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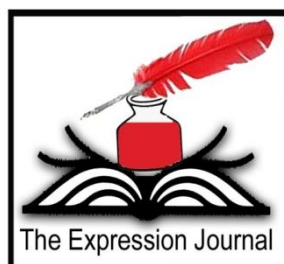
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## **GEOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF THE RAMAYANIC PERIOD**

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### **Abstract**

Investigating the geographical background of Ramayanic age has been the main motive behind this research. This paper highlighted the various physical aspects of Ramayanic age geography. The facts have been traced out of the rituals, procedures, discussions and mythologies by way of interpretation from a geographical point of view. Physical features and cultural landscapes that existed in that age have been discussed in this paper. The aim of the study is to search for geographical knowledge and concepts and arranging them systematically with a view of manifesting deep insight into geographical facts as known during the Ramayanic period. This study reconstructs the geography of the past. There has been an attempt to elaborate various geographical regions in a concise manner without affecting their intrinsic merit. The need to carry out this research was felt due to the fact that geographers do not really venture into this field. The various mountains, rivers, climate and vegetation and their importance and contribution in the epic have been sorted out and studied. The major events of the epic took place in forests. One can recognize India's forest wealth from the epic. Ram mentioned certain plants that had sacred qualities or those which could be used for medicinal purposes. Each river mentioned in the Ramayan played a significant role in the narrative and added to the cultural and geographical richness of the era. In this era, the land was made of river basins and mountains, terrain having arid, semi-arid, hot and humid climate. These are favourable conditions for the growth of natural vegetation. The two elements of surface configuration-river basins and the adjoining mountains were easily distinguished and had great bearing in the Ramayanic age. Climate and natural vegetation were intimately associated with the activities and settlements of Ramayanic age people.

### **Keywords**

Ramayanic Age Pyramid Period, Geospatial Mapping, Sacred Landscapes, Historical Ecology  
River, Mountain, Medicinal, Culture, Climate, Vegetation.



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### RELIEF OF RAMAYANIC AGE MOUNTAINS

The mountains formed two distinct regions one along the northern border and the other in the south. As a relief feature the mountains are described as immovable. Process of erosion emerged in that era.

1. **Himvant**<sup>1</sup> (98-1 Baal kand)-Himvantis a term frequently used for a mountain covered with snow. The term Himvant is formed of Hema (snow)and vanta (possessor). It means that mountains were covered with snow. The Himvant of Ramayanic age mountain is the present Himalayan.
2. **Sumeru**<sup>2</sup> (231-2 Ayodhyakand)-It was said to be the chief habitat of the soma plant. It was found in the Himalayan region.
3. **Kailash Mountain**<sup>3</sup> (50-3 Baal kand)- The abode of Kuber, which is said to be white and golden and is related to Kailash Mansarovar region. Sugriv directs the vanars to move westward rises a mountain Mainaka in search of Sita. Mainak(the present Shivalik range of Himachal Pradesh) by name, the abode of kinnar. Beyond the Mainaka, Sugriv instructs them to search for Sita in the Kamakya, Yavan and Saka janpadh.
4. **Trikut Mountain**<sup>4</sup> (27-6 Kishkindhakand)- It was a mountain with threepeaks. Ravans Lanka was situated on Trikutmountain, in an island in the Indian oceanmaking its defense impregnable.
5. **Mainaka**<sup>5</sup> (28-7 Aranyakand)- The reference of these mountains in the Ramayanicera may be conclusive. Kailash, Mainak and Kraunch mountains are mentioned together by Sugriv while giving directions to Shatvali, who was sent to the north in search of Sita. This shows that the Kailashand Mainak were in the same region and that the Kailash was located to the north of the other two. Supposing the Kailash to be the present Kailash, north of the Mansarovarlake, or the part of the greater Himalayas where the Bhagirathi and Alaknanda originate. The Mainak Mountain may be identified with the range near the confluence of the Bhagirathi and Alaknanda in the Tehri district of Uttar Pradesh.

6. **Rishyamukha Parvat**<sup>6</sup> (22-4 Kishkindhakand (Valmiki Ramyana)- Sri Ram visited Kishkindha during his forest exile and met Sugreev on the Rishyamukh Parvat.
7. **Vindhyachal Mountain**<sup>7</sup> (9-4 Uttar kand)- The mountain possessed of myriad peaks & cliffs, resounded peals of laughter. Gods, Gandharav, Apsara and Kinnaras disporting themselves there and transformed it into a paradise.
8. **Mahendra Mountain**<sup>8</sup> (66-34 Kishkindhakand) - Hanumana ascended the Mahendra mountain and took the leap to cross over the sea to Lanka. Sri Ram also passed through the Mahendra mountain while going from Kishkindha to the southern sea shore. It is the greatest of mountains covered with trees, always laden with fruits and flowers, full of creepers and waterfalls, inhabited by lions & tigers, frequented by rutting elephants, and noisy with flocks of birds.
9. **Malaya Mountain**<sup>9</sup> (15-10 Baal kand) - This area was filled with sandalwood and lovely forests. It was also famous for various minerals. In Malaya Mountain, highly reputed ashram of Agastya Muni was located. River Tamrapanni takes its rise from Malaya Mountain.
10. **Malayavan Mountain**<sup>10</sup> (210-2 Baal kand)- Located near Kishkindha. Ram and Lakshman made this mountain as their abode during their exile. Its natural beauty was extremely pleasant.
11. **Chitrakoot**<sup>11</sup> (215-2 Ayodhyakand)- Ram spent a substantial time of his exile here. River Mandakini flowed through this mountain. Lord Rama visited Sage Attri & Mata Anusuya's ashram here.

## DRAINAGE SYSTEMS OF RAMAYANIC ERA

Regional unity of Ramayanic period was a great contribution to the various rivers, which provided easy accessibility and convenient land to live upon. The rivers play a crucial role in shaping the geography and cultural landscape of the ancient world depicted in the Ramayan. The rivers are also associated with rituals, ceremonies and sacred practices in ancient India. The rivers flowing in the eastward direction formed the Ganga system.

When king Dashrath announced the exile of Ram for 14 years, Bharat was in Kaikayajanpadh. On his way back to Ayodhya, he spent seven nights on road before reaching there. He crossed Iravati (Ravi), Satadru (Satluj), Kalinga (Ghaggar), Yamuna, Kapivati, Gomati and Sarayu.<sup>12</sup> (216-1 Baal kand)

1. **Saraswati**<sup>13</sup> (20-1 Baal kand)- Saraswati was the tributary of Sindhu river. It is depicted in two forms. Firstly, as a river and secondly as a great deity. It is considered the goddess of rivers. Saraswati, with its tributaries, marked the Eastern boundary of Ayodhya. It originates from the Shivalik hills. The disappearance of the Saraswati may be attributed to physical courses. Deforestation and gradual rise in the catchment area of the Saraswati due to aggression of sand from the desert.
2. **Ganga system**<sup>14</sup> (196-3 Ayodhyakand)- The river Ganga is one of the most sacred river and it is mentioned in various episodes of the Ramayana epic. Doab of Ganga-Yamuna rivers were inhabited by religious people. Lord Ram visited sage Bhardwaj's ashram at Prayag at the confluence of river Ganga.

3. **Yamuna**<sup>15</sup> (220-1 Ayodhyakand)-Yamuna is the tributary of pious Ganga. It formed the western boundary of Ayodhya. Lord Ram crossed the river Yamuna at Prayag<sup>20</sup> and travelled towards Chitrakoot<sup>21</sup> along the banks of Yamuna.
4. **Ved Shruti**<sup>16</sup> (49-2 Ayodhyakand)- VedShruti was the auspicious river where sage Agastya lived. Lord Ram crossed this river at the time of forest exile.
5. **Gomati**<sup>17</sup> (142-3 Baal kand)-Gomati was on the intersection of the Jambumarg path. Lord Ram crossed this river. Gomati having beautiful water whose banks were adorned with cows.
6. **Sarayu**<sup>18</sup> (216-1 Baal kand)-This river has mythological and religious importance. It is part of the Ganga river system. The river Sarayu witnessed many significant events that make up the body of the epic Ramayana.
7. **Syandika**<sup>19</sup> (49-12 Ayodhyakand) -It is a river in Kosala. It is mentioned in Ramayana. In the beginning of his forest exile, Shri Ram had crossed this river. River Syandika was resounded with howls of peacocks and swans.
8. **Tamsa**<sup>20</sup> (35-2 Uttar kand) -The Tamsa river is mentioned in the content of the exile of Ram, Sita and Lakshman. In present Tamsa is Tons river. They spent the first night of their exile near Tamsa river. It's 20 km far from Ayodhya. The ashram of sage Valmiki is regarded to have been located at the banks of Tamsa river. Sita met Valmiki and lived there.
9. **Mandakini**<sup>21</sup> (379-3 Ayodhyakand)- The river Mandakini is mentioned in the context of the Chitrakoot region, where Lord Ram spent a significant portion of his exile.
10. **Narmada**<sup>22</sup> (35-7 Uttar kand)- Its pure water flowed over a bed of stones and the river emptied herself into the western sea. The flocks of Saras & Swans abounded there. Sages frequently visited there.
11. **Godavari**<sup>23</sup> (29-3 Aranyakand)- This river is also referenced in the Ramayan. It is strongly associated with Rama, who is said to have traversed its banks in the Ramayan. Godavari is considered as one of the most sacred rivers in India. It originates from Trimbakeshwar in Nashik and flows and dumps into the Bay of Bengal.

## CLIMATE OF RAMAYANIC PERIOD

In Ramayanic age, the power of climate was seen, which along with other factors of environment, largely shaped the needs of life and thinking of the people. The climatic phenomena formed an important subject of discussion among the Ramayanic era sages and kings. It is important to note that most of the climatic information is given through the characteristics and functions of Gods who are the representations of one or the other climatic elements.

Seasons or Ritu in Ramayanic age

In the Ramayanic period sages minutely marked and observed the climatic variations from time to time. They had developed a concept of dividing the year into seasons, which were formed as a result of the sun's journey for six months in the North said to be Uttarayan while Dakshinayan while in southern journey. These six month journeys were counted from solstice to solstice. The Ramayanic era climate was dominated by 6 distinct seasons namely: Basant, Grishma, Varsha, Sharad, Hemant, Shishir<sup>24</sup> (41-46-1 Baal kand)



## 1. Spring or Basant – Month of (Chaitra and Baisakh)

Covered the period from mid-March to mid-May. Pleasant temperature was observed during most of spring season. It gradually increased as the days grew longer. Sprouting of plants and ripening of crops were the common vegetation phenomena. It was considered the best season of all due to its refreshing and calming nature.

## 2. Summer or Grishma Ritu-Month of (Jyestha and Asadha)

Covered the period from mid-May to mid-July, when temperatures grew higher due to the blazing sun. Shukra and Shuchi derived. Direct rays of the sun caused scorching heat. The demon of drought<sup>25</sup> (260-2 Baal kand) named Vritra ruled over in the Ramayanic period. The sun attained the greatest brilliance at mid-day and fire burns in forests<sup>26</sup> (83-2 Ayodhyakand). During this season, the sun cause scorching heat due to which wind during this season was very hot called as 'loo'<sup>27</sup> (45-2 Baal kand). Such references clearly show that extreme drought and intense heat were two main characteristics of this season.

## 3. Rainy season or Varsha Ritu- Month of (Shravan & Bhadra)

Shravan and Bhadra extend from mid-July to mid-September and were recognised as the season of general rains brought by the nabh or skies (to burst or to be moist) indicate the bursting of the monsoons to cause downpour or to cause invisibility due to clouds<sup>28</sup> (275-1 Ayodhyakand). The weather phenomena like storms<sup>29</sup> (6-5 Baal kand) Rudra, thundering<sup>30</sup> (86-2 Lanka kand), lightning flashes <sup>31</sup>(86-2 Lanka kand) were commonly observed. The Maruts were considered as great warriors associated with Indra, the God of rain, who fights with Vritra, the demon of drought. By defeating Vritra, Indra releases water from the sky.

## 4. Autumn or Sharad-Month of (Ashwin and Kartika)

This season was considered to be the first among those of the southerly course of the Sun and covered the period from mid-September to mid- November.

## 5. Winter or Hemant-Month of (Margshirsha and Pausa)

The period from mid-November to mid-January formed the winter season. The powerful conditions of winter, which were dominated by 'Hima' or cold, low temperature during this season, was indirectly mentioned in Ramayanic epic as 'leaves fall from the trees', 'withering of plants' as a result of extremely low temperatures, 'bedewing of barley crops', a winter crop by rains and its destruction by hail<sup>32</sup> (3-4 Baal kand) implying that the land of Ramayanic era, particularly the Western parts of the Ganga valley, received some rain by the west winds or west maruts. Hails were associated with westerly winds. Frost <sup>33</sup>(243-3 Ayodhyakand) occurred due to extremely low temperature in northern places of Bharat.

## 6. Cool or Shishira-Month of ( Magha and Phalgun)

This season starts from mid-January to mid-March. The word 'tap', 'tapasya' (derived from the root tap = to heat) indicates that the season was not comfortable due to low temperatures.

### VEGETATION OF RAMAYANIC PERIOD

The forests mentioned in Ramayan are namely-Chitrakoot<sup>34</sup> (132-1 Ayodhyakand), Dandakaranya<sup>35</sup> (119-1 Lanka kand), Panchvati<sup>36</sup> (139-3 Ayodhyakand), Kishkindha<sup>37</sup>

(18-1 Kishkindhakand) and Lanka<sup>38</sup> (27-6 Kishkindhakand). The forests are classified as per their temperament or characteristics- as Shanta (calm), Madhura (sweet), Raudra (anger), and Vibhatsya (fearful)<sup>39</sup> (). The forest landscape included the water elements in the form of rivers<sup>40</sup> (278-1 Ayodhyakand), lakes<sup>41</sup> (62-3 Ayodhyakand), streams<sup>42</sup> (13-3 Kishkindhakand), ponds<sup>43</sup> (303-2 Ayodhyakand), aquatic plants like the lotus<sup>44</sup> (203-1 Ayodhyakand) and water lilies etc. The continuous flow of water from waterfalls<sup>45</sup> (37-4 Aranyakand) and springs<sup>46</sup> (235-3 Ayodhyakand) helped to maintain the moisture content in the trees. Forests were described as deciduous type. A classification of natural vegetation, as based on the reference content in the Ramayanic text is given below.

1. Trees (vana on vriksha<sup>47</sup> (138-138 Ayodhyakand))
2. Shrubs (Oshadhi<sup>48</sup> (6-74-63 Yudhkand (Valmiki Ramayan))- medicinal and Virudhi- non medicinal plants)
3. Grass (Trin<sup>49</sup> (138-138 Ayodhyakand)), which was found all over the land of Arayavrat (India). Main grasses were dub, kusha, munja, durba.

Categories of vegetation found in the Ramayana period –

## 1. Tropical Deciduous forest (Dandkarayan Region<sup>50</sup> (119-1 Lanka kand))

Sage Bharadwaja advised Lord Rama to settle in Chitrakoot forest.

Chitrakoot Region- In Chitrakoot region, Mandakini river flowed. The forest comprised of beautiful flowering trees which surrounded it on all sides. Different vegetation were found such as mango<sup>51</sup> (236-1 Ayodhyakand), beal<sup>52</sup> (234-4 Ayodhyakand), jackfruit<sup>53</sup> (3-15 Aranyakand), neem<sup>54</sup> (3-73 Aranyakand), beri<sup>55</sup> (3-73 Aranyakand), bamboo<sup>56</sup> (324-2 Ayodhyakand), ashoka<sup>57</sup> (12-12 Sundarkand) trees.

Dandkarayan forests- Lord Ram stayed for a long time in Dandkarayan region. Dandatrina a type of long grass, flourished in this region. Danda also called rows of trees. Sacred grass durba<sup>58</sup> (14-14 Kishkindhakand), trees like sal<sup>59</sup> (3-15-16 Aranyakand), madhuka, bilva<sup>60</sup> (234-4 Ayodhyakand), kakubhan were present at that time. Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh regions are included in Dandkarayan region.

## 2. Tropical dry deciduous forest (Panchvati Region<sup>61</sup> (139-3 Ayodhyakand))

Panchvati- After his Dandkarayan journey, Lord Rama stayed at Panchvati, which is located near Godavari river. Sita was abducted from Panchvati. In Ramayanic period there were fruit trees<sup>62</sup> (214-2 Ayodhyakand) aromatic, flowery and hard wood trees. Among them sal tree, khajoor, kathal, mango, ashok, sandal wood<sup>63</sup> (214-4 Ayodhyakand), babool, shammi, date palm, jackfruit, sesame, khadira were present. The presence of cereals in this region like barley, wheat and rice is also mentioned in the Ramayan.

## 3. Dry and moist deciduous forest (Kishkindha Region<sup>64</sup> (18-1 Kishkindhakand))

In search of Sita, Ram and Laxman were wandering in these forests where Kabandha directed them westwards, towards the Pampa sarovar<sup>65</sup> (35-7 Aranyakand) and Kiskandha. This sarovar (lake) lied to the west of Rishimukh hill and east of the Matang hill. At present their names are the same as the originals. The vegetation of this region is that of the dry and moist deciduous type. Fruit yielding varieties like jamun<sup>66</sup> (236-1 Ayodhyakand), banyan<sup>67</sup> (236-4 Ayodhyakand), plaksha (Indian fig), panasa (jackfruit), pipal<sup>68</sup> (3-73 Aranyakand), mango, sandalwood, etc.

#### 4. The Himalayan region(Himalayan Region<sup>69</sup>(234-3 Baal kand))

This region was located between two mountains- Kailash and Rishabh. Kailash is situated beyond the Trans Himalayan region, which is confirmed by the reference of Hanuman crossing the Himalayas to reach Kailasha. There existed Oshadhi peak, where several medicinal plants were found. Laxman was wounded and fell unconscious during his battle with Meghnath. The physician Sushena suggested for mritasanjeevanibuti<sup>70</sup>(3-5 Aranyakand)(capable of restoring life) to be used for his treatment. Hanuman rushed to the Dronagiri hills to fetch the sanjeevani plant. But he could not identify the plant, therefore he lifted the entire Dronagiri mountain and brought it to Lanka.

Deodar, bilwa, shalmali, Sanjivni, semal, silk cotton<sup>71</sup> (4-2 Baal kand), kushtha, etc. The Himalayan region was the main habitat of such vegetation.

#### 5. Evergreen forest(Lankan Region)

The main characteristics of the Lankan vegetation were the rock plants with adequate water resources. Varieties of lotus<sup>72</sup> (39-1 Aranyakand) of different colours such as golden, fiery red, dark coloured (anjana), blue (neela) and skin coloured<sup>73</sup> (5-15 Aranyakand (Valmika Ramayan)). A stream descended from a cloud like mountain, and made its way to lotus ponds and filled it with birds.

The Ramayan is replete with descriptions of trees and their uses. Sita on her way to the forest, worshiped a large banyan tree. The Ramayan also mentions the Ashoka tree in many places like Ashok vatika (where Sita was held captive by Ravan). There was a popular belief that the cutting of trees would bring about the destruction of the wood cutter's family. This indicates that the people at the time conserved and protected forests.

### CONCLUSION

Till date Ramayan remains as a perpetual source of inspiration, offering spiritual solace and Acting as a fountain-head of guidance for the masses. Valmiki Ramayan is a rich database for conducting multi-disciplinary studies. Further in depth analysis and research on this epic would pave the way to understand why and how we have certain species and varieties of grass and medicinal plants.

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