CHAPTER 1:

THE SUBLIME PATHOS
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The prelude to the origin of the narrative of Rāmāyaṇa, contentious in its historicity, invokes the dynamics of creative process as experienced by the great Seer Vālmīki who enquires into the existence of a “truly virtuous” human being. The nature of enquiry and the anxiety in tone itself is consequent to severe asceticism and deep study of scriptures. The nature of enquiry aims at locating the essence of human form in virtues like righteousness, propriety, truth, beauty etcetera: “Is there a man in the world today who is truly virtuous … always speaks truth and holds firmly to his vows … exemplifies proper conduct … [is] a pleasure to behold … is self-controlled … judicious and free from envy … [and] when his fury is aroused in battle, is feared even by the gods” (Goldman, BālaKāṇḍa 121); and the anxious tone of questioning brings into relief the humble disposition of the questioner himself who, purged of his ambition to open the secrets of this universe, is now prepared to listen as the reality gets revealed to him. The subsequent revelation conjoins mortal human form with moral perfection that is attributed by the Celestial Bard Nārada to Rāma, the king of Ikṣvāku dynasty ruling Central India’s Gangetic region of Kośala. The description of his great deeds and actions belies his humanness even though it portrays all the moral qualities that Vālmīki is looking for. Nārada begins by describing the physical beauty and the great virtues of Ikṣvāku king and talks of his “perfect” proportions and his “well formed and symmetrical” limbs. He says that Rāma’s complexion is dark and his eyes are large, his chest is “vast” and “fully fleshed,” his neck as beautiful as “a conch shell,” his jaws “powerful,” his collarbone “set deep in muscle, his arms reach down to his knees, his head is finely made, and his brow is noble while his gait is full of grace.” From this description of his physical beauty, grace and prowess Nārada moves on to describe Rāma’s virtues: “He knows the way of righteousness and is always true to his word. The welfare of his subjects is his constant concern. He is renowned, learned, pure, disciplined … protector of all living
things ... guardian of righteousness. Versed in the essence of Vedas ... expert in the science of arms ... highly intelligent ... good, cheerful and clever" \textit{(Bālakāṇḍa} 121-122).

From thereon, as this description of Rāma’s virtues progresses, Nārada’s endeavor to capture them within language appears more and more difficult and he resorts to employ a series of hyperbolic similes in his description:

- He is the constant resort of good men, as is the ocean of rivers
- ... he is as deep as the ocean and as unyielding as the Himalayas. He is mighty as Viṣṇu, but as pleasant to behold as the moon. In his wrath he resembles the fire at the end of the time, yet he rivals earth in forbearance. In charity he is the equal of Kuber, giver of wealth, and in truthfulness like a second Dharma, the god of righteousness. \textit{(Bālakāṇḍa} 121-122)

Even as the abstract qualities of constancy, steadfastness, might, righteous anger, forbearance, charity and truthfulness become concretized within the referential frame of these grand similes, the human subject which houses all these qualities gets sublimated yet defamiliarized in this comparison with the grandeur of oceans’ depth, mountains’ strength, apocalyptic fires as well as godlike generosity of Kuber, might of Viṣṇu and the truth of dharma. The hitherto clear-cut description of Rāma’s beauty and his virtues gets blurred in the readers’ imagination as the language stretches itself to its limits through these hyperbolic similes in an attempt to accommodate the sublimity of moral virtues within his human self.\textsuperscript{2} While, on one hand, this strain on language helps to transform Rāma into something more than mere human by bestowing on him shades of divinity, the semantic strain on language, on the other hand, points towards certain hidden depths within the phenomenal existence. The common language of interpreted context starts bursting at its
seams to invite glimpses of a Reality which is the ground of all the phenomenal existence with its subjective moral virtues and their objective natural correlates, as eternal as the world and the gods who reside in it.

The following summary narration of Rāma’s great asceticism and even greater martial deeds by Nārada bears out the fact of him being more than a human being in a mythical manner as he is shown to be responsible for bringing the kingdom of heaven on earth. If his act of leaving his throne to keep his father’s promise sets a moral precedence to be followed, his act of killing Rāvana has cosmic proportions of liberating the entire creation from the demonic clutches: “The three worlds, including all that moves and is fixed, and the hosts of gods and seers were delighted by the mighty feat of great Rāma” (BālaKāṇḍa 125); and his subsequent ascendancy to the throne of Ayodhyā then becomes the beginning of a “Golden Age” where there is physical, emotional and spiritual happiness (BālaKāṇḍa 126). Such is the auspicious significance of his actions that, Nārada asserts, the simple act of readers’ participation in this narrative will make them transcend not only their limited human selves but will also prepare them for heaven by revealing the Truth that will purge them of all sins: “Whoever reads this history of Rāma, which is purifying, destructive of sin, holy, and the equal of Vedas, is freed from all sins ... [and] ... will after death rejoice in heaven” (BālaKāṇḍa 126).

Contemplating on this great vision proposed by Nārada, Seer Vālmīki enters the great forest with his disciple to take bath on the bank of river Tamasa. His entry into the solitude of this great forest marks a break from his human world and its categories of host/guest, questioner/respondent, and human/divine to lead him into the wilderness where no social context exists except the primal instincts of creatures. The epistemological context of a scholar seeking moral essence of human beings now gets replaced by the solitude of the dense forest which is not governed by any moral or ethical law. This break from the human
world is coincidental with the beginning of a calm inward mood as the seer spies an
excellent bathing spot on the bank of river Tamasā and meditatively looks at the waters into
which he is about to take a dip:

... look at this lovely bathing place so free from mud. Its
waters are as lucid as the mind of a good man (satpuruṣa). 4

(BālaKāṇḍa 127)

In this calm meditative mood, the “lucid” waters of the river evoke a similarity with the
mind of a ‘good’ man which, like the clear waters of the river remains free from the ‘mud’
of moral and ethical interpretations to let the reality of the phenomenal world reflect, as it
is, in its Being – sat. With this revelation of sat in existence, all the familiar interpretations
of existence through which human beings relate to the world are lost and the seer submits
himself, as Heidegger calls it, to the “open center”, “a clearing, a lighting” which “grants
and guarantees to us humans a passage to those beings that we ourselves are not, and access
to the being that we ourselves are” (Heidegger, Poetry Language and Thought [PLT] 53). 5

The only way to find the truth of our self – “that we ourselves are” – is to be as others,
humans and animals alike – “that we ourselves are not” – in the “passage” of this
“clearing,” outside of the familiar modes of living. It is only as being-as-others that the
interpretive self will be disowned in this Open – “clearing” – and the truth of his
epistemological quest, finding moral virtues in human existence that was troubling the seer
earlier, will disclose itself. With this disowning of interpretive self the seer turns inwards to
dwell into his self by proceeding to become one whose senses are “tightly controlled,”
niyatendriya, to exist as an authentic being-as-others (BālaKāṇḍa 127). With this introvert
turn of his self the grasp on the phenomenal reality is suspended to such an extent that the
immediate act of bathing becomes a burden and taking the barkcloth from his disciple the
seer wanders aimlessly in the dense forest.
As he walks without purpose, "looking all about him" in the forest "nearby" (BālaKāṇḍa 127) he accidentally becomes a witness to a vision of love in the togetherness of a pair of kroupa birds. The "vast forest," vipulam vanam, which was a scary unknown to the interpretive consciousness now becomes a dwelling, an un-threatening nearness where the seer can witness the love-play of the birds. The seer’s sense of displacement, consequent to the loss of interpretive self, causes him to be aware of the phenomenal world for its own sake as it ceases to be an instrument to fulfill his desires. He cannot interpret birds either as the in-human others that are constitutive of his human identity, or as mere objects of enjoyment. Instead both the seer and the birds share the same ground of existence as equals. The birds too, like the seer, are "wandering about" aimlessly, lost into each other and oblivious of the world surrounding them and its threatening otherness. They are conscious neither of the seer nor of the hunter who lies in wait to hunt them down. Lost in their passion for each other they sing, and the instinctive song in their "sweet-voice[s]" is echoed throughout the forest. This song is not an object of mere aesthetic pleasure but instead seeks to create an inclusive harmony which invites all to participate in their togetherness. In this harmony the singers and the song are as "inseparable" (BālaKāṇḍa 127) as the pair of birds itself – the singers become the song and the song singers. The seer’s bare subjectivity, without its epistemological underpinnings, completely absorbs this all-inclusive bliss of oneness and participates in it so completely that the interpreted context with all its contrary categories of passion and asceticism, seer and sight, human and animal, singers and song get reconciled into each other. The oneness of this participatory experience makes the seer forgetful of his existence separate from the birds so that he also suffers the shock and the mortal pain of the male bird equally as he is hurt by the violent action of the hunter.

This abrupt disruption of the passive participation within the unearthly bliss of harmonious oneness gives way to a tragic vision as the hunter’s search for food ends in the
death of male krouṇḍa bird. Instantly the beauty of the birds’ song is reduced to a “piteous cry” (BālaKāṇḍa 127) of the female krouṇḍa bird lamenting her slain mate who writhes on the ground covered with blood. The harmony of meditative calm experienced by the seer which had consumed all interpreted categories is shattered as he is jolted out of it into the world of grief and pain brought about by the violence of the hunter. This sudden emergence of the seer out of the meditative calm into the interpreted context announces itself through the linguistic innovation of a couplet of lament-curse as his en-worlded human identity with all its contrary categories comes rushing back:

> Since, Niṣāda, you killed one of this pair of Krouṇḍa, 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.’ (BālaKāṇḍa 127-128)⁷

Use of perfect form of verb babhūy in the syntax of the śloka immediately following the curse is interpreted by Tilak to mean events that are not directly witnessed by the narrator.⁸ This grammatical anomaly implies the depth of the seer’s meditative mood wherein his interpretive self is absorbed so completely in the scene of happily singing pair of krouṇḍas that he becomes a witness to the words coming out of his own mouth. This impersonal witnessing of his own speech starts his return to the phenomenal world as the meditative mood begins to get lifted and an awareness of simultaneously generated contrary feelings of pity and anger grips him – pity for the birds with whom his subjective self identifies itself upon its return into the interpreted context, and a consequent hatred for the hunter whose act is responsible for their tragedy. This throwing back into the linguistically interpreted context involves a concealing as the seer loses his vision of oneness, but it is also a revelation as it sublimates language to the level of Logos projecting out of that Open where there is no
distinction between a word-sign and the reality which it seeks to represent. “Language,” Heidegger writes, “by naming beings for the first time, first brings beings to word and to appearance. Only this naming nominates beings to their being from out of their being. Such saying is projecting of clearing, in which announcement is made of what it is that beings come into the Open as” (PLT 73-74). The language here recovers its primordial status where words become living realities projecting themselves “from out of” the Open to be the things rather than being dead signifiers arbitrarily yoked with things. The seer’s words become a living reality for the hunter by becoming true as he will suffer for his actions in the prophesized manner.

The seer’s nascent consciousness of the lament-curse upon his forced ejection out of the meditative calm, finding its being as the contrary states of pity and anger, also generates a feeling of awe and wonder at the dawning of language as Logos and the newness of its form: “Stricken with grief for this bird, what is this I have uttered.” The remembrance of the moment when he was seized by ‘what is’ and the awareness of contraries involved in its articulation is the basis of his ek-stasis as his self is propelled into assuming a new identity of poet-seer who is now torn between the feelings of oneness and alienation with the phenomenal reality. As his pity for the suffering birds gives him an empathetic oneness with the suffering in all existence, his anger for the hunter who caused the suffering of the birds alienates him from the very same existence.

This assuming of the identity of the poet-seer on his reemergence into the phenomenal context however makes Vālmīki forgetful of the truth that his vision of harmonious oneness had disclosed. His empathetic identification with the pain of death and separation experienced by the birds is arrived at by ignoring the equally powerful pain of hunger that the hunter experiences. His privileging of birds’ suffering over that of the hunter involves a forgetting of the truth of oneness wherein both the birds and the hunter would be
equals in their interpretations of existence through their respective actions. Within that vision, both the actions are representations of varied but equal aspects of the phenomenal reality they inhabit as the contraries of love and cruelty, hunted and hunter, beauty and hunger all rest equally within the meditative calm. Forgetting this essence of his meditative vision, the poet-seer would seek to restore his human world where the hunter is his ontological other who lives by his instincts and cannot experience the harmonious bliss that the seer is rejoicing in. His inability to experience the bliss of oneness emanates from his existence within the phenomenal world of sensuous categories, to be suffered as an unfeeling and insensate other, that must either be controlled or destroyed to sustain his own self. The pain of his hunger-ridden instincts prepares him to interpret only the instrumental aspect of this phenomenal world where the living reality of the birds is reduced to their being a kind of food that must necessarily be destroyed to perpetuate and nourish his self. Unlike the poet-seer his consciousness of the pain of hunger does not allow him to see any harmony or beauty in the passionate oneness of his prey and their song is merely seen as a sign to locate their whereabouts.

Once the vision conceals itself to restore human world of contrary categories, the poet in him overcomes the seer and his identification with only one aspect of existence at the expense of the other makes him feel only anger for the hunter: “That wicked man, his mind possessed with malice, did a terrible thing in killing such a sweet-voiced Krouṣṇa bird for no reason” (BālaKṛṣṇa 128). This poet also finds the center of his creative impulse lying within the painful gestation of human identity as it emerges out of the meditative calm to articulate itself as the Logos containing the contrary categories of pity and anger. It is his consciousness of searing pain felt on his emergence into this world of contrary categories that takes the form of paradoxical linguistic innovation of lament-curse. The entire experience of the poet first losing himself into this participative bliss of oneness and then his subsequent reemergence in pain had unleashed a creative energy to recover its tragic
essence. Now even as the meditative calm of the seer is concealed from him, the self-conscious poet exults in finding the core of his creativity:

Fixed in the metrical quarters, each with alike number of syllables, and fit for the accompaniment of stringed and percussion instruments, the utterance that I produced in this access of śoka, grief, shall be called śloka, poetry, and nothing else. (BālaKāṇḍa 128)

Defining the formal parameters of creativity as prosody, meter and rhetoric, and with punning playfulness calling his new creation as śloka,9 Vālmīki points to “(sic) excess of grief” (śokārta) as the source of his creativity. “To submit to this displacement means,” Heidegger writes, “to transform our accustomed ties to world and to earth and henceforth to restrain all usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking, in order to stay within the truth that is happening in the work” (PLT 66). Thus the poet-seer “lapses ... into profound thought” (BālaKāṇḍa 128) as he struggles to come to terms with this experience which has displaced him from his everyday existence to reveal the essential truth of creativity residing in-between the meditative calm and the pain of articulation while containing within itself the contraries of pity and anger, empathy and hatred.

For Heidegger the fourfold of mortals, divinities, earth and sky are symbolical primordialities of ontology that bring phenomenal reality, inhabited by man, into being. The united “mirroring” or interplay of these four is ontologically the home that man dwells in. The oneness of the fourfold lies in the fact that mentioning one of the elements necessarily refers to the other three for they are inseparable and essentially one: “Earth and sky, divinities and mortals – being at one with one another of their own accord – belong together by way of the simpleness of the united fourfold. Each of the four mirrors in its own way the presence of the others ... The mirroring, lightening each of four, appropriates their own presencing into simple belonging to one another ... The appropriative mirroring sets each of
the four free into its own, but it binds these four free ones into the simplicity of their essential being towards one another" (PLT 179). Vālmīki’s primordial awareness will reveal to him the Being of beings as “happening” of truth in the śloka. The seer as “mortal” had lost his interpretive self into the meditative calm to reveal the ground in oneness with the krouṇḍa bird whose tragic death will now be unfolded as a sublime song joining both the “earth” and the “sky” where the “divinities” will also participate. As this experience incubates in his solitary awareness he is visited by Brhamā, the source of all creation, to be passively welcomed by a “subdued and wonderstruck” poet-seer (BālaKāṇḍa 128). As the Creator-of-All sits in front, Vālmīki’s mind remains silently absorbed in the remembrance of the preceding experience and “lost into inner thought” he once again sings the couplet thinking of the events that led to this poetic creation:

That wicked man, his mind possessed by malice, did a terrible thing in killing such a sweet-voiced krouṇḍa bird for no reason. Grieving once more for the krouṇḍa hen, given over wholly to his grief and lost in his inner thought, he sang the verse again right there before the god. (BālaKāṇḍa 128)

The contrary categories of “wicked man” and “sweet-voiced ... birds” are now firmly couched in his mind underlining his identification with the tragedy of the suffering birds as he sings the verse again. Brahmā asks him not to be perplexed by this great vision but submit to it as a blessing given by the Creator himself: “This is a śloka that you have composed ... it was by my will alone that you produced this elegant speech” (BālaKāṇḍa 129). He then commands him to “stay within the truth” of this new form of verse and use it to write the story of Rāma, as he heard it from Nārada. The creation and singing of the sublime song then becomes the basis of revealing the “truth” of all existence to him. As Logos, the linguistic face of that vision, this new form of language will join signifiers with their signified as whatever he writes will become a living truth not only for his characters
but also for the people who will participate in it by either listening to it or by reading it. As the visionary poet-seer he will, Brahma says, *be able to create reality in any form that he wishes:*

> You must tell the world the story of the righteous, virtuous, wise, and steadfast Rāma ... the full story, public and private of that wise man. For all that befell Rāma, Saumitri, the rāksasas, and Vaidehī, whether 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.

*(BālaKāṇḍa 129)*

Whatever will be written by him will become the truth that will be lived by his characters as he will know all the public and private events in their lives. Thus the visionary poet-seer will be made aware of the workings of this phenomenal world, *"even those events of which [he is] ignorant,"* as the great story of Rāma narrated by the Divine Seer Nārada will become a perfect vehicle for his creative insight. This sublime song as Logos of this world will renew itself every time the readers or audience will participate in it by reading or listening about the holy life of the righteous, virtuous, wise and steadfast Ikśvāku King as it will *"delight the heart"* of all created beings and will make Vālmīki’s name immortal in all the worlds:

> As long as the mountains and rivers shall endure upon the earth, so long will the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* be told among men. And as long as the story of Rāma you compose is told, so long will you live on in my worlds above and below.

*(BālaKāṇḍa 129)*

Brahmā’s visit thus makes the poet-seer understand the meaning of his creative vision and reconcile its poetic essence with the events of Rāma’s life as they were presented by
Närada. It is only by experiencing the inherent paradoxes captured within his creative impulse that Vālmīki will be able to reconcile the essence of morality with the mortal form of Rāma that Nārada’s narrative described. The prelude to this epic had begun with Vālmīki’s quest of a truly virtuous human being and his readiness to articulate the sublime song lies in his understanding of the Being of all beings hidden deep into the core of all the moral and ethical categories. Born with such a grand objective, the sublime song will soar to complete its arduous journey that will bring that core within his song: “And thus did the renowned sage with enormous insight compose this poem ... with hundreds of ślokas equal in syllables, their words noble in sound and meaning, delighting the heart” (BālāKāṇḍa 129).

The narrative that follows this prelude evokes the vision of a universe which interprets all existence as a seamless commingling of the divine, natural, and human layers of reality where the gods, men, and natural entities coexist and even interchange their forms. This vision develops mainly through the mythological narratives of Viśvāmitra Kaushika as he journeys along with the Ikṣvāku princes, Rāma and Laṅkāśāmaṇa, through the vast Gangetic plains introducing them to the history and geography of that region. The mythical universe of BālāKāṇḍa reveals itself to be a place where human beings get transformed into natural forces like a river;¹⁰ mountain and even inanimate weapons assume human shapes;¹¹ and the deposits of divine taint from Indra’s body can create our human reality¹² as easily as does the procreative power of Lord Śiva.¹³ This oneness of coexistence among various layers of creation however shows itself to be far from being a harmonious one as this universe, which was created by the gods for human beings, always threatens to fall into a chaos brought about by the internal contradictions that goes into its making. These contradictions tearing at the center of this universe are evident in the impulses at work within the myth of Creation of Universe. This myth reveals the ground of these contradictions which lies in gods’
perception of Being-as-Śiva in contradictory terms – a perception that has its basis in their immortal condition. Unable to die, the gods are perpetually trapped in an existence where negation is the fearful other which remains unknowable and this duality conditions their vision of Śiva. He is perceived to be both the origin of the world as well as the fearful harbinger of the negation of all and everything. Eager for Lord Śiva to procreate with his consort Umā, the gods persuade the great Lord to unite with her. Thereafter scared of their own negation and that of all “the three worlds” which the splendor of the product of such union may bring about, the very gods who had gone to such lengths to persuade Him to procreate, now pray so as to refrain Him from doing so with His divine consort (BālaKāṇḍa 192). Their immortal condition makes them fearful of unknown-as-nothing which they believe death to be, rather than perceiving it as a necessary condition of the existence which has brought them to be in the first place. This inability to believe in the interconstitution of existence and negation as the being in all becoming makes them incur Umā’s wrath which renders their own wives barren.¹⁴ That their immortality precludes any understanding of originary aspect of death as the condition of a new beginning, is symbolized by their inability to procreate with their wives as they perennially reside outside the cycle of birth-and-death. Outside this cycle of existence their desires are as chaotic, witness Vāyu’s lust for Kuśanābha’s daughters¹⁵ or Indra’s lust for power, as they are barren that must then be harnessed through the imposition of an order.

Indra Vāsava, the king of immortal gods and ruler of Amarāvati, the city of immortals, interprets existence as this bipolarity of chaos and order where the chaos originates from struggle between all creatures’ desire to be and the impermanence of their existence; and this chaos must be controlled by the imposition of Indra’s own interpretation of existence as teleological order and harmony. This teleological ordering of existence is based upon a strict ethical code, adherence to which will be rewarded by stay in Amarāvati
for a limited period after human beings finish their time on earth. For Indra ethical values within this teleology are essentially instrumental which are to be practiced for the sake of a harmonious *telos*, his immortal capital Amarāvati. This teleology is sustained through his ability to control desires by exercising power and cunning which not only gives the impression of blurring the sense of inner contradictions residing within it but also allows him to keep other gods, demi-gods, humans, demons and other creatures in their appointed places. Instances of his exercising power and cunning are apparent in his willingness to commit the sin of *brāhmaṇa*-killing while executing Vṛtra,\(^\text{16}\) his brazen seizure of the nectar of immortality for gods during the churning of the sea through currying deception of his cousins, the *daityas*,\(^\text{17}\) then his treacherous destruction of the fetus of his cousin in his aunt Diti’s womb which she is bearing in order to seek revenge for her sons slain in the battle by the king of gods,\(^\text{18}\) and even his robbing of Sage Gautama of his great asceticism by sullying the honor of his wife Ahalyā\(^\text{19}\) (*BālaKāṇḍa* 170-172; 209-211; 191-193; 217-218). Weaving fictions of harmony born out of his will, he makes the inhabitants of this world-order believe in them and demands their allegiance to it. Thus even in the face of grave injustice that is borne by his daughters, Kuśanābha preaches them the virtue of being patient in front of gods. Kuśnābha realizes that the only way of existing within this world-order is to live within the strict ethical code of Indra because any form of self-assertion, righteous or unrighteous, will be punished by the king of gods. For him, Indra’s ethical teleology, constitutive of all human condition, must be suffered and he not only suffers it without question but also preaches the same to his daughters while praising their continence in front of Vāyu’s lust:

> Forbearance is an adornment to women as well as men, and such forbearance as yours is hard to achieve, especially in the face of the thirty gods ... Forbearance is charity; forbearance
is sacrifice; forbearance is truth, my daughters. Forbearance is glory; forbearance is righteousness. The world itself is founded on forbearance. (BālaKāṇḍa 186)

Refusing temptations to give in to their subjective desires even when the temptation comes from the gods, human beings are asked to be resolutely patient and accept both good and bad without casting any judgment. Although Kuśanābha’s contention that forbearance is the essence of all virtues and even human condition is based upon his inability to see beyond the limits of Indra’s teleological interpretation, it is such patience only that holds this world together: “The world itself is founded on forbearance.” As dupes of the fictions woven by Indra, men like Kuśanābha are instrumental in maintaining his version of harmony by excluding any possibility of harboring desires independent of their station within this teleology. Thus Indra’s control over the world-order through the imposition of his will needs active consent of all the layers of existence like the gods, seers and human beings – the gods, who constitute the phenomenal reality of this world-order are asked to perform the prescribed actions assigned to them; the seers who understand this world-order well enough are asked to sustain it by bringing all the layers of existence – divine, human and animals – together through their sacrifices; and the human beings are asked to live within this world-order by justly ruling over the earth and replicating the role of Indra Vāsava, controlling all its animate and inanimate wealth.

The efficacy of this teleology however demands that Indra self-submits to it as one of its constituents and must be governed by the same moral paradigms that he forces on all others; and so all his excesses in coercing others to keep their appointed place in the world-order are followed by severe punishment as the impersonal ethical underpinnings of this teleology sustain themselves only by the penance that he will undergo. Thus he must bear the taint of brāhmaṇa-killing after killing Vṛtra and be overwhelmed with filth and hunger;
he must give the status of gods to all the seven parts of Diti’s fetus that he has slain; and
must bear the effect of Sage Gautama’s curse and be emasculated for his indiscretion
against Ahlyā. To reduce the effects of his punishment thereafter he is again dependent
upon the knowledge of seers and the help from other gods who are his subordinates within
this teleological world-order. For it is the seers’ understanding of the workings of his
teleology and the unique, though one-dimensional, capacities of other gods that bail him out
of his punishment. Thus his pitiful cries for help as he calls out for seers and gods after
Gautama’s curse has emasculated him:

In arousing the anger of great Gautama and thereby creating
an obstacle to his austerities, I have accomplished the work of
the gods. For, in his wrath he has emasculated me and
repudiated his wife and so, in provoking this great outpouring
of curses, I have robbed him of his ascetic powers. Therefore,
all of you – great gods, celestial bards, and hosts of seers –
should restore my testicles to me, for I have aided the gods.

(BālāKāṇḍa 217)

The seers and all the layers of this world-order then respond to his call and help him out on
each occasion: Guided by Agni, the god of fire, the seers provide him with an alternate pair
of testicles taken from a ram to save him from the curse of Sage Gautama, and also give him
the sacred bath to cleanse him of the taint of brāhmaṇa-killing after he has executed Vṛtra
(BālāKāṇḍa 171, 217).

The limits of Indra Vāsava’s teleological interpretation of existence lie not only in
his dependence upon the active consent of the inhabitants or their help in alleviating his
sufferings but also in his inability to provide any sense of permanent harmony within it.
With his cunning manipulations and coercion he only manages to impose a temporary sense
of order for a time being after which the desires will rise again to open the chasm of chaos undermining his sense of order. And his immortality, like a curse, will only ensure that this cycle of imposed fictions of order and chaotic desires it seeks to contain will continue forever. Moreover, if his teleological order is fractured by the excesses of one of its constituents, Indra does not have the power to heal the rift by himself. Then it is left either to the culprit or one of the members of family to atone for their sins and restore order. Thus Ahalyā and Sage Gautama suffer the pain of separation from each other for hundreds of years for their respective sins of lust and anger to restore balance and Sagar’s entire lineage bears the stigma for the sin of pride committed by their forefather until the fracture is healed and order restored by Bhagfratha.²⁰

The heroic figure of this world-order, who has the power to bring authentic harmony from inside and heal the rift created by excessive desires, is a human being like Bhagfratha, the king of Ayodhyā. Unlike Kuśanābha, Bhagfratha wisely understands the limits of Indra’s power and so assumes his responsibility to restore order by ending the curse brought upon by his ancestor. Born in the family of Sagar who committed atrocities by allowing the ravaging of entire earth, he bears a curse which is not of his own doing. These atrocities were the result of a split between Sagar’s avowed intentions and his actions caused by his pride. Horse sacrifice, āśvamedha, that he wanted to perform for the benefit of all the inhabitants of the earth was obstructed by the stealing of the sacrificial horse, which made him forget his duty of protecting the earth’s inhabitants and he sinfully let his sixty thousand sons loose to kill blameless creatures in their search for the sacrificial horse. As Sagar’s forgetting of his role destroyed the teleological fabric, all existence ran amuck crying “the sons of Sagar are slaughtering all creatures” (BālaKānda 199). The tragic end to this cosmic disruption came with the burning of all the sixty thousand sons of Sagar by Seer Kapila and their ashes lay scattered in the underworld without their last rites. The core of
Bhagîratha’s wisdom in attempting to redeem the curse lies in his acceptance of his mortality, an acceptance that comes to Gautama and Ahalyâ through their penance where they suffer the pain of deathlike existence which results in their humble realization of their human follies. It is his sense of his own mortality which makes him aware of his role as a link between his dead ancestors and the unborn future generations. Their last rites must be duly performed because he would also want his sons to perform his last rites when he would be among the dead – this is the truth of human existence which binds him in harmony with not only other human beings but also to all the creatures of this world. When the final rites of his great-granduncles are over, a more authentic sense of harmony than the imposed one of Indra will rise within the world-order and heal the fracture created by Sagar’s sin. It is only through his sense of his own mortality that Bhagîratha not only redeems this curse of incomplete telos, whereby sons of Sagar are trapped in a limbo and cannot go to Amarâvati, but proves the act of a mere mortal to be more powerful than that of the king of gods. His transcendence over Indra’s action is achieved in his bringing of Holy Gangâ from heaven to the underworld via earth, thereby joining all the three worlds. This great endeavor will also get the blessings of Being-as-Śiva, the true arché and telos of all world-orders, as He will bear the force of Gangâ falling from heaven on His head, and then release a part of it from His great locks to accomplish Bhagîratha’s task.

The fragility of Indra’s control over this world-order is also foregrounded in the fact that it remains forever under siege from the desires of other immortal gods, demons, seers and kings who try to assert their independence of it by giving in to their subjective desires and unhinge the precarious balance of ethical principles constitutive of this teleology. Thus Vâyu, the god of air, is so driven by his lust for the fair daughters of Kuśanâbha that in failing to seduce them he punishes them unjustly for not complying with his wishes; Gautama, desirous of ascetic greatness, forgets his self-control in anger to curse Indra for
exposing the lust hidden beneath his wife Ahalyā's ascetic exterior (*BālaKāṇḍa* 214-216); and Sagar who in his pride unleashes the anger of his mighty sons on the entire earth and inflicts cruelties on the very subjects he is supposed to protect. And then there are demons like Bali Vairočana and Rāvaṇa Paulatsya who provide the most serious challenge to Indra’s teleo-centric interpretation of existence. They, unlike most of gods, seers and humans, interpret their existence to be autonomous of Indra Vāsava’s world-order and refuse to regard it as constitutive of their selves. Grounding their self in their awareness of a Reality much greater than Indra’s teleology, a belief which has gathered force by the great asceticism that they have practiced in the past, demons like Bali Vairočana interpret this teleological world-order in subject-centric terms and believe that the constitution and working of the present teleology can be retained intact while replacing Indra at the top for a better and more efficient ruler that is, himself. Instead of submitting to the given teleology as constitutive of his self by accepting his place as one of its constituents, Bali Vairočana believes his self to be independent and autonomous enough to reinterpret the teleological existence with himself as the center. It is in this subordination of the teleological order to his subject-centric interpretation that the demonic aspect of his personality lies, for it reduces the entire creation to empty pieces which will move according to the will of a master who is not governed by the same rules. This is the fate that Indra escapes by being a constituent of the same world-order who is not only governed by the same rules that he applies on others but is also dependent upon the help of the other layers of existence to escape his predicament. Bali’s subject-centric interpretation of existence precludes any understanding of the fact that limitedness of Indra’s power is merely a reflection of the limits of his teleology – an understanding forced upon Indra Vāsava which he humbly accepts as is displayed in his repeated homage to its *arché*, Being-as-Viṣṇu in this mythology, who is the ground of both the chaotic existence of desires and the teleological order that is imposed upon them.
If gods are unable to die then demons like Bali Vairocana, in their enthusiasm to interpret existence by keeping their subjective self at the center, become oblivious of the fact of death. That is why, for them meaning of existence gets reduced to the reality of their own interpretations. Indra Väsava’s self-submission to his own world-order as one of its constituent results from his humble awareness of the Being which is the arché of all existence and forces him to allow existential space within his teleology for seers like Vasiṣṭha, Viśvāmitra, Agastya and kings like Bhagiratha and Janak to transcend its limits to reach the Truth of Being. In contrast, Bali Vairocana’s subject-centered interpretation of existence makes him dissociate weakness of Indra’s rule from his teleology which retains its systemic usefulness. Mistaking transgression of his appointed place in the world-order for transcendence, he does not realize that actual transcendence of this world-order lies in his realization of its limits. That is why, his conquest of all the three worlds and his subsequent attempt to resurrect the teleological order through sacrifice ends in an immediate failure.

Being-as-Viṣṇu, appearing as the Perfected-Being Dwarf, Vāmana, asks Bali to give him as much land as he could measure in his three paces and then traverses all the three worlds in those three paces. Humbled by this sudden vision of the immensity of the all-pervading Being as the substratum of all creation including Indra’s teleology and many such teleologies along with the chaotic desires they would seek to control, Bali Vairocana gracefully accepts the emptiness of his ambition of usurping Indra’s place at the helm and controlling this universe. This revelation of a Reality which is the ground of all existence makes Bali realize Indra’s weakness as a ruler to be a mere reflection of the limitedness of his teleology and brings forth an humble admission of the futility of own ambitions to usurp Indra’s throne. His vision of existence relative to the grounding context of Being brings out his acceptance of the immensity of Being underlying all creation and saves him from Rāvana’s fate as he gets blessed with the kingdom of the underworld.
Rāvaṇa’s challenge to Indra’s teleo-centric world-order is more radical than Bali Vairośana’s and his ambition is much more than merely replacing Indra at the helm. Not oblivious of the fact of death, he harbors ambitions of conquering it through great ascetic penance. His penances reveal to him the face of Being as the source of all creation but his desire to perpetuate his self endlessly makes him use this vision as the source of power which will grant him invulnerability from “gandharvas, yaḵsas, gods, dānavas and rāḵsasas” (BālaKāṇḍa 154). His self-indulgent penances only make the illusion of his cleverness stronger as he now believes that he has tricked the Creator, Brhamā, into giving him the immortality that he desired. His understanding of Being as the true source of all creation along with his illusion of immortality makes him believe in his virtual equality with the Being Himself as he sees the entire creation divested of any inherent existential reality of its own, an unreal and even an irrelevant derivative which can be altered to suit his desires. So, the phenomenal world trembles in his presence and works against its given nature: “The sun does not burn him. The wind will not blow near him. Even the ocean, with its garland of restless waves, dares not stir when he appears.” Lacking the humility of Bali Vairośana and secure in his virtual sense of immortality, he makes nature bow to his commands and becomes “unassailable.” His contempt of all creation also results in his desire to “overthrow ... Śakra, the king of the thirty gods” (BālaKāṇḍa 154). His successful oppression of entire creation instills a further belief in him that he can create as many teleological world-orders as he wishes, a fact that is symbolically represented in him having ten heads. Ten times more demonic than Bali Vairośana, he wishes to replace Indra within this world-order and create an alternate rule with the help of his son Indrajīta wherein his golden city Lankā will replace Indra’s Amarāvati. For this reason he cannot bear the sacrifices of the seers as they are homage to Indra and gods within his world-order which help in its sustenance and asks his followers like Mārića and Subāhū to disrupt them.24

It is to counter such evil that all the three worlds rise together to call Being-as-Viśṇu to appear on earth to save them. The context chosen for Viśṇu to appear is Ayodhyā, the
capital of Ikşvākū dynasty, where the ascetic-king Bhagīratha was also born. The vision is that of a peaceful and prosperous society of Ayodhyā, a symbol of righteous bravery and a great seat of learning,25 which is now ruled over by Daśaratha. The king is called a “royal seer” who has “conquered his senses” and rules Ayodhyā by subordinating his individual desires to the “devotion to righteousness”26 (BālaKānda 136). The self-control exercised by the king, in strict “accordance with righteousness” (BālaKānda 137), gets reflected in the contented lives of his subjects also: “All the men and women conduct[] themselves in accordance with righteousness and [are] self-controlled and joyful” (BālaKānda 136); and in the functioning of his ministers who, like their king, put good of society before their personal gains: “Adept at their duties, they [are] tested in loyalty so that, if the occasion demanded, they [will] punish even their own sons ... They fill[] the treasury without injury to the brahmans and kshatriyas and mete[] out strict punishment only after considering the relative gravity of a man’s offense” (BālaKānda 138). The happiness and prosperity of the citizens is the direct result of their contentment with their appointed place in the society: Thus “they [are] truthful and not covetous, for each man [is] content with his own property ... No one [is] lacking in either rings or self-control” (BālaKānda 136).

Ruling this magnificent capital of Kośala like “Indra rules Amarāvati” (BālaKānda 136), Daśaratha maintains a strictly organized social structure following the traditional injunctions of righteousness provided by the founder of his dynasty, the patriarch Manu. In the entire society there is no sense of an individual self separate from the appointed place in the social order of caste and personal desires and ambitions are subsumed within the principles of social organization. Legitimized by the scriptural treatises and guided by their brāhmaṇical interpreters, all the members of the four castes exercise self-restraint accordingly and live within their given social spheres and perform their respective duties:

... Nor was there any who indulged in mixing of the social classes ... The brahmans had subdued their senses and were
always devoted to their proper occupation. They were given over to charity and study and were restrained in accepting gifts. The kshatriyas accepted the brahmans as their superiors, and the vaiśyas were subservient to the kshatriyas. The śūdras, devoted to their proper duty, served all the three classes.

(BālaKāṇḍa 138-139)

Its communal code reflecting the great teleological order of Indra, life in the capital discourages any excess of desire which will make an individual put his self above the social structure. Its inhabitants are taught not to hurt others for the sake of their personal gain which is considered a sin, and self-control, restraint and refusal to interpret subjective self outside their place within the social structure is lauded as righteousness.

The only lack that Daśaratha suffers from lies in the fact that there is no heir “to carry his dynasty” (BālaKāṇḍa 139), and to succeed him on the throne. In a world-order where human beings are asked to restrain their subjective desires to maintain their appointed place, suffering a lack of heir not only means the end of his dynastic lineage but a great teleological rupture as there will be nobody to perform the last rites. That is why seers and ministers seek a solution to this problem which comes through Sumantra’s recounting of the prophecy of great seer Sanatkumāra who predicts birth of four sons to carry the dynasty of the old king. In accordance with the prophecy, Daśaratha invites the great Sage Ṛṣyaśṛnga to propitiate the gods through this dual-sacrifice of aśvamedha and putrīyaiṣṭi. Under the careful guidance of Daśaratha and Vaśiṣṭha, all the four orders of civilized society – brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiśya and śūdra – along with kings, seers and gods participate in this endeavor. Replicating the teleological order of Indra Vāsava, these great sacrifices become a symbol of the microcosm where all the layers of existence come together to implore Lord Viṣṇu to appear on this earth for the welfare of all. Unlike Sagar’s sacrifice Daśaratha’s dual-sacrifice is not mockery of the moral and political hegemony of a monarch, it is
performed to sustain the world-order as well as the existing social organization under his rulership, which is in accordance with the actual spirit of āśvamedha sacrifice. The immediate result of putrīśāṣṭi sacrifice is to perpetuate that rule through the birth of an heir and perform last rites of the old king to give him a place among his ancestors.

This great enterprise of dual-sacrifice gets transformed into a cosmic call for Being with Seer Rṣyaśṛṅga's participation in it. Vaśiṣṭha and Sanatkumāra, in their wisdom, may understand the working of Indra's teleology but the power to rejuvenate it is accorded to the innocent man who exists outside human society in the deep groves of the forest. The myth of Rṣyaśṛṅga, narrating the Seer's powers of fecundity in bringing rains to end the drought of Aṅga, points to the solitude of forest as the center of regeneration which redeems the ills of the communal existence of the cities which has completely cut itself off from the natural world. The boy Rṣyaśṛṅga's life is an existence of complete isolation from the communal life as he devotes his time “serving the sacred fire and his renowned father” (Bālakaṇḍa 139). His innocent living as a mere mortal in oneness with the entire world and its divinities is symbolized in his serving of the “sacred fire” which, like Bhagāratha, not only joins the three worlds in ritualistic sacrifices but also reach their arché by subsuming the contraries of city and forest, ascetic and householder within itself. Rṣyaśṛṅga's sense of oneness with the source of his own origin and his lack of any awareness of individual self apart from his father, a sense given in his unqualified devotion to his father, qualifies him as the perfect instrument of regeneration. A time will come when he will become conscious of his separate self and will father children who will serve him the way he has served his own, thus fulfilling his ritualistic role as a link in the chain of the human existence; but until then he lives as “the son of his [father's] body” (Bālakaṇḍa 141) who, in his innocence finds wonder in all the familiar things which the sick life of city has reduced to merely ordinary and commonplace. He has the capacity to live the wonder of ordinary with same innocence as he lives the pain of his desires in pining for beautiful courtesans. It is as a symbol of such
innocence where there is no sense of self separate from the world, that he has the power to end the drought within the great city of Aṅga. And now Daśaratha is advised to bring this Seer to Ayodhyā to end the drought of heir by providing mighty sons to carry his lineage. It is only when this innocent sage will preside over the sacrifice that it will become a cosmic enterprise involving the participation of all layers of existence including animals, humans and gods²⁹ to evoke Being-as-Viṣṇu. The sacrifice will reach its fruition as gods will request Lord Viṣṇu to take the form of four mighty sons of the king for the welfare of the world. Lord Viṣṇu’s incarnation as the four sons of the king will not only serve the immediate purpose of the sacrifice by perpetuating Daśaratha’s dynasty, but also the larger purpose of sustaining this existing world-order by destroying the sinful existence of Demon-King Rāvaṇa.

Daśaratha’s great sacrifice also brings forth the human perception of Being as opposed to the divine and the demonic. The divinities, as immortals, perceiving Being as the home of the contraries of existence and negation create their own reality of order and chaos; and the demons, oblivious to the fact of Death, perceive existence in relation to Being as its source where meaning resides in the duality of Being and their perception of It, thereby making the creation irrelevant and essentially devoid of all meaning which can be oppressed to suit their own ends. Only human beings, living through this tragic predicament of existence in the consciousness of their own mortality, have the ability to perceive Being beyond all these dualities. Their tragic consciousness of mortality does not allow them to see the duality of existence and negation as contrary categories but rather interconstitutive categories. Existence brings its negation within itself and negation is the necessary condition of all origin and in their living of this process in all innocence, they become aware of its ground in Being where both the categories of existence and negation remain forever reconciled in each other. Nor will such consciousness of mortality allow a subject-centric interpretation of Being where the phenomenal reality becomes irrelevant because their
tragic suffering in the phenomenal world is too real to be ignored — confer lives of Kusanābha, his daughters, Sagar, Bhagīratha, Ahalyā — and carries the same meaning as the Being that sustains it. Placed in this world gives them awareness of Being as both its source and its end, while their consciousness of mortality displaces them from its center and reduces them to a humble link between their ancestors and successors thereby making them conscious of a hidden Reality sustaining this existence. Thus living their mortality each moment will give them the privilege to witness Being both as the transcendent source of all existence as well as the immanent ground of all phenomenal world where both the source and its derivative phenomena carry equal significance. This perception of Being, both as transcendent and immanent Reality, comes forth in the grand description of the dual-sacrifice where Being-as-Viśṇu is not only the fruition of the sacrifice but its very initiator as the Logos that has prophetically pre-ordained through Sanatkumāras that Daśaratha will have four sons “measureless in valor and famed in all the worlds” (BālaKāṇḍa 144), and it is after learning of this prophecy through Sumantra that the king of Ayodhya begins the process of twin-sacrifice. And this great microcosmic sacrifice also becomes the very face of Being as the joining of aśvamedha sacrifice with putriyāishṭi sacrifice can be etymologically interpreted as the “pervaded essence” of Being as the informing principle of all existence that now takes incarnation in this world for the welfare of creation.

Once a part of the phenomenal reality the incarnation is a simultaneous revelation and concealment of Being. The humanness of Being is a self-dissimulation, a concealment where He plays all the “roles” demanded by His phenomenal contexts, living through all the joys and sorrows of human existence like an ordinary mortal. But it is precisely in this living of ordinary existence of human beings inhering all its tragic contradictions that the ground or the source that sustains all and everything will be fully revealed. Here ordinary would point towards the extraordinary and the familiar will imply an unknown dimension. But first the self-dissimulation demands that the human incarnation must undergo the
process of education needed to exist in this phenomenal world and then, in keeping with the
mythological tone of BālaKāṇḍa
announce Being’s arrival in our world. Both these
functions are fulfilled when Seer Viśvāmitra comes to take away both Rāma and Laśmaṇa
to protect his sacrifice by fighting Māricā and Subāhū. As the Seer demands the services of
both the sons, the old king faces the dilemma where his love for the sons he has begotten in
his ripe old age comes in direct conflict with his righteous duty as a king of Warrior class.
Daśaratha begins by begging Viśvāmitra not to take Rāma to face certain death and offers to
go as his replacement with the army confident in the knowledge that his experience in the
battle along with the might of his army will kill the demons. But when Viśvāmitra discloses
the identity of the demons as followers of Rāvaṇa, Daśaratha realizes that he stands to lose
the affection of his son either way — sending Rāma would kill the boy and if he goes there
are chances that he may be killed — and thus refuses to help the seer at all:

Even the gods, dānavas, yakṣas, great birds, and serpents are
unable to withstand Rāvaṇa in the battle — what then of men?
This rākṣasa takes away the might of the mighty in the battle.
Best of sages, I am unable to do battle with him or with his
troops, even if I am accompanied by my troops or my sons ...
No, I will not give you my little son. [Italics mine]

(BālaKāṇḍa 165)

This tragic dilemma of Daśaratha caught between interpreting existence through his
personal desires or following the impersonal way of righteousness that ethical code imposes
upon him serves as a hint to the larger problems that will follow in AyodhyāKāṇḍa. Here
however, he is properly guided by Vasiṣṭha who first reminds him of his righteous duty:
“The Rāghavas,” he tells Daśaratha, “are renowned in the three worlds as righteous men.
You must follow the tradition of your house and must not resort to unrighteousness”; and
then goes on to dispel his fears for Rāma’s safety by telling him about Viśvāmitra’s
greatness; “rākṣasas will not be able to withstand [Rāma] if he is protected by the son of Kuśika, like nectar by the blazing fire” (BālaKāṇḍa 166). It is the second reason more than the first one that makes Daśaratha agree to perform his royal duty and send Rāma and Lakṣamaṇa with the great seer Viśvāmitra.

Viśvāmitra Kauśika’s fitness to guide Rāma through this world rests on the fact that in his hoary past he has suffered the pain of interpreting existence in all its aspects: human, demonic and divine. Śatānanda’s narrative about Viśvāmitra’s great deeds occupies a major part of BālaKāṇḍa and tells the story of King Kauśika’s transgression of his appointed place within the Warrior caste in his ambitious quest to become a brāhmaṇical seer of self-existent Being, brahmaṇa. Born to follow the Warrior code, Viśvāmitra Kauśika interprets existence in terms of martial power and drunk with pride and greed forgets the role of protector in his attempt to rob Vaśiṣṭha of his divine cow Śabalā who has the ability to fulfill all human desires. Vaśiṣṭha’s pleas to leave the cow as she is the very center of his entire āśrama and its various rituals leave him unaffected. The subsequent confrontation as Viśvāmitra’s army faces the magical army born of Śabalā’s limbs ends in the king’s humiliating realization of the emptiness of his military prowess and in his hurt pride he begins his search for the true source of power. For this he practices severe asceticism and gains various divine weapons and returns to challenge Vaśiṣṭha. The ensuing battle once again results in his defeat before the much greater asceticism of brahmaṇa. Treating this defeat as great humiliation, he decides that the real power does not lie in the conquest of earth but in the knowledge of the self-existent Being, the arché of all the existence, human or divine. Still desiring power over all the existence he remains a warrior at heart as he begins his great asceticism to realize Being, the source of all power. The following narratives of Triśaṅku, Śunahśeṣa, Menakā and Rambha recount the difficulties that he faces in this arduous journey.
Triśaṅku’s narrative describes his conceptual realization of Being as the source of all existence, which leads him to believe that all the rules of this existence can be broken to accommodate his pride. Triśanku’s desire to go to heaven with his own body is as demonic as Viśvāmitra’s challenge to Indra as he creates “a whole new set of constellations in the south like a second Brahmā, lord of creatures ... and in his wrath [begins] to create even gods” (BālaKāṇḍa 238). Śunahṣepa’s story shows his gradual understanding of mortality as he empathizes with the brāhmaṇa boy who is doomed to be sacrificial victim at Indra’s altar. He tries to save him and asks his sons to replace him at the sacrificial altar. When his sons refuse to obey him he disowns them and curses them to become “eaters of dog-flesh” (BālaKāṇḍa 241). As yet his acceptance of his own mortality is conceptual and not genuine enough because he cannot forgive the weaknesses of other mortals in front of ultimate negation. He must learn to accept other peoples’ weaknesses and must not sit in judgment over them, and this will be possible only when he would learn to accept his own weaknesses. The narratives of Menaka and Rambhā, taken together, will bring a more genuine acceptance of mortality in him. Both the narratives show his love-hate relationship with the beauty of this phenomenal existence. The narrative of Menaka describes his infatuation with the apsara who is sent by the gods to take away his ascetic power: “All of this, this great theft of my ascetic power, is the work of the gods! Ten years have passed like a single day and night with me a victim of love’s infatuation. Truly an obstacle has come to me” (BālaKāṇḍa 243). As he leaves Menaka and resumes his austerities, this struggle with lust followed by Rambhā’s attempt to seduce him results in his curse. But no sooner he curses her, he regrets it, because once again he has been “unable to control his anger” (BālaKāṇḍa 245). It is only when his self becomes impoverished “like a piece of wood” that he would be able to see the “three worlds with their moving and unmoving contents” (BālaKāṇḍa 246) with the same eye, without love or hate, that he will become brahmārśi, the seer of self-existent Being. It is then that “the sacred syllables ‘om’ and ‘vaṣṇ’ and the vedas” (BālaKāṇḍa 247) will be fully revealed to him, and Vasiṣṭha, the seer who was
instrumental for this beginning of the journey will confer it on him. With his acceptance by
Vasiṣṭha as a friend, he will truly become Viśvāmitra, friend of the entire universe. As
brahmārsi Viśvāmitra, though he has power to do anything he has desire to do none which is
why he is unable to fight anyone, even the demons and goes to Ayodhyā begging Daśaratha
to help him by sending his sons. But as he will take both of them to his penance-grove, he
will not only impart knowledge of this world, but will become a fit instrument to announce
Rāma as the incarnation of Viṣṇu on earth.

His teachings to both the brothers, Rāma and Laṅkaṁaṇa, are not only about the
teleo-centric order of universe but also concentrate on their code as the warrior-princes
which interpret righteousness as their cooperation in maintaining the balance of this
teleology. He begins by telling them the secret of self-restraint that informs human
condition within Indra’s teleology by teaching them the two magical spells of Balā and
Atibalā practicing which they will “suffer neither fever nor fatigue” or “experience ...
hunger [and] thirst.” This conquest of their senses is the basis of all human virtues and they
will “have no equal on earth in strength of arms ... beauty, skill, wisdom, resolve, or ready
response” (BālaKaṇḍa 167-168). Then he goes on to elaborate on the ontological and
historical contexts, relating to both Rāma and Laṅkaṁaṇa, the origin of the world as well as
the role that the kings of Ikṣvāku dynasty played in keeping the balance of this world-order
intact. If the narrative of Kuṣanābha’s daughters teaches both the brothers virtue of patience
within Indra’s teleology, the narrative of Ganga’s origin through Bhagiratha’s austerities
teaches them the genuine acceptance of mortality which is the true righteousness that
warrior-kings must practice to bring all the three worlds together. The negative example of
Sagar is a counterpoint to the actions of his great-great grandson who heals the teleological
rupture created by Sagar’s ambitions.

Viśvāmitra’s instructions don’t limit themselves to teach the princes their roles in
maintaining the balance of the world-order and protect the sacrifices of seers but also
concentrate on the ethical intricacies underlying the duties of the martial class which
sometimes ask a warrior-king to resort to manipulations replicating Indra’s transgressions.
Thus he asks Rāma to perform a seemingly unethical action of killing Tāṭakā by stripping
her of gender privilege of physical immunity for creating order in existence. “A king’s son,”
he is told, “must act for the welfare of the four great social orders ... [and] must kill this
unrighteous creature, for there is no righteousness in her” (BālaKāṇḍa 173). He then
narrates the stories of Indra and Viṣṇu who, in the past, had killed women to maintain the
balance of existence and asks Rāma to live up to their examples. By passing the test of
killing Tāṭakā, Rāma becomes ready to receive the knowledge of powerful divine weapons
which will help him in his future conflict with Rāvaṇa. He uses some of these weapons to
kill Mārića and Subāhu and then starts his journey towards Mithilā where, under the
guidance of Viśvāmitra, his actions will announce the fact of him being the incarnation of
Viṣṇu on earth.

In Mithilā, the formal announcement takes place through Gautama’s prophecy which
has already ordained that Ahalyā’s penance will be over when Rāma will come to their
āśhrama. The prophecy thus implicitly acknowledges the fact of incarnation and sets
Rāma’s visit as limit of Ahalyā’s punishment. Śatānanda, the eldest son of Gautama
exclaims: “Mighty man, did my mother do homage with offerings of forest fruits to Rāma,
who is worthy of homage of all living beings?” (BālaKāṇḍa 220) thus making a formal
announcement that Rāma is something more than a mere human being. This is followed by
Rāma’s act of breaking Śiva’s great bow in Mithilā which also wins him the hand of Sītā,
the girl who rose from the earth’s furrow and is “not born from the womb” as the price of
his strength (BālaKāṇḍa 249). Śiva’s bow is lying in the house of Janak for generations and
is so great that “All the hosts of gods, asuras, rākṣasas, and foremost among the
gandharvas and yakṣas, kinnaras, and great serpents are incapable of bending this bow,
stringing it, fitting an arrow to it, drawing its string, or even lifting it.” Yet Rāma lifts the
bow “as though it were mere play to him,” goes on to string the bow and affix the bowstring, fits an arrow to it, and draws it back. The bow immediately breaks in the middle with “a tremendous noise, loud as a thunderclap and a mighty trembling [shakes] the earth, as if a mountain had been torn asunder” (BalaKāṇḍa 250-251). The noise reverberating all earth is the announcement of Being’s arrival, a fact that is underlined in Rāma’s subsequent confrontation with Rāma Jāmadagnya. Rāma Jāmadagnya appears on the scene, “unassailable as Mount Kailāśa ... blazing with some extraordinary energy ... like fire,” to test Rāma Dāsarath with “yet another splendid bow” (BalaKāṇḍa 264). He presents Rāma with Viṣṇu’s bow and arrow and recounts the myth of its greatness. This divine bow along with Śiva’s bow that Rāma has already broken was created by Viśvakarman, the god of craft, for Lord Viṣṇu had started a competition for greatness among the two Great Gods – a competition which was won by Viṣṇu making this bow even greater than Śiva’s. Now this bow, along with Viṣṇu’s great arrow, is presented to Rāma and he is asked to put an arrow to it – a task so easily performed by Rāma that it humbles Rāma Jāmadagnya and he makes this announcement to the entire world:

> From the way you handle the bow, I know you to be Viṣṇu, lord of the gods, and imperishable slayer of Madhu. Hail, destroyer of your foes. All the hosts of gods assembled here bear witness that you are incomparable in your deeds and unrivalled in battle. And so, Kākutstha, I need not be ashamed of being bested by you, the lord of the three worlds. (BalaKāṇḍa 249)

It is not only these formal announcements but Rāma’s actual actions that justify the proclamation of him being the human incarnation of Being-as-Viṣṇu. Even though conditioned by the contexts, the ambiguity of his act frees it from those very contexts by throwing into relief their own inherent contradictions. Transcendence of the world-context
is desired by the gods, demons, and humans alike as shown in the actions of Indra, Vāyu, Bali, Rāvaṇa and Viśvāmitra. Indra, along with other gods, believes that he transcends the world-context because of his immortality and seeks to control it as his other by imposing his own sense of order from the outside; the demons think that they transcend the given world-order through their understanding of the ground of all creation and give themselves the power to oppress and destroy their other, that is, those who don’t share their view. The desire to transcend proves futile for both gods and demons – Indra’s consciousness of his “role” as the controller of all world places him within the world-order and makes him hopelessly dependent upon its inhabitants whom he seeks to control and harmonize, and demons’ consciousness of their “roles” first as challengers and subsequently as conquerors of the world-order makes them open to retaliation and punishment from humans as well as gods. In Rāma’s actions however transcendence of the world-order remains implied in his lack of desire, unlike gods and demons, to interpret existence within the polarities of freedom and conditionality where freedom is a category beyond and outside the given context. This refusal to interpret existence as such and act with complete unselfconsciousness brings out the tragic contradictions constituting Indra’s world-order where human subjectivity commonly fashions various conflicting self-representations – the “roles” of warrior-prince, son, husband, disciple etcetera. As Rāma continues living all the “roles” imposed upon him by his human condition with unselfconscious innocence, the contradictory contexts constituting the roles subvert each other and his act stands-out, as it were, to exist as a moment of freedom in itself. Such unselfconscious role-playing not only implies a freedom from the immediately given contexts through their subversion, but also suggests a subversion of the inner contradictions of the roles themselves as they harmoniously coexist with each other in him. In Rāma’s complete denial of the need to interpret existence, human subjectivity performs an unqualified surrender to this role-playing so that no self is left independent of various “roles” to be conscious of their ability to subvert either their conditioning contexts or their own internal conflicts. It is through
such unselfconscious innocence that an authentic transcendence is implied, which is beyond all human experience as no self is left to be conscious of either the contradictions within existence or within human subjectivity.

The instances of such transcendence are seen in Rāma’s encounters with Tāṭakā and Rāma Jāmadagnya, where the contradictions within the context are brought out by his actions even as he plays the conflicting roles with complete integrity. In Rāma’s encounter with Tāṭakā, Viśvāmitra’s teachings to the warrior-princes bring out the contradictions inherent in the given world-order. Even though the warrior-code explicitly recommends gender privilege for a woman who must not be killed by a warrior, Viśvāmitra invokes the higher duties of a warrior-king who must sometimes resort to unethical actions, like Indra, for the greater welfare of human society: “A king’s son must act for the welfare of the four great social orders. This is the immemorial rule for all men charged with the burden of kingship.” Rāma’s initial response is true to his role as an obedient disciple learning his craft from a renowned seer: “Since ... it is ... the command of a man learned in the vedas, I shall without question undertake the eminently justifiable action of killing Tāṭakā.” But as he challenges her with the sound of his bowstring, he tells Lakṣamaṇa in keeping with the letter and spirit of the warrior code: “I dare not actually kill her, for, being a woman, she is protected. My intention is merely to deprive her of her strength and her lair,” and announces his decision to “send her back without her ears and the tip of her nose.” The actual act of killing Tāṭakā is governed by neither of the two interpretations and is merely an instinctive response of a mortal facing an enemy who surprises him with her speed and agility as she “hurl[s] herself upon him, as swift and powerful as a bolt of lightening” (BālaKāṇḍa 174). The act will be later appropriated by the gods who would feel “gratified by this deed,” and would hail Rāma for being “steadfast” in following Viśvāmitra’s advice (BālaKāṇḍa 175), but at the actual moment of killing Tāṭakā he is acting neither as the warrior-king doing his duty for the gods nor is he following the warrior code. The act, as an ambiguity, exists in a
moment that remains free from all the interpretations which had existed before the act and will come just after to appropriate it.

The other instance is when Rāma is challenged by his namesake Rāma Jāmadagnya who presents another contradiction in existence. Born as a brāhmaṇa, he dresses and acts like a warrior with “his battle-axe slung over one shoulder and a bow … and a mighty arrow in his hand,” and has, in the past, “exterminate[d] the kṣhtriyas in his rage over his father’s murder” (BālaKāṇḍa 264). Before challenging Rāma to a single combat, Rāma Jāmadagnya decides to test his fitness for such an arduous task by asking him to prove his strength: “Now show me how mighty you are. Put an arrow to this, Jamadagni’s great bow, so dreadful to behold” (BālaKāṇḍa 264). The warrior code demands that Rāma must treat Rāma Jāmadagnya as his social and moral superior, a fact he is quite aware of: “I owe you reverence both because you are a brahman and for the sake of Viśvāmitra,” but the same code would also demand that he must respond to the challenge that is thrown at him. Rāma responds to this internal conflict of the warrior code by following Rāma Jāmadagnya’s demands to the letter: “Stringing the bow, Rāma fixed the arrow to the string.” And after that he posits that as a mark of respect for Lord Viṣṇu, his arrow fixed to the string must have a purpose: “For the divine arrow of Viṣṇu, conquering enemy citadels and crushing with power all pride in strength, never flies in vain.” As the purpose of the arrow is to crush the pride in strength, that purpose, Rāma Jāmadagnya is told, will be best served by destroying “either your retreat or the incomparable worlds that you have won through your austerity” (BālaKāṇḍa 267). If in killing Tāṭakā, Rāma’s instinctive response to her attack subverted the ethical contradiction underlying the situation, here it is his absolute refusal to interpret the spirit of the challenge, and an unselfconscious adherence to its letter that subverts the ethical intricacy embedded in its context. As his playing the role of a mere mortal facing imminent danger was his reality then, the role of a humble archer respecting the greatness of the weapons handed to him becomes his only reality now. The greatness of
the arrow chooses its own great purpose, as it were, and Rāma merely becomes the instrument to fulfill the purpose for which the arrow was made. He thus, remains placed within his immediate context, yet the contexts which are informing his actions are subverted to imply a freedom from the contradictions which rule the world-order. The entire world-order with all the gods, demons, seers and others stands “stunned” along with Rāma Jāmadagnya who feels “his strength sapped by the power of lotus-eyed Rāma” (Bālakāṇḍa 267). It was Tātaka’s mad fury which killed her, and it is Rāma Jāmadagnya’s pride which is the cause of his defeat, Rāma just served the purpose by sincerely living the role of an instrument appropriate for the occasion.

Bālakāṇḍa had begun with Celestial Bard Nārada’s description of Rāma’s virtues where commonsensical syntax of language was sagging under the overbearing weight of Being. The poetic vision of Vālmīki raised language to the level of Logos, so that it became a fit instrument to sing the sublime praise of Being, and it sings the glory of Being in both His transcendent and immanent glory to occupy the center of this universe. The world of Bālakāṇḍa as revealed to the seer-poet’s imagination, remains a surreal world of myths and symbols that merely contextualizes the arrival of Being on earth. It is only with the beginning of AyodhyāKāṇḍa, with its social and political context, that the problems underlying ethical action and their human cost will be described in detail and it is there only that Rāma’s placement in the human world will test his complete surrender to all the phenomenal contexts that he lives through along with his ability to make the inherent contradiction of each “role” living in the bareness of a self unconscious of the “role” itself.
Notes

1 The beginning of Rāmāyaṇa is a highly controversial issue as the epic comes to us through various recensions, the most important being the Southern recension and the Northern recension which comes further divided into many manuscripts, some of which were later appropriated by the Vaiṣṇava cult. Goldman admits that “the goal of critical edition of Rāmāyaṇa cannot be the recovery of the actual text of the poet” (BālaKāṇḍa 273n). This edition of Rāmāyaṇa by Robert P. Goldman and his team of scholars, used in this dissertation for quotations, is acutely conscious of the problem of the reception of an uneven text and has used various editions, most prominent being Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmikī ed. by Wāsudeva Laxmaṇa Śāstri Paṇḍālikar and The Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa ed. by G. H. Bhatt and U. P. Shah, to recreate as authentic a version of this great epic as possible. This mammoth project, both in scale and concept, has also tried to critically look at the interpretations of most of their predecessors following which it retains the first four chapters of the prelude that provide an insight into creative vision of the epic. “The first four sargas of the Bālakāṇḍa, as it now stands, give an insight into the ancient Indian view of the poem, its origin, nature, and destiny. In its treatment of the epic as the world’s first piece of true poetry, and its author therefore as the ādīkavi, or the first poet, the preamble affords the earliest glimpse of the tradition’s attitude towards art, emotion, and aesthetics” (Introduction, BālaKāṇḍa 71).

2 Goldman, in his “Introduction” to Bālakāṇḍa describes the differences between Greek and Sanskrit epics’ uses of similes and other figures of speech. He astutely argues that while the simile of Greek poets like Homer force “a reader to imagine, almost to experience” a particular incident, the use of simile by Vālmīki “obscure” an experience “by a cloud of qualifiers and rhetorical figures” (BālaKāṇḍa 102).

3 There are two different summaries of the whole story within the first four chapters – the first narrated by Nārada to Vālmīki and the other as it is written by the poet-seer himself in Chapter 3. There is not much to choose between both the summaries except that the first one is little more elaborate in details. Goldman believes that first version is the story given to Vālmīki by Nārada whereas the second is a conspectus of the poem as envisioned by the poet-seer (BālaKāṇḍa 275n).

4 Goldman translates sat as good which is a philosophically loaded term in Sanskrit literature. Monier Monier-Williams in his scholarly and mammoth dictionary of Sanskrit words translates it as “being, existing, occurring, happening, being present … true, good, right … that which really is, entity or essence, the true being or really existent” (Sanskrit English Dictionary 1134).

5 Poetry, Language and Thought, hereafter referred to as PLT.

6 Sanskrit word for “nearby” is abhyāśe and Goldman quotes both Bhūṣaṇa Tikā by Govindarāja, and Amṛatakātaka by Kataka Mādhava Yogindra for different interpretations of the word. Whereas Govindarāja translates it as “near the tīrtha,” Kataka Mādhava Yogindra translates it as “near the forest.”
One of the most quoted and widely known couplet of Sanskrit literature, Vālmīki’s curse is variously interpreted by the commentators. While Govindarāja’s commentary Bhūṣāṇa stresses the wonder at the creation of the couplet, Nāgesh Bhaṭṭa’s commentary Tilak is struck by the use of perfect form of verb in babhūva to describe the thoughts rising in the seer. Tilak’s argument is that this tense is reserved for the events of distant past not directly witnessed by the narrator. Goldman’s translation, however, is influenced by Bhūṣāṇa and the translators confess their disappointment at the sloka which although “supposed to be the very first example of the poet’s genius, is rather a disappointment, for it appears to be almost entirely lacking in the qualities of sound, sense, and suggestion that form the basis for the major traditional schools’ critical assessment of the poetry” (BālaKāṇḍa 72). My argument will lean towards Nāgesh Bhaṭṭa’s insight which notes a grammatical anomaly in this description and will see it as indicative of a larger point inherent in the experience of the seer.

Goldman refers to this point in his notes: “The point is that, according to the grammarians, this tense is reserved for distant past events not directly witnessed by the narrator (parokṣabhūtakale lit). Yet Vālmīki is supposed to be the narrator.” Goldman then goes on to summarize the view of Govindarāja, saying that “First he suggests that the use of the perfect is allowable because, although the verse is Vālmīki’s composition, it was intended to be recited by the bards Kuśa and Lava. As an alternative he suggests that Sargas 1-4 of the poem, the Upodghāṭa, are the product of one or another of the sage’s students” (BālaKāṇḍa 281n).

Goldman: “Vālmīki names his new creation punningly because of its origin in his grief of śoka. This sort of popular etymology, based on accidental phonological similarity, is well known and extremely popular in brahmanic tradition ... The particular play on śoka and śloka ... also makes a theoretical statement ... about the origin and nature of aesthetic experience” (BālaKāṇḍa 281).

The first encounter of both the princes, Rāma and Lākṣmaṇa, as they begin their journey to protect the sacrifice of Seer Viśvāmitra, is with river Kausikī which in the mythology is Seer Viśvāmitra’s own sister Satyawati turned into a river. The seer’s affection for his sister makes him stay near her at all times (BālaKāṇḍa 188).

The divine weapons given to Rāma as a boon by Viśvāmitra after he has passed the test of killing Tāṭakā are shown to take human shape when they are beckoned by their users through recitation of sacred spells (BālaKāṇḍa 177-78).

Viśvāmitra narrates the myth of the creation of the two regions of Malad, the filthy, and Karuṣa, the famine-ridden, which came into existence through the deposits of Indra’s taint acquired by killing demonic Vṛtra who is actually a brāhmaṇa by birth. These are the two regions which are now afflicted by the terror of Tāṭakā (BālaKāṇḍa 171).

In Rāmāyaṇa, the myth of creation of the phenomenal world is narrated independently of the myth of the burning of Kandarpa Kāma, whereas in a Saiva text like Śiva Purāṇa, both the myths come as part of the larger myth of the birth of Kumbāra Kārtikeya. Here the myth is seen as the part of the myth of creation of our phenomenal world with all its natural wealth, minerals and ores through the semen of Lord Śiva when Gangā is suffused by it through Agni’s mediation and is only tangentially related to the myth of Kumbāra Kārtikeya’s birth which Gangā gives to Kṛttikās to rear. The interesting thing to note here is that the text uses the myth of creation from Śiva mythology regarding Śiva as the creator of this world, a surprising fact considering how complete is its appropriation by the Vaishāvī cult (BālaKāṇḍa 193-195). Tulsidāsa in Rāmacaritamānasā solves this paradox rather ingeniously by making Śiva one of the narrators and a devotee of Viṣṇu as Rāma.
The myth elaborates that gods’ participation in the process of creation ends with their wives’ inability to bear their children through them, a result of the curse of Goddess Pārvatī who is angry with their designs to thwart her attempt to carry Lord Śiva’s child (BālāKāṇḍa 195). They however, still retain power to procreate mortal children through demi-goddesses, human beings and animals.

Seer Viśvāmitra narrates the myth of his grandfather Kuśanābha who is the father of hundred very beautiful daughters. Once as the daughters are taking bath, Vāyu, the god of air, is enamored by their beauty and proposes to sleep with all of them. The girls, in their modesty and righteousness refuse to compromise themselves and their father’s honor. Angered by this rejection, Vāyu punishes them by turning all of them into ugly hunchbacks. The girls are praised by their father for their righteousness and the myth ultimately ends in their happiness as all of them get married to Brahmadatta, the ascetic-king who gives them back their beauty by touching them (BālāKāṇḍa 185-87).

For the detailed account of Indra’s penances consult 12n of the present chapter.

The myth of churning the sea, along with the myth of creation, is one of the most important myths which can be interpreted as a narrative describing the birth of this world-order of Indra. It is the myth where all the gods like Viṣṇu and Śiva are assigned their respective roles and the bearer of Laxmi and the drinker of the poison respectively. It is also the myth that narrates the story of gods’ immortality by drinking somarasa, and the beginning of the god-demon war as Indra, along with Viṣṇu, tricks the demons into leaving the nectar of immortality (BālāKāṇḍa 209-11).

One of the many myths enumerating Indra’s treachery which includes his serving Diti for nearly one thousand years, and then killing her fetus as she unwittingly sleeps in an impure state. He enters her womb as she sleeps and cruelly splits her fetus into seven pieces and manages to accomplish this act when only ten short years are left for her austerities to end. The myth ends with Indra granting all the seven parts of her fetus the status of gods and calling them the Maruts who will be the boundaries of Indra’s world-order and will protect it from all directions (BālāKāṇḍa 211-12).

The myth of Ahalyā tells of her indiscretion with Indra who comes to sleep with her in the guise of her husband, Gautam. A variant and more popular version of this myth in Tulsidāsa’s Rāmačaritamānasa shows Ahalyā to be an innocent dupe of Indra’s trick. Here however she is shown to be perfectly conscious of her indiscretion. It is in a moment of “lust” that the foolish woman knowing very well that “it [is] thousand-eyed Indra in the guise of the sage” consents to sleep with him and after fulfilling her heart’s desire, advises Indra to “protect” himself from the wrath of her husband. The indiscretion of both Indra and Ahalyā are found out by Gautama who, in his anger, curses Indra to be emasculated. Indra cries out aloud and calls all the seers and gods to help him and they, pitying him, give him ram’s testicles. Ahalyā’s punishment is more severe as she is left alone in her āśrama, to survive on air for a thousand years where she will not be seen by anyone except Rāma when he would arrive their with Visvāmitra (BālāKāṇḍa 214-16).
The name Sagar etymologically means “poison” and he poisons his glory as well as the entire world-order when his sixty thousand sons, intent upon finding the sacrificial horse, dig and tear up the entire earth and kill all the creatures that stand in their way. They finally find the horse in árama of Sage Kapila and thinking him to be the thief end up insulting him who burns them in his anger. In Rámâyana, Indra is not involved in the incident but other variant of the myth, most notably Mahábhárata, directly names Indra as the thief (BālaKānda 201-03).

Unlike Vālmiki, Tulsi’s Ramcaritamānasā portrays Ahalyā turned into a stone who becomes alive again as Rāma’s foot touches her. Here however, Rāma visits her árama and pays homage by touching her feet as a warrior-prince should to an elderly brāhmaṇa lady and wife of a great sage. Instead of Rāma performing any miracle, his arrival in the ascetic-grove is merely recognized as stipulated end of the time of her punishment (BālaKānda 219).

Rāma’s performance of the last rites of Jataus in Aranyakānda with all the respect that is due to a venerable old human being.

The myth of Bali Vairocana talks about one of the incarnations of Lord Viṣṇu as dwarf, Vāmana, born of Aditi. It describes how Bali, son of Vairocana and grandson of Prahlāda, defeated Indra and the Maruts to establish his sovereignty over the three worlds. To establish his role as the new king of this world-order, he performed a great sacrifice where Viṣṇu appeared as a Perfected Being Dwarf and begged for as much land as he can traverse in three steps. Bali granted him his wish and the Supreme Deity traversed all the three worlds in his three steps and thus gave back all the three worlds to Indra (BālaKānda 178-80).

Both Māriṣa and Subahu are directly linked to Rāvaṇa Paulatsya in Bālakaṇḍa itself, as Viśvāmitra tells Daśaratha that they are the followers of the Demon king (BālaKānda 163-65).

Sarga 5 describes the righteous bravery of the warriors of Ayodhya thus: “King Daśarath had populated the entire city with thousands of great chariot warriors … who would never shoot their arrows upon a foe who was isolated from his comrades, the sole support of his family, in hiding, or in flight … [he] also peopled the city with great brahmans who tended the sacred fires and had mastered the vedas with their six adjunct sciences … and with prominent seers, like the great seers themselves” (BālaKānda 135).

Righteousness or dharma, in this context can be interpreted as following the ethical bindings of Indra’s teleological order which constitutes the entire existence, and to which the beings must adhere at the expense of their subjective desires.

The sins referred to in this magnificent description of Ayodhyā are miserliness, lechery, cruelty, lack of faith, lack of learning (BālaKānda 136), lies, envy, incompetence, ignorance (of truth and righteousness) (BālaKānda 137) all of which are qualities that put the satisfaction of and individual and his own desires at the expense of social good.
The reference here is to the joining of the two sacrifices of aśvamedha and putriyaṣṭi, which Daśaratha is asked to perform to fulfill his desire for a son. The joining of these two sacrifices is a matter of considerable discussion. Goldman cites some of the concerns: "The staging of elaborate Horse Sacrifice, normally employed in the epics to sanctify a king's acquisition of sovereignty over his neighbors' territories is unusual for the purpose of procuring a son" (BālaKāṇḍa 74). The critical edition by Bhatt and Shah regards this sacrifice as a means to secure happiness of all sorts and thus can be performed "for a particular purpose" (The Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa 437). Goldman however, refuses to agree and argues that then one two sacrifices will be redundant and feels that "it would ... appear more probable that Daśaratha's great Horse Sacrifice, which is described in far greater detail than any other ritual performance in the Rāmāyaṇa, is a later addition introduced with the purpose of firmly establishing in the mind of the audience the splendor and might of the Kosalan monarchy. By the period of the final shaping of the Sanskrit epics, the aśvamedha had evidently become the great symbol and demonstration of Hindu hegemony (BālaKāṇḍa 74).

The opulent description of the sacrifice and the epic grandeur of the sacred ceremony of Horse Sacrifice include people from all the four castes: "The aged and sick were fed ... heap upon heap of perfectly prepared food ... In the intervals between the various rites, learned and eloquent brahmans ... engaged in numerous philosophical debates ... The ... sacrificial post were erected ... adored ... with gold" (BālaKāṇḍa 150-51). The three day ceremony of the actual sacrifice is attended by guests from all the four corners of the civilized world – the righteous kings, sages and seers from all lands – along with all the gods who come to take their share of the oblations and thus participate in the ceremony.

Although a cultural highpoint of ancient India, aśvamedha sacrifice can be interpreted in purely symbolical terms based on its etymology. Monier Monier-Williams translates this as a tatpurusa samāsa or compound which comprises of two words – aśva and medha. The roots of both words is aś and midh respectively. The meaning of the root aś is variously given as “to reach, come to, arrive at, get, gain, obtain, ... to master, become master of ... to offer ... to pervade, penetrate, fill ...” (Sanskrit English Dictionary 112); and the meaning of the root midh is given as “juice of meat, ... marrow, ... sap, pith, essence, ... a sacrificial animal, victim, ... animal-sacrifice, offering, oblation, any sacrifice ...” (Sanskrit English Dictionary 832). Thus Horse sacrifice may mean an offering to Being which is the “pervading essence” of the entire creation followed by the Sacrifice for the Son which may be interpreted as a call for the Being to take human shape.

The myth of Triśanku tells the story of this king born in Ikṣvāku dynasty who, though righteous in life and actions, has this demonic desire to break the world-order and go to heaven retaining his own body. For this purpose, he goes to all the seers including Vasiṣṭha’s sons who curse him for harboring such sinful ideas and turn him into a pariaḥ. Viśvāmitra, in the pride of his newly acquired ascetic powers agrees to help him and calls all the seers to help him in this endeavor. When Vasiṣṭha’s son Mahodaya, along with his hundred brothers, refuses to participate in this sacrifice and even calls into question Viśvāmitra’s patronage, Viśvāmitra in his anger curses them to become “vile outcastes, hideous to look upon and loathsome in their occupation, their daily food the flesh of dogs” (BālaKāṇḍa 236). Although Viśvāmitra is unable to send Triśanku to heaven with his body, he does create another heaven for him to live in; and in his anger is going to create another universe along with the gods is stopped by the seers and gods who pacify him and ask him not to do anything so unrighteous as this (BālaKāṇḍa 231-237).
The myth of Šunahśepa tells the story of this middle son of a brāhmaṇa couple who is given away by his parents to king Ambariṣa as a sacrificial victim at the altar of Indra Vāsava, the king of all gods. As he is going with his king he meets Viśvāmitra and tells him of his plight. The seer takes pity on him and agrees to help him by letting one of his sons take Šunahśepa’s place at the sacrificial altar. His sons however refuse to comply with their father’s wishes which angers Viśvāmitra who curses them to become dog eating outcastes like Vasiṣṭha’s sons. In the end he teaches Šunahśepa two divine verses and asks him to chant them at the time of the sacrifice thus appeasing Indra and persuading him to let him go (BālaKāṇḍa 239-42).

This narrative is one of the most popular myths telling us the enticement of Sage Viśvāmitra by apsarā Menakā. Enamored by her beauty the seer lives with her for ten years and then miserably realizes that he has fallen prey to one of the tricks of gods. He forgives Menakā for her role and goes on to practice severe austerities at the banks of Kauśikī River (BālaKāṇḍa 242-44).

This is the lesser known narrative which tells Indra’s second attempt to digress Viśvāmitra from his goal to become a seer of brahman. Rambā is given the same task as Menakā but the seer sees through Indra’s trick and curses Rambā to turn into a stone for ten thousand years (BālaKāṇḍa 246).

The story of Manthara, Goldman says, who is the daughter of Virocana is “known apparently only to this passage,” while the story of Viṣṇu’s slaying of Kāvyā’s mother comes in Matsyapurāṇa and Padmapurāṇa as well (BālaKāṇḍa 337n).

Viśvāmitra is Rāma Jāmadagnya’s maternal granduncle. Rēka marries Satyavati or Kauśikī River and is Viśvāmitra’s brother-in-law. Satyavati gives birth to Jamadagni who is Rāma’s father (BālaKāṇḍa 379n, 394n).