



English

Bala Kanda (“The Book of the Childhood”): Summary

The origins and childhood of Rama. Sita’s birth, betrothal, and marriage to Rama. Dasharatha, king of Ayodhya, had three wives Kausalya, Kaikeyi, and Sumitra. Having been childless for a long time and anxious to produce an heir, he performs a fire sacrifice. As a consequence, Rama is born to Kausalya, Bharata is born to Kaikeyi, and the twins Lakshmana and Satrugna are born to Sumitra. These sons are endowed, to various degrees, with the essence of the Supreme God Vishnu; Vishnu had opted to be born into mortality to combat the demon Ravana, who was oppressing the gods, and who could only be destroyed by a mortal. During their upbringing the princes receive instructions from the Vedas (scriptures) and in warfare. When Rama is 16 years old, the sage Vishwamitra comes to the court of Dasharatha in search of help against demons who were disturbing sacrificial rites. He chooses Rama, who is followed by Lakshmana, his constant companion throughout the story. Rama and Lakshmana receive instructions and supernatural weapons from the sage and destroy the demons. Janaka was the king of Mithila. One day, the king found a female child in the field in a deep furrow dug by his plough. King Janaka adopted the girl and named her Sita, the Sanskrit word for “furrow”. Sita grew up to be a girl of unparalleled beauty and charm. When Sita was of marriageable age, the king decided to have a swayamvara³ which included a contest. The king was in possession of an immensely heavy bow, presented to him by the Destroyer God Shiva: whoever could wield the bow could marry Sita. The sage Vishwamitra attends the swayamvara with Rama and Lakshmana. Only Rama is able to wield the bow and, when he draws the string, it breaks. Marriages are arranged between the sons of Dasharatha and daughters of Janaka. Rama marries Sita, and his brothers marry other brides from among the people of Mithila.

The preparations for Rama’s coronation in the city of Ayodhya, his exile into the forest, and the regency of Bharata.

After Rama and Sita have been married for twelve years, an elderly Dasharatha expresses his desire to crown Rama king, to which the assembly and his subjects express their support. On the eve of the coronation, Dasharatha’s wife Kaikeyi—her jealousy aroused by Manthara, a wicked maidservant—claims two boons that Dasharatha had long ago granted her. Kaikeyi demands Rama to be exiled into the wilderness for fourteen years and that the succession pass to her son Bharata. The heartbroken king, constrained by his rigid devotion to his oath, accedes to Kaikeyi’s demands.

Rama accepts his father's reluctant decree with absolute submission and calm self-control, two of the virtues that characterize him throughout the story. Sita and his half-brother Lakshmana join him in his exile. After Rama's departure, King Dasharatha, unable to bear the grief, passes away. Meanwhile, Bharata, who was visiting his maternal uncle, learns about the events in Ajodhya. Bharata refuses to profit from his mother's wicked scheming and visits Rama in the forest. Rama, determined to carry out his father's orders to the letter, refuses to return before the fourteen years are over. Bharata refuses to be king, instead styling himself "Regent" and keeping Rama's sandals on the throne as symbolic of Rama's status as the rightful king of Ayodhya.

Canto XVII. Rama's Approach. As Rama, rendering blithe and gay His loving friends, pursued his way, He saw on either hand a press Of mingled people numberless. The royal street he traversed, where Incense of aloe filled the air, Where rose high palaces, that vied With paly clouds, on either side; With flowers of myriad colours graced. And food for every varied taste, Bright as the glowing path o'erhead Which feet of Gods celestial tread, Loud benedictions, sweet to hear, From countless voices soothed his ear. While he to each gave due salute His place and dignity to suit: "Be thou," the joyful people cried, "Be thou our guardian, lord and guide. Throned and anointed king to-day, Thy feet set forth upon the way Wherein, each honoured as a God, Thy fathers and forefathers trod. Thy sire and his have graced the throne, And loving care to us have shown: Thus blest shall we and ours remain, Yea still more blest in Rama's reign. No more of dainty fare we need, And but one cherished object heed, That we may see our prince today Invested with imperial sway." Such were the words and pleasant speech That Rama heard, unmoved, from each Of the dear friends around him spread, As onward through the street he sped, For none could turn his eye or thought From the dear form his glances sought, With fruitless ardour forward cast Even when Raghu's son⁵ had past. And he who saw not Rama nigh, Nor caught a look from Rama's eye, A mark for scorn and general blame, Reproached himself in bitter shame. For to each class his equal mind

With sympathy and love inclined Most fully of the princely four, So greatest love to him they bore. His circling course the hero bent Round shrine and altar, reverent, Round homes of Gods, where cross-roads met, Where many a sacred tree was set. Near to his father's house he drew Like Indra's ⁶ beautiful to view, And with the light his glory gave Within the royal palace drove. Through three broad courts, where bowmen kept Their watch and ward, his coursers swept, Then through the two

remaining went On foot the prince preeminent. Through all the courts the hero passed, And gained the ladies' bower at last; Then through the door alone withdrew, And left without his retinue. When thus the monarch's noble boy Had gone his sire to meet, The multitude, elate with joy, Stood watching in the street, And his return with eager eyes Expected at the gates, As for his darling moon to rise The King of Rivers⁷ waits. Canto XVIII. The Sentence. With hopeless eye and pallid mien There sat the monarch with the queen. His father's feet with reverence due He clasped, and touched Kaikeyi's⁸ too. The king, with eyes still brimming o'er, Cried "Rama!" and could do no more. His voice was choked, his eye was dim, He could not speak or look on him. Then sudden fear made Rama shake As though his foot had roused a snake, Soon as his eyes had seen the change So mournful, terrible, and strange. For there his reason well-nigh fled, Sighing, with soul disquieted, To torturing pangs a prey, Dismayed, despairing, and distraught, In a fierce whirl of wildering thought The hapless monarch lay, ⁶ Chief of the Hindu gods; God of Thunder. ⁷The sea. ⁸ The youngest of the three queens; mother of Bharat; at this point she has already demanded Rama's banishment, but he is unaware (RLK). Like Ocean wave-engarlanded Storm-driven from his tranquil bed, The Sun-God in eclipse, Or like a holy seer, heart-stirred With anguish, when a lying word Has passed his heedless lips. The sight of his dear father, pained With woe and misery unexplained Filled Rama with unrest, As Ocean's pulses rise and swell When the great moon he loves so well Shines full upon his breast. So grieving for his father's sake, To his own heart the hero spake: "Why will the king my sire to-day No kindly word of greeting say? At other times, though wroth he be, His eyes grow calm that look on me. Then why does anguish wring his brow To see his well-beloved now?" Sick and perplexed, distraught with woe, To Queen Kaikeyi bowing low, While pallor o'er his bright cheek spread, With humble reverence he said: "What have I done, unknown, amiss To make my father wroth like this? Declare it, O dear Queen, and win His pardon for my heedless sin. Why is the sire I ever find Filled with all love to-day unkind? With eyes cast down and pallid cheek This day alone he will not speak. Or lies he prostrate neath the blow Of fierce disease or sudden woe? For all our bliss is dashed with pain, And joy unmixt is hard to gain. Does stroke of evil fortune smite Dear Bharat, charming to the sight, Or on the brave Satrugna⁹ fall, Or consorts, for he loves them all? Against his words when I rebel, Or fail to please the monarch well, When deeds of mine his soul offend, That hour I pray my life may end. How should a man to him who gave His being and his life behave? The sire to whom he owes his birth Should be his deity on earth. Hast thou, by pride and folly moved, With bitter taunt the king

reproved? 9 Bharat and Shatrughna are Rama's half-brothers who are out of town (RLK). Has scorn of thine or cruel jest To passion stirred his gentle breast? Speak truly, Queen, that I may know What cause has changed the monarch so." Thus by the high-souled prince addressed, Of Raghu's sons the chief and best, She cast all ruth¹⁰ and shame aside, And bold with greedy words replied: "Not wrath, O Rama, stirs the king, Nor misery stabs with sudden sting; One thought that fills his soul has he, But dares not speak for fear of thee. Thou art so dear, his lips refrain From words that might his darling pain. But thou, as duty bids, must still The promise of thy sire fulfil. He who to me in days gone by Vouchsafed a boon with honours high, Dares now, a king, his word regret, And caitiff-like¹¹ disowns the debt. The lord of men his promise gave To grant the boon that I might crave, And now a bridge would idly throw When the dried stream has ceased to flow. His faith the monarch must not break In wrath, or e'en for thy dear sake. From faith, as well the righteous know, Our virtue and our merits flow. Now, be they good or be they ill, Do thou thy father's words fulfil: Swear that his promise shall not fail, And I will tell thee all the tale. Yes, Rama, when I hear that thou Hast bound thee by thy father's vow, Then, not till then, my lips shall speak, Nor will he tell what boon I seek." He heard, and with a troubled breast This answer to the queen addressed: "Ah me, dear lady, canst thou deem That words like these thy lips beseem? I, at the bidding of my sire, Would cast my body to the fire, A deadly draught of poison drink, Or in the waves of ocean sink: If he command, it shall be done,— My father and my king in one. Then speak and let me know the thing ¹⁰ pity (RLK) ¹¹ cowardly (RLK) So longed for by my lord the king. It shall be done: let this suffice; Rama ne'er makes a promise twice." He ended. To the princely youth Who loved the right and spoke the truth, Cruel, abominable came The answer of the ruthless dame: "When Gods and Titans fought of yore, Transfixed with darts and bathed in gore Two boons to me thy father gave For the dear life 'twas mine to save. Of him I claim the ancient debt, That Bharat on the throne be set, And thou, O Rama, go this day To Dandak forest far away. Now, Rama, if thou wilt maintain Thy father's faith without a stain, And thine own truth and honour clear, Then, best of men, my bidding hear. Do thou thy father's word obey, Nor from the pledge he gave me stray. Thy life in Dandak forest spend Till nine long years and five shall end. Upon my Bharat's princely head Let consecrating drops be shed, With all the royal pomp for thee Made ready by the king's decree. Seek Dandak forest and resign Rites that would make the empire thine,

Kishkindha Kanda (“The Book of the Monkey Kingdom”): Summary Rama and Hanuman in Kishkindha. The kishkindha kanda is set in the monkey citadel Kishkindha. Rama and Lakshmana meet Hanuman, the greatest of monkey heroes and an adherent of Sugriva, the banished pretender to the throne of kishkindha. Rama befriends Sugriva and helps him by killing his elder brother Vali thus regaining the kingdom of Kishkindha, in exchange for a promise to help Rama recover Sita. However Sugriva soon forgets his promise and spends his time in debauchery. The clever monkey queen Tara, second wife of Sugriva (and former wife of Vali), calmly intervenes to prevent an enraged Lakshmana from destroying the monkey citadel. She then eloquently convinces Sugriva to honor his pledge. Sugriva sends search parties to the four corners of the earth, only to return without success from north, east, and west. The southern search party under the leadership of Angad and Hanuman learns from a vulture named Sampati, who is the elder brother of Jatáyus, that Sita was taken to Lanka.

Detailed account of Hanuman’s adventures, including his meeting with Sita. The sundara kanda is traditionally read first when reading the Ramayana and derives its name from the nickname given to Hanuman by his mother. Book V forms the heart of Valmiki’s Ramayana and consists of a detailed, vivid account of Hanuman’s adventures, which were briefly alluded to in Book IV. After learning about Sita, Hanuman assumes a gargantuan form and makes a colossal leap across the ocean to Lanka where Hanuman explores the demon city and spies on Ravana. He locates Sita in the ashoka grove, where Ravana and his demons alternately woo and threaten her. Hanuman reassures Sita, giving her Rama’s signet ring as a sign of good faith. He offers to carry Sita back to Rama; however, she refuses, reluctant to allow any male other than her husband to touch her. She says that Rama himself must come and avenge the insult of her abduction. Hanuman then wreaks havoc in Lanka by destroying trees and buildings, and killing Ravana’s warriors. He allows himself to be captured and presented to Ravana and gives a bold speech demanding Sita’s release. Hanuman’s tail is set on fire, but he escapes his bonds and, leaping from roof to roof, uses his tail to set fire to Ravana’s citadel. Finally, he makes the giant leap back to the mainland. The joyous search party returns to Kishkindha with the news.