

## Ecological Awareness in Vālmikī's *Rāmāyana*

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### Abstract

*The use of ecological awareness in the Vālmikī Rāmāyana is an exemplary case to deal with the postmodern environmental crisis. This research paper focuses on the connection between flora and fauna in this classical text. This study primarily interprets the discourses of the text which relates to the ecological awareness. At the same time, it also deals with the logic behind constructing the discourse of the poet through the activities of the characters and their thoughts related to ecology. To analyze the ecological awareness of the text, ecological study has been used as an overall theoretical approach. This study is significant in order to present how Vālmikī Rāmāyana manifests the ecological awareness to the postmodern people. The research approach adopted in this exploration is interpretive. The findings of this investigation provide the evidences that the epic has used ecological awareness in such a way that the epic impresses humans to make a balance between nature and creatures. The main conclusion drawn from this research is that Vālmikī is a far-sighted classical poet to make human beings aware of ecological crisis and its effects everywhere in the world.*

**Keywords:** Ecology, hazards, awareness, *panchamahabhuta*, flora, fauna.

### Introduction

The term "Ecology" is made up of two words. *ikos* (home) and *logos* (knowledge). In this sense, ecology is the knowledge of home. It studies the interactions between organism and environment (Brothakur 6). It is the body of knowledge concerning the economy of nature. Ecology is the scientific study of the interrelations between living organisms and their environment, including both inter-specific and intra-specific relations. Human ties with Nature are old phenomenon and the idea of ecological balance of a particular place in a period may be discovered from its flora, fauna and water elements. In the present day context this relationship is taken as "religious ecology" which draws attention to kinship with the dependence on nature for necessities of life. The ancient *Sanskrit* texts are a veritable treasure house of information on Ecology. They reveal the deep ties that the ancients had with nature. Ecological awareness is a reaction to the environmental hazards caused by the achievements of technology.

Ecological awareness relates to air, water and plants which are in need of preservation. Ethical commitment is necessary for the health of the natural things. Dunlap and Jones intensify that ecology and environment are same. Environmental consciousness is necessary to keep ecology in good condition. The critics write in confirmation with their logic: “Environmental concern is defined as the awareness or insight of individuals that the natural state of the environment is threatened through resource overuse and pollution by humans” (5). Pollution is the main root of the crisis in ecology. The *Vedic* seers visualized the different aspects of nature and advised humans for maintaining the ecological balance for sound health and happiness of men. For Vālmikī, ecology is a particular order in the universe and nature has its own system of manifestation. Awareness in ecology inspires human to be careful in the exacerbation in the environment of the world.

Vālmikī, popularly known as *ādi kavi*, that is the first poet in Sanskrit literature, has unexpected condition of life in his boyhood and manhood. Robber Ratnakar has committed sin by killing animals and birds and also robbed people to support his large family (Agrawal 2). Later, the robber comes to know that his family members are not ready to share his sin so that the robber changes his lifestyle as per the instructions of sage Narada. Ratnakar turns into Vālmikī from his writings of the *Rāmāyana* and other literary works. Vālmikī Rāmāyana, the original version, composed between 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC to 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (Narayan 3) deals with the ecological awareness for drawing attention of humans to preserve nature. It becomes the source of other versions of Rāmāyana such as Adhyatma Rāmāyana (Sanskrit), 3 Tulsidas Rāmāyana (Awadhi), Kamba Rāmāyana (Tamil), Ezhuttachan Rāmāyana (Malayalam) and many other versions of Rāmāyana.

The Vālmikī Rāmāyana presents the scenario of Tropical Deciduous Forest, Alpine Region Semi-forest, particularly the Himalayan, and the evergreen tropical Forest of Lanka. The manifestation of forest refers to the ecological awareness for humans (Roy 1). The text links the awareness of ecology to the awareness of *ātma* and the writer opines that *ātma* is the simplest form of human awareness. Such awareness helps make a balance between flora and fauna. The author discusses the ecological awareness in the light of the suggestive meanings. The entire narration of the text relates to the banishment of Rāma for fourteen years in Daṇḍkāraṇya forest. During that time, the Lord observes ecological harmony between flora and fauna. The text was composed before the environmental crisis occurred on this earth even though it traces the ecological awareness for the readers of the modern readers.

This research work connects present ecological awareness mentioning the major ideas of Vālmikī Rāmāyana. The aim of this writing is to highlight the utility of the Rāmāyana for the protection of ecology by referring the evidences from the text. It investigates and explains different flora and fauna which have been described in Vālmikī Rāmāyana. Rāma describes the

plants, Sitā speaks about the welfare of animals and against hunting for sport (Amrithalingam 5). The accuracy of the description draws the attention of the modern readers and researchers to deal with the ecological issues. Environmental awareness from this text extends the scope of this classical text as a relevant material to educate the present humans. Sacred qualities of the plants described in the text motivate the readers of the present world to preserve ecology without any hindrances.

### **Problem, Objectives, and Methodology**

In the history of *Sanskrit* poetry, Vālmikī is widely regarded as a crucial classical poet who uses ecological awareness effectively. For him, the elements of ecology enhance the value of religion to save nature and they are the bases for meanings as well. The keen interest of the poet enables him to unfold the ecological imbalance on the earth. Honnappa Bagavata argues:

The poet seems to be in the height of his talent in representation of the natural order, of the finest mode of life, of the purest moral endeavor, of the most worthy sovereign, and of the most sober divine meditation. (238)

The basic problem of this study is to address how these elements of ecological awareness are displayed in Vālmikī's epic, the *Rāmāyana*. To find it out, this article answers the following research questions:

- What ecological imaginings can we find in the *Rāmāyana*?
- How does the text evoke the ecological awareness?

To find out the reasons, the researcher analyses the activities and motives of the characters in the light of Barry Commoner's theory of ecology "Everything is connected to everything else." There is one ecosphere for the living organism. There is connection between human beings and other species. This theory believes that compassion of humans to plants and animals is necessary for harmony. The researcher uses interpretative method for confirmation of ecological awareness with evidences in the text.

### **The Place of the *Rāmāyana* Sanskrit Literature: Review of Literature**

Vālmikī's *Rāmāyana* has drawn the attention of the diverse readers, critical thinkers, and academicians. Issues, theme, and its popularity are the main attractions which invite the literary reviews from the men of letters. Major philosophers, critics, and the men of intellects such as Rāmanujacharya, Hanumanta Rao, P.S. Sundaram, Lakshmi Lal, Nair Somraj Sivadas, Nirmala Chinchani, Ramesh C. Dutta, Kevin Dodd, and Jean Francois Lyotard have analyzed the *Rāmāyana* (Sundaram 17). Their focus relates to the impressiveness of the *Rāmāyana* in the *Hinduism*. The reviews made by the different intellectuals and critics are noted herewith.

Rāmanujacharya, a theologian of the *Vedic* lineage, intellectually evaluates the *Rāmāyana* of Vālmikī as a *magnum opus* of the *Sanskrit* Literature. In his words: “The *Rāmāyana* of Vālmikī is a landmark in the history of *Sanskrit* Literature; literary art begins with the composition of this epic” (120). The interpreter points to the reality that the *Rāmāyana* is the origin of the literary art in the history of the *Sanskrit* Literature as well as *Hinduism*. The writer picks up both subjects: history and art; and expresses in the lucid style. Hanumanta Rao and M. K. Murthi support Rāmanujacharya about the supremacy of the *Rāmāyana* in the *Hinduism* and they write ahead: “Vālmikī *Rāmāyana* is an epic poem of India, which narrates the journey of virtue to annihilate vice. Sri Rāma is the hero and *ayana* (journey) is his journey and adventures” (3). The critics point out the journey of virtue for the victory against vices. Long journey of the hero is one of the characteristics of an epic and the *Rāmāyana* is not an exception. Lord Rāma completes His adventurous journey to Lanka from *Dandaka* Forest (India) for the rescue of Sitā.

Unlike Rao and Murthi, P. S. Sundaram argues on the creation of the *Rāmāyana* by quoting a saying of Tulsidas: *Ram katha kai miti jaga nāhi* [“It is impossible to keep count of Rāma *kathās*”] (3). The critic bases his idea on the eternity of the Rāma *kathās* in the *Hinduism* because of the popularity of the oral form of this text. The Rāma *kathas* cannot be limited only in the particular texts and their origin. Lakshmi Lal has different line of argument on the text from Sundaram. The reviewer is apt to state on the characterization of Rāma and he argues that the central figure, Rāma, is human, then super human and finally divine- divinity settling like a thin layer on a core of super humanity” (1). Rāma has dynamic character in the *Rāmāyana* and His character reflects the ecological awareness to the modern humans. The modern readers are aware of their intervention in ecology from the precepts of the *Rāmāyana*. Mira Roy argues that Rāma is revealed as a divine being because a normal person cannot build a bridge on the ocean without the modern technological equipments (7). The interpreter believes in the divine actions of Rāma due to His miraculous activities for constructing a bridge.

Nair Somraj links ecology with ethics and other subjects such as politics, human resource management and statecraft in the narration of the *Rāmāyana*:

The narrative is regarded as a veritable treatise on social sciences, offering lessons that transcend both time and space. In fact, this famous *Grantha* carries useful tips on ethics and values, statecraft and politics, and even general and human resource management. (5-6)

The ethics and values of the Vālmikī *Rāmāyana* are practically useful in the life of human beings. The use of narration is a noticeable aspect in the text which includes the subject matter of the social sciences, ethics, politics, and the transcendentalism. The narrative technique extends the scope of the text and it teaches the readers about the managerial skills in their lives.

The literature review of Ramesh C. Dutta on the *Rāmāyana* contradicts with the views of Somraj, Lakshmi Lal and Sundaram. Dutta argues mentioning the plot of the text and he "finds comparisons between Homer's *Iliad* and the *Rāmāyana* for they share the basic plot of a husband who goes forth to battle to rescue a kidnapped wife" (17). Both the epics manifest the scenario of kidnapping of the beloved wives of the protagonists. Menelaus brings back his wife Helen from Paris of Troy after the Trojan war in the *Iliad* and Rāma brings Sitā from Rāvana of Lanka with the accompany of the monkey soldiers in the *Rāmāyana*. Rāmanarayana Dutta supports in the role of Rāma in the epic and the expounder further explores Rāma not as an ordinary character but as an incarnation of God Vishnu. In Kevin Dodd's words: "Rāma is the main character, an incarnation of the god Vishnu, the ideal man, who restores order to the universe and righteous to the social world. Therefore, we are to honor him in all our actions and thoughts" (1). The reviewer comes to know that the Rāma is a model personality of this classical epic. There is the restoration of the universal rights from his deeds. The subjects of Rāma get proper justice and righteousness during His regime and His Rāma *Rajya* is admirable even in the present world.

Likewise, Nirmala Chinchain discusses on the significance of the Rāmāyana: "The epic has a very rich and enormous space, where there is unlimited scope for modification, rethinking and reconstruction" (3). Explaining this statement, the interpreter clarifies that there is special perfection in the creation of this epic in everything. All of the above mentioned reviews relate to the impression of the *Rāmāyana* in relation to the personality of the main character. The reviewers come to know that Vālmikī *Rāmāyana* displays the ecological awareness for the modern readers for the solution of present ecological problems.

### **The Quest for Ecological Awareness in Vālmikī Rāmāyana**

Vālmikī's *Rāmāyana* includes ecological elements which represent sentimental form of nature. The poet depicts the natural beauty and ecology in all its artistic qualities in the text. The beauty of nature evokes internal happiness for beholders. The hallmark of the poet is to explore the ecological evidences to warn humans from hazards. The text includes the significance of the *Pancha-Mahābhuta* (earth, air, sky, water and light) and the poet presents the relationship between flora and fauna. It makes the readers ecologically aware of the *Pancha-Mahābhuta* and save them without pollution in their own form. Peaceful environment with the diverse trees, plants, and creepers are observed in the background of the epic. *Ādikavi* Vālmikī shows the sign of special respect to the *Pancha-Mahābhuta* season and circumstances, vegetation and birds and animals for pointing out the ecological awareness. The researcher analyses the ecological awareness in the *Rāmāyana* on the following headings:

### **Ecological Awareness Based on *Pancha-mahābhutas***

The *Pancha-mahābhuta* is the foundation stone of ecology. The epic includes the *Pancha-mahābhuta* for the base of interpretation. These are water, air, earth, sky and light and the *Panchamahābhuta* traces the ecological awareness in the Vālmikī *Rāmāyāna*. The epic stresses about the conservation of the *Pancha-mahābhuta*. There is the manifestation of the ecological imaginings in the *Pancha-mahābhuta*. These *Pancha-mahābhutas* affect directly in the life of flora and fauna. If modern people preserve these elements of nature, they become useful for the ecological balance. Rāmanarayan Dutta quotes a verse from the *Rāmāyāna* about the value of water: *pa:nia du:sake pa:pam tathiba bias:dake* [“Our life is in crisis from pollution in water”] (*Bala Kanda*: 2. 75. 56). One can point out the pollution in water referring the ecological crisis. The creatures of water die and one cannot see clearly the images of trees in water due to pollution. This imagining of the ecology relates to its awareness. The reality is that one can observe the scenario of pure and fresh water in Vālmikī *Rāmāyāna*. The writer (Vālmikī) mentions the glory of fresh water and warns humans not to create environmental crisis in it. If there is pollution, it creates so many problems in the world. Bharadwaj Muni writes ahead to referring the freshness of water: *padmagandhi sivam wa:ri su:khasi:tamanayam* [“The described water of Vālmikī *Rāmāyāna* is *suwāsīt* (with perfume), *Sitāl* (calm), and *roganāsak* (curing of diseases)] (12). The critic mentions *sivajalam* as fresh and healthy *kalyānkāri* water. The description of water in the text refers to the benefits of fresh water for creatures. When there is question mark in the freshness of water, it creates so many problems in our lives.

Emphasizing the value of water, Vālmikī makes ecologically aware to humans. The people of the present world are not careful about ecology as Lord Rāma. He is aware of ecologically and supports to save water in fresh condition. When Rāma and Lakshmana are in *Panchawati* State, Rāma suggests his brother to search a place where there is pure water for them to live. From the stand point of Vālmikī, one can see how the *Rāmāyāna* explores the value of water: *Rāmate yatra baidehi twamaham chaiba laksmana/ ta dri:so drisyatam desa sannikrista jalasaya* [“The area of pure water is good place to live”] (*Bala Kanda*: 3. 15. 4). The *Rāmāyāna* makes ecologically aware to people mentioning *Pampa Sarabara*, and the renowned holiest rivers such as *Ganga*, *Yamuna*, *Narmada*, *Kausiki*, *Saraswati*, *Srayu*, and *Mandakini* (Gupta 262). The scenario of those rivers and lakes trace richness in ecology. *Maharshi* Vālmikī considers conserving water resources in the *Rāmāyāna* to humans for their awareness ecologically. Thus, there is the reflection of the model of ecology in the *Rāmāyāna* and the text relates to the freshness of water as an important component for ecological awareness.

The text has a number of noticeable ecological evidences to preserve air carefully. Air is as important as our *praṇa* (life) and it should be free from pollution for the welfare of biotic and a

biotic. Air is a component of *Panchamahabhuta* and it is the duty of humans to keep it in fresh condition. Vālmikī evaluates ecology and he writes a verse in *Bala Kanda* of the *Rāmāyana*: *ma bināsam gamisyam aprāsadhyadite suta* [“Pollution in air causes destruction”] (7.35.63). As air enters into our body, it saves our lives because nobody imagines life without air. Hanumāna refers the elements of *bayu* (air) in the text because he is known as *Pawan Putra* and he becomes *chiranjivi* (Vālmikī 49). The *Rāmāyana* stresses in *yajna* for the purification of air. If there is continuation of *yajna*, it freshes air and it makes the life of the flora and fauna better. In Vālmikī’s words: *ni:swadyayabasatkaram ni:kri:ya dharma barjitam/ bayu:prakopa:t trailokyam nirayasthamiwabhawat* [“If there is pollution in air, the religion stops and all creatures suffer as if they are fallen in the hell”] (Vālmikī: 7. 35. 52). *Yajna* is the main *karma* to save air pollution. After the destruction of Rāvana in Lanka *sugandhit bāyu* (pure air) starts blowing. Thus, the *Rāmāyana* evokes the ecological awareness for humans to make air always fresh and healthy.

Sitā is a representative character of the earth in the Vālmikī *Rāmāyana*. She remains close to nature in her life. In the same way, Lord Rāma gets bliss while He remains in the forest. But Sitā feels difficulties to remain in the forest due to the fear of wild beasts. According to Vālmikī: *giri:nirjharasambhuta giri:nirdarivasinam/singhānam ninada du:kha srotu:m dukhamato vanamsupports* [“ Intensified by hill-streams, the roars of lions dwelling in mountain caves are unpleasant to hear. Hence a forest is full of misery”] (2. 28. 7. 296). This idea further proves that it is not easy for Sitā to remain in Dandaka Forest because of the fear of wild beasts. There are challenges in the life of Sitā, Rāma, Lakshmana and others in the forest. Self- awareness is necessary for them not to save plants and creatures but to save themselves. Thus, ecological awareness is necessary not only to save plants and animals but also for the protection of humans.

Humans do not have ecological awareness and they create disturbance in plants, creatures and also for humans. Sitā faces problems from wild animals and humans in Vālmikī *Rāmāyana*. When one *dhobi* (washer man) makes a scandal of Sitā during the time of dispute with his wife, Rāma listens and the Lord instructs her to remain in *guptabash* (hidden settlement). Lakshmana takes Sitā to forest for the completion of *guptabash*. The writer writes ahead: *si:tāhi rājabachnādasram pu:nyakarmanam/ maya neya mahisi:nam shi:ghRāmani:yatām ratha* [“Sitā has to be taken to the hermitage of the pious sages at the command of the king, please do not delay in bringing the chariot”] (7.46. 3. 825). Sitā is like the earth in toleration, accepts it and is ready to go to forest again. As the earth, Sitā has awareness about her ethics and ecology. She does not create any problems in it. The activities of Sitā are related for the protection of ecology. There is special conversation of the earth in Vālmikī *Rāmāyana*. Rāma always thinks about the welfare of the earth. To prove the ideas of the ecological awareness, Vālmikī *Rāmāyana* relates to respect earth for the welfare of all.

The epic writer mentions his plausible ideas about the value of the sky. Its color is blue due to its endless area. Likewise, ecology denotes eternal relation of humans with plants and creatures. Industries and vehicles make too much air pollution. Its effects relate to the ozone layer depletion. Ecological awareness is necessary to control the depletion of the ozone layer and Vālmikī *Rāmāyana* motivates the modern readers to maintain the ecological balance on this planet. The description of the sky in the text is free from pollution. The birds fly everywhere in fresh sky. The writer links fresh environmental condition with *dharma* and the interpreter further explores: *mangalam prayunjana mu:da: paRāmaya yuta* [“The environment is fresh from the boon of *mangalam*”] (*Bala Kanda*:3. 1. 17). The author further ventures to say that melodious music and sound purifies the environment (3. 1. 27). But harsh sound creates fear for others. When Lord Rāma goes to Lanka with His monkey soldiers, the monkeys make a harsh sound to frighten Rāvana. These are the expressions that indirectly indicate the ecological awareness for the benefits of all. If there is crisis in ecology, one can listen harsh sound everywhere and the harsh sound symbolizes destruction.

The *Rāmāyana* discusses to preserve light which originates energy and the *Kali Yuga* is the age of *yantras* whereas *mantras* and *tantras* had been used in the *Dvāpara* and *Tretā Yugas* for the energy (Sivasakti 1). For the conduction of *yantra*, light is inevitable. The natural works have been going on due to the existence of light (sun). Reddy states that the sun consumes the water of the oceans and seas and gives back to the earth in the form of rain. If somebody chants the sun God, he gets victory in his life. In the words of Vālmikī: *ra:m ra:m mahaba:ho srinuguhayam sanatanam/ yena sarbanari:n batsamare bijayisyasi* [“Like Lord Rama, one who chants and worships the sun gets victory against his enemies”] (*Bala Kanda*:6. 105. 3). The light is not only the sources of physical energy but there also lies the spiritual energy to humans. Likewise, *agni* (fire) is also a form of the sun (Vālmikī 383). The Lords and the devotees of the Lords perform *yajna* to solve the ecological hazards. They believe that the smoke from the *yajna* reduces air pollution. Without the essence of light, one cannot imagine the existence of the creation on the earth. The discussion above shows that the ecological awareness on the *Panchamahābhuta*.

### **Ecological Awareness Based on Season and Circumstances**

Vālmikī makes a considerable impact of ecological awareness based on seasons and circumstances in the *Rāmāyana*. The whole creation deals with the actions of the seasons and the ecological awareness. The poet manifests the description of morning, day, evening and night of the particular season vividly in the *Rāmāyana*. Radheshyam Gangavar discusses: “*Rāmāyansyanu silanadidam pratibhati yadtra...sandhya- suryendru- rajani- grisma- barsa: saradahementa – basantadinam nibandhena cha maharsirasau pRāmanyati swiyam sadharanam paryabaranawa lokandaksatam* [“In the evening, birds take rest in the nests after



eating bait; the sages come to their hermitages with water in their *kalas* and the trees of far place cannot be seen from darkness”] (*Ayodhya Kānda*: 118. 5. 750). Anusuiyā, the wife of sage Atri explains the scenario of *Tapobana* to Sitā. When there is the time of evening, humans, birds, animals and insects come back to their dwelling places for rest at night.

In the summer season, one cannot see the sun on the day time and star at night (Gupta 285). The earth is satisfied by the fulfillment of the mass of water everywhere. In the season of *Sarada*, the sky is clear and fresh and it is covered by fresh fragrance from flowers, plants and trees. *Aranya Kānda* of the *Rāmāyana* is related to the forest life of Rāma. In the logic of Rāgini Rao: “Forests are reservoirs of ample knowledge” (100). In this epic, the sage describes forest referring the trees which provide shade and natural fragrance from their flowers. In the autumn season, Rāma, Sitā and Lakshmana set up a base to live at *Panchavati* some last years of their period of banishment. The place is enriched by natural beauty. C.L. Goswami writes ahead: “Rāma is choosing a location for building a cottage also shows the importance given to having a water stream as a source and trees as a source of pure oxygen in their environment” (690). Appropriate place for settlement is beneficial for humans and the other creatures.

The sage narrates the scenario of the abduction of Sitā by Rāvana which represents invasion in the world of nature. An innocent person of ecological world gets disturbance by the evil minded people such as Rāvana. This incident reflects evil actions onto non-human life and nature. During the time of abduction, “Sitā is crying out to the trees, mountains, rivers, birds, sun, animals, wind as being witness of her abduction indicates that nature was not seen as dead” (Rao 104). Sitā, the consort of Rāma, personifies the natural things as human beings for help. Here, there is ecological harmony with humans. Sitā’s ask for help to the natural things denotes the ecological balance between biotic and a biotic. Barry Commoner further proves that Sitā has her connection with the natural things (4). Rāvana abducts Sitā in the late autumn season (*Hemanta*) and this season has bad impression in the life of Sitā which is always memorable in her life. Thus, with all these logical descriptions, one can conclude that Vālmikī *Rāmāyana* presents the scenario of ecological awareness exhibiting the richness of nature.

### **Ecological Awareness in Vegetation**

The development of Vālmikī *Rāmāyana* gradually unfolds ecological awareness from the representation of vegetation. The text regards vegetation as elixir for the creatures. In this regard, Aruna Goyal rests on the argument:

Plants, gardens, Forests have been befitting human life and animal life since the evolution of life on this earth. We cannot imagine human life without plants. We need them in all seasons as different plants fructify in different seasons. The *Rāmāyana* is full of the knowledge about their origin, classification, development, utility, and medicinal properties. (174)

Ecological awareness of Vālmikī *Rāmāyana* relates to the welfare of creatures. Rāma, Lakshmana, and Sitā make ecological harmony during the time of their banishment. There is minute survey in the text about environmental awareness. *Aranya Sanskriti* (Culture related to forest) plays a crucial role in the *Rāmāyana* (Gupta 287). During that time, sages and their disciples used to remain in the hermitage of dense forest. There is the development of *Gurukula Shiksha* in forests. The sages have special intimacy with vegetation.

During the period of the *Rāmāyana* the sages did not make any harm to the trees of fruits. In the words of Vālmikī: *hasta: da: no mu: kha da: no niyato bri: kshamulika/ bha: napratho bhabisyami hradri: stwa ja: nakatmaja: m* [“The grain and fruits whatever I get on my hands from you I will be satisfied and I will stay beside you- tree”] (Dutta: 5. 13. 40). The trees are the sources of food, shelter, and clothes for humans. The intention of the poet is to link between humans and trees for their dependency each other. But selfish and so-called civilized people destroy trees. During that epoch, the sages used to worship trees as the inhabitation of God (Gupta 288). In the *Rāmāyana*, when Sitā reaches *Chitrakuta*, sage Bharadwaj instructs people to worship *nyagrodha* tree (Sripada: 2. 55. 6). Bharadwaj expresses his sign of happiness from the presence of Sitā by worshipping the trees. The trees produce oxygen so that the sages used to say to get grace from trees and saved them carefully.

Not only Rāma but also Sitā has love and affection for the trees, shrubs, and herbs. Lord Rāma expresses his love to trees in Vālmikī *Rāmāyana*. Rāma says to his father Dasharatha: *phalani mulani cha bhakshayam bane/ giri: swa pasyan sarita saramsi: cha/ banam prabi: syeiba bichitra padapam/ sui: khi bhabisyami tawastu nirbri:*  [“I will be happy in the areas of trees where I can get food and shelter”] (Dutta: 2. 34. 59). This expression of Rāma is reliable to live in forest where one can live as Lord Rāma, Lakshmana, and Sitā. Rāma is apt to state that He does not go to *Indraloka* because of the richness of natural beauty (Dutta 82). Likewise, Sitā extends the value of ecology by planting trees. Her attraction is to the blossomed flowers while she is in the forest. According to the writer: *asti kachhitwa dri: sta sa kadamba priya priya* [“Sitā loves *kadamba* tree as her son”] (Sripada 11). The *Rāmāyana* narrates the ecological harmony through the characterization of Sitā. The characters of the epic have their positive attitude towards trees.

### **Ecological Awareness in Birds and Animals**

The origin of Vālmikī *Rāmāyana* is possible from *karuna rasa* when the epic writer sees the death of a male bird by a *Nishada* in a forest beside *Tamasa* River. In Plal’s words:

Once, not far from the river *Tamas*,  
The ascetic Vālmikī was wondering in a forest,  
Meditating on the beauty of nature,

Nearby, unafraid,  
Two sweet-voiced *krauncha* birds were mating  
Savouring the delights of spontaneous love,  
With deliberate malice,  
In Vālmikī's presence,  
Killed the male bird. (1)

The poet refers the death of *krauncha* bird and its agony. The scenario stirs the heart of Vālmikī and the poet starts writing the *Rāmāyana*. The text describes animals and birds such as lion, deer, monkey, peacock, goose, *jatayu*, cow, and *krauncha* birds. Bal Krishna Sharma proves the ecological awareness in the *Rāmāyana* from his logical expression: *Rāmāyana kabye bhagawato ba:mi:ke prani:ja:tamdikri:tya gumfita parysbaran /chetana sahridayachittam chamattam chatatkurbati manaba* ["Vālmikī *Rāmāyana* describes ecological awareness mentioning the dependency between humans and other creatures"] (265). The critic bases his ideas for the preservation of animals and birds for the continuation of ecosystem without any disturbances.

The tribute of Vālmikī for being a proficient poet is his use of virtuous animals and birds in the *Rāmāyana*. Rāma stresses the death of a vulture (*Jatayu*) on the hands of Rāvana: *sarvatra khalu drshyante sa:dhavo dharmachaarinah/ shuraahshranyaah saumitre tiryagyoni galeshwapi* ["Indeed pious and valiant souls practicing virtues and worth approaching for protection are found everywhere- even in those belonging to the sub-human species (Goswami 842). Seeing the condition of near dead *Jatayu* from Rāvana, Rāma falls prey to anger. Due to separation with Sitā after her abduction by Rāvana, grief-stricken Rāma wants to destroy the planet (Rao 105). But Lakshmana consoles Him not to do so. Rao writes ahead mentioning the version of Lakshmana to Rāma: "What object of yours will be achieved through universal destruction wrought by you" (106). This statement excellently imparts profound insight to humans not to express their anger on nature. This touching scene makes the reading of the *Rāmāyana* full of feelings of tenderness towards ecology.

This classical scripture treats animals and birds with love, affection and care. B. Sitārāmaiya intellectually notes this argument:

He knew the forests, the hills and the rivers, the flora and the fauna of the country; the nature and habits of animals gentle and wild; of birds and their cries. As a *Rishi*, his mind had got toned up tempered by meditation on nature, man and God (Gupta 308).

The *Rāmāyana* formulates the reciprocal relationship between animals and plants. To make the creation of this world free from ecological hazards, everybody has to consider the significance of nature in our lives. When Rāma and Lakshmana are at Chitrakuta, Rāma tells his brother that He is not satisfied from the collection of horses and cows (Rao 107). It is traceable evidence in

the text to indicate that Lord Rāma has his craze in horses and cows and he never harms them. The text includes the conversation between humans and animals. The animals express their feelings from different signs and symbols. In *Bāla Kānda*, the poet mentions: *di:na na:ga turangama* [Animals and birds were sad"] (2. 59. 165). The absence of Rāma in Ayodhyā makes sad for birds and animals as well. There is the description of *Kamadhenu* (*Surbhi*) cow. Sage Vasistha admires his divine cow to sage Vishwamitra: *etadeb hi me ratnametadeb hi me dhanam/ etadeb hi sabaswametadeb hi jibitam* ["This *kamadhenu* is my *ratna* and everything. She is my karma and *yajna*"] (*Bala Kanda*:1. 53. 24). The divine cow is the sign of omen for Vasistha. The sage is able to control various difficulties using his cow.

Thus, in the present world, animals and birds are in danger zone. The explosion of human population causes deforestation and there is the destruction of the inhabitants of birds and animals. Many flora and fauna have been disappeared (Gupta 308). Nowadays, humans have been suffering from global warming, landslides, acid rain, flood, siltation of rivers and desertification everywhere because of the negligence of Vālmikī's ecological awareness described in the *Rāmāyana*.

### Conclusion

Balmiki's use of ecological awareness in the *Rāmāyana* has great relevance in the present-day scenario. The text exerts powerful effects for the solution of the ecological hazards of the present world. By following the trend of the Vālmikī *Rāmāyana*, humans of the present world have to be more conscious about the issues of ecology. In it, the poet manifests deep understanding of the relationship between man and nature. It points out the problems if there is negligence in the ecological awareness mentioning the pollution in the *Panchamahābhuta*. The knowledge of the poet's ecology in this epic is not only accurate, but also sympathetic because the prime characters such as Rāma and Sitā respect plants and other species. His depth of understanding and superb imagination have succeeded in presenting the characters like Rāma, Sitā, Lakshmana, Rāvana, Sugriva, and Jatāyu. These characters are in favor of ecology and they do not make any harm in nature. The text explores the ecological awareness touching upon the universal truth regarding the condition of humans. Their relationship with all living and non-living existence is the principal message of the *Rāmāyana*. Unlike the complex modern social order, the epoch of the *Rāmāyana* was ecologically conditioned to a simple pattern and there was the association of geography in the life of humans and non-humans. It is essential to study for thinking, realization and implementation of the Vālmikī *Rāmāyana* for the sake of controlling the present ecological crisis. The epic is capable to give proper direction for the solution of the ecological hazards on the face of the earth.

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