

The Rise of the Religious Significance of Rāma

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With the Foreword by
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And the Preface by
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TO PATRICIA, JOHN PREM FRANCIS

and

RUTH SHANTI PATRICIA WHALING

CONTENTS

| | PAGE |
|--|------|
| Foreword | vii |
| Preface | ix |
| Acknowledgements | xv |
| List of Abbreviations | xix |
| Part A : I Introduction | 1 |
| Part B : Rāma in the <i>Rāmāyaṇa</i> | |
| II The Story of Rāma in <i>Vāl.</i> | 11 |
| III Our Approach to the <i>Rāmāyaṇa</i> | 36 |
| IV Rāma as an Example of Dharma | 39 |
| V Rāma as an Example of Human Relationships | 49 |
| VI Rāma as Hero | 57 |
| VII Rāma the Ideal King | 64 |
| VIII Rāma's Continuity with Indra | 76 |
| IX Rāma as an Avatāra of Viṣṇu | 82 |
| Part C : Rāma in the Medieval Period | |
| X Medieval Developments in the Religious Significance of Rāma | 95 |
| Part D : Rāma in the <i>Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa</i> | |
| XI The Background of the <i>Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa</i> | 105 |
| XII The Story of Rāma in the <i>Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa</i> | 116 |
| XIII Rāma as Man and Hero in the <i>Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa</i> | 146 |
| XIV Rāma as Devotional Lord in the <i>Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa</i> | 159 |
| XV Rāma in Relation to the Philosophical Background of the <i>Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa</i> | 186 |
| XVI The Rāmology of the <i>Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa</i> | 211 |
| Part E : Rāma in Tulsī Dās | |
| XVII The Background of Tulsī Dās's <i>Rāmacaritamānas</i> | 221 |
| XVIII The Story of Rāma in Tulsī Dās's <i>Rāmacaritamānas</i> | 229 |
| XIX Rāma as a Man in Tulsī Dās | 252 |
| XX Rāma as Brahman in Tulsī Dās | 269 |

| | PAGE |
|---|------|
| XXI Rāma and Devotion in Tulsī Dās | 290 |
| XXII The Rāmology of Tulsī Dās | 308 |
| Part F: XXIII Conclusion | 319 |
| Part G: XXIV An Appendix. Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, and Christ. A Comparison and Some Theological Comments | 331 |
| Bibliography | 347 |
| Glossary | 361 |
| Index | 383 |

IX

RĀMA AS AN AVATĀRA OF VIṢṆU

The highest level of representation of Rāma in *Vāl.* is as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. At this level, He is no longer merely an ideal man, He is no longer merely a successor of Indra, He is an incarnation of God. There was a time when scholars asserted that the *avatāra* theme was introduced in the first and last *kāṇḍas* of *Vāl.*, and that this proved that they were later than *kāṇḍas* two to six. Hopkins stated that Rāma's "Viṣṇu-form is fully recognised only in *Bāla* and *Uttara*."¹ This view is no longer tenable, for a close examination of the text shows that the *avatāra* theme is present in *kāṇḍa* six, and is more common in *kāṇḍa* six than in the *Bālakāṇḍa*. It is likely that the references to Rāma as an *avatāra* were later additions to *kāṇḍa* six, but this does not mean that they distort the original story, it means rather that they reveal a deeper truth that was already latent in the original story. They reveal another level of meaning in the Rāma symbol. The Rāma who was an ideal man, the Rāma who had continued the heroic tasks of Indra, is now seen to be an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu.

At this highest level of representation, the *Rāmāyaṇa* is placed in a new setting. While Daśaratha is desiring a son on earth, the gods are debating in heaven how to destroy their tormentor Rāvaṇa. Brahmā remembers that Rāvaṇa had requested a boon, as a reward for his austerities, according to which he could not be killed by any creature apart from man. Rāvaṇa had disdained man for his weakness, and therefore thought it impossible that any man could destroy him. Brahmā suggests that Rāvaṇa "must therefore be killed by a man; he can die in no other way."² The gods approach Viṣṇu and tell Him about the merits of Daśaratha and his queens, and they say to Viṣṇu, "become their sons dividing Yourself into four parts."³ They believe that the incarnate Viṣṇu will be able to kill Rāvaṇa and they make the request, "become a man, O Viṣṇu, and kill Rāvaṇa

1. E. W. Hopkins, *Epic Mythology*, p. 212.

2. *Vāl.* I.14.14 *tasmāt sa mānuṣād vadhyo mṛtyur nānyo'sya vidyate.*

3. *Vāl.* I.14.18 *viṣṇo putratvam āgaccha kṛtvātmanaṃ caturvidham.*

the mighty tormentor of the worlds in battle for he cannot be killed by the gods."¹ Even though He knows what the gods have in mind, "Nārāyaṇa Viṣṇu" humours the gods and agrees to become incarnate as the sons of Daśaratha.²

According to this account, the story of Rāma has its beginning in heaven when Viṣṇu agrees to become incarnate. Viṣṇu has the gift of foreknowledge, and is the Leader of the gods. He also has the power to become incarnate. However, His plan is to become incarnate not just as Rāma but also as Rāma's three brothers. *Vāl.*'s Rāma is not a full incarnation, He is a partial incarnation of Viṣṇu. To be sure, only the Rāma *avatāra* is stressed in *Vāl.*, and His mother receives most of the sacred *pāyasa* food.³ However, in theory, Rāma is only the highest among four brothers who are all *avatāras* of Viṣṇu.

In the later Rāma tradition, Rāma would be finally viewed not just as a partial *avatāra* of Viṣṇu but rather as Viṣṇu Himself conceived as devotional Lord and as Brahman. In this account, He is still a partial manifestation of Viṣṇu.⁴

The remainder of the *Bālakāṇḍa* has a number of stories about Viṣṇu, but none of them specifically states that the Viṣṇu mentioned in the stories is actually Rāma.⁵ The only other instance in this *kāṇḍa* of Rāma's incarnate nature comes in the episode of Paraśurāma. This mighty warrior, having been vanquished by Rāma, addresses Him as "the imperishable Slayer of Madhu, the Lord of the gods."⁶ It is clear that even the *Bālakāṇḍa* is keen to stress that Rāma ordinarily functions at the human level of consciousness. Having set the scene in heaven, it is content to dwell most upon the human nature of Rāma on earth.

1. *Vāl.* I.14.19

*tatra tvaṃ mānuṣo bhūtvā pravṛddhaṃ lokakaṇṭhakam
avadhyaṃ daivatair viṣṇo samare jahi rāvaṇam.*

2. *Vāl.* I.15.1-7.

3. *Vāl.* I.15.25-26.

4. *Vāl.* I.17.6—Rāma is *viṣṇor ardha* (part of Viṣṇu).

5. This does not mean that there is necessarily a dichotomy between Viṣṇu and Rāma in these stories; they were presumably included in order to point out the closeness of Rāma and Viṣṇu.

6. *Vāl.* I.75.17 *akṣayyaṃ madhuhantāraṃ jānāmi tvāṃ sureśvaram.*

Kāṇḍas II-V contain virtually no specific references to Rāma as an *avatāra*.¹ However, these *kāṇḍas* occasionally refer to qualities in Rāma that suggest that He is more than a man. Rather than examining these passages in detail, we shall concentrate upon some passages in *kāṇḍa* VI which state specifically that Rāma is an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. Some of these are very important, and they stress Rāma's divine nature more strongly than the passages in the *Bālakāṇḍa*.

The first clear instance occurs when Rāvaṇa's minister, Mālyavat, advises Rāvaṇa not to fight against Rāma. Mālyavat says to Rāvaṇa, "I consider Rāma to be Viṣṇu Who has taken the form of a man; for this Rāghava of firm valour Who built this remarkable bridge over the sea is not just a man. Therefore, O Rāvaṇa, conclude a peace with Rāma the king of men."² It is interesting that Rāma is portrayed as a full *avatāra* of Viṣṇu in this passage, and this is in contrast with another passage which refers to Lakṣmaṇa as a partial *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. This passage occurs during the battle at the time when Lakṣmaṇa is wounded by Rāvaṇa. Rāvaṇa's intention is to carry Lakṣmaṇa away, but he is unable to lift Lakṣmaṇa. The reason is that "Lakṣmaṇa, even though he was wounded in the breast by Brahmā's weapon, remembered that he himself was an inconceivable part of Viṣṇu."³

The next reference to Rāma's more than human nature occurs in Mandodarī's lament over the dead Rāvaṇa. She recollects the great power of Rāvaṇa, and concludes that the Rāma Who had slain Rāvaṇa's brother Khara and the host of *rākṣasas* in Janasthāna,⁴ and Who had now slain Rāvaṇa, must be more than a man.

The most comprehensive statement of Rāma's divinity that appears in *Vāl.* occurs in *kāṇḍa* VI in the episode when Sītā

1. Specific references to Rāma as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu occur occasionally in some of the recensions but are omitted by the Critical Edition.

2. *Vāl.* VI.26.31-32

*viṣṇuṃ manyāmahe rāmaṃ mānuṣaṃ deham āsthitam,
na hi mānuṣamātro 'sau rāghavo dīḍhāvīkramaḥ.
yena baddhaḥ samudrasya sa setuḥ paramādbhutaḥ,
kuruṣva nararājena samdhiṃ rāmeṇa rāvaṇa.*

3. *Vāl.* VI.47.104.

4. *Vāl.* VI.99.11

*yadaiva hi janasthāne rākṣasair bahubhir vṛtaḥ,
kharas tava hato bhrātā tadaivāsau na mānuṣaḥ.*

endures the fire ordeal. While Sitā enters the fire, Indra rebukes Rāma for His distrust of Sitā and suggests that insofar as Rāma is God He should have known better than to treat Sitā in this way. He addresses Him as the Creator of the whole universe, and the foremost among those with knowledge.¹ He says to Rāma,

Don't You know that You are the highest of the gods ? Formerly You were the Vasu Ṛtadhāman, and the Progenitor of the Vasus. For You are the primordial Creator of the three worlds, Svayambhu, the eighth Rudra and the fifth Sādhyā. The two Aśvins are Your ears, the sun and moon Your eyes, and thus You are seen at the end and the beginning of the worlds, O Foe-slayer. And still You distrust Sitā as if You were a mortal being.²

Rāma responds in a famous passage which would later be the stimulus for the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*'s deepening of the Rāma symbol. He says, "I consider myself to be Rāma, the offspring of Daśaratha—who then am I and whence have I come, tell me that, O Lord."³

Brahmā then responds to Rāma's question with an even deeper and more elaborate statement of Rāma's divinity. Indra had portrayed Rāma as the Lord of the gods, that is to say his own successor. Brahmā now portrays Rāma as Viṣṇu, the Lord of the universe, Who is the source of everything that is.

1. *Vāl.* VI.105.5

kartā sarvasya lokasya śreṣṭho jñānavatām varaḥ.

2. *Vāl.* VI.105.5-8

*katham devagaṇaśreṣṭham ātmānaṃ nāvabudhyase
ṛtadhāmā vasuḥ pūrvaṃ vasūnām ca prajāpatiḥ
tvaṃ trayāṇāṃ hi lokānām ādikartā svayamprabhuḥ
rudrāṇāmaṣṭamo rudraḥ sādhyānām api pañcamaḥ
aśvinau cāpi te karṇau candrasūryau ca cakṣuṣī
ante cādau ca lokānām dṛśyase tvaṃ paraṃtapa
upekṣase ca vaidehīṃ mānuṣaḥ prākṛto yathā*

3. *Vāl.* VI.105.10

*ātmānaṃ mānuṣaṃ manye rāmaṃ daśarathātmapam,
yo 'haṃ yasya yatas cāhaṃ bhagavāṃstad bravitu me.*

He says to Rāma,

You are the great god Nārāyaṇa, the effulgent, armed with a discus ... You are the imperishable Brahman and the true ... You are beyond the worlds ... You are the supreme Puruṣa ... You are Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa ... the Slayer of Madhu ... You are Indra ... the Refuge and Protector ... the soul of the Veda ... the syllable Om ... no one knows Your origin and end or who You are ... You appear in all creatures, in Brahmins, and in cows ... You support living creatures and the earth ... when the earth comes to an end, You appear as the great serpent in the waters ... I am your heart, and the goddess Sarasvatī is Your tongue ... nothing exists apart from You ... Your Body is the whole world ... Agni is Your wrath, and Soma is Your grace ... Sitā is Lakṣmī and You are the god Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa and Prajāpati ... for the purpose of killing Rāvaṇa, You entered a human body ... those men who are firmly devoted to You, the primordial highest Puruṣa, who will praise you, they will not be defeated.¹

This long passage, which appears in the Critical Edition, is the clearest expression of Rāma's divinity in *Vāl*. Rāma is no longer merely a partial *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. He is Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa in person, indeed He is Brahman Who is beyond the world. He is also immanent in the world of man and nature. He is the supreme Puruṣa. He is even Kṛṣṇa as well as all the gods. As Refuge and Protector He is related to His devotees. This passage anticipates many of the themes which will assume great importance in the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*. The crucial difference between this passage and later descriptions of Rāma (such as those of the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*) is that in this case Rāma professes not to know His own divinity. It has to be pointed out to Him by

1. *Vāl*. VI.105.12-28 *bhavān nārāyaṇo devaḥ śrīmām̐scakrāyudho vibhuḥ... akṣaraṃ brahma satyaṃ ca... lokānāṃ tvaṃ paro... puruṣo-tamaḥ... viṣṇuḥ kṛṣṇaśca... madhusūdanaḥ... mahendras tvaṃ... śaraṇyaṃ śaraṇaṃ ca... vedātmā... omkāraḥ... prabhavaṃ nidhanaṃ vā te na viduḥ ko bhavān iti... dṛśyase sarvabhūteṣu brāhmaṇeṣu ca goṣu ca... tvaṃ dhārayasī bhūtāni vasudhāṃ ca... ante pṛthivyāḥ salile dṛśyase tvaṃ mahoragaḥ... ahaṃ te hṛdayaṃ rāma jihvā devī sarasvatī... na tadastī tvayā vinā... jagatsorvaṃ śariraṃ te... agnīḥ kopaḥ prasādaste somaḥ... sitā lakṣmīr bhavān viṣṇur devaḥ kṛṣṇaḥ prajāpatiḥ... vadhārthaṃ rāvaṇasyeha praviṣṭo mānuṣiṃ tanum... ye tvāṅ devaṃ dhruvaṃ bhaktāḥ purāṇaṃ puruṣottamaṃ... ye narāḥ kirtayiṣyanti nāstī teṣāṃ parābhavaḥ.*

Brahmā. Even in this clear expression of Rāma's divinity, His humanity is still emphasised; and He still remains the supreme Upholder of dharma.

The final passage stressing Rāma's divinity in *kāṇḍa* VI is found in the episode of Daśaratha's appearance to Rāma. Daśaratha says to Rāma that he now understands that the gods had sent the supreme Puruṣa to become incarnate on earth to kill Rāvaṇa.¹ Daśaratha also says to Lakṣmaṇa, "you will receive dharma, O knower of dharma, and great fame on earth, and by Rāma's pleasure you will receive heaven . . . Rāma is the supreme Puruṣa . . . the imperishable Brahman . . . the heart of the gods."²

The *Uttarakāṇḍa* has many references to Rāma as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. This *kāṇḍa* also stresses Rāma's nature as Viṣṇu rather than His nature as a successor of Indra. We will glance briefly at the main passages which refer to Rāma's divine nature.

In the first place, Rāma's birth and Sitā's birth in order to destroy Rāvaṇa are separately predicted.³

Later Indra approaches Viṣṇu with a request for help against Rāvaṇa. Viṣṇu encourages Indra to fight against Rāvaṇa, and promises that if Indra does not succeed He Himself will later kill Rāvaṇa.⁴ The implication is clearly that the Lord Viṣṇu will become incarnate as Rāma.

Gautama forecasts to Ahalyā that Rāma will be born in order to save her from the curse brought about by her misconduct with Indra.⁵ Gautama says, "the great-armed Rāma, Viṣṇu in the form of a man, renowned in the world, will go to the wood for the sake of the Brahmins."⁶

1. Vāl. VI.107.17

*idāniṃ ca vijānāmi yathā saumya sureśvaraiḥ,
vadhārtham rāvaṇasyeha vihītam puruṣottamam.*

2. Vāl. VI.107.28-31 *dharmaṃ prāpsyasi dharmajña yaśaśca vipulaṃ
bhuvī rāme prasanne svargaṃ ca . . . puruṣottamam . . . akṣaraṃ brahma . . .
devānāṃ hṛdayam.*

3. Vāl. VII.17.37 and Vāl. VII.19.30.

4. Vāl. VII.27.19 *bhavitāsmi yathāsyāham rākṣaso mṛtyukāraṇam.*

5. Another example of the downgrading of Indra by comparison with Viṣṇu.

6. Vāl. VII.30.41-42 *rāmo nāma śruto loke vanaṃ cāpyupayāsyati
brāhmaṇārthe mahābāhur viṣṇur mānuṣavīgrahaḥ.*

One of the few clear instances of *bhakti* occurs in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* when the monkeys are so devoted to Rāma in Ayodhyā that a month passes by as if it were an hour.¹ Another instance occurs later when Bharata and Lakṣmaṇa are so engrossed in their love for Rāma that many years pass by quickly.² Later still the inhabitants of Ayodhyā desire to accompany Rāma to heaven as an expression of their response to His love for them.³ On resuming His form as Viṣṇu in heaven, Rāma says that the citizens of Ayodhyā are His devotees who have sacrificed themselves for His sake.⁴ Other examples of love and devotion are scattered throughout the work, especially in connection with Rāma's ideal human relationships. These few examples of *bhakti* in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* are the only plain instances of *bhakti* to Rāma as God.

As in the *Bālakāṇḍa*, many stories of Viṣṇu are told; the difference is that in this *kāṇḍa* those stories are in general more closely linked to Rāma.⁵ A good example is Bhṛgu's curse of Viṣṇu. This is not just related as an event in the life of Viṣṇu, it is directly connected with Rāma. Bhṛgu says to Viṣṇu, "therefore You will be born in the world of men, O Janārdana, and there You will live separated from Your wife for many years."⁶

Elsewhere in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, Rāma is described by various divine epithets. He is called "Paramātman;"⁷ Agastya calls him "Nārāyaṇa,"⁸ Brahmā says to Him, at the time of Sītā's death, "O Rāma of fine vows, You must not be angry, remember Your former origin . . . remember Your birth as Viṣṇu."⁹ Kāla says to Him, "because of this invincible and eternal nature of Yours, You ought to protect all creatures, for You have assumed the form of Viṣṇu."¹⁰

1. *Vāl.* VII.39.27.

2. *Vāl.* VII.102.18.

3. *Vāl.* VII.107.13.

4. *Vāl.* VII.110.17.

5. Kirfel's arguments about the late date of *Vāl.* refer mainly to the *Bālakāṇḍa*. The evidence deduced from content shows clearly that the *Uttarakāṇḍa* is later than the *Bālakāṇḍa*.

6. *Vāl.* VII.51.14-15.

7. *Vāl.* VII.41.7.

8. *Vāl.* VII.76.28.

9. *Vāl.* VII. 98.12-13 *rāmarāma na saṃtāpaṃ kartum arhasi suvrata smara tvaṃ pūrvakaṃ bhāvaṃ . . . smara tvaṃ janma vaiṣṇavam.*

10. *Vāl.* VII.104.9.

His divine nature is also indicated in other ways. He says to Kāla, "I came for the sake of the good of the three worlds."¹ Brahmā says to Him, "Come (back to heaven) O Viṣṇu . . . together with your godlike brothers and enter Your own body . . . for You are the way for the world . . . You are inconceivable, remarkable, imperishable and ageless."² Rāma then returns to His form as Viṣṇu, and the gods worship Rāma as God having the form of Viṣṇu.³ For now "Viṣṇu has returned to heaven as formerly and it is He Who pervades the three worlds with everything moving and unmoving."⁴

I have not mentioned every minute reference to Rāma as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. However, I have given enough evidence to show that the concept was existent in *Vāl.*, especially in *kāṇḍas* VI and VII. What conclusions do we draw from these references to Rāma as Viṣṇu ?

In the first place, there is clearly theological development within the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself. There is an opening up of different levels within the Rāma symbol within *Vāl.* Vālmiki's poem⁵ stresses the human level of portrayal of Rāma, and it sees Him not so much as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu but rather as a successor of Indra and as an ideal man. The references to Rāma as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu constitute a later historical development, and they open up a deeper level of meaning within the Rāma symbol. I accept and welcome the critical work that has been done on the *Rāmāyaṇa* because it shows a development of a theology of Rāma, of the Rāma symbol, and of a potential Rāma tradition within the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself.

The vital question is this—when we know that there was this development within *Vāl.*, what attitude do we adopt towards it ? At this point, I disagree with the critics who generally assume

1. *Vāl.* VII.104.18 *trayānām api lokānām kāryārthaṃ mama saṃbhavaḥ.*

2. *Vāl.* VII.110.8-13 *āgaccha Viṣṇo . . . bhrātṛbhīḥ saha devābhīḥ praviśasva svikāṇi tanum . . . tvam hi lokagatir . . . tvam acintyaṃ mahad-bhūtam akṣayaṃ cājaraṃ.*

3. *Vāl.* VII.111.2 *tato viṣṇumayaṃ devaṃ pūjayanti sma devatāḥ.*

4. *Vāl.* VII.111.2

*tataḥ pratiṣṭhito viṣṇuḥ svargaloke yathā purā,
yena vyāptam idaṃ sarvaṃ trailokyaṃ sacarācaram.*

5. This is basically the core of *Vāl.* II-VI.

that the original portrayal of Rāma was the true one, and that the later additions detract from the pristine purity of Vālmiki's original presentation. Why should this be so? Conceivably the later tradition (represented by the later portions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*) might have stressed other elements in the Rāma story, and it might have seen the real significance of Rāma to be something other than Rāma's being an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. In fact, as we will examine briefly later, the Buddhist and Jaina Rāma stories *did* develop in ways whereby the human aspects of Rāma were stressed. The important point is that the Hindus who sang and heard and meditated upon and wept at the Rāma story came to realise that Rāma *was* an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu: this was the only concept which adequately expressed what Rāma meant to them.¹ If we wish to understand what Rāma meant to them, we must see Him through their eyes. In order to see Him through their eyes, we must examine the *Rāmāyaṇa* in its final version.²

When we examine the *Rāmāyaṇa* in its final version, we see two things which are important both in themselves and also for their future significance. First, the later portions of *Vāl.* open up another level of meaning within the Rāma symbol. Rāma is no longer merely an ideal man or a successor of Indra, He is also an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. This level of meaning could be then and can be now read back into the whole *Rāmāyaṇa*.³ Rāma is now seen as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu Who limits Himself and becomes conformed to the human condition. By His perfect adaptation to the conditions of human life, He shows what human life should be like. The fact that Rāma has a divine nature does not, however, minimise His humanity. The later portions of *Vāl.*

1. This is at least as important as what Rāma had meant to Vālmiki.

2. In our case, the Critical Edition is the basic text. In some ways the "search for a Critical Edition" betrays the same tendency towards emphasising origins that I am questioning. I use it as a scholar, but can also foresee the value of a study of the interpolations that have been omitted from the Critical Edition as revealing what was important to those who added these interpolations.

3. There is a possible analogy with the New Testament, the Synoptic Gospels being closer to Vālmiki's poem, and St. John being closer to the later section of *Vāl.* The analogy is deficient mainly because the length of time required to complete the canon of the New Testament was far shorter than the length of time required to complete *Vāl.*

extend the concept of Rāma's human example in significant ways. They stress the important concept of Rāmarājya; they emphasise that Rāma is one Who suffers because He does what is right according to dharma; the *Uttarakāṇḍa* puts into words what had been explicit in the earlier part of *Vāl.* when it states that Rāma is "the great-souled One Who is dharma in person."¹ The development of the Rāma symbol in *Vāl.* is in some ways a paradigm of the future development of the Rāma symbol. *Vāl.* opens up new levels of meaning in the Rāma symbol, but it does not abandon the levels of meaning that had been there before. The old levels are integrated in the new. The same process of the integration of old levels of meaning of the Rāma symbol into new levels of meaning will occur more significantly in the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* and Tulsī Dās.

In the second place, *Vāl.* establishes the theological importance of Rāma's nature as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, and Rāma's relationship to Viṣṇu would remain an important theological theme for many centuries to come. As we have seen, historically there is a development within *Vāl.* from the stress upon Rāma as a successor to Indra to the stress upon Rāma as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. Vālmiki's poem had visualised Rāma as an ideal man who was an example of dharma, of human relationships, of heroism, and of *rājadharmā*; he had conceived Rāma as fulfilling the work of Indra. Later ages open up the level of Rāma's nature as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. However, by the time the *Rāmāyaṇa* is complete Rāma has not yet been completely identified with Viṣṇu.² Many of *Vāl.*'s Purāṇic stories about Viṣṇu do not claim that Rāma is Viṣṇu. Moreover, there is little specific stress upon *bhakti* to Rāma as devotional Lord. Rāma is not yet identified with the Viṣṇu Who is an object of devotion. He is not yet the Lord Who grants *mokṣa* to His devotees. He is rather Viṣṇu in a more philosophical sense. It is recognised that He and His brothers are partial *avatāras* of Viṣṇu; it is occasionally recognised that He is a full *avatāra* of Viṣṇu; in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* passage it is even recognised that He is the

1. *Vāl.* VII.101.17 *mahātmānaṃ sākṣād dharmam.*

2. The *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* would complete this process of identifying Rāma with Viṣṇu, and it would also prepare the way for Tulsī's suggestion that Rāma "transcends" Viṣṇu.

immanent and transcendent Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa in person. However, this is primarily a philosophical apprehension rather than a saving fact. In the main *Vāl.*'s Rāma is an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, He is not yet fully identified with Viṣṇu. We see in *Vāl.* the beginning of a theological process that would first reveal Rāma's identity with Viṣṇu and later Rāma's superiority to Viṣṇu.

Finally we note that *Vāl.* stresses above all the human element in the Rāma symbol. Rāma is the ideal man who followed the leadings of dharma whatever might be the cost; he is the ideal son, brother, husband, protector, and enemy; he is the ideal hero and the ideal king. He sets a standard of human life that is a model for all. He also performs as a man the acts that Indra had performed as a god. Even when seen from the level of portrayal as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, He is still primarily a man—this is the reason for His incarnation for none but a man can kill Rāvaṇa. *Vāl.*'s Rāma is very rarely viewed from His divine aspect. The general stress is upon the ideal humanity of the Rāma Who is an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu; it is upon the human nature of the Rāma Who is God; Rāma Himself does not know His own divinity, it has to be pointed out to Him by Brahmā. Although He has a divine nature as Viṣṇu, emphasis is not placed upon it. Rāma is not yet worshipped as God. He is portrayed in *Vāl.* rather as a symbol of God. He is not yet God in all His fullness.

The development of the religious significance of Rāma that we have seen in *Vāl.* was not the end but the beginning of a process that would culminate in North India in the work of Tulsī Dās. Rāma would continue to be seen from the human level of representation, but the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* and Tulsī Dās would open up the levels of meaning of Rāma as devotional Lord and Brahman that had only been hinted at in *Vāl.*