Preface

Ever since I came to India (June 1967), I felt a keen fascination for the Rm. This was partly due to its poetico-psychological grandeur - what captured my mind most in the initial stage of my study was V.'s depiction of the human heart in vibration with nature - and partly (more subconsciously) due to the fact of its being an Epic, and being a student of Greco-Roman literature, I had a special liking for Homer. The more I read of the Rm., the more my heart opened up to V.'s portrayal of characters as such. And when I decided, in 1969, to write a thesis, I had no other theme in mind than 'Characterization in the Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki'. I knew that innumerable works had been written about the Rm.: about its genesis, about historico-geographical identifications, about its social background etc. I knew that popular and religious writers had expounded the ideals and characters of the Rm. with devotion and reverence. But the absence of any scientific (scil. intuitivo-scientific) work on characterization in the Rm. made me all the more keen on my project, prompted by these reasons:

1) Characterization is one of the most important aspects, I would say is the very heart-beat, of any literary work that deals with human beings. Any such literary study that forgets to explore the poet's mind in portraying his characters remains merely a frame-work study. And so I felt that almost all studies made on the Rm. are only frame-work studies, but have not penetrated to its heart.

2) And this in a work that is unrivalled in its unfolding of the human heart, in its expounding of the loftiest ideals and deepest aspirations of man, in a work that has been the
source of edification and inspiration for more than two millenia to millions and millions of people, like perhaps no other work in the world.

3) The history of Epic characterization, the history of the human heart as expressed in the Epics, has yet to be written, both phenomenologically and genetically. A study of characterization in the Rm., where traditional rhapsodic and refined poetic art harmoniously meet for the first time, is perhaps the best starting-point to probe back step-by-step into the beginnings of Epic characterization in India and explore the genesis of Epic characterization in India. This thesis is meant to be the first of a cycle of works to explore the history of Epic characterization along the following lines: 1. Vālmīki's Art of Emotional Characterization. 2. Characterization in the Early Mahābhārata. 3. The Art of Heroic Characterization in the Early Mahābhārata. 4. The Genesis of Epic Characterization in India. 5. A Comparison between Early Greek and Indian Epic Characterization and the Collective Unconscious mirrored in them.

To lay a foundation for our study of characterization, we had to sort out an early homogeneous stage of the Rm. For had we taken as our basis the whole Rm. with its many and variegated interpolations, our study would be a distortion of V.'s mind, just as many of the later interpolations are a distortion of V.'s work. It would be a jumble of heterogeneous characterizations. We had at least to dispose of all such interpolations which are in clear contrast to and obscure the original unity or outlook of the Rm. So, it was necessary to review once more the question of the genesis of the Rm. We did not want to rely on authorities, for we felt that the last word had not been said by any of them, and to simply cling to one
school of interpretation, howsoever authoritative, would have been hazardous. Furthermore, we felt that no scholar so far has really situated the nature of the Rm. as on the threshold from oral to written poetry. But the consequences of such a situation are very far-reaching for the understanding of the genesis of the Rm., for the understanding of its nature and the author's poetic mission, and last but not least his art of characterization. Having acquired experience in the line of ancient Epics, especially the Homeric Epics, we thought we would be able to do this. The imprints of this perspective of ours are the landmark everywhere in our thesis.

This is all I have to say. It is up to the judges to say whether I have achieved my objectives: to unravel the heart of the Rm., and, by doing so, to contribute in filling a gap in the intuitivo-scientific unfolding of the phenomenology of Ancient Indian Epic literature and of the yet-to-be-written history of Epic characterization in India.

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