

MIPHAM ON RAMAYANA

—B. GHOSH

II

A free translation of the two excerpts from Mipham is attempted here.

Excerpt No. 1

MISRAKAVYABHEDA

Meaning of the expression 'Se-tu-beings': setu means canto also installation of bridge. In the present context it means 'to compose a Mahakavya' with many Sargas (cantos). The word Adi (Sogs) means the Mahakavya which is composed spontaneously and includes here the Kavya in the chain of words without being split into Sargas, otherwise (Setubandha-) refers to the episode of King Ramana (Rama) who led the army to the country of the demons and construction of bridge across the ocean. Some of the versified epics like Setubandha are generally composed spontaneously in the language of Ma-ga-dha (i.e. Prakrita), which is indeed the most excellent form (F. 22 (b) p. 44).

Excerpt No. 2

UDATTALANKARA

The God Mahesvara granted the Lord of Demons, Ravana Dasanana, the boon that he would be conqueror of the three worlds. That Ravana who forced three worlds to be his slave, had the determination of mind to risk cutting his own heads (as offering).

The illustrious Ramana (Rama) a descendant of the Royal family of Raghu, also known as Raghava, was himself an Avatara (Lama). His father Dasaratha, ordered him to go to forest accompanied by consort Sita, abandoning (claims to) kingdom. He obeyed father's command and went to the forest. The wise (Rama) did not shirk from killing Raksasa Dasanana. So his obedience to father's command and going to forest renouncing Kingdom graphically illustrated the alankara suggesting magnanimity or generosity of soul. The style or rhetoric of speech here suggests Udattalankara. Although it is customary in India to narrate the exploits and adventures of Rama for many days, here I would narrate the story in brief. (Folio—126 (a) p. 251).

Although the demon king Ravana worshipped Mahesvara for long but could not attain accomplishment, he himself chopped one after other his heads (excepting one) and offered those in the sacrificial altar; though one head was left unchopped so he remained celebrated as Dasanana of Lanka. Mahesvara was pleased to observe the brave-hearted performance of such daring act, he

requested Devi Uma to go and grant the boon for this to Ravana. At this Goddess went and promised to grant whatever accomplishment Ravana desired, but Ravana refused to receive boon from a woman. Uma was enraged and cursed Ravana saying "In future your Kingdom will come to an end because of dishonouring woman". Again Mahadeva deputed his second son having monkey-face. Ravana, being asked what he desired, refused to receive boon from a monkey. The monkey-faced one was also enraged at this refusal and cursed Ravana saying, "In future your kingdom would be destroyed by the monkeys". Then Mahesvara himself appeared and blessed Ravana by restoring his (chopped) heads; and, because he did not cut the Central one which was the horse-head, blessed him with life eternal. Mahadeva granted the boon that Ravana would be victorious over three worlds. Ravana thus reduced three worlds to his slaves. (F. 126(b) P. 252).

(As an instrument of subduing Ravana) among ten incarnations of Vishnu, the second Rama (first being Parashurama) was scion of Raghu's lineage and called Raghava. His father Dasaratha told Rama: In olden days during the great war between the gods and demons, I took the side of the gods and fought the demons; I was wounded with various sharp weapons by the demons. Then my consort Kaikeyi attended me and nursed me, and in return I granted this Kingdom to your (step) brother Bharata; and (now) you Ramana accompanied by your wife Sita, should go (in exile) to the forest. Rama with generous heart agreed and went to forest with Sita.

His wife Sita was born in the country of demons: (even though) she was exquisitely beautiful, there appeared omens of Lanka's destruction. So the baby was placed in a copper casket and thrown into water. The casket was eventually carried into the field through channels of water and found by some husbandmen who uncovered the casket and saved the handsome baby. (F. 127(a)—P. 253 (Folio 127(b) missing).

Having known that Sita was pulled away by (false) sounds (calls) they went on search and came across a reservoir of hot water of yellow grey colour filled with gaseous objects. To trace the source of this water they came to the valley where King Bali and (his brother) Sugriva were arrayed with troops. The dust (storm) raised by the encounter polluted that water. When (Rama) arrived there King Sugriva told that they were fighting for the kingdom. "I shall win against Bali within three days. You should make friendship with me." Rama was an accomplished archer, he meted out certain death to the victim, and after slaying the victim he would despatch the slain to be born in heavens. So Rama promised to kill king Bali by his arrow. But, on the first day Rama only enjoyed the fight of the monkeys. On second day he (Rama) did not shoot because he could not distinguish between the two monkeys. On third day, as a sure mark of identification he tucked up a mirror on the forehead of Sugriva. (Folio 128(a)—P. 255 Folio 128(b) missing).

Then he (Hanumanta) came near Sita and said "I have been sent by King Ramana; you now come with me". At this when Sita could not take his word (Hanumanta) presented the King's ring (to Sita). Then Sita told "How could I be able to escape (run away). If the King himself possesses power he should demonstrate that." Carrying this message he (Hanumanta) moved with a great leap (across the ocean) and appeared in front of Ramana. Thus being informed (by Hanumanta) of all the events, Rama immediately collected a great monkey army and went to the sea shore.

Rama asked the great sage Valmiki about the kinds (species) of animals in the ocean. Valmiki spoke of the aquatic animals like Te'imi (whale) measuring a hundred length which swallow all fishes. Again there are other more terrifying animals which can devour Te'imi, and there are others who can devour the latter and so on. Then the monkey army constructed a bridge with their own hands and through the bridge Rama reached the country of the demons.

Even today remnants of the bridge are still in existence. This is considered by the heretics of India (=non-Buddhists=Hindus) as a very sacred place and it is customary to pay a visit there.

It is said that the entire earth (of the country Lanka) is covered under a mantle of blood of demons, and the soil, rock and rivulets there are of red colour. This place in the south of India is famous as Setubandha Rameshvara. (Folio 129(a) P. 257, Folio 129(b) missing).

(After having allowed himself to be taken prisoner Hanuman ...) practised further deceit. He asked them whether and if so they had any laws (about trespassers and accused persons). "According to laws on my maternal side at first the person is thrown in the store of provision and enough food is granted so that the victim is choked to death. And following paternal custom the tail is wrapped with cloth made from furs and soaked in Til Oil; then the tail is put into fire". (Hanuman) offered to be killed following the father's custom. (Ravana) said to the demons, "it is inauspicious to witness death of a monkey so you keep yourself in your respective houses". When the demons acted accordingly (i.e. went inside their houses) Lankapuri which was a Tripuri (three-tier city) surrounded by high wall of lac consumed by the fire of (Hanuman's) tail in a moment.

After Sita was rescued, it is said Rama by his divine power agitated the ocean in a way that the waves were all diverted towards Lanka and the demons could not sail their boats towards "country of men" because of obstruction by the whirling waves; so by virtue of this act the harm to the country of man (India) was stopped. Some demons flew away to secure places and some of them woke the brother of Ravana, Kumbha Karna (whom they called) the "sage of trance" from his deep slumber by pouring hot water into his ear... and Ravana was killed.....(Folio, 130(a) P.259).

III

Translation of excerpts has to be less literal and more free, particularly because the full text of the original (Miphm) has not so far been found; and the gaps in the excerpts from extant versions are vital. Besides Miphm, the author, in this work depicts the greatness and merits of Sanskrit poetics and rhetoric. He is not obviously concerned with a full and perfect account of Ramayana.

In the excerpts given above the Tibetan scholar expounds the various Alankaras: characters and styles like Misrakavyabheda and Udattalankara and seeks illustrations from Valmiki's Mahakavya. It is not within the scope of my article to enquire whether Miphm had access to the full story of Ramayana as in the Sanskrit original attributed to Valmiki. It is only relevant to note that Ramayana story was recorded in Tibetan tradition even a

thousand years before Mipham wrote. This is borne out by the finds from Tunhuang.

The events and the sequence of the events in the story as in Mipham on poetics and rhetoric do not conform to those in the Indian originals extant. The ominous curses of Siva's consort Uma and Siva's monkey-faced son are not known in Indian records.

The descriptions "country of man", for India and "hermit of Samadhi", for Kumbhakarna are indeed Tibetan coinings which express the mind of Hindu India very aptly. The Tibetan expression for heretics or outsiders—(non-Buddhist or Hindu) is not derogatory to India, the Land of Enlightenment.

Some renderings from Sanskrit to Tibetan in Mipham's work are not conventional. The Tibetan word Lama used for Avatara does indeed great honour to Hindu concept.

(Concluded)