

Hikayat Seri Rama: Establishing the Source

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Purpose of the study: The main aim of this paper is to establish the Tamil literary sources of the Hikayat Seri Rama. Various recensions of the Hikayat Seri Rama demonstrate the close identity between one text and the other which would seem to indicate that all these texts were apparently derived from some older versions of the Rama story, which was the common source of all the recensions. **Methodology:** The methodology employed in this article is qualitative in nature. It is library research based on the existing published materials. Four steps of Hermeneutics approaches have been employed to produce findings which are objective in nature. This research is aimed to contribute to the existing body of knowledge about the sources of Hikayat Seri Rama. **Main findings:** This study would enable us to appreciate the close similarity of motifs and episodes between HSR and the Rama story in Tamil tradition. The Rama story in Tamil folklore itself stands out as a great proof to manifest that the Tamil sources are predominant in Hikayat Seri Rama compared to any other sources. **Applications of this study:** This study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge and will enable one to appreciate the close cultural relationship between the Tamil and the Malay literary traditions. Hence, it provides a platform for the positive cultural as well as civilizational dialog between the two communities. Additionally, this article can also contribute to the comparative studies involving Indian and Malay literature. **Novelty/Originality of this study:** Literature reviews clearly show that there is no other similar study to this work conducted elsewhere. Hence, the originality of this study is established. Previous studies failed establish the source for the Hikayat Seri Rama as most of those studies ignored Tamil literary sources. This study managed to prove the source of Hikayat Seri Rama based on Tamil literary sources.

Key words: *Hikayat Seri Rama, Kambaramayanam, Valmiki Ramayana, Malay Literature, Tamils.*

Introduction

Mahabharata, Ramayana and *Pancatantra* are three masterpieces which have established a place for Sanskrit in the world of literature. The epic of *Ramayana* by Valmiki (RV) is believed to have been composed between fourth century B.C. and second century A.D. However, its influence is not contained in the Indian sub-continent alone (Winternitz, 1977; Gurugay, 1960). Popularity of this epic has resulted in the emergence of hundreds of different versions of the epic in different languages in India itself (Zieseniss, 1963). Whereas in Asia, at least fifteen countries have their own version of the epic which has become a part of their tradition (Raghavan, 1973). Besides literature, the influence of this epic in Southeast Asia is also visible in other areas of art (Hooykaas, 1963) like dance, drama, painting, shadow-play, caring, magic, etc. (Singaravelu, 1966). *Ramayana* has indeed reared a unity of culture in Asia that it is also referred to as the ‘Bible of Asia’ and ‘the Odyssey of Asia’ (Raghavan, 1973).

The story of Rama is also popular compared to other stories in South East Asia (Rajantharan, 2018; Fengyang, 2018; Ganyi, 2016). The literary versions of the Rama story in Malay, which is a long and comprehensive prose narration, is generally known as the *Hikayat Seri Rama* (story or chronicle of Sri Rama). It would seem to have been written in its present form, or adapted to that form, in Perso-Arabic (Jawi) script after the coming of Islam to the Malay Archipelago and peninsula by an unknown author sometime between the thirteen and seventeenth centuries A.D. (Winstedt, 1969; Zieseniss, 1963).

The *Hikayat Seri Rama* has survived in several manuscripts. Of these, two recensions were published earlier. Una by Van Eysinga in 1843 referred to as HSR.Rve (1938), and the other by Shellabear in 1915 referred to as HSR.She (reprinted in 1938). Subsequently Ikram (1980) referred to as HSR.Ikr have again published Shellabear's recension in 1915. This text gives the full details of HSR as this recension prepared after being compared with the existing ones. It must be noted that there are at least five other recensions of HSR still in manuscript form, of which brief accounts have been given by various scholars in their writings (wan Wijk, 1891; Juynboll, 1899; Winstedt, 1969; Barrett, 1963).

A significant feature of the various recensions of HSR is that, though they differ from each other in respect of certain aspects such as the sequences of episodes, name-forms and the degree of Islamic influence found in them, there is nevertheless close identity between one text and the other in regard to their over-all contents, and this characteristic would seem to

indicate that all these texts were apparently derived from some older versions of the Rama story, which was a common source of all the recensions (Winstedt, 1969; David, 2017).

Literature Review

The question regarding the source of the original HSR (Ronkel, 1919; Singaravelu, 1981) has been open for discussion for a long time since Dozon refuted van Eysinga's (1843) description of HSR as a translation of RV, by pointing out that HSR was indeed a distinct work, though dealing with the same characters and following for the most part the narrative of the Hindu epic (Dozon, 1846). Subsequently in 1899, Juynboll tried to trace the origin of HSR to the South Indian Tamil source, because of the apparent Tamil – like forms of some proper names such as Baradan (Baratan), Bibusanam (Bibhusana or Vibhusana), and Mahameru Parwatam (Mahameru Parvatam), occurring in the Malay versions (Juynboll, 1899).

In 1919, Ronkel also drew attention to some Dravidian (Tamil) features relating to the name-forms such as Trisulam (Trisulam) in the Malay version, although he did not venture to judge its origin (1919). In 1922, Rassers compared the most important features of the Malay version with the RV and concluded that those motifs and episodes of HSR, which differed from the Sanskrit epic, were derived from Indonesian sources (1922). Stutterheim (1925), who thought HSR had originated in Indonesia tried to establish that HSR had its source in a mixture of Indonesian tales and the predominantly oral tradition from the western as well as the eastern regions of the Indian sub-continent (1925). However, three years later Ziesenis (1963) wrote a systematic monograph by giving a full textual synopsis of the entire HSR in its two recensions, namely, the texts edited by Roorda van Eysinga and Shellabear (1915), and comparing it with the RV. His conclusions were two-fold, namely, that the texts of both the HSR were to be traced back to one original version, from which they originated orally, and that HSR is a more extensive form comprising of numerous innovations and amplifications drawn from diverse textual and oral legendary sources such as the Puranas, and popular tales, which reached Indonesia from various parts of India, especially from the Eastern and the Western parts of India before reaching the Malay Peninsula (Ziesenis, 1963).

The next scholar to examine the question was Singaravelu. In his article, 'The Rama Story in Malay Tradition', deals with the Rama story in Malay tradition, literary as well as folk traditions and concludes that the Rama story in the Malay folk and literary traditions has assumed distinct forms incorporating both localised elements and popular elements from oral sources reaching the Malay archipelago and peninsula from the different parts of the Indian sub-continent, and that it is a highly developed and well-balanced account containing many innovations, modifications, embellishments in regard to motifs, episodes, and characterization (Singaravelu, 1981; Ezeanyejí Clement, 2016).

The author of this article has also done a comparative study of the HSR in Malay language, RV in Sanskrit, *Kambaramayanam* (KR) composed by Kamban in Tamil (1957-1970 Kamban) including the Uttara Kadam in Tamil which is believed to have been composed by Ottakkuttar (UKO). The possible conclusion that can be drawn points to the fact that Tamil sources are more significant in the HSR in terms of motifs and episodes (Rajantharan, 1995). Ziesenis (1963) however, did not highlight this as stories of Rama in Tamil tradition were not included in his analysis.

Therefore, the main purpose of this article is to weigh the possibility of Tamil sources (written works as well as folklores) being used by the author of HSR in composing the epic.

Research Method

The methodology employed in this article is qualitative in nature. It is aimed at achieving the underlying purpose of the paper i.e. to interpret and analyse the source of the Hikayat Seri Rama in order to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the field. The following four steps of Hermeneutics have been employed to produce an objective result. Step 1: Identification - This step involves reading and researching many direct and indirect aspects of the data sources on this article. Step 2: Investigation - This step involves in-depth inquiry and analysis of the primary and secondary data collected through the first step, focusing on the similarities and differences that can be compared to draw a reasonable conclusion. Step 3: Interpretation - This step involves providing meaning and relevance to the data, context and textual verses. Examples warrant for a detailed analysis of the context that the researcher could identify. Step 4: Integration - This step involves adopting the context, facts and interpretations from the study and presenting the subject matter based on comparative literature approach in an enlivened manner for the contemporary reader.

Discussion / Analysis

Examination of the Motif and Episodes

A significant feature of the narrative relating to Ravana's ancestry in the Malay recensions of the Rama story contained in the Raffles and Wilkinson manuscripts, is that they refer to a character named Siranchak. Siranchak (Ravana, in his previous birth) was a creature who lived in the heaven. However, he had disturbed the piece of anchorites and even raped the seven wives of Bagawan Bisparupan in the heavenly world of Keinderaan. Upon the wishes of the anchorites, Mahabishnu attacked and pushed Siranchak under the seven 'patala', below the surface of the earth (Winstedt, 1969; Barrett, 1963).

There, Siranchak performed austerities for twelve years to gain power to revenge on Mahabishnu. He made a musical instrument in the form of a lute with four strings using his head, his three fingers and his hand. His tendons were made into strings for the instrument. According to the story, Siranchak played the instrument beautifully in honour of Dewata Mulia Raya for twelve years (Barrett, 1963; Fang, Zakaria & Shokory 2016).

This particular episode is not to be found in the RV. However, a similar episode is found in Tamil Uttara Kandam composed by Ottakkuttar in Tamil during the 13th century (Varadarajan, 1972). In Uttara Kandam, Ravana (Iravanan/Tacakkirivan) was said to have tried to uproot Mount Kailasa. Lord Shiva, who dwells on it, presses the mountain with his great toe, and crushes Ravana's arms. The story continues when Ravana makes a lute (vinai) from one of his heads and one of his arms. He strummed the strings of the yinai, singing Sama-Veda in praise of Lord Shiva for a thousand years after that. Lord Shiva, who is impressed by Ravana's devotion, releases him from the pressure of his great toe on the mountain and confers upon him a magic sword known as Candrasasa and boon of long life to rule over the Three Worlds (Ottakkuttar, 1977).

A similar episode of Ravana making the vinai in UKO is also found in the *Tevaram* which is a compilation of holy hymns written during the Bhakti period (600 AD-900 AD) by the Saivite saints (Senkalvaraya, 1954; 1962; 1963). There is a possibility that Ottakkuttar (1977), author of UKO, had adopted the story which was already in existence in the Tamil oral tradition in South India. Therefore, it could be possible that the author of HSR knew about this story from Tamil sources. It may be noted that the story about the 'vinai' is indirectly linked to Ravana. The link is provided by the story of Siranchak who is depicted as the future Ravana.

Another episode which proves the possibility of Tamil literature being the sources of HSR is the story of Maharesi Kala (the father of Sita) who hid his daughter in a house of worship where the idols resembled her. His main purpose is to delay the wedding between Sri Rama and Sita Dewi because he was reluctant to part with her. Sita who was standing between the idols, blinked when Sri Rama hit her with a stalk of cengkelenar (HSR.Ikr, 1980). A similar motive is also seen in a 13th century A.D. Tamil poem entitled, *Nala Venba* (Pandarattar, 1955; Jesudasan and Jesudasan, 1961; Iramacamippillai, 1954). In the poem, Tamayanti (the heroine) recognises Nalan (her lover) among the Demi Gods who resembled him when he blinked. The flower is called *Cengkalunir* in Tamil. The scientific name for it is *Nymphaea Odorata* (*Tamil Lexicon*, 1928). In Malaysia, the flower is called Teropak Merah (Burkill, 1966). It may be noted that the name cengkelenar for the stalk of flower in HSR is undoubtedly the corruption of Tamil name form, *Cengkalunir*.

Another motif in HSR is about a young hunchback who works in the palace as an assistant to Mandudari. Rama (Sri Rama) who was a young lad at that time often shot his arrows on the boy's hump. His hump would move backward and forward when hit by the force of Rama's arrow. The boy badly wanted to seek revenge on Rama for this. His opportunity came when Dasarata Maharaja made a decision to crown Rama as his successor. The hunchback persuaded Baliadari (Rama's stepmother) to ask Dasarata Maharaja to crown her son Baradan as king of Mandupuranegara (Mandurapurinegara) instead. The king had no option but to agree as Baliadari had once saved his life and he had given his word that he would fulfil any of her wishes as reward (HSR.Rve, 1938; Zieseniss, A, 1963; HSR.She, 1964 and HSR.Ikr, 1980).

Similarly in RK, a young and playful Rama often shot his arrows at the hump of Mantarai/Manthara's back. Mantarai, an old woman was a maid to Queen Kaikeyi (Rama's stepmother). To get back at Rama for his mischief, Mantarai instigated Kaikeyi to ask king Tayaratan (Dasaratha) to crown Baratan (Bharata) as his successor instead of Rama. King Tayaratan has to agree for Kaikeyi had once saved his life (RK, II, 2:41, 74-75, 81, 84 and RK, II, 3:4).

The similarity of motive between HSR and RK is visible in this story. The only difference lies in the sex of the hunchback. In HSR, the hunchback was a young boy but in RK, it's an old woman. There is also another similarity in terms of name. Baradan's name in HSR is similar to Barathan in RK. Baradan follows the pattern of the Tamil name for the suffix 'an' in Tamil refers to a male. In RV, Bharata is the name-form and not Bharatan.

According to HSR, Surapandaki transformed herself into a beautiful young lady to tempt Rama (HSR.Rve., 1938 and HSR.Ikr, 1980). In RK, Curpanakai (Surpanakha) too transformed herself into a beautiful woman for the same reason (RK, III, 5: 30-32). This motive is not to be found in RV. It is another example of the similarity between HSR and RK. In HSR, Ravana abducted Sita Dewi and placed her under the watchful eyes of ogres (rakshasis) headed by Vibishana's daughter, Dewi Seri Jati (HSR.Rve, 1938; HSR.She, 1964; HSR.Ikr, 1980 and Zieseniss, 1963). This story bears a close resemblance to another story in RK where Ravana abducts Sita and places her in the garden of Asoka with a few ogres (rakshasis) lead by Vibhishana's daughter Tiricatai (Trijata) (RK, III, 8:146). However, in RV, Ravana abducts Sita and hides her in his place first where he persuades her to marry him. When Sita refuses only did Ravana imprison her in the garden of Asoka 37 (RV, III, 54-56; RV (HPS), II, 114-120).

An episode entitled, Patala Maharayan in HSR (HSR.Rve, 1938; HSR.She, 1964; HSR.Ikr, 1980; Zieseniss, 1963.) is another good example to prove the possibility of Tamil folklores

being the original sources of HSR. This may be due to the absence of similar episodes in earlier Tamil and Sanskrit versions of the Rama stories.

Due to this, the author of HSR could have used a Tamil folklore entitled *Mayiliravanan Katai* (1925) as a source for the episode of Patala Maharayan. The story of *Mayiliravanan Katai* bears strong similarity with the episode of Patala Maharayan. As in Patala Maharayan, Mayiliravanan is also based on incidents where Mayiliravanan kidnaps Rama and imprisons him in a kingdom in the underworld ('Patala Bumi' in Tamil) with the purpose of killing him. Hanuman follows Mayiliravanan to save Rama.

To show the possibility of the author of HSR using elements from *Mayiliravanan Katai* for the episode of Patala Maharayan, the similarities and differences between the two stories have been listed below:-

1. Patala Maharayan in HSR and in *Mayiliravanan Katai* are said to be rulers of the netherworld kingdom.
2. Patala Maharayan in HSR possess magical powers similar to Mayiliravanan in *Mayiliravanan Katai*.
3. In HSR, Hanuman warned all of Vanara warriors to be on guard for Patala Maharayan was capable of transformings himself to resemble anyone for the sake of kidnapping Rama. In *Mayiliravanan Katai*, Vibhishana gave the same warning.
4. In HSR, Patala Maharayan sent two of his generals to kidnap Rama. When they failed, he planned the abduction himself. The same incident occurs in *Mayiliravanan Katai*.
5. Hanuman, in HSR fortified Rama's palace with his lengthened body-hair but in *Mayiliravanan Katai*, the fort was formed with Hanuman's tail.
6. Patala Maharayan in HSR, cast a magic spell on all the royal guards to put them to sleep before he kidnapped Rama, In *Mayiliravanan Katai*, a similar method was need by Mayiliravanan to kidnap Rama and Laksamana.
7. In HSR, prediction of an astrologer prompted Patala Maharayan to imprison all his nephews for he feared that one of them would over-throw him as king of the netherworld. Mayiliravanan did the same in *Mayiliravanan Katai*
8. In HSR and *Mayiliravanan Katai*, Hanuman who discovered that Rama was kidnapped reaches the under-world through the open pores of the stalk of a waterlily.
9. In HSR, before entering Patala Maharayan's palace, Hanuman encounters Hanuman Tugangghah and wages war against him. But Hanuman discovers that Hanuman Tugangghah is too strong. He also realised later that Hanuman Tugangghah was actually his son. In *Mayiliravanan Katai*, Hanuman finds his son Maccakarppan in a similar manner.
10. Hanuman Tugangghah in HSR was born by a fish (Raja Manik or Jandana) who swallowed Hanuman's semen in the sea as he was leaping over it to save Sita in Lanka.

In *Mayiliravanan Katai*, a similar incident occurred causing Timiti, a fish gave birth to Maccakarppan.

11. In HSR, Hanuman meets a princess (Patala Maharayan's aunty) as she was getting water from a pond similarly in *Mayiliravanan Katai*, Hanuman meets Mayiliravanan's sister near a pond as she was taking some water from it.
12. In HSR and *Mayiliravanan Katai*, Hanuman promised to enthrone the princess' son as the ruler of the under-world.
13. In both stories, the princess tried to bring Hanuman into the city of Patala Maharayan / *Mayiliravanan*. According to HSR, Hanuman disguised as a bird and perched on the 'buyung' (a round bottomed earthenware water-jar) brought in by the princess. In *Mayiliravanan Katai*, Hanuman disguised himself as a beetle which hid beneath the mango leaf in the waters of a container.
14. According to HSR and *Mayiliravanan Katai*, when the 'buyung' was brought in by the princess to weigh, the weight-scale broke and Hanuman emerged in his original self.
15. In HSR, Hanuman's child that is Hanuman Tugangga remained loyal to his master, Patala Maharayan. Similarly, in *Mayiliravanan Katai*, Hanumans son Maccakarppan remained loyal to his master Mayiliravanan.
16. HSR and *Mayiliravanan Katai* stated that Hanuman succeeded in saving Rama after overcoming all the obstacles in the nether world.
17. In HSR, the relative/cousin of Patala Maharayan was elected as the ruler of the underworld in this context, the *Mayiliravanan Katai* also showed the relative/cousin of Mayiliravanan as the head of the state of the underworld, selected by Hanuman.
18. In both these versions, Rama knew all the happenings after he was brought to the tent by Hanuman.

Apart from the similarities, we can also observe some differences between the HSR and the *Mayiliravanan Katai*. For example, the name-forms of the characters in the two stories displayed a distinct difference. In the HSR, the name of the character is Patala Maharayan while in *Mayiliravanan Katai*, it is Mayiliravanan. Hanuman's child in HSR is Hanuman Tuganggah and in the Tamil folk-tale, it is Maccakarpan. In the HSR, the name of the fish that gave birth to Hanuman Tuganggah was Raja Manik or Jandana. However, in *Mayiliravanan Katai*, the name of the mother of Maccakarpan is Timiti.

From the aspect at lineage/kinship, HSR showed that Patala Maharayan is the child of Ravana but Mayiliravanan in the Tamil folk-tale is the younger brother to Ravana. In the area of incidences, in the *Mayiliravanan Katai*, at the time Mayiliravanan kidnapped Rama and Laksmana, a voice was heard from Heaven as a warning that Hanuman will destroy the underworld (Patala Ilankai in the Tamil language) and elect Nilamekan (relative to Mayiliravanan) as the ruler of the underworld and save Rama and Laksmana. This incident is

not found in HSR. Hence, as an addition in the HSR there is a character named Amiraba (the uncle to Ravana), who was killed by Hanuman. In relation to the death of Mayiliravanan, it is said that he died when Hanuman destroyed the five beetles that his life was dependent on. However, in HSR, Hanuman did not kill Patala Maharayan but instead Rama was the one who killed him. Finally, according to HSR only Rama was kidnapped by Patala Maharayan but in the *Mayiliravanan Katai*, Rama and Laksamana were kidnapped by Mayiliravanan.

The comparison between the episode of Patala Maharayan in the HSR and *Mayiliravan Katai*, shows that there is an intimate connection between the two stories amidst the differences. The similarities that are so distinct if the two stories form the basis for the writer to deduce that there is a great possibility that the author of HSR has the knowledge of the story of *Mayiliravanan Katai*, which is a Tamil folk-tale from Southern India. This can be further emphasized by observing the name-form of the characters like Patala Maharayan. The name Patala Maharayan is derived from the term Patala (the nether region) and the word Maharayan which is a Tamil form for the Sanskrit word Maharaja (Supreme King).

Apart from *Mayiliravanan Katai* there are few other motifs which can be examined to prove my conclusion. In HSR, to deceive Rama, Indrajit had created a false Sita and killed her. Hanuman disguised as a bee flew to Lanka to ascertain if Indrajit's doings were true or not (HSR.Rve, 1938; HSR.She, 1964; HSR.Ikr, 1980; Zieseniss, 1963). RK stated that after the false Sita was killed, Vibhishana disguised as a bee flew to the park of Ashoka and realized the deceit by Indrajit (RK, VI, 25:91-95). At this point, we can see the similarity of the motive of Hanuman (HSR) and Vibhishana (RK) disguising as a bee to ascertain the doing of Indrajit.

Besides that, there are also some name-forms in HSR (HSR.Rve, 1938; HSR.She, 1964; HSR.Ikr, 1980; Zieseniss, 1963) that reflect of the Tamil Language. For example, the word 'Wedam', Vetam in the Tamil language and Veda in Sanskrit the name Indra Pawanam is Inthira Pavanam in Tamil. The name Trisulam is Tirisulam in Tamil and Trisula in Sanskrit. The name of the character like Dasarata Raman, Kikukan in HSR (HSR.Rve, 1938; HSR.She, 1964; HSR.Ikr, 1980; Zieseniss, 1963) also reflect the Tamil name forms that are from Dasarata Raman and Kukan.

Conclusion

Through this comparative analysis, the close similarity of motifs and episodes between HSR and the Rama story in Tamil tradition (including folk story) have been demonstrated. This motif similarity cannot be obtained for HSR and Valmiki's Ramayana. The episode of Patala Maharayan in HSR itself stands out as a great proof/prove to establish that the Tamil sources (written well as folk) are predominance in HSR compared to any other sources. Finally, it



may be noted that the Malay folk and literary traditions of Rama story have assumed distinct forms incorporating both localised elements and popular elements from oral sources reaching the Indonesian shores before reaching Malay Peninsula from the different parts of the Indian sub-continent especially from South Indian Tamil sources. It must be noted that HSR is a highly developed and well-balanced account containing many innovations and modifications and enrichment with regard to motifs and episodes.



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