

Title

THE RAMAYANA
AND
THE MAHABHARATA

Condensed
into
English verse

By Romesh C. Dutt

Bird Publisher, 2012

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A note on the late Romesh C. Dutt

Romesh Chunder Dutt, to whom English readers are indebted for the condensed metrical version of the ancient Indian epics given in this volume, was one of the most distinguished sons of modern India. He came of a Hindu family standing high among the Kayasths, second of the great castes in Bengal, was born in 1848, and grew to manhood amid influences of deep spiritual disturbance. In those days an Indian youth who had felt the call of the West encountered the sternest opposition from both his own family and the community, if he avowed his ambition of making the voyage to Europe. Romesh Dutt, having passed through the Presidency College, Calcutta, took his fate into his own hands. Accompanied by two friends, both of whom after wards rose to eminence in Bengal, he secretly took ship, came to London, entered for the Indian Civil Service, and took third place in the open examination of 1869. He was the first of his race to attain the rank of divisional commissioner, and long before his retirement in 1897, at the end of twenty-five years' service, had made a high reputation as an administrator. He sat for a time in the Bengal Legislative Council, and, in recognition of his official work, received the Companionship of the Indian Empire. He died on November 30, 1909, at Baroda, the capital of the important Native State which he had served with brilliant success as revenue minister and dewan.

The influences which determined his literary activity were primarily European. As a student in Calcutta he had made acquaintance with the English classics, and later, while at University College, had read the poets insatiably. Nevertheless his first successes were achieved in his mother tongue. He wrote in Bengali poems and plays, historical and social novels, and aroused a storm of protest within the orthodox community of his Province by publishing a Bengali translation of the Rig Veda. In English, of which he had complete mastery, his first complete essay was a history of civilisation in Ancient India, which, though not a work of original research, fulfilled a useful purpose in its day. When freed from Government service gave him the opportunity he set himself to writing the *Economic History of India* and *India in the Victorian Age*, the two together forming, his chief contribution to the subject which he, more than any other Indian of his time, had made his own. In these books, as in others of kindred theme and purpose, there is much criticism of British administration, strongly felt if temperately expressed. Apart from this, its more controversial side, the work of Romesh Dutt is valuable mainly in that it has helped to reveal to his own people no less than to ours, the spiritual riches of ancient India.

S. K. Ratcliffe

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RAMAYANA

Epic of Rama, Prince of India

BOOK I: SITA-SWAYAWARA (The Bridal of Sita)

The Epic relates to the ancient traditions of two powerful races, the Kosalas and the Videhas, who lived in Northern India between the twelfth and tenth centuries before Christ. The names Kosala and Videha in the singular number indicate the kingdoms, - Oudh and North Behar, - and in the plural number they mean the ancient races which inhabited those two countries.

According to the Epic, Dasa-ratha king of the Kosalas had four sons, the eldest of whom was Rama the hero of the poem. And Janak king of the Videhas had a daughter named Sita, who was miraculously born of a field furrow, and who is the heroine of the Epic.

Janak ordained a severe test for the hand of his daughter, and many a prince and warrior came and went away disappointed. Rama succeeded, and won Sita. The story of Rama's winning his bride, and of the marriage of his three brothers with the sister and cousins of Sita, forms the subject of this Book.

The portions translated in this Book form Section vi., Sections 1xvii. to Ixix., Section Ixxiii., and Section Ixxvii. of Book i. of the original text.

I Ayodrya, The righteous city

Rich in royal worth and valour, rich in holy Vedic lore,
Dasa-ratha ruled his empire in the happy days of yore,

Loved of men in fair Ayodhya, sprung of ancient Solar Race,
Royal rishi in his duty, saintly rishi in his grace,

Great as *INDRA* in his prowess, bounteous as *KUVERA* kind,
Dauntless deeds subdued his foemen, lofty faith subdued his mind!

Like the ancient monarch Manu, father of the human race,
Dasa-ratha ruled his people with a father's loving grace,

Truth and Justice swayed each action and each baser motive quelled
People's Love and Monarch's Duty every thought and deed impelled,

And his town like *INDRA'S* city, - tower and dome and turret brave -
Rose in proud and peerless beauty on Sarayu's limpid wave!

Peaceful lived the righteous people, rich in wealth in merit high,
Envy dwelt not in their bosoms and their accents shaped no lie,

Fathers with their happy households owned their cattle, corn, and gold,
Galling penury and famine in Ayodhya had no hold,

Neighbours lived in mutual kindness helpful with their ample wealth,
None who begged the wasted refuse, none who lived by fraud and stealth!

And they wore the gem and earring, wreath and fragrant sandal paste,
And their arms were decked with bracelets, and their necks with nishkas graced,

Cheat and braggart and deceiver lived not in the ancient town,
Proud despiser of the lowly wore not insults in their frown,

Poorer fed not on the richer, hireling friend upon the great,
None with low and lying accents did upon the proud man wait

Men to plighted vows were faithful, faithful was each loving wife,
Impure thought and wandering fancy stained not holy wedded life,

Robed in gold and graceful garments, fair in form and fair in face,
Winsome were Ayodhya's daughters, rich in wit and woman's grace

Twice-born men were free from passion, lust of gold and impure greed,
Faithful to their Rites and Scriptures, truthful in their word and deed,

Altar blazed in every mansion, from each home was bounty given,
'Stooped no man to fulsome falsehood, questioned none the will of Heaven.

Kshatras bowed to holy Brahmans, Vaisyas to the Kshatras bowed
Toiling Sudras lived by labour, of their honest duty proud,

To the Gods and to the Fathers, to each guest in virtue trained,
Rites were done with true devotion as by holy writ ordained,

Pure each caste in due observance, stainless was each ancient rite,
And the nation thrived and prospered by its old and matchless might,

And each man in truth abiding lived a long and peaceful life,
With his sons and with his grandsons, with his loved and honoured wife.

Thus was ruled the ancient city by her monarch true and bold,
As the earth was ruled by Mann in the misty days of old,

Troops who never turned in battle, fierce as fire and strong and brave,
Guarded well her lofty ramparts as the lions guard the cave.

Steeds like *INDRA'S* in their swiftness came from far Kamboja's land,
From Vanaya and Vahlika and from Sindhu's rock-bound strand,

MAHABHARATA

The epic of the Bharatas

BOOK I: ASTRA DARSANA (The Tournament)

The scene of the Epic is the ancient kingdom of the Kurus which flourished along the upper course of the Ganges; and the historical fact on which the Epic is based is a great war which took place between the Kurus and a neighbouring tribe, the Panchalas, in the thirteenth or fourteenth century before Christ.

According to the Epic, Pandu and Dhrita-rashtra, who was born blind, were brothers. Pandu died early, and Dhrita-rashtra became king of the Kurus, and brought up the five sons of Pandu along with his hundred sons.

Yudhishtir, the eldest son of Pandu, was a man of truth and piety; Bhima, the second, was a stalwart fighter; and Arjun, the third son, distinguished himself above all the other princes in arms. The two youngest brothers, Nakula and Sahadeva, were twins. Duryodhan was the eldest son of Dhrita-rashtra and was jealous of his cousins, the sons of Pandu. A tournament was held, and in the course of the day a warrior named Karna, of unknown origin, appeared on the scene and proved himself a worthy rival of Arjun. The rivalry between Arjun and Karna is the leading thought of the Epic, as the rivalry between Achilles and Hector is the leading thought of the Iliad.

It is only necessary to add that the sons of Pandu, as well as Karna, were, like the heroes of Homer, god-born chiefs. Some god inspired the birth of each. Yudhishtir was the son of Dharma or Virtue, Bhima of Vayu or Wind, Arjun of Indra or Rain-god, the twin youngest were the sons of the Aswin twins, and Karna was the son of Surya the Sun, but was believed by himself and by all others to be the son of a simple chariot-driver.

The portion translated in this Book forms Sections cxxxiv. to cxxxvii. of Book i. of the original Epic in Sanscrit (Calcutta edition of 1834).

I The gathering

Wrathful sons of Dhrita-rashtra, born of Kuru's royal race,
Righteous sons of noble Pandu, god-born men of godlike grace,

Skill in arms attained these princes from a Brahman warrior bold,
Drona, priest and proud preceptor, peerless chief of days of old!

Out spake Drona to the monarch in Hastina's royal hall,
Spake to Bhishma and to Kripa, spake to lords and courtiers all:

"Mark the gallant princes, monarch, trained in arms and warlike art,
Let them prove their skill and valour, rein the steed and throw the dart."

Answered then the ancient monarch, joyful was his royal heart.
"Best of Brahmans and of warriors, nobly hast thou done thy part,

Name the place and fix the moment, hold a royal tournament,
Publish wide the laws of combat, publish far thy king's consent.

Sightless roll these orbs of vision, dark to me is noonday light,
Happier men will mark the tourney and the peerless princes' fight,

Let the good and wise Vidura serve thy mandate and behest,
Let a father's pride and gladness fill this old and cheerless breast."

Forthwith went the wise Vidura to his sacred duties bound,
Drona, blessed with skill and wisdom, measured out the tourney ground,

Clear of jungle was the meadow, by a crystal fountain graced,
Drona on the lighted altar holy gifts and offerings placed,

Holy was the star auspicious, and the hour was calm and bright,
Men from distant town and hamlet came to view the sacred rite.

Then arose white stately mansions, built by architects of fame,
Decked with arms for Kuru's monarch and for every royal dame,

And the people built their stages circling round the listed green,
And the nobles with their white tents graced the fair and festive scene.

Brightly dawned the festal morning, and the monarch left his hall,
Bhishma and the pious Kripa with the lords and courtiers all,

And they came unto the mansions, gay and glittering, gold-encased,
Decked with gems and rich baidurya, and with strings of pearls be-laced.

Fair Gandhari, queen of Kuru, Pritha, Pandu's widowed dame,
Ladies in their gorgeous garments, maids of beauty and of fame,

Mounted on their glittering mansions where the tints harmonious blend,
As, on Meru's golden mountain, queens of heavenly gods ascend!

And the people of the city, Brahmans, Vaisyas, Kshatras bold,
Men from stall and loom and anvil gathered thick, the young and old,

And arose the sound of trumpet and the surging people's cry.
Like the voice of angry ocean, tempest-lashed, sublime and high!

Came the saintly white-robed Drona, white his sacrificial thread,
White his sandal-mark and garlands, white the locks that crowned his head,

With his son renowned for valour walked forth Drona, radiant, high,
So the Moon with Mars conjoined walks upon the cloudless sky!

Offerings to the gods immortal then the priestly warrior made,
Brahmans with their chanted mantra worship and obeisance paid,

And the festive note of sankha mingled with the trumpet's sound,
Throngs of warriors, various-armed, came unto the listed ground.

II The Princes

Gauntleted and jewel-girdled, now the warlike princes came,
With their stately bows and quivers, and their swords like wreaths of flame,

Each behind his elder stepping, good Yudhishtir first of all,
Each his wondrous skill displaying held the silent crowds in thrall.

And the men in admiration marked them with a joyful eye,
Or by sudden panic stricken stooped to let the arrow fly!

Mounted on their rapid coursers oft the princes proved their aim,
Racing, hit the target with arrows lettered with their royal name,

With their glinting sunlit weapons shone the youths sublime and high,
More than mortals seemed the princes, bright Gandharvas of the sky!

Shouts of joy the people uttered as by sudden impulse driven.
Mingled voice of tens of thousands struck the pealing vault of heaven.

Still the princes shook their weapons, drove the deep resounding car,
Or on steed or tusker mounted waged the glorious mimic war!

Mighty sword and ample buckler, ponderous mace the princes wield,
Brightly gleam their lightning rapiers as they range the listed field,

Brave and fearless is their action, and their movement quick and light
Skilled and true the thrust and parry of their weapons flaming bright!

III Bhima and Duryodhan

Bhima came and proud Duryodhan with their maces lifted high,
Like two cliffs with lofty turrets cleaving through the azure sky,

In their warlike arms accoutred with their girded loins they stood,
Like two untamed jungle tuskens in the deep and echoing wood!

And as tuskers range the forest, so they range the spacious field,
Right to left and back they wander and their ponderous maces wield,

Unto Kuru's sightless monarch wise Vidura drew the scene,
Pritha proudly of the princes spake unto the Kuru queen.

While the stalwart Bhima battled with Duryodhan brave and strong,
Fierce in wrath, for one or other, shouted forth the maddened throng,

"Hail to Kuru prince Duryodhan!" "Hail to Bhima hero proud!"
Sounds like these from surging myriads rose in tumult deep and loud,

And with troubled vision Drona marked the heaving restless plain,
Marked the crowd by anger shaken, like the tempest-shaken main,

To his son he softly whispered quick the tumult to appease,
Part the armed and angry wrestlers, bid the deadly combat cease,

With their lifted clubs the princes slow retired on signal given,
Like the parting of the billows, mighty-heaving, tempest-driven!

Came forth then the ancient Drona on the open battle-ground,
Stopped the drum and lofty trumpet, spake in voice like thunder's sound:

"Bid him come, the gallant Arjun! pious prince and warrior skilled,
Arjun, born of mighty *INDRA*, and with *VISHNU'S* prowess filled."

IV The advent of Arjun

Gauntleted and jewel-girdled, with his bow of ample height,
Archer Arjun pious-hearted to the gods performed a rite,

Then he stepped forth proud and stately in his golden mail encased,
Like the sunlit cloud of evening with the golden rainbow graced,

And a gladness stirred the people all around the listed plain,
Voice of drum and blare of trumpet rose with sankha's festive strain!

"Mark! the gallant son of Pandu, whom the happy Pritha bore,
Mark! the heir of *INDRA'S* valour, matchless in his arms and lore,

Mark! the warrior young and valiant, peerless in his skill of arms,
Mark! the prince of stainless virtue, decked with grace and varied charms!"

Pritha heard such grateful voices borne aloft unto the sky,
Milk of love suffused her bosom, tear of joy was in her eye!