Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

People make love over and over, but only you
Know how it feels. I write about the same Ram
Everyone else has known, but my feelings of love are mine.
—Viswanatha Satyanarayana’s Ramayana Kalpavrikshamu
(qtd. Bhattacharya para 1)

Ramayana is not a simple narrative only; it occupies an eminent place in the cultural scene of India. Culture finds its manifestations in many forms; in a similar manner even Ramayana exists in the form of many different tellings of the epic. The Ramayana is so intensely coupled with truth that it has become an imperative part of people’s lives not only in India but throughout Asia. An epic is just one text; however, the Ramayana is not a single text but a tradition of tellings. It reflects the concerns of people at different stages of time, at different places. The Ramayana story we know and hear today varies greatly from the Ramayana story prevalent and known in our grandmother’s time. The story, as well as the presentation of the story of king Ram varies with every version; but the stories of the past bear their shadows in every new telling. There is no other story on earth that comes close to the Ramayana in the astonishing way it is alive as a vital, fluid, narrative tradition. Most of us know that there are many versions of the Ramayana, many different myths related to the Ramayana, and also many different Ramayanas. It is important to go through these many versions of the Ramayana to understand the problems others have identified with it in the past and to understand how the tale adapted itself to the changing times and became a ‘living epic’, as even Anandita Banerjee calls it. Banerjee, in her article ‘Higher Narrative Under Fire’ asserts Ramayana “to be a living epic on the basis of the enclosed, hidden adaptability and sustenance power which the epic confirms to” (para 1).
This is one epic which has become immortal in our culture, for it has never restricted itself; it has adapted, transformed and revolutionized itself in the hands of the society, culture and time. It is due to the uncanny regularity with which it appears that it has almost become a living epic.

The Ramayana is an ancient Sanskrit epic attributed to Valmiki and is an important part of the Hindu canon. The name Ramayana is a compound of Rama and ayana “going, advancing”, translating to “the travels of Rama”. The Ramayana (Valmiki) consists of 24,000 verses in seven cantos (kandas) and tells the story of the prince (Rama) of Ayodhya, whose wife Sita is abducted by the demon king of Lanka. In its current form, the Valmiki Ramayana is dated variously from 500 BCE to 100 BCE. As occurs with most traditional epics, since it has gone through a long process of interpolations and reductions, it is impossible to date it accurately. Indian tradition regards the Ramayana as a part of history (Itihasa), with Valmiki’s version as the most authentic and the oldest written form.

Interestingly, Ramayana, the story of Ram has been told in thousands of different ways over the centuries. Primarily of Hindu origin, the Ramayana also exists in other versions within some Buddhist and other Asian traditions. There are texts of Ramayana in several regional languages, including Sanskrit, Chinese, Thai, Telugu, Bengali, Kashmiri, and Tamil. The Ramayana story combines magic, fantasy, romance and adventure as it recounts the life of Ram - the seventh incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu, his brother Lakshman, his wife Sita, his opponent Ravan, a host of demons, and an army of monkeys loyal to Ram led by Hanuman. It has remained a vital story through the present time in India, and is widely accepted as a religious text among the Hindus. The mainstream story in North India holds that Dussehra and Diwali commemorate the victory of good over evil, as Lord Ram freed Sita from Lanka, where she was abducted by the demon-king Ravan. However, in parts of south India as well as in south-east Asian countries like Indonesia it is Ravan who is worshipped as a hero, for his reckonable knowledge, spiritual fervour and courage. After Valmiki penned the first written Ramayana around two millennia ago, various versions were written, sung or told with widely varying plots, characterizations and beliefs. Centuries ago, some oral versions of the Ramayana placed Ram and Sita as siblings. Therefore ramkatha exists in multiple forms and none of these versions of the story is incorrect; it is valid to construe a story in diverse ways.
VALMIKI’S RAMAYANA

The oldest version of the Ramayana or Valmiki’s Ramayana is the base for most of the versions of the Ramayana in various cultures. Valmiki Ramayana has been traditionally divided into seven books, dealing with the life of Ram from his birth to his death.

1. **Bala Kanda** – Book of the young Ram, which details the miraculous birth of Ram, his early life in Ayodhya, his slaying of the demons of the forest at the request of Vishvamitra and his wedding with Sita.

2. **Ayodhya Kanda** – Book of Ayodhya, in which Dasharatha grieves over his promise to Kaikeyi and the start of Ram’s exile.

3. **Aranya Kanda** – Book of the Forest, which describes Ram’s life in the forest and the abduction of Sita by Ravan.

4. **Kishkindya Kanda** – Book of Kishkinda, the Vanara kingdom in which Ram befriends Sugriva and the Vanara army and begins the search for Sita.

5. **Sundara Kanda** – Book of Sundara (Hanuman), in which Hanuman travels to Lanka and finds Sita imprisoned there and brings back the good news to Ram.

6. **Lanka Kanda** – Book of the War, which narrates the Ram-Ravana war and the return of the successful Ram to Ayodhya and his coronation.

7. **Uttara Kanda** – Epilogue, which details the life of Ram and Sita after their return to Ayodhya, Sita’s banishment and how Sita and Ram pass on to the next world.

**Variant Versions**

The epic story of Ramayana was adopted by several cultures across Asia. There is an extensive tradition of oral storytelling based on the Ramayana in Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, Laos, Vietnam, Indonesia and Maldives. Ramayana has occupied the place of a living epic. Multiple versions and translations have not only taken the epic beyond the frontiers of its native domain to the global market but have also ensured an after life that borders on immortality. Ramayana has traveled the boundaries of its native lands and reached for international acclaim. It is performed not only in India but in many other countries of the world. In Germany, France, Russia, Europe, Canada, Iran, Indonesia, Thailand etc. Ramayana plays are very popular. The epic survives beyond the frontiers and boundaries of geographical areas.
and the limits of time and culture. And with each new version the epic bounces back as an epic resurrected all over again. There occur multiple versions of this epic in and around India.

Below are given the pictures of the *Ramayana* performances from different parts of the world:

![Stage Performance: Russia](image1)
![Folk Theatre: Thailand](image2)

Notable among other *Ramayana* texts is the pre-Christian, Buddhist Dasharatha *Jataka* a variant Hindu version attributed to Tulsidas, the Laotian Buddhist *Phra Lak/Phra Lam* the twelfth century Cambodian *Kampan* and the Thai *Ramakirti*. There are also the post-eighteenth century Buddhist/Hindu hybrid *Ramakien* written by several Thai kings, each with “Rama” included in his royal name, the sixteenth-century Bengali *Ramayana* by Kritibas, and the eighteenth-century Kashmiri *Ramayana* of Divakar Prakash Bhatt. The many texts reflect the cultures in which they were written and differ from each other in myriad ways, including variances in character, stories, and motives. In one of the *Ramayanas*, Sita
is Ravana’s daughter (Ramakien), while in another she is Ram’s sister (Buddhist Dasaratha Jataka). In many Malay language versions, Lakshman is given greater importance than Ram, whose character is considered somewhat weak.

**Southeast Asian Versions**

Many other Asian cultures have adapted the Ramayana, resulting in many more versions of the story. Kakawin Ramayana is an old Javanese rendering of the Sanskrit Ramayana from ninth century Indonesia. It is a faithful rendering of the Hindu epic with very little variation. Phra Lak Phra Lam is a Lao language version, whose title comes from Lakshman and Ram. The story of Lakshmana and Ram is told as the previous life of the Buddha. In Hikayat Seri Ram of Malaysia, Dasharatha is the great-grandson of the Prophet Adam and Ravana receives boons from Allah instead of Brahma.

Ramakein is Thailand’s national epic; it is also derived and based on the Hindu epic Ramayana. In Ramakien, Sita is the daughter of Ravan and Mandodari. Vibhisan, the astrologer brother of Ravan, predicts calamity from the horoscope of Sita. So Ravan has her thrown into the waters who is later, picked by Janaka. While the main story is identical to that of the Ramayana, many other aspects were transposed into a Thai context, such as the clothes, weapons, topography, and elements of nature. It has an expanded role for Hanuman and he is portrayed as a lascivious character.

Other Southeast Asian adaptations include Ramakavaca of Bali, Maradia Lawana of the Philippines, the Reamker of Cambodia and the Yama Zatdaw of Myanmar. Aspects of the Chinese epic Journey to the West were also inspired by the Ramayana, particularly the character Sun Wukong, who is believed to have been based on Hanuman. Two versions of Ramayana are present in Nepal. One is written by Mahakabi Siddhidas Mahaju in Nepal Bhasa. The other one is written by Aadikavi Bhanubhakta Acharya.

**Within India**

There are diverse regional versions of the Ramayana written by various authors in India. Some of them differ significantly from each other. The Ramayana related in North India differs in important respects from that preserved in South India.
and the rest of South-East Asia. During the twelfth century AD, Kamban wrote *Ramavatharam*, popularly known as ‘Kamba Ramayanam’ in Tamil; Kamban has modified and reinterpreted many anecdotes in Valmiki *Ramayana* to suit the Tamil culture and his own ideas. Valmiki’s *Ramayana* inspired saint Tulsidas to write the *Sri Ramcharitmanas* in 1576, an epic in Awadhi (a dialect of Hindi) with a slant more grounded in a different realm of Hindu literature, the realm of bhakti. Gujarati poet Premanand wrote a version of *Ramayana* in the 17th century. Other versions include, a Bengali version by Kritibaas in the 14th century, in Oriya by Balarama Das in the 16th century, in Marathi by Sridhara in the 18th century, a Telugu version by Ranganatha in the 15th century, a Kannada *Ramayana* by the 16th century poet Narahari and in 20th century Rashtrakavi Kuvempu’s *Sri Ramayana Darshnam*, *Kotha Ramayana* in Assamese by the 14th century poet Madhava Kandali and *Adhyathma Ramayanam Kilippattu*, a Malayalam version by Thunchaththu Ezhuthachan in the 16th century.

There have been reports of a version of the *Ramayana* story prevalent amongst the Mappilas of Kerala. This version, known as *Mappila Ramayana* forms a part of the *Mappillapattu* (a genre of folk singing popular amongst the Muslims of Kerala and Lakshadweep). Being of Muslim origin, the hero of this story is a Sultan. There are no major changes in the names of characters except for that of Ram’s which is changed to ‘Laman’.

There is a sub-plot to *Ramayana* prevalent in some parts of India. It relates to the adventures of Ahi Ravan/Mahi Ravan, the evil brother of Ravan, which enhances the role of Hanuman in the story. Hanuman rescues Ram and Lakshman after they are kidnapped by the Ahi-Mahi Ravan at the behest of Ravan and held prisoner in a subterranean cave.

**Contemporary Versions**

Contemporary versions of the *Ramayana* include Sri *Ramayana Darshanam* by Dr. K. V. Puttappa (Kuvempu) in Kannada and *Ramayana Kalpavrikshamu* by Viswanatha Satyanarayana in Telugu. A prose version called Geet *Ramayana* (Geet - song) in Marathi by G.D. (Gajanan Digambar) Madgulkar was rendered in music by Sudhir Phadke and is considered to be a masterpiece of Marathi literature. The
modern Indian author Ashok Banker has composed English language novels based on the *Ramayana* and is working on the seventh.

The *Ramayana* has been adapted for the screen as well in the form of mythological movies and in a television series in the 1980s (1987-88) with the same name by the producer Ramanand Sagar, which was based primarily on the Ramcharitmanas and the Valmiki *Ramayana*. An animated movie called *Rama - The Prince of Light* was also released in the early 1990s, then came *Warrior Prince, The Legend of Prince Ram*. Also, two animated movies on Hanuman have been produced, *Hanuman* in 2005 and *Hanuman Returns* in 2007. Virgin Comics is creating a video game based on the *Ramayana*. *Ramayana* is hence a culture in itself; a diverse tradition of tellings. Banerjee writes:

The diverse ‘traditions’ of the *Ramayana*, which operate around this core narrative, have been contrasted to Homer’s compositions, for instance, which have been consolidated into single literary text. The ‘ready availability’ of the core narrative, as Sheldon Pollock demonstrates, resulted in its appropriation for political struggle and resistance to perceived cultural ‘invasions’ or ‘contaminations’; during the twelfth century, the Sanskrit *Ramayana* attributed to Valmiki became the hegemonic narration in the northern part of the subcontinent, offering a prototype of a divine political order within which ‘a fully demonized other’ could be ‘categorized, counterposed, and condemned.’ A multitude of vernacular renditions of the story can be found in the Buddhist Jatakas, the sixteenth-century *Ramcharitmanas* by Tulsidas, Kampan’s Tamil and Kritibas’ Bengali *Ramayana*. Eknath’s *Bhavarth* in Marathi, as well as Malayalam, Telugu, Urdu, and Kannada. The relationship between the various texts mentioned above is not so much derivative as genealogical, drawing upon a ‘pool of signifiers that include plots, characters, names, geography, incidents, and relationships.’ Beyond the sphere of fixed literary texts, various such ‘tellings’ are still being produced today in oral and performative genres (1-2 para 23).
The various texts reflect the cultures in which they were written and differ from each other in myriad ways, including variances in character, story, and motives. In 1979, a group of South Asian women presented a feminist, anti-neo-Nazi version of the Ramayana in London (Southall). It was in 1987, that the Ramayana was serialized in an extravagant manner on Indian television, achieving immense national popularity.

Like Tulsidas, a few authors of the Ramayana do not diverge and continue to follow the Valmiki text as faithfully as possible. However, there are others like Kampan whose Tamil interpretationboldly subverts the canonical Valmiki text. In Kampan’s Ramayana, Ravan is portrayed as a tragic hero rather than a villain. Tulsidas provides both script and tropes for Ramlila in North India, an annual street enactment performed by members of a particular neighborhood or town. In the Indian context, Ramayana is a part of our consciousness. Many of us might have never read the Ramayana; but most of us are aware of the Ramayana story. Even the children are familiar with the basic story line.

Ramanand Sagar has been hailed as the ‘Tulsidas of the Video Age’ (as even Philip Lutgendorf exhorts in his article (“Raghu Family” 228). Statements like: ‘Ramanand Sagar created a new epic on the television’ (Lutgendorf “Raghu Family” 227) might appear as exaggerated statements to some, but Sagar’s contribution is similar to Tulsidas’; forming a new version of the story. Just like Tulsidas, who wrote the Ramayana in Awadhi catering to the needs of the common man who could not read the ancient Sanskrit epic by Valmiki, Ramanand Sagar catering to the needs of the present day public televised the epic, giving it a new facet. Even the kids are aware of the Ramayana story and the credit goes to Ramanand Sagar. The serial’s popularity can be well gauged by the fact that for young children Ramanand Sagar is the author of India’s most popular and revered epic, the Ramayana.

The Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi stated, “Ramayan (the serial) has stirred the imaginations of millions of viewers. It has imbued the great Indian culture, tradition and normal values especially in the young” (qtd. “Ramayan - The great TV Series” para 6). Ramanand Sagar became a reference point, and Ramanand Sagar’s serial, Ramayan the pivotal hinge which changed the common man’s perception for Ramayana. The popularity charts attained by Ramayana serial can even be held responsible for the misery in a married couple’s otherwise contented life.
Mr. Pankaj Arora, a property dealer in one of the colonies of East Delhi, was happy when he got the news from the Star TV network that he had got selected, one among millions, for participating in the popular show and he considered himself lucky to be so chosen. He was also told to bring his wife along to the studios at Mumbai where the game shows were to be hosted by Mr. Amitabh Bachhan.

There was suspense in the air and the audience could sense money floating all around them. Amitabh Bachhan started the show by smiling benignly at the nervous Mr. Arora, the kind of smile he would give to an ABCL investor, clapped his hands and read out the question. “Mr. Pankaj Arora, yeh hai aap ka pehla sawaal. Who wrote ‘Valmiki Ramayan’? The choices are A. Tulsidas B. Ramanand Sagar C. B R Chopra D. Valmiki?”

Mr. Pankaj Arora very promptly said, “Ramanand Sagar!” He had not forgotten the days when he used to get up early on Sundays solely to watch the epic.

Amitabh commiserated with him and told a shocked Mr. Arora that his answer was wrong. The pin-drop silence that followed immediately was only to be broken by loud angry shriek from a female, that evidently from a female, who had been done in by her husband. She shouted immediately, ‘Is there a lawyer in the house?” Before the pandemonium that broke out could settle in, Mr. Arora and Mrs. Arora had parted ways as husband and wife’ (“Kaun Banega Krorepati Claims its First Victim” para 3).

The above episode speaks for the wide popularity enjoyed by the serial and its director. However, I believe that to hold Ramanand Sagar’s tele serial Ramayan as the one and only most significant Ramkatha after that of Valmiki and Tulsidas is almost an overstatement. Though Ramanand Sagar’s Ramayan occupies a very important place and in popularity surpasses the popularity charts laid down by Tulsidas’ Ramcharitmanas, the significance of other Ramayanas (vernacular and international) cannot be denied. The Ramayana cult developed from the Valmiki Ramayana to a massive number of 140 (the number is an approximation, and must have increased by
now) different versions of the sacred text; which were rooted in different traditions, historical periods and sociological factors. The Ramayana does not belong to any one moment in the history, for it has its own history which lies embedded in the many versions which were woven around the theme at different times and places. And among all the various Ramayanas the most popular and far reaching remains Ramanand Sagar’s Ramayan which broke all barriers and traveled across cultures. Ramanand Sagar's Ramayan was not the retelling of any particular, earlier existing Ramayana; it was the formation of a new epic. Ramanand Sagar foresaw that television would be the medium for the future and hence created a new telling of our revered epic in this medium. Observers estimate that millions of people watched the weekly broadcasts, making it a social event rather than just a serial. In this project I shall attempt to analyse the pre-textual, textual and post-textual elements of this socio-cultural event. The thesis shall try to critically evaluate the making of the television Ramayan and the changes brought about in the epic by means of the medium of television.

Of all the communications media, television is generally believed to have the most comprehensive impact on audiences. The media that transmits moving visual images has something special about it; moving images have a matchless ability to engage the emotions and imagination of viewers. Ramanand Sagar’s Ramayan also engaged the imagination of the viewers in a unique way; the hysteria attached to this serial was unusual and unprecedented, experienced for the first time in Indian television. The Indian audiences were witnessing for the first time, the telecast of one of their most popular epics and the program was a huge success, approximating a national obsession. The audience swelled in all dimensions with the telecast of every episode.

Conservative estimates of Doordarshan’s daily viewership during the period range from 40 million to 60 million. But the response to Ramayana serial was unique; most popular episodes must have been viewed by 80 to 100 million people – roughly an eighth of India’s population. But the number must be appreciated in terms of the limited number and the distribution of television sets in India and the restricted availability of electricity (Lutgendorf “Ramayan: The Video” 136).
It must be observed that the success of India’s most popular serial derives largely from the enduring appeal of the narrative tradition on which it draws. Narrative refers to the strategies, codes and conventions employed to organize a story. Because narrative appears in so many cultural forms (novel, film, theatre, mythology, painting etc.) it appears as natural as life itself. Narrative tradition is a combination of narrative strategies, including the *katha* traditions prevalent since ages, also the familiar performance tradition and religious iconography.

The point to ponder upon is that, did the success of this serial (*Ramayan*) point to the enduring supremacy of the sacred narrative to galvanize the common man; or instead was, an indication to the advent of a new force in Indian culture, the mesmerizing power of television. This is a question difficult to be answered; the success was a mixture of both – the new power and the force within the narrative. The credit for the success of this new presentation of the story goes to the medium (the television screen), the existing power that is the force within the narrative and the encompassing effect of the epical tradition.

It was not only the effect of the medium and the epic presented through the means of the medium. Another environment adjacent to which the background of the serial must be viewed is the history of motion pictures in India, particularly the film genre of “mythologicals.” Drawing on the story traditions of the epics and ‘*puranas*’ and imbued with the emotional piety of regional devotional traditions.

The figures of long told stories took flesh and blood and the impact was overwhelming. People were swept off their feet by the images of lord Ram and Sita presented through this new mode of communication technology, the television. Afterall, Ramanand Sagar had given a form and shape to an image existing in the minds of Indians since ages. These images created by Ramanand Sagar have been so deeply imprinted in our minds that the Ram- Sita (Arun Govil, Dipika Chiklia) seem to be real Ram-Sita. The new forms of God in the shape of these two television actors were almost worshipped by the common people, at many public gatherings people would touch Arun’s and Dipika’s feet. This was a result of ages of ritualized worshipping rather than the impact of the television medium. The worship of the “flesh and blood” (or video) image far from being a consequence of the “revolutionary” impact of film was a response with a long indigenous pedigree, rooted in the ritualized Hindu folk performance.
The serial premiered in the long tradition of the Ramayana stories in various languages thus introduced the theme of the Ramayana as a symbol of national unity and integration. The serial had substantial effects and the proof for this was the constant reports in the paper. The news about the serial and articles related to its performance were almost a regular feature in the papers; throughout the years of its performance 1987-88 Ramayan related news appeared in the form of articles ranging from critical analysis of the serial to the sensational account of the viewers. Many articles gave a report on the performances of various characters liked or disliked in the serial by its fans. A few articles described the enthusiasm with which the weekends and the coming up Ramayan episodes were awaited by the viewers.

The serial’s popularity gained an unequalled momentum, for fans nothing could interfere with their experience of the lord’s darsan. Visible manifestations of the serial’s popularity included the cancellation of Sunday morning cinema shows for lack of audience, the delaying of weddings and funerals to allow participants to view the series, and the jarringly quite look of many cities and towns during screenings. On some occasions, trains were delayed when passengers refused to leave platform sets until the broadcast was over. Trains, buses, and inner-city trucks stopped running when the show was on; even the religious services (Hindu and non-Hindu) were deferred or reorganized to accommodate the show’s broadcast; and, in villages, hundreds of people would gather around a single television set to watch the show. Local press reporters detailed instances of mass devotion; a Banaras newspaper reporter reported about a sweet shop where a borrowed television was set up each week. This television set is placed on a makeshift altar sanctified with cow dung and Ganges water, worshipped with flowers and incense, and watched by a crowd of several hundred neighborhood residents, who then contribute to the distribution of more than a hundred kilograms of sanctified sweets (prasad), which had been placed before the screen during the broadcast (Lutgendorf “Raghu Family” 224).
A TV set garlanded and worshipped

In many homes the screening of Ramayan became a religious ritual. The television sets were garlanded, decorated with sandalwood paste and vermillion, and conch shells were blown before the weekly broadcast began. Grandparents reprimanded youngsters to bathe before the show and housewives put off serving meals so that the family 'fasts' before the Ramayan. Phillip Lutgendorf tells us,

such ritualized public viewings were not uncommon: throughout the country, crowds gathered in front of video shops to watch display sets, and some community groups undertook to place sets in public areas. During the final months of the serial, electronic shops reported a dramatic surge in television sales and all available rental sets were engaged for the crucial Sunday morning slot – sometimes by whole villages that pooled their resources to allow residents to see Ramayan. Sporadic incidents of violent protest resulted from power failures during the weekly screening, as when an angry mob in the Banaras suburb of Ramnagar (home of north India’s most acclaimed Ramlila pageant) stormed and set fire to an electrical substation. The airing of the final instalment (special one hour telecast on July 31) was marked by festivities in many parts of the country. Sunday newspapers carried full page articles on the Ramayan serial, featuring photos of its stars and with headlines like ‘Farewell to Doordarshan Ramayan’. In Banaras, many neighborhoods were decorated with saffron coloured pennants and festive illuminations, while residents celebrated Ram’s
enthronement by distributing sweets, sounding bells and conches and setting off fireworks. In the Maharashtrian city of Nagpur, canopies were erected at principal intersections and coloured sets installed to allow those without televisions to witness the spectacle. Other municipalities reported homes decorated with earthen oil lamps to welcome Ram’s return, prompting one reporter to call it an ‘Early Diwali’ (similarly the slaying of Ravan several weeks before had been observed in some areas as an out-of-season dasahra festival. Yet amid the descriptions of rejoicing, there were imitations of grief and loss as viewers anticipated the first of many Sundays without Ram and Sita. These sentiments found expression in the press a week later, detailing the stages of what one columnist called ‘the national withdrawal symptom.’ The front page headline of Jansatta on August 9, 1988 announced, ‘Without Ramayana Sunday mornings Seem Empty.’ Noting that people throughout the country passed their first Ramayan-less day ‘with difficulty,’ the article reported responses to the show’s absence by people in various neighborhoods of the nation’s capital. A betel seller, ‘after so many months, I’m finally getting some business on Sunday morning’ to a cloth seller in Karolbagh who explained why he had sent his in-shop television set back home by asking, why watch television now that the Ramayana is over? anticipating a promised sequel, a woman shopping on Chandni chowk no doubt summed up the feelings of many devoted viewers: ‘at least we only have to wait two months. Then Ram will return! Mother Kaushalya waited fourteen years for Ram to come back, but I don’t know if we can manage for even two months’ (“Raghu Family” 225-26).

Many in India and elsewhere are predisposed to believe that television possesses something like the Midas touch in reverse: it corrupts and debases all with which it comes in contact. However, after viewing the weekly telecasts of the Ramayan such a view would be too hasty. The televisation of the Ramayana created a legendary event; it further elevated the epic’s dimensions. The epical account of the Ramayana was presented with an extravaganza through a new mode of presentation.
Amongst all the means of communication television is believed to have the most significant impact on audience and the most far reaching effects on the information transmitted. Even the information transmitted through this new mode faces mutations at the hands of the medium.

It seems that the 1987-88 presentation of Ramanand Sagar’s serialization of the *Ramayan* will ultimately be seen as the watershed event in the history of Indian television. For the first time, the medium was utilized for the transmission of a major cultural text. The result was something approximating a national obsession; the program attracted huge audience and touched off an anguished debate about the possibilities and boundaries of television, and indeed about the nature of *Ramayana* as well (Babb & Wadley “Introduction” 14).

In Sagar’s *Ramayan*, along with its ability to increase the mobility of religious symbols, another factor of great importance is the extent to which the mechanical or electronic exigencies peculiar to a given medium may affect the content transmitted and the way that content is perceived by the audience. In *Ramayan*, the mass culture, the search for roots, entertainment and education have all got mixed to form an additive compound. This compound is available without much effort by the recipient. There is a substantial amount of difference between a description in the written form or even in still photographs, and a cinematic record of the same event. This is so because a film can give us a close approximation of reality. The film is presented to its viewers as if reality is being televised. Simplicity is inherent to this medium; a complex myth presented in the serial form is likely to be greatly simplified. The presentation of an episode in the form of moving images accompanied by dialogue, dance and music simplifies the entire episode.

Mankekar believes that the serial indeed even participated in the racist, casteist, and masculinist constructions of the Hindu (Indian) past. The serial explicitly and repeatedly characterized Ram’s clan and their “culture” and lifestyles as Aryan. As one of the pillars of Aryan (Hindu) civilization, Ram is said to have laid the foundation for a superior society and polity through his personal example as the embodiment of perfect manhood. The portrayal of Ram in the Doordarshan *Ramayan* bore a striking resemblance to this image: not only was he depicted in terms of
popular iconology with a bow and arrows slung on his shoulder, he was frequently
shown meditating, praying and leading the ascetic life of a renunciate. Sagar’s
Ramayan glorified the code of conduct (dharma) as practiced and exemplified by
Ram, who has been repeatedly hailed as ‘maryada purshottam’ (roughly an ‘ideal
man of propriety’), and allowed no space for the criticism of any of his actions (206-
08).

Many aspects which ascertain and establish the bhakti were brought out in the
television retelling. Great emphasis was placed on the absolute loyalty toward
Brahman sages, and kshatriya dharma (code of conduct) was constantly valorized as
chivalrous and honorable. “The television Ramayan aimed at establishing a mood of
bhakti to lord Ram that precluded counter hegemonic interpretations or commentaries
(e.g., feminist revisionist interpretations, or lower-caste critiques such as those
constructed by dalits)” (Mankekar 202). Unlike, the Mahabharata, in which lower-
class characters such as Karna protest upper-caste dominance, the lower caste
characters in the Ramayana exhibit nothing but an unwavering loyalty and devotion
towards their upper-caste rulers. One scene presents Nishaad, a lower caste chieftain
who was a childhood friend of Ram, as reluctant to eat with Ram and the Brahman
sage Atri until he is persuaded to do so with a patronizing lecture on the equality of all
people.

Because of Ramanand Sagar’s television version the local flavour, traditions
and divergences disappeared from the Ramayana, everything became standardized.
Standardization is a central issue in the study of the impact of modern media on
religious culture. One might have hypothesized that the increased mobility of symbols
afforded by new technologies would inevitably lead to homogenization and
uniformity and this is a major concern of the critics. They believe that Ramanand
Sagar’s Ramayan would either bring to an end or standardize the regional and the folk
tellings of the Ramayana story. It has been asserted by critics worldwide that the
television Ramayana would end the varied versions of the Ramayana; the rich
Ramayana tradition would be left in the form of one standardized version for the
future generations. But they forget that the Ramayana tradition can never be frozen
into a single text. It is a living epic, it cannot exist in mummified, meusemised form.
Homogenization is one charge against the television Ramayan and this shall be
discussed in the third chapter of the thesis.
TELEVISION (VIDEO) AS A MEDIUM

An eminent film critic once said ‘a film is difficult to explain because it is easy to understand’ (Christian Metz). Even a young (seven-eight year old) child can understand cartoons, a serial, or a film telecast on the television. The children who otherwise do not know a language might understand the television serials or films in that language (e.g. children in India watch cartoons in English and are even able to understand them at an age when they do not even know their mother tongue, interpreting and understanding English is a separate issue altogether). The reason behind this is the visual and the auditory perception, the recorded sounds and the recorded images. This is the special language, the language of the cinema. Cinema has a language of its own, ‘codes’ of its own, thereby becoming a very different and a new experience in itself. All genres have their codes and conventions. These codes are the rules by which the narrative is governed. These are alternatively referred to as classic canons or canonic laws. These canonic laws can of course be subverted as they usually are in art cinema or counter cinema. Codes and conventions should not be viewed just within their textual or generic context but also within their social and historical contexts. Codes and conventions change over time and according to the ideological climate of the time. This is a characteristic of cinematic codes, which also acted as an advantage in the presentation of the Ramayan by Ramanand Sagar. The epic which changes with time (cultural, sociological and historical ideology) could be best portrayed through a medium whose codes and conventions (in a simplified manner - the style of production) change according to the ideological climate of the time.

According to Bennet the cinematic codes are the codes through which cinema operates and the codes that operate within it. Codes are critical constructions or systems of logical relationship. This relationship is derived from the television itself. They are not preexisting laws that the filmmaker consciously observes. A great variety of codes combine to form the medium through which the meaning is expressed. There are culturally derived codes – those that exist outside the film and which the filmmakers simply reproduce (the way people eat, for example). There are a number of codes that cinema shares with the other arts (for instance, gesture which is the code of theatre as well as film). The culturally derived codes and the shared artistic codes are vital to cinema. But it is the unique codes (those that form the
specific syntax of film), that most concern us here. Perhaps ‘unique’ is not a completely accurate adjective; not even the most specifically cinematic codes are truly unique to cinema. Certainly cinema emphasizes them and utilizes them more than other arts do, yet something like montage has always existed in the novel. Any storyteller is capable of switching scenes in midstream. More important, for nearly a century film art has had its own strong influence on the older arts. Prior to 1900 something like the montage never existed in prose narrative, but since that time, novelists, increasingly influenced by films, have learned gradually to make their narratives more like cinema (Bennet et al. 13).

Cinema is not a language in the sense that English, French, or mathematics is. First of all, it is impossible to be ungrammatical in cinema. Infants appear to understand television images, for example, months before they begin to develop any facility with spoken language. Clearly, it is not necessary to acquire an intellectual understanding of cinema in order to appreciate it – at least at the most basic level. It is not necessary to learn a vocabulary in this language.

However, cinema is very much like language. People who are highly experienced in cinema – highly literate visually (or we can call ‘cinemate’?) – see more and hear more in cinema than people who seldom go for movies. Highly literate or illiterate men, all enjoy a film almost in a similar fashion. An illiterate person does not face any difficulty in comprehending the film. The point has been proved aptly in Sagar’s television or the cinematic Ramayana. People from various castes, creeds, social stratum, educated or uneducated all understood the Ramayan and waited voraciously for every new episode.

An illiterate person but the so called “cinemate” (Monaco 152) can understand more about a film than a highly literate person might be able to. Hence, there must be a separate language or symbolic code for a film. “An education in the quasi language of television opens up greater potential meaning for the observer, so it is useful to use the metaphor of language to describe the phenomenon of cinema” (Monaco 152).

Literacy does not impart any difference to the way we comprehend and perceive images or cinema. However, difference in culture changes our perception of images. This was observed for Sagar’s legendary presentation as well, wherein the episodes of the serial were received with a similar reverence and entertained the wise, learned and the illiterate alike. However, the perception of this serial changed with the
change of cultural environment. The Hindi critics and the Indian public praised the serial and wanted a few more episodes, whereas the English critics dismissed it for slow pace. James Monaco supports the above given view,

There are cultural differences in the perception of images. In one famous 1920s test, anthropologist William Hudson set out to examine whether rural Africans who had little contact with western culture perceived depth in two-dimensional images the same way that Europeans do. The conclusions that can be drawn from this seminal experiment and others that have followed are two: first, that every normal human being can perceive and identify a visual image; second, that even the simplest visual images are interpreted differently in different cultures. Therefore, we know that people must be reading these images. There is a process of intellection occurring – not necessarily consciously – when we observe an image, and it follows that we must, at some point, have learned how to do this (153).

Hence, as mentioned by Monaco in the above text a process of intellection occurred while the Indian public witnessed the telecast of *Ramayan* (serial). The iconography, the images formed by the television, the usage of computer simulated graphics all provided added meaning to the images shown in the *Ramayan*. All this is further discussed in chapter III of my thesis.

At some points, different viewpoints could be drawn for the same scene. All the viewers, quite similar to a reader’s experience while reading the same text, viewed the images in a different light. This qualifies film to have a language of its own. As a basic definition, the image is the smallest unit of meaning in a filmic text in the sense that it is composed of a single shot. The image lends itself to a series of readings depending on the type of shot. Volume and size of objects within the shot give a first denotative reading; the angle of the camera further informs the meaning or preferred reading at a denotative level. When one is considering the image, considerable importance must be given to what is called the iconography of the image, for this will yield a second order or connotative meaning (Susan 68).
We experience a connotative meaning being constructed if we try to study the iconography of images in the television. The images circulated and newly formed by Sagar’s *Ramayan* on the television gave a new connotative meaning and directed the text towards nationalization and politicization. This newly given meaning and direction (nationalism, politics, *hindutva*) shall be discussed in detail in Chapter IV of the thesis. Images construct our understanding of a film or television series and it is through these images that a code is understood.

The word “image”, indeed, has two conjoined meanings: an image is an optical pattern; it is also a mental experience, which is probably why we use the word “imagine” to describe the mental creation of pictures. Both, the optical pattern and the mental experience significantly affect the transmission. It was this mental experience which made people worship their television sets, sanctify the place occupied by the set, distribute ‘prasad’ (sweets) and look upon Arun Govil and Deepika Chiklia as the Gods.

Therefore, there is a strong element of our ability to observe images, whether still or moving, that depends on learning. This is, interestingly, not true to a significant extent with auditory phenomena. The auditory phenomenon can never have the same or an impact even somewhere close to the visual performance. The oral singing of the Ramayana is an altogether different experience as compared to the visual presentation. The auditory device might be able to provide a very clear, sharp voice and tone clarity but the impact of the visual imagery in no way matches the auditory. The experience of a *Ramayani* reciting the *Ramlila* verses can never stand anywhere close to the *Ramlila* performances. Similarly, in terms of modern technology, the Ramayana verses recited on the radio have a much lesser impact on the audience’s mind as compared to the Ramayana presentation on television (Sagar *Ramayan*). Further, if such a presentation imbibes latest technological aids, the experience is encompassing, overwhelming as experienced by the serial *Ramayan*. This encompassing effect of the serial derived from the heightened visual imagery, background music, computer simulated graphics has been discussed in detail later on in Chapter III of my thesis. By the usage of latest and sophisticated machines, we can produce recorded sounds that are technically indistinguishable from the originals but the impact stands nowhere in comparison to a visual presentation. The result of this difference in the mode of two systems of perception – visual and auditory - is that
whatever education our ears undergo in order to perceive reality is sufficient to perceive recorded sounds, whereas there is a subtle but significant difference between the education necessary for our eyes to perceive (and our brain to understand) recorded images and that which is necessary simply to comprehend the reality that surrounds us. It would serve no purpose if we consider phonography as a language, but it is useful to speak of photography (and cinematography) as a language, because a learning process is involved.

The Physiology of Perception

The point, that there is a modus operandi behind studying a film recording has never really been explored. Just as we read a piece of literature, film-critics read a film. Most of us are not aware that we read an image physically, mentally and psychologically, just as we read the written word, or a text. All the images presented by Ramanand Sagar had a physical, mental and psychological impact on the viewers. Unknowingly and unconsciously the viewers were subjected to the power asserted by the images. These images have a hegemonic effect on the audience and the tragedy lies in the fact that the viewers are illiterate as far as the language of imagery is concerned. The difference lies in that we know how to read a page from left to right and top to bottom - but we are seldom cognizant of precisely how we read an image. The paradox here is that we know very well that we must learn to read before we can attempt to enjoy or understand literature but none of us ever thought of learning the language of film before we can watch and appreciate it. We must learn a technique before we can put it to practice. But we tend to believe, although mistakenly, that anyone can understand or read a film. It is true that anyone can see a film, it’s true but not everyone can understand it and read it.

Cinema is not a language, but is akin to language. Hence, some of the methods we use to study language might be applied to study a film. Yet, since film is not a language, only like a language, we cannot limit it to the narrow linguistic concepts.

According to Monaco, ever since the beginning of cinema history, theorists have been fond of comparing film with verbal language (partly to justify the serious study of cinema). But it was not until a new, larger category of thought developed in the fifties and early sixties – one that saw written and spoken language as two among many systems of communication – that the real study of film as a language could
proceed. This inclusive category is known as semiotics, the study of systems of signs. Semioticians justified the study of film as language by redefining the concept of written and spoken language. Any system of communication is a “language”; English, French, or Chinese is a “language system”. Cinema therefore may be a “language” of a sort, but it is not clearly a language system. According to semioticians, a sign consists of two parts: the signifier and the signified. Any word has two parts – one which represents the word that is ‘the set of English alphabets’ which form the word and the second is, what is denoted by these set of alphabets when spelled together. The word “pen”, for example – the collection of letters or sounds – is a signifier; what it represents is something else again – the “signified”. This is true for every word existing in the language. In literature, the relationship between signifier and signified is a main locus of art: the poet is building constructions that, on the one hand are composed of sounds (signifiers) and, on the other, of meanings (signifieds). (157-58).

However, in film, the signifier and the signified are almost identical and the sign of cinema is a short-circuit sign. A picture is closer to the object denoted than the word which denotes it. A picture of a man is closer to the man, conceptually, than the word “man” as what it signifies, a word rarely does. The power of language systems is that there is a very great difference between the signifier and the signified; the power of film is that there is no difference. This was one of the most significant characteristic of television, it was this characteristic which took the epic (Ramayana) to a new world, the world of television. This was not only employed thoroughly in the making of the serial on Ramayana by Ramanand Sagar, but exploited to the possible limits. This shall be discussed in detail in the third chapter of the thesis.

Nevertheless, film is like a language; we might wonder how does film achieve the kind of impact which language can not. Monaco writes,

Films communicate meaning in two different manners - denotatively and connotatively. Quite similar to the written language but to a large extent film image or sound has a denotative meaning, it is what it is and we do not have to strive to recognize it. This seems a simple statement but this is the advantage or strength of cinema (159-60).
Clearly, one person’s image of a certain object is not another’s. If two people read the word “exam”, one may perhaps think of the exam in which he failed for the first time while the other might be thinking of the competition exam which got him/her a scholarship for a Ph.D. program. In cinema, however both of them get to see the same exam, while the filmmaker can choose from an infinite variety of exams possible and then present the image of the one exam chosen. Therefore this acts as a limitation of cinema as compared to literature. This limitation acts in a manner which converts it from being a limitation to an advantageous factor; it is just like a power which lies in the hands of the producer (contradicting the ‘authoritative power’ in the hands of the author as believed by the traditional critics and negated by the modern critics).

Yet while the code system of semiotics goes a long way towards making possible a more precise description of how a film does what it does, it is limited in that it more or less insists that we reduce film, like language, to basic discreet units that can be quantified. Like linguistics, semiotics is not especially well adapted to describing the complete, metaphysical effect of its subject. It describes the language or the system of communication, of a film very well. But, it does not easily describe the artistic activity of a film.

The artist’s choice in cinema is boundless; the artist’s choice in literature is circumscribed, while the reverse is true for the observer: the great thing about literature is that you can imagine and the one about films is that you can not. Film does not suggest, it states, and therein lays its power and the danger it poses to the observer. The reason why it is useful, even vital, to learn to read images well so that the observer can seize some of the power of the medium. The better one reads an image, more power one has over it. The reader of a page invents the image, the reader of the film does not, yet both readers must work to interpret the signs they perceive in order to complete the process of intellection. The film provides us with a language that: consists of short-circuit signs in which the signifier nearly equals the signified.

There is a substantial difference between a description in words (or even in still photographs) of a person or event, and a cinematic record of the same. This characteristic of cinema has already been discussed in terms of film being invested with denotative and connotative meaning, with denotative dominating the scene. Because film can give us such a close approximation of reality, it can communicate a
precise knowledge that written or spoken language seldom can - film is what you
can’t imagine. Language systems may be much better equipped to deal with the
nonconcrete world of ideas and abstractions (imagine this book for example, on film:
without a complete narration, it would be incomprehensible), but they are not nearly
so capable of conveying precise information about physical realities. By its very
nature, language (written/spoken) analyzes. To write the word “rose” is to generalize
and abstract the idea of a rose. The real power of the linguistic languages lies not in
their denotative ability but in this connotative aspect of the language.

According to Monaco, considering the strongly denotative quality of film
sound and images, it is surprising to discover that the connotative abilities are very
much a part of the film language. In fact, many of them stem from film’s denotative
ability. Because film is a product of culture, it has resonances that go beyond what the
semiotician calls its ‘diegesis’ (the sum of its denotations). In addition to the
influences from the general culture, film has its own unique connotative ability. We
know that the filmmaker has made specific choices: the “rose” for example is filmed
from a certain angle, the camera moves or does not move, the colour is bright or dull,
the rose is fresh or fading, the thorns apparent or hidden, the background clear or
vague, the shot held for a long time or briefly and so on. These are specific aids to
cinematic connotation, and although we can approximate their effect in literature, we
cannot accomplish it there with the precision or efficiency of cinema. A picture is, on
occasion, worth a thousand words, as the adage has it (162).

Except the obvious and powerful difference of pictorial narration and
linguistic narration, other differences are also quickly visible. First, the television
operates in real time and it is more limited. Novels or other modes of fiction have no
time frame - they end when they like. For example, film is in general restricted to
what Shakespeare called - the short two hours’ traffic of our stage. The long form
television serial could be a better and a possible remedy to the time frame trouble.

The written texts are told by the author. We see and hear only what he wants
us to see and hear. The television serials/films are more or less told by the author, too,
but we see and hear a great deal more than a director necessarily intends. It would be
an absurd task for the novelist to try to describe a scene in as much detail as is
conveyed in cinema. More important, whatever the novelist describes is filtered
through his language, his prejudices, and his point of view. With film, we have a
certain amount of freedom to choose, to select one detail rather than another. The driving tension of the film or serial produced on the television is the relationship between the materials of the story (plot, character, setting, theme, and so forth) and the narration of it in the language; between the story and the story-teller, in other words. The driving tension of television, on the other hand is between the materials of the story and the objective nature of the image. It is as if the author/director were in continual conflict with the scene he is shooting. Chance plays a much larger part, and the result is that the observer is free to participate in the experience much more actively. The words on the page are always the same, but the image on the screen changes continually as we redirect our attention. Television (the audiovisual) is, in this way a much richer experience. But it is poorer as well, since the persona of the narrator is so much weaker. Film can approximate the ironies that the novel develops in narration, but it can never duplicate them. (Monaco 45-6)

However as films asserted themselves, claiming to be the most significant twentieth century art form/ form of entertainment it was inevitable that a new vocabulary be needed, which would in turn(seep back into the critical mainstream). As a result we are used to terms such as 'close up', 'point of view' and even 'cinematic' being used across a range of creative contexts, from computer games to novels. These terms like close-ups, point of view, camera, shots etc. were originally used for cinema but have a wider usage these days. This entire process, apart from consolidating television’s position at the very centre of contemporary culture, is trying to find a critical vocabulary to meet the particular creative challenge of cinema. Different points of view have been presented regarding this engulfing process of cinema. Moreover, by early twentieth century, there was a substantial database of answers (or at least responses). Some of these were heavily leant upon by early film criticism which often used this critical heritage to cover up its lack of knowledge of the mechanics of the new medium, of its specific techniques. In this way films based on classic literary texts attracted particular attention since it seemed to some that they could be 'read' as degradable books. What was often missing was the understanding that film has or is a language. And that without an understanding of its language (its syntax, its grammar, its vocabulary) no criticism would be adequate (Bennet et al. 9).
If you want to tell the untold stories, if you want to give voice to the voiceless, you’ve got to find a language. Which goes for film as well as prose, for documentary as well as autobiography.
Use the wrong language and you are dumb and blind.

Salman Rushdie
(qtd. Bennet et al. 9).

As a medium, television needs to be considered as a phenomenon very much like language and not a language. It has no codified grammar, it has no enumerated vocabulary, it does not even have any specific rules of usage. Hence, it is very clearly not a language system like written or spoken English. But it nevertheless does perform many of the same functions of communication as language does. Television or film may not have grammar, but it does have a system of codes. As discussed earlier, it does not have a vocabulary, but it does have a system of signs. It also uses the system of signs and codes of a number of other communication systems. Any musical code, for instance, can be represented in the music of film or any other television performance.

Rhythm, melody, and harmony, for example, are essential codes of music. Within each of these codes, there are elaborate sets of sub-codes. Likewise, in painting, form, colour and line are generally regarded as the basic codes. In stage drama, gesture is central to the art, one of its basic codes. The system of an art can generally be described in semiotic terms as a collection of codes. The unique activity of an art, however, lies in its tropes. Television can be used to record most of the other arts. It can also translate nearly all the codes and tropes common to narrative, environmental, pictorial, musical and dramatic arts. Finally, it has a system of codes and tropes, unique to the recording arts.

Television’s codes and tropes stem from its complex technology – new phenomenon in the world of art and media. The idea that the codes of film constitute the syntax of film is an interesting and useful one. James Monaco assumes that cinema is or has a language, while it may be commonplace to emphasize that film is a visual medium, that ‘talks’ in pictures (Bennet et al.14).
Music is seen as quintessentially an ornamental addition to the television. It might have been viewed just as an element which adds to the entertainment quotient of television. But it is not so; television’s relationship with music is multifaceted. Television’s association with music is altogether more complex. Until the development of the recording arts, music held a matchless position in the community of arts. It was the only art in which time played the central role. Our system of the musical notation indicates this relationship. The music accompanying any performance not only adds to its entertainment but also gives us a cue to the story which is yet to unfold itself. The accompaniment of background music along with images and the presentation of the story enables us to guess the future happenings in the Ramayan serial as well. The sharp tunes at the onset of a horrendous war scene or the calm tone accompanying Ram’s image were not the only musical notes, music was incorporated almost everywhere as and when required by the narrative. This aspect of cinema in relation to Sagar’s Ramayan has been dealt with, in detail in Chapter III.

The mechanical nature of the television medium allows strict control of the time line, narrative “melodies” can now be controlled precisely. In the frame, events and images can be counterpoised harmonically. The significance of film sound, if put simply, most often provides anchorage, the process through which meaning is applied to otherwise open signs. How often is the status and function of a character simply indicated by the soundtrack theme that introduces him, or more crudely by how or what he says (i.e. but what we hear)? Connections between sound and vision are vital to a film’s coherence and effectiveness. The vital role music plays in the film can be well gauged even by the study of the background music or the sound track running throughout the film, also while the dialogues are being delivered. There are sudden changes in the music while the film progresses; at hero’s entry, at a villain committing a villainous crime, an intrigue being conspired and so much more. Therefore, the changes in the musical track running in the background heighten the impact laid by the visuals.
Television and Theatre

Monaco in his book *How to Read A Film* writes,

On the surface, television seems most closely comparable to theatrical performance or stage drama. Certainly, the roots of television in the early years of this century lie there. However, television differs from stage drama in several significant respects: it has vivid, precise visual potential of the pictorial arts; it has a much greater narrative capability (48).

The most salient difference between staged drama and television, as it is between prose narrative and film narrative, is in point of view. We watch a play the way we want to; we see a film only as the director or the film maker wants us to see it. And in film we also have the potential to see a great deal more. The film can take advantage of so many more points like, close up, facial expressions, music, imagery, camera movements etc., all these are absent in a theatrical performance. In a film, emphasis can be laid on a particular character according to the requirement. The camera movements can provide the situation an entirely new angle and light to be viewed in. On carefully viewing Ramanand Sagar’s screening of the epic and a *Ramlila* presentation of the epic we can easily spot the differences in both the forms of presentation. These differences arise mainly due to the technological aids and support in television as a medium. Through these technological aids the entire presentation changes; right from the make up ‘look’ i.e. the voice ‘dialogue delivery’, action, to the stage everything can be altered. Further, elaborating and strengthening the differences Monaco writes,

It has become a truism that a stage actor acts with his voice, while a television actor uses his face. Even in the most intimate situation, an audience for a stage play (note the word used “audience”, listeners – not spectators) has difficulty comprehending all but the broadest gestures. Meanwhile, a television actor, thanks to dubbing, doesn’t even need a voice of his own; dialogue can be added later. But the face must be extraordinarily expressive especially when it is magnified as much as thousand times in the close ups. A television actor will often consider a day well spent if he has accomplished one good “look”.

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When we consider in addition that television films, serials can be made with “raw materials” – non professional actors, even people who are not aware they are being filmed – the contrasts between stage acting and television acting appear even greater. Just as important as the difference in acting styles is the contrast between dramatic narration in film and on stage (48).

But theatre has one advantage over television, and it is a great one: theatre is live. If it is true that film can accomplish a great many effects unknown in the theatre simply because it is shot discontinuously. It is also true that people who perform on the television, in the films are not in contact with their audience; whereas, in a theatrical performance they are. Hence, though television is an extended modernistic theatre but this theatre differs from theatre in a great way. We cannot deny the fact that the television derived its roots from theatre but it has excelled theatre in many ways. Similarly though Sagar’s Ramayan is an extension of the local nautanki, street theatre and the ramlila tradition but it bypasses all these in many ways. Therefore along with borrowings from the theatre especially the ramlila tradition there are many contrasts between Ramayan (serial) and the ramlitas prevalent throughout India.

The Ramayana and the Everyday Religiosity and Faith

Ramayan serial was enveloped in a layer of bhakti and this bhakti was very crucial to the viewership of the Ramayan. Bhakti, the personal relationship of surrender and absolute devotion between a devotee and the subject of his/her worship, seemed to be an important form of engagement for many of the Ramayana’s Hindu viewers; the fact that their bhakti was electronically mediated seemed to make little difference to them. Indeed, the tele-visual medium seemed to encourage a particular form of bhakti through the visual process of seeing or darshan this audiovisual representation of Ram is analysed in Chapter three. Darshan is crucial to the bhakti between a devotee and the guru or the deity being worshipped. The viewers engaged the Ramayana with the same reverence they would have accorded a religious ritual, seeing lord Ram on television became a form of darshan for them.

In the serial we discover how bhakti, as a mode of engagement and as a structure of feeling, is constructed by the Sagar Ramayana. As
sociohistorical narratives enacting cosmological and ethical conflicts and dilemmas, epics are not just religious per se. In the case of the *Ramayana* tradition, however, Valmiki’s *Ramayana* and Tulsidas’ *Ramcharitmanas*, are primarily religious texts. This is particularly true of *Ramcharitmanas*, which is steeped in *bhakti* towards Ram. Ram *bhakti* is the dominant mood in Sagar’s rendition, which was based largely on this version. As noted above, it was invoked at the beginning of many episodes with a devotional discourse (*pravachan*) or hymn. Further, viewers were encouraged to have *darshan* of Ram; the grace and beauty of Ramji’s form (his *chavvi*) were emphasized throughout the serial. Early in the serial, when Ram and Lakshman walk through the streets of Mithila, a background song describes how the people of Mithila are mesmerized by Ram’s beauty and grace. Similarly when Ahalya a woman who is turned to stone, is ‘redeemed’ by Ram, she expresses her gratitude, exclaiming: ‘my eyes have feasted on Ram.’ Indeed, the serial invites all Hindu viewers to have Ram’s *darshan* by ‘feasting’ their eyes on his form (Mankekar 200).

The predominance of *bhakti* in the television Ramayan was further reinforced by its emphasis on lord Ram’s divinity and the miracles he is able to perform. Ramayana, the folklore talks of its principal characters having superhuman capabilities. The makers of the serial correctly chose not to break any of the myths of the legend by depicting all the characters with legendary strength and fighting abilities. The hero Ram is shown to be the master of the bow and the arrow; he is not
only good at it but almost perfect. This occurs right from the childhood when all the brothers are playing the ‘mango game’, Ram is shown to be the best at it.

The presentation of Ram’s story and form by means of an audiovisual aid carried not only the religious implications but served as a commercial and entertainment form as well. Neil Postman believes that:

- television is unsuited to religious experience because it is ‘so saturated with our memories of profane events, so deeply associated with the commercial and entertainment worlds that it is difficult to be recreated as a frame for sacred events’ suggests the over-facility of the conventional sacred/profane dichotomy; in any case it is clearly inapplicable to the Indian situation. Millions of Hindus did indeed feel a need to sacralize their television screens each week in order to make them ‘a frame for sacred events,’ yet they apparently found no more difficulty in doing this than they do in sacralizing their town squares for Ramlila plays each October, their kitchens for monthly ekadasi rites, or piles of cow dung for govardhan puja (qtd. Lutgendorf “Raghu Family” 242).

As a researcher, I cannot give my comments on whether the televisation and further marketing of religious stories like the Ramayana on television is good or bad. The only statement I can make at this stage is that the Ramayana tradition is inseparable from performance; as far as the choice of the medium of transmission is concerned (television in this case), it has simplified the myth and in the process popularized the same.

The technology of mass media must be the same everywhere, but its utilization and impact depends upon specific conditions, even specific ways of seeing, which vary in culture dependant ways. In a manner quite similar to the way, one would perceive different ideas, images etc. there occurs a cultural difference, a gap in the perception of images and this has been experimentally proved. For most of the people from the same social group, an image is usually perceived in a similar manner, whereas people belonging to different social groups might comprehend an image in distinct ways. This is true not only for images; any kind of a logical understanding might be viewed in a separate light by different social stratum.
In this introductory chapter to my thesis, I have tried to provide substantial, but relevant background information to my research project. This Chapter comprises of all supplementary information to my work to start with I discuss about the varied forms of Ramayanas existing throughout the world providing some details of the Valmiki Ramayana (the believed original, authentic telling of the epic). Then some insights are provided about the relevance and existence of the epic in the contemporary world. Further I have discussed Ramanand Sagar’s Ramayan in brief, which acts as the primary source of reference for my project. Since the project is interdisciplinary in its form, the television theory or the techniques of television related to my study have also been dealt with in this chapter. A brief description about the language, the codes, the working and perception of cinema has been provided in this chapter. This was imperative since, televisation remains an integral thread throughout my work. All the pre-requisite concepts, mandatory to my study have been tried to be enveloped in this chapter briefly.

The present project aims at studying the pre-textual, textual and post-textual aspects of Ramanand Sagar’s Ramayan in a linear fashion. The pre-textual aspect would discuss how the older performance traditions have been integrated into the televised Ramayan. This part would deal with the existing style of narration and presentation which helped Ramanand Sagar to form this new Ramayan. This mainly considers the influence of existing pictography and images on the formation of a new epic on the new medium that is television. The textual study would deal with both technique as well as content. This chapter mainly enlightens the reader about the impact levied upon the text by the codes of television. It studies in detail how the medium of television helped in the imposition and belief in the Ramayana myths and Ramayana characters. The study of the post-textual elements will deal with the impact of the televised serial on various fields which include the new communications media, comic and the animated movies, and its impact on Indian politics. In a broader sense, the study is based on understanding the impact that the new communications technology and the traditional performances had on the formation of this mythological serial. In studying the post textual impact of Ramanand Sagar, the political scene in India especially relating to the proliferation of the elements of Hindutva and Saffron Rising would also be studied.
All the components of the introduction further take us to the three chapters in my thesis. The chapter ‘Tradition Revisited: Emergence of the Video Epic’ dwells upon an inquiry into the older performance traditions incorporated into the televised Ramayan. While discussing the pre-existing performance tradition I have dealt with the borrowings from the Katha and the Ramlila tradition. The chapter further discusses the influence of Calendar Art and Amar Chitra Katha on the production. Calendars with religious iconography and the ‘immortal illustrated story’ (Amar Chitra Katha) not only influenced the serial a great deal but formed the basic framework for the same. Henceforth, the chapter tries to explore the borrowings from both the available sources. Most features of the 1987-88 presentation of Ramanand Sagar’s serialization of the Ramayana turn out to be entirely ‘authentic’ reflections of the performance traditions and religious culture. In the Ramayan (televised) are found elements of the folk theatre, also glimpses of importations from the traditional Katha and Ramlila are easily visible. A critical assessment of all the borrowings will be made. Ramanand Sagar’s Ramayana’s functioning was similar to ‘Street Theatre’, the Ramlila tradition. If a comparative study is made between both we find that Sagar’s Ramayan is framed on lines similar to the Ramayan, this is discussed in detail in the Chapter. My research will concern itself more with the performance aspects, narrative style and structure.

The next chapter of my thesis ‘Katha and the Camera: Transformation of the Sacred into a New Medium,’ critically evaluates Ramanand Sagar’s Ramayan in the light of the television techniques. This chapter attempts to analyze what the techniques of television did to the ‘dharmashastra’ and the extent to which the mechanical or electronic exigencies peculiar to a given medium affect the content transmitted. This would deal in detail with the production of the serial and how Hindi Cinema influenced the production. This includes the cinematic techniques and their influence on the production of this epic on television. Sets and costumes adhere to the garish standards of film mythologicals, costumes and the architecture used by Ramanand Sagar. An attempt shall be made to study the impact of all the television techniques which led to the bollywoodization of the Ramayana characters.
This chapter also deals in - how the native discourses; tellings of myths and recitation of text, which have been wisely employed by Ramanand Sagar influenced and helped in the making of this Ramayana. In this chapter I have tried to relate Ramanand Sagar’s production style to cinema and the techniques of cinema. The chapter includes a detailed study of the video epic contrasting it to the modes of cinema. It caters to the part played by music, costume, sets and the display of images which was employed by Ramanand Sagar. This part of my study explores in detail the production of the serial and how cinema influenced the production.

Further, moving to the next chapter of my thesis, ‘Reception of the Text: Amalgamation of the Sacred, the Political, and the Commercial,’ this chapter explores how the cartoon companies imported Ramanand Sagar’s costumes, make-up, setting as well as jewellery. Ramanand Sagar influenced various fields but its influence on politics and further in the transmission of Hindutava consciousness (if at all), will also be explored in this chapter. Were the issues like Ramajanamabhumi instigated by it? Did it facilitate to bring BJP, RSS, and VHP in vogue? The chapter also studies the impact Ramanand Sagar’s sets, costumes and special effects used by him in this serial had on the present day cartoons and animated Ramayana movies produced not only in India but even the outside world.

The project understands the impact communications technology and the existing styles of performances had on this sacred text. Through this work I have tried to discuss the impact of the medium in giving a new shape to this epic on the Indian political scene. The affect of this serial on the political and cultural imagination of our country shall be discussed. The televised version of Ramayana, helped in the formation of a political consciousness among Indian people.

For Ramanand Sagar’s Ramayan one can say mass culture, search for roots, mythology, religion, entertainment and education all have been mixed. This compound with a thread of technology and traditionalism running parallely pleases the aesthetic sense and quenches the intellect of the viewer. Mathematically, an entertainment form, added to it a tinge of mythology and available to the recipient without much effort would be equivalent to a big hit. Another great rationale behind the fame and triumph of the serial is the oral tradition in India. The oral tradition which is the base on which our culture, our myths and religion is passed from one
generation to another. Therefore, the serial’s wide ranging success can be credited to the great religious significance attached to the act of seeing (darsan) and hearing (sruti); and the of oral performance genres that continue to flourish in India. The Ramayana culture, exists till date with a new Ramayan screened on the television (NDTV Imagine). Also, mythology as a genre has suddenly come to the forefront once again with serials like Ramayan, Mahabharata and Jai Shri Krishna being screened on the television.