāwanā by Rāma
2. Hindu concept of god included in the Rāmāyana was alien and unacceptable to Buddhism.

Some Sinhala scholars have rejected the usage of Rāmāyana, for example, Totagamuve Rāhula therọ who wrote Kāvyashekara, Veedagama therọ who wrote Budugunālankāraya, Buddhagosha therọ who wrote Pāpanchasudani had not considered them as worthy of study.

However, one cannot ignore the fact that, Rāmāyana is important as a historical source building up Sri Lankan History. There are many places which are related to the story of Rāmāyana in Sri Lanka, i.e. Seethāwaka, Seethā Eliya, Rāwanā Ella, Roomassala (Unawatuna). Although our chroniclers took no notice of Rāmāyana in constructing Sri Lankan history we should not ignore the story of Rāmāyana when studying history.

Key word: epic, legend