

A Varied Optic
Contemporary Studies on the *Rāmāyaṇa*

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Anklets Away: The Symbolism of Jewelry and Ornamentation in Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa

Abstract

This paper will examine how beauty -- both male and female -- is defined and articulated by Vālmīki in his monumental epic, the Rāmāyaṇa. Physical beauty is equated with ornamentation, a concept made clear in numerous passages throughout the epic. The inverse is also true in general; lack of ornamentation marks a lack of physical beauty. However, it is when there is absence of ornamentation, especially in regard to those very characters whose viability depends on their beauty, that we see the poetic genius of Vālmīki at work.

Who wears ornaments and why? Brides are adorned with jewelry, wives wear it, but widows remove their jewels and other ornamentation -- women undertaking suttee, however, ornament themselves.¹ Ornamentation of the body and the wearing of jewelry is known in the earliest extant literary records we have,² and by the time of the epics is pervasive. Thus, the wearing of jewelry in Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* is seemingly commonplace, but is it meaningful? The question is not original. Alf Hiltebeitel raises the issue of Draupadī's and Sītā's ornamentation, associating its significance with the two figures' connection with the Goddess [1980, 1981a, 1981b]. But his arguments are gender specific, focussing exclusively on the two epic heroines' wearing of ornaments. Sheldon Pollock makes mention

of ornaments in his translations of the *Ayodhyā* and *Aranyakāṇḍa* as [1986, 1991]. In his Introduction to the *Ayodhykāṇḍa*, he draws our attention to the fact that "Sītā at one point is said to be wearing jewelry then not wearing it, then again wearing it (34.17,54.16,82.13)" [1986:25], but attributes this only to the inconsistencies and discrepancies of Vālmīki's text [1986:25]. Again in his note on *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* 3.49.2 [1991: 323] he questions the significance of ornamentation. Here, he comments, "It is remarkable how frequently attention is called to the jewelry worn by *rākṣasas* (in the *Aranyakāṇḍa* alone 24.20, 25.7, 30.9, 33.8, 36.2, 36.13, 42.16, 47.7, 57.24)." Pollock, however, fails to take the matter any further, noting only, "What is unclear, however, is the significance we should attribute to this detail." It is my contention that in Vālmīki's text we can see a very clear pattern emerging as to who is marked as wearing jewelry and when, and that this patterning is significant. And, I believe and hope to demonstrate, that for Vālmīki the wearing of, exchanging of, and secreting away of jewelry is a clear reference to one's status as a sexual being.

The wearing of jewelry is not specifically associated with gender, although the specific types of jewelry mentioned are not uncommonly gender specific. The *rākṣasas* to which Pollock's comment refers are male.³ Vālmīki, however, does seem to make a connection between the wearers of ornaments, here the *rākṣasas*, and the nature of the individual wearing the ornaments. Take, for example, Vālmīki's first detailed description of the epic's major antagonist, the lord of the *rākṣasas*, Rāvaṇa. This passage is found in the third book of the epic, the *Aranyakāṇḍa*, and presents an imposing and heavily ornamented figure:

She [Sūrpanakhā] found Rāvaṇa in his splendid palace, radiant in his power, his advisers sitting beside him like the Maruts next to Vāsava. He was seated upon a golden throne radiant as the sun, and he looked like a fire on a golden altar blazing with rich oblations. . . .⁴ He had twenty arms and ten necks. His regalia was a wonder to behold. A broad-chested, mighty king, he was marked with all the marks of royalty. He sparkled with earrings of burnished gold and the glossy beryl he wore. His arms were handsome, his teeth bright white, his mouth huge, and he was as tall as a mountain. . . . The

rākṣasa woman beheld this savage and powerful brother of hers, clad in heavenly garments and jewels, adorned with heavenly garlands, the illustrious lord of *rākṣasas*, delight of the House of the Paulastyas. (3.30.4-5,8-9,1)⁵

Later, in the *Sundarakāṇḍa* as Hanumān searches the demon's residence, we are given another detailed description:

On that glittering bed, the great monkey saw the mighty lord of the *rākṣasas* sleeping. With his red eyes, great arms, garments shot with gold, and his precious dazzling earrings, he resembled a great storm cloud. His body smeared with fragrant red sandalpaste, he truly resembled a cloud laced with streaks of lightning and reddened in the sky at twilight. He was handsome and could take on any form at will. Surrounded by heavenly ornaments, he looked like Mount Māndara slumbering with its trees, forests, and thickets. He had now ceased his dalliance for the night and left off his drinking. And there-adorned with costly jewelry-he lay, the beloved of the *rākṣasa* maidens and the bringer of delight to the *rākṣasas*. (5.8.5-9)⁶

Again later in the *Sundarakāṇḍa* at *sarga* 47, Hanumān, as part of his intelligence gathering mission allows himself to be captured by the *rākṣasas*. As he is brought into the court he again describes the lord of the demons:

Then Hanumān gazed upon the immeasurably splendid lord of the *rākṣasas*, who sat before him like a rain-charged thundercloud resting on the peak of Mount Meru. With his priceless, glittering, golden crown set with masses of pearls, he was luminous and resplendent. He wore exquisite, golden jewelry made up largely of priceless gems and fastened with diamond pins. They seemed to be creations of the imagination. He was clothed in costly silks and covered with red sandalpaste. His body was beautifully adorned with various lovely designs. With his ten large and beautiful heads each with red eyes, terrifying appearance, large, sharp, and shining fangs, and pendulous lips, that powerful hero was as

splendid as Mount Mandara, its peaks filled with various savage beasts. Resembling a mass of black collyrium and with a sparkling necklace-its principal gemstone like the full moon-strung across his chest, he looked like a thundercloud crossed by a bright line of flying cranes. With their coating of fine sandalpaste, their armlets tightly fastened, and their bracelets flashing, his muscular arms resembled five-headed serpents. He was seated on a great and splendid crystal throne. It was exquisite, adorned with jeweled fastenings and covered with a magnificent cushion. He was closely attended by young women exquisitely ornamented, who stood all around him with yak-tail fly whisks in their hands. (5.47-2-13)⁷

While these passages highlight the physical prowess of the lord of the *rākṣasas*, they also clearly mark him as being ornamented with jewelry and compared to or surrounded by gold and jewels. But the description, especially the inclusion of the jewelry becomes more meaningful in the context of Vālmīki's description of Rāma. Compare for a moment, the opening passages of the *Bālakāṇḍa*, where the poet takes the opportunity to provide the audience with a detailed description of Rāma.

His name is Rāma and he was born in the House of Ikṣvāku. All men know of him, for he is self-controlled, mighty, radiant, steadfast, and masterful. He is wise and grounded in proper conduct. Eloquent and majestic, he annihilates his enemies. His shoulders are broad and his arms mighty. His neck is like a conch shell and his jaws are powerful. His chest is vast, and a subduer of his enemies, he wields a huge bow. His collarbone is set deep in muscle, his arms reach down to his knees, and his head is finely made. His brow is noble and his gait full of grace. His proportions are perfect and his limbs well-formed and symmetrical. Dark is his complexion and he is valorous. His chest is fully fleshed; he has large eyes. He is splendid and marked with all auspicious signs. He knows the ways of righteousness and is always true to his word. The welfare of his subjects is his constant concern. He is renowned, learned, pure, disciplined, and contemplative. He is the protector of all living things and the guardian of righteousness. Versed in the essence of the Vedas and their

subsidiary sciences, he is equally expert in the science of arms. He is versed in the essence of every science, learned in traditional lore, and highly intelligent. All the people love him, for he is good, cheerful, and clever. He is the constant resort of good men, as is the ocean of rivers. For he is noble and equable in all circumstances and always a pleasure to behold. The delight of his mother Kausalyā, he is gifted with every virtue. For he as deep as the ocean and as unyielding as the Himālayas. He is as mighty as Viṣṇu, but as pleasant to behold as the moon. In his wrath he resembles the fire at the end of time, yet he rivals the earth in forbearance. In charity he is the equal of Kubera, giver of wealth. . . . (1.1.8-19)⁸

What is noteworthy for our purposes is that despite the "thick" description of the physical and psychological makeup of the hero, there is not one reference to his body being ornamented nor is he compared with any colors or images suggestive of ornamentation, such as "golden" [R. Goldman 1984: 121-122]. Similar descriptive passages are repeated throughout the epic, especially in the *Sundarakāṇḍa*, which focuses much attention, serving as a meditation, as it were, on the description of the absent hero.⁹

The contrast between the protagonist and the antagonist is marked and intentional. Rāma maintains the law, Rāvaṇa breaks it. Rāma is self-controlled, while Rāvaṇa abducts the wives of others. At the same time both passages draw on similar images, albeit for purposes of contrast, providing an almost uncanny parallelism between the two figures. For example, both, not unexpectedly, focus on the physical size and martial prowess of the figures: Rāma's "chest is vast . . . he wields a huge bow. His collarbone is set deep in muscle, his arms reach down to his knees, and his head finely made," while Rāvaṇa "had twenty arms and ten necks. . . . A broad-chested, mighty king, . . . His arms were handsome, his teeth bright white, his mouth huge, and he was as tall as a mountain." Viṣṇu appears in both passages, presaging the epic's final battle. Rāma "is as mighty as Viṣṇu," while Rāvaṇa, "In combat with gods his body had been wounded in hundreds of places by blows from Viṣṇu's discus. . . ." Similarly juxtaposed is the figure of Kubera: Rāvaṇa of course has conquered his half-brother and taken his flying chariot Puṣpaka, while Rāma is said to be "in charity the equal of Kubera, giver of wealth."

Both the antagonist and the protagonist are clearly great beings and worthy foes.¹⁰ The virtual absence of any ornamentation in reference to Rāma- he seems, as it were, to be adorned with his virtues- when juxtaposed to the what appears as almost excessive and repeated identification of Rāvaṇa in terms of his ornamentation becomes more striking. Rāvaṇa has a golden throne, he looks "like fire on a golden altar blazing with rich ornaments." He "sparkles" with earrings of burnished gold and glossy beryl. He wears "exquisite, golden jewelry made up largely of priceless gems and fastened with diamond pins." But, what does this contrast signify?

The wearing of jewelry is, of course, not limited to males or *rākṣasas*. Women, not unexpectedly, are commonly associated with jewelry. The poetic description of the wives of Rāvaṇa-women of all backgrounds, *yakṣas*, *gandharvas*, and the like- found in the *Sundarakāṇḍa* is memorable for its erotic intensity as well as its careful attention to the women's of jewelry.¹¹

And there he saw reclining on the carpet a thousand beautiful women. They were wearing clothes and garlands of all different colors, and they wore every sort of dress and ornament. It was past midnight, and they had all succumbed to the power of drink and sleep. They had ceased their amorous play and now slept soundly in the dead of night. Lying there in slumber, the various sounds of their ornaments stilled, they collectively resembled a vast bed of lotuses whose *hamsas* and bees had fallen silent. (5.7.30-33)

The women lay there, their consciousness stolen by slumber. Their thick and heavy garlands were disordered, and their fine jewelry lay scattered about them from their bouts of drinking and physical exertions. Some of them had their *tilakas* smudged, and some had their anklets all awry; while some of those beautiful women had their necklaces tossed to one side. The pearl necklaces of some had been broken; the garments of others had fallen away. Indeed, with their belt-strings snapped, they resembled young fillies relieved of their heavy loads. Some of them, wearing beautiful earrings, their garlands crushed and torn, resembled flowering creepers crushed by mighty elephants in the great forest. Splendid pearl necklaces-shining with the luster of moonbeams-rested like sleeping *hamsas* between the breasts

of some of the women. The lapis lazuli necklaces that some wore looked like *kādamba* birds, while the gold chains of others resembled *cakravāka* birds. Their buttocks resembling sandbanks, the women looked like rivers crowded with *hamsas* and *kāraṇḍavas* and adorned with *cakravākas*. With their masses of tiny bells for lotus buds and their large gold ornaments for full-blown lotuses, with their amorous gestures for crocodiles and their radiant beauty for banks, the sleeping women resembled rivers. The lovely marks left on some of them, impressed on their tender limbs and nipples by their ornaments, looked like the ornaments themselves. (5.7.41-49)

Some of those beautiful young women-all adorned with bracelets-lay cushioning their heads on their arms and on their lovely upper garments. (5.7.56)

The passage makes numerous references to the disarray of the women's ornamentation from their recent lovemaking. The description of these women, it can be argued is, in fact, structurally dependent upon their jewelry and ornaments. What is opaque in the passages describing Rāvaṇa and the other *rākṣasas* mentioned by Pollock, is made clear in this passage: For here ornamentation is directly linked to sexual activity.

In this light Rāvaṇa's excessive association with jewelry and ornamentation discussed above is most apt. He is, after all, the character most marked by excess, particularly sexual excess.¹² The scene above describes his harem, his women, his sexual activities with the women, and his sexual excess. Contrasted with this is Rāma, a figure who is the paragon of sexual restraint. He has only one wife and unlike other males in the epic is willing to abandon her, even though she is innocent, for the sake of his kingdom.¹³ To emphasize this Vālmiki leaves his hero largely unadorned.

That Vālmiki chooses to describe the women of Rāvaṇa's harem, fresh from their exertions of lovemaking, so densely in terms of their ornamentation becomes even more significant, if we examine the descriptions of other women in the epic. For not all women are associated with the wearing of ornaments. Take, for example, Kausalyā, the senior wife of Daśaratha. Vālmiki has remarkably little to say about the physical appearance of this important figure. Kausalyā is a somewhat shadowy figure through much of the epic, one

often mentioned but rarely seen or heard from. One of her major appearances, if not her main one, occurs in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*. When Rāma first comes to her, after hearing of his imminent coronation, "Kausalyā stood with her eyes closed . . . from the moment she received word the her son was to be consecrated as prince regent on *puṣya* day, she had been controlling her breathing and meditation on the Primal Being, Janārdana."¹⁴ Then as Rāma comes to tell her that he is going to be banished, Vālmīki pauses to describes her as, "Dressed in linen, intent upon her vow and with deep delight, she was then pouring an oblation into the fire in accordance with the Vedic verses and pronouncing benedictions."¹⁵ The description is of a pious woman who has focused her energies and life on her son, rather than on her husband.¹⁶ If one associates jewelry with sexual activity as suggested above, the absence of ornamentation or mention of jewelry can then be understood as intentional on the part of the poet. For, Kausalyā is engaged in religious activities, and such activities are normally marked by sexual abstinence in the tradition.¹⁷ Moreover, as the elder wife she is no longer erotically favored by her husband, Daśaratha, and has been replaced by a sexually active younger wife.¹⁸ She has been located outside of the world of sexualities.

Now let us turn our attention to yet another group of women, women who like the women of Rāvaṇa's harem are described in great and graphic detail. These are the female guards of Sītā. They are *rākṣasīs*, and markedly dissimilar the women described above:

Straining to see Vaidehī, Hanumān, son of Māruta the wind god, saw a short distance away - frightful-looking *rākṣasa* women. One had but one eye. One had but a single ear, while another's ears covered her entire upper body. One had no ears at all. Another had pointed ears, while yet another had her nose on her forehead. One had a huge head; another's neck was long and thin. One had hardly any hair, while another was completely bald. Yet another's hair covered her like a woolen blanket. One had pendulous ears and a bulbous forehead; another's breasts and belly hung down. One's lips protruded, while another's lips were on her chin. Yet another's mouth hung open, while still another's knees stuck out. One was very short; another very tall. One was hunchbacked, another was deformed, while yet another was a dwarf. One was snaggle-toothed; another had a sunken face:

One had yellow eyes, while another's features were distorted. The best of monkeys stared at those *rākṣasa* women, whose appearance caused his fur to bristle. They were deformed, yellowish, black, wrathful, fond of quarrels, and armed with spears, mallets, and war-hammers of black iron. Some had the faces of boars, deer, tigers, buffalo, goats, or jackals. Some had feet like those of elephants, camels, and horses. Others' heads were sunk into their bodies. Some had only one hand; others one foot. Some had the ears of donkeys, horses, cows, elephants, or monkeys. Some had no noses; others had huge ones. Some had crooked noses or noses without nostrils. Some had noses like elephants' trunks, while others had nostrils in their foreheads. Some had the feet of elephants, some had enormous feet, some had feet like cows' hooves, and some had hairy feet. Some had enormous heads, necks, breasts, and bellies. Some had enormous mouths and eyes, while others had long tongues and nails. Some of those dreadful-looking *rākṣasa* women had the faces of goats, elephants, cows, sows, horses, camels, or donkeys. They held lances and war-hammers; and they were wrathful and fond of quarrels. Those *rākṣasa* women were snaggletoothed. Their hair was like smoke, and their faces were hideous. Addicted to meat and wine, they were constantly guzzling strong drink. Their bodies were smeared with flesh and blood, for such was their food. (5.15.4-17).¹⁹

The women here are grotesquely unattractive. They are working-class women, as it were, sharply differentiated from the attractive aristocratic women of Rāvaṇa's harem. This and the parallel passage at 5.20 provide a frame in which the unattractiveness of these women surrounds and contrast sharply with Sītā's delicate beauty,²⁰ which we will discuss below. These grotesque and terrifying women are partly intended to serve as a foil for the heroine. Their terrifying mien and physical appearance is acutely brought to the forefront through their animal body parts, often anatomically misplaced. The passage leaves little to the imagination: these women are not intended to be physically attractive. Despite earlier associations of *rākṣasas* and the wearing of jewelry, here for these grotesquely asexual *rākṣasīs*, there is a marked lack of such ornamentation.²¹

That we can establish an association between the wearing of jewelry and sexual activity and desirability can be further attested by looking at the passage in which Kaikeyī, Bharata's mother, coerces her husband, Daśaratha, to give her two boons. The passage, found in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, really starts with Mantharā, Kaikeyī's servant, arriving in a rage to tell Kaikeyī of Rāma's impending coronation. Kaikeyī throughout the passage is called golden and is described as wearing abundant and costly jewelry. Mantharā herself, like the *rākṣasīs* in Rāvaṇa's employment, is a working woman. She is deformed, a hunchback. At first, hearing her news, Kaikeyī is delighted²² but Mantharā convinces Kaikeyī that her position in the harem is in danger (from Kausalyā) if Rāma is made king. Finally succeeding in persuading her, Mantharā tells Kaikeyī what to do:

Now go into your private chamber, daughter of Aśvapati, as if in a fit of rage. Put on a dirty garment, lie down on the bare ground, and don't speak to him, don't even look at him. (2.9.16).²³

Incited by Mantharā, Kaikeyī then retreats to her private chamber, "puffed up with the intoxicating power of her beauty":

There the lovely lady removed her pearl necklace, worth many hundred thousands, and her other costly and beautiful jewelry. And then, under the spell of the hunchback Mantharā's words, the golden Kaikeyī got down upon the floor and said to her: "Hunchback, go inform the king that I will surely die right here unless Bharata receives as his portion the land and Rāghava, as his, the forest." And uttering these ruthless words, the lady put all her jewelry aside and lay down upon the ground bare of any spread, like a fallen *kinnara* woman. (2.9.43-46)

As soon as Daśaratha has given the orders for Rāma's coronation, he retreats to Kaikeyī's private chambers, the expected site of sexual activity. Daśaratha enters only find his beloved on the floor; he is filled with sorrow and begins to caress her. He promises to do anything for her, even if it costs him his life.²⁴ The removal of jewelry,

the lying down on the floor, and the wearing of a "dirty" garment, mark Kaikeyī as unattractive, that is sexually unappealing or unavailable; and Daśaratha immediately understands the message.

"I do not understand, my lady, why you should be angry. Has someone offended you, or shown you disrespect, that you should lie here in the dust, my precious, and cause me such sorrow? What reason have you to lie upon the floor as if possessed by a spirit, driving me to distraction, when you are so precious to me?" (2.10.6-7)

"I and my people, we all bow to your will. I could not bring myself to thwart any wish of yours, not if it cost me my life. Tell me what your heart desires, for all the earth belongs to me, as far as the wheel of my power reaches." (2.10.11-12)

The epic makes it clear that Daśaratha is infatuated with his young wife, willing to do anything to keep her happy. Kaikeyī's removal of her jewelry sends a unmistakable message to her husband that she is not sexually available and will not be until her demands are satisfied. Only then will she put on her ornaments and be available to him.

Perhaps the issue that becomes most significant and puzzling in this discussion of the symbolic association of sexual activity and jewelry, is that of Sītā's possession of jewelry during her exile and, in particular, of her special crest-jewel ornament (*cuḍāmaṇi*) that she has secreted away during her abduction and imprisonment.

This issue of Sītā's jewels is very complex. When Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, and Sītā leave Ayodhyā, Kaikeyī makes it clear that they are to abandon all wealth before they go into exile. Before departing, Rāma and Sītā give away their belongings, including their jewelry, to various dependents and brahmins.²⁵ As they take their leave of their father, Kaikeyī insists that the threesome give up their finery and dress in barkcloth, the garb of ascetics. In a touching scene, an embarrassed Sītā asks her husband, "How do the sages who live in the forest put on barkcloth?"²⁶ And,

At once Rāma, champion of righteousness, came up to her and with his own hands fastened it over Sitā's silks. (2.33.12)

Note the poignancy of the passage as Rāma places the barkcloth over Sitā's silken garments, a symbolic covering up, as it were of sexual activity. Sitā like Rāma is supposed to abandon her finery for a life of restraint and deprivation in the forest. But Daśaratha relents at the last minute, and orders Sumantra to "fetch precious garments and choice ornaments for Vaidehī, calculating against the number of years."²⁷ Then,

Noble Vaidehī, on the point of leaving for the forest, adorned her noble limbs with sparkling jewelry. (2.34.17)

Later, at the end of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, Anasūyā, wife of Atri presents Sitā with gifts of "raiment, cream, jewelry, and garlands."²⁸ The issue arises as to why Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa are sent off in barkcloth garments, garments that represent restraint, poverty and celibacy, but Sitā is allowed to wear silk, and jewelry, signs that mark beauty and sexuality. The answer in part can be attributed to a gender bias; men are stronger and can withstand the hardships of life, whereas women are weak (*abalā*). More importantly, however, is the fact that the plot of Vālmīki's epic cannot move forward without Sitā going to the forest,²⁹ and moreover she must be represented as a sexually viable/desirable figure. She needs to be attractive enough to have Rāvaṇa desire to abduct her. The jewels given to her by Daśaratha and Anasūyā symbolically provide Sitā with such erotic viability.

In the *Araṇyakāṇḍa*, the presence and absence of jewelry become more clearly symbolic. We have already heard Vālmīki's dense description of Rāvaṇa discussed above. But, when Rāvaṇa comes to abduct Sitā, he is disguised as a wandering mendicant, a holy man, "he had come in the garb of a twice-born-a brahman with a begging bowl and saffron robe;" when she saw these accouterments, it was impossible to refuse him, and so she extended him an invitation befitting a brahman.³⁰ He presents himself as someone who has given up the pleasures of life, someone whom Sitā, although vulnerable, should not

have to fear. He has taken off his fine garb and his ornamentation, and is marked as an asexual figure.

Sitā however is described in very feminine, in fact in very sexual, terms. Even her garments of yellow silk reflect the color of her jewels. They are of fine luxurious material, not linen like that of Kausalyā, they are yellow, later called "golden," and, like golden jewelry, are compared to lightning.³¹

But the words Vālmīki has Rāvaṇa use to describe Sitā are such as to leave no doubt in the audiences' mind of his intentions despite his garb:

"Who are you, golden woman dressed in garments of yellow silk, wearing a lovely lotus garland, and like a lotus pond yourself? Are you the goddess Modesty or Fame? Are you Śrī or lovely Lakṣmī or perhaps an *apsaras*, lovely lady? Could you be Prosperity, shapely woman, or easygoing Pleasure? Your teeth are bright white, tapered, and even; your eyes are large and clear, rosy at the corner, black in the center. Your hips are full and broad, your thighs smooth as an elephant's trunk. And these, your delightful breasts, how round they are, so firm and gently heaving; how full and lovely, smooth as two palm fruits, with their nipples standing stiff and the rarest gems to adorn them. Graceful lady with your lovely smile, lovely teeth and lovely eyes, you have swept my heart away like a river in flood that sweeps away its banks. Your waist I could compass with my fingers; how fine is your hair, how firm your breasts. No goddess, no *gandharva* woman, no *yakṣa* or *kinnara* woman, nor mortal woman so beautiful have I ever seen before on the face of this earth. Your beauty, unrivaled in all the worlds, your delicacy and youth, and the fact of your living here in the woods stir the deepest feelings in me. I urge you to go home, this is no place for you to be living. For this is the lair of the dreaded *rākṣasas*, who can change their form at will. In the most delightful palaces, in luxuriant, fragrant city gardens is where you should be strolling. To my mind you deserve the finest garlands and beverages and raiment, and the finest husband, lovely black-eyed lady. Could you be one of the Rudras or Maruts, sweet-smiling shapely woman, or one of the Vasus, perhaps. You look like a goddess to me." (3.44.15-26)

Like Kaikeyī, she is "golden,"³² her breasts are "delightful, round, so firm and gently heaving; full and lovely, smooth as two palm fruits," and adorned with "the rarest gems." The passage is as physically and sexually explicit as Vālmiki's epic gets, comparing in tone to that of *Sundarakāṇḍa* discussed above.³³

Rāvaṇa then reveals his own true form:

With eyes flaming bright red, with earrings of burnished gold, with bow and arrows, he became once more the majestic ten-faced stalker of the night. (3.47.6)

With eyes flaming bright red in his rage, lowering like a bank of storm clouds, clad in a red garment Rāvaṇa stood before Maithilī, staring at her, perfect jewel of a woman, with her jet-black hair, her sunlike radiance, and the fine clothes and ornaments that she wore. (3.47.9-10)

Note that Rāvaṇa's true form, the form in which he will abduct Sītā, requires that he be ornamented with "earrings of burnished gold." Sītā's finery is not neglected either at this most crucial moment of the epic not only is she a "perfect jewel" of a woman, but she is wearing fine clothes and ornaments. Moreover, she is once again associated with the color gold, for her radiance is "sunlike."

As Rāvaṇa carries her up into the sky in his chariot, Sītā is again described:

All adorned in ornaments of burnished gold and dressed in garments of yellow silk, the princess looked like a streak of lightning flashing from a storm cloud. (3.50.13)

A few verses later,

Maithilī was golden skinned, the *rākṣasa* deep blue-black, and folded within his arms she looked like the star that glitters within a sapphire. Fair as a lotus, golden hued, with ornaments of burnished gold, the daughter of Janaka in Rāvaṇa's embrace looked like a streak of lightning caught within a storm cloud. The sound of Vaidehī's ornaments made

the overlord of the *rākṣasas* still more like a rain cloud, pure blue-black and now sounding as well. (3.50.21-23)

Here Sītā is compared to a "star that glitters within a sapphire," again she is golden, and now, like Rāvaṇa, has "ornaments of burnished gold." But as she is dragged into the sky, her ornaments begin to fall off:

Vaidehī's jewel-studded anklet was shaken from her foot, and gently tinkling it fell like an arc of lightning . . . (3.50.27)

Her flame-colored ornaments were scattered noisily upon the ground, falling like stars from the firmament when their store of merit has been exhausted. Shining like the moon, the overlord of stars, Vaidehī's pearl necklace slipped from between her breasts and fell like the white Ganges descending from heaven. (3.50.30-31)

What is the significance of Sītā's ornaments falling off at this particular juncture in the epic story? Or do they actually fall off? Here the inference is that the jewels actually slip off, but at the beginning of sarga 52, she removes them intentionally:

The large-eyed, shapely Maithilī dropped her golden silk shawl among them, and her lovely ornaments, in hopes they might tell Rāma. She unfastened her garment and let it fall with her jewelry among them, but the ten-necked Rāvaṇa was too wild with excitement to notice she had done so. (3.52.2-3)

Sītā is sending a message to Rāma. Moreover, it is an action that Rāvaṇa, it seems, would have prevented had he seen it, but he is too excited to notice. The narrative use of the jewelry is clear. The fallen ornaments can provide a clue for Rāma. The symbolism of the falling off of or the removal of the jewelry of Sītā becomes more meaningful in light of the present discussion. For, again like Kaikeyī and Kausalyā, once deprived of ornaments, Sītā is no longer sexually available or viable. Her symbolic sexuality is left behind, as it were, in Rāma's keeping.³⁴

Rāma searches the forest for Sitā, and finally at the beginning of the *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, when he meets Sugrīva and Hanumān, he is told that the monkeys have found her golden ornaments. The monkeys have carefully protected the jewelry keeping them secreted deep in a mountain cave:

The monkey took the shawl and bright ornaments and showed them to Rāma, saying, "look at this." Then, as Rāma took that garment and the bright ornaments, tears covered his face as mist covers the moon. His face was stained with tears he shed for love of Sitā. Crying, "Ah, beloved," he lost his composure and fell to the ground. Repeatedly he pressed those fine ornaments to his heart and sighted deeply like an angry snake in its burrow. Through an unbroken stream of tears, Rāma saw Saumitri by his side and began to lament piteously: Look, Lakṣmaṇa, here are the shawl and ornaments that Vaidehī let fall from her body to the ground as she was being carried away. (4.6.13-18)

Rāma's reaction to the jewelry and garment is one of physical intensity. He presses it to his body, as if caressing it. Finally, the sight of it causes him to "lose his composure." He laments piteously.

The narrative significance of the discarded jewelry is once again noted, this time by Rāma. Vālmīki also makes it clear that Rāma understands its symbolic meaning as well. For, he says to Lakṣmaṇa,

"As she was being carried off, Sitā must surely have dropped these ornaments onto grassy ground, and that is why they look like this." (4.6.19)

What exactly does the phrase, "that is why they look like this," (*tathārūpam*) mean here? And what is the significance of Rāma saying it? The commentators are in agreement that the ornaments look as they always had, that is to say they are undamaged. According to Govindarāja, they are undamaged because they fell in a soft place. Moreover, according to him, Rāma is surprised, it seems, that the ornaments are intact. The fact that the jewels are not broken or damaged, as they were in the *Sundarakāṇḍa* scene after the violent

lovmaking scene of the women in the harem, would argue for Sitā's sexuality being left intact, as it were, that is to say, not violated or damaged.

At this juncture in the epic, the southern or vulgate version of the epic inserts a well-known verse, which for the purposes of our discussion is very significant. Lakṣmaṇa, being asked to identify the jewelry, responds:

"I do not recognize these armlets, I do not recognize these earrings. But I do recognize these anklets because of my constant bowing at her feet."³⁵

This oft quoted verse makes clear that Lakṣmaṇa's devotion to and total subservience to his older brother, Rāma, is so great that he would not even look at his brother's wife. Such a look would have sexual connotations.³⁶ That he cannot recognize her armlets and her earrings plays on this understanding and further strengthens the argument for the connection between sexuality and the wearing of jewelry.

Jewelry once more becomes a focal index of sexuality in the *Sundarakāṇḍa*, the fifth book of the epic. Here Hanumān finds the abducted heroine in Rāvaṇa's pleasure garden. It is attached to the *antahpuram*, or harem, and is marked as a site of sexual activity.³⁷ Here the beautiful and touching description of Sitā as she languishes in the *aśoka* garden stands in stark contrast to not only her surroundings but to earlier descriptions of her. The passage is remarkable for its poetry, some of the finest in the epic, for its pathos, and for its seemingly utter inconsistency and confusion over Sitā's jewelry.

As Hanumān searches the garden and its environs,

Then he saw a woman clad in a soiled garment and surrounded by *rākṣasa* women. She was gaunt with fasting. She was dejected and she sighed repeatedly. She looked like the shining sliver of the waxing moon. Her radiance was lovely; but with her beauty now only faintly discernible, she resembled a flame of fire occluded by thick smoke. She was clad in a single, fine yellow garment, now much worn. Covered with dirt and lacking ornaments, she resembled a

pond without lotuses. Ashamed, tormented by grief, disconsolate, and suffering, she looked like the constellation Rohiṇī occluded by the planet Mars. She was dejected, her face covered with tears. She was emaciated through fasting. She was depressed, given over to sorrow. Brooding constantly, she was consumed with her grief. No longer seeing the people dear to her but only the hosts of *rākṣasa* women, she was like a doe cut off from her herd and surrounded by a pack of hounds. She had a single braid-like a black serpent-falling down her back. Deserving only happiness and unaccustomed to calamity, she was consumed with sorrow. Closely examining that wide-eyed woman-so dirty and emaciated-he reasoned from these indicative signs, "She must be Sitā!" (5.13.18-25)

The description is one that evokes great pathos in the audience, she is covered with dirt, wearing a single soiled garment and above all lacking ornaments. She is like an ascetic woman meditating on her lord. But our heroine must have some redeeming features, for not only did the antagonist abduct her, but her husband is willing to literally go to the ends of the earth to find her. Hanumān continues:

"This woman looks exactly like the one I saw earlier being carried off by that *rākṣasa*, who can take on any form at will." Sitā's face was like the full moon; her eyebrows were beautiful; her breasts were lovely and full. With her radiance that lady banished the darkness from all directions. Her hair was jet black; her lips like bimba fruit. Her waist was lovely, and her posture was perfect. Her eyes were like lotus petals, and she looked like Rati, wife of Manmatha, god of love.(5.13.26-28)

But again we are reminded that though beautiful, she is still virtuous and faithful:

That lovely woman-as cherished by all living things as the radiance of the full moon-was seated on the ground like an ascetic woman practicing austerity. Sighing constantly, that timorous woman resembled a daughter-in-law of a serpent

lord. By virtue of the vast net of sorrow spread over her, her radiance was dimmed like that of a flame of fire obscured by a shroud of smoke. She was like a blurred memory or a fortune lost. She was like faith lost or hope dashed, like success undermined by catastrophe or intellect dulled. She was like a reputation lost through false rumors. She was distraught at being prevented from rejoining Rāma and anguished by her abduction by the *rākṣasa*. That delicate, fawn-eyed woman was looking about here and there. Her sorrowful face with its black-tipped eyelashes was covered with a flood of tears. She sighed again and again. Dejected, covered with dirt and grime, and devoid of ornaments-though she was worthy of them-she resembled the light of the moon, the king of stars, obscured by a black storm cloud. As he examined Sitā closely, Hanumān's mind was once more afflicted with uncertainty; for she seemed barely discernible, like some Vedic text once learned by heart but now nearly lost through lack of recitation. It was only with great difficulty that Hanumān was able to recognize Sitā without her ornaments, just as one might make out the sense of a word whose meaning had been changed through want of proper usage. Still, after closely examining the wide-eyed, blameless princess, he concluded that this was indeed Sitā, confirming his judgment through the telltale signs. (5.13.29-38)

Yet again, we are reminded of Sitā's perfect beauty:

Then he noticed on Vaidehī's body-beautifying her limbs-the mass of jewelry that Rāma had described. Though blackened with long use, her beautifully formed earrings, her finely crafted 'dog's teeth,' and the handsome jewelry on her hands, variegated with gemstones and coral, are all in their proper places. I think they must be the very ones that Rāma described. I do not see the ones that fell back there, but those that have not fallen off are undoubtedly the very ones described by Rāma. Then, caught in a tree, where she had let it fall, the monkeys spied her splendid, yellow upper garment. It looked like a sheet of gold. On the ground they also found the large, jingling pieces of jewelry that she had thrown down. Although this garment of hers is exceedingly worn from long use, still, surely, it is the same splendid color as the other.

This must be Rāma's beloved golden-hued queen, who, though she is lost to him, has not departed from his heart." (5.13.39-46)

The passage appears problematic. At verses 20, 35, and 37 she is described as having no ornaments, yet here two verses after this last mention of a lack of ornamentation, we are given a detailed inventory of Sitā's jewelry. Does Vālmīki nod? Or is the use of the jewelry here more symbolic. The verses are all well attested and solidly belong to the critical edition. It is equally doubtful that Vālmīki forgot so quickly that Sitā was lacking ornaments or was an unsophisticated poet.³⁸ If one looks more closely at the structure of the passage an internal logic appears, one that allows the seemingly contradictory presence and absence of the jewelry to be understood.³⁹ The passage fluctuates between describing Sitā on the one hand as a woman who is sexually restrained and on the other as and sexually available. Thus in verses 18-25, we are given a description of Sitā as she appears in the *aśokavana*, like an ascetic woman, thus "lacking ornaments," but in verse 26-28, Hanumān reminds us of the woman he saw being abducted. Verses 29-38 again locate us in the *aśokavana*, and again an ascetic, asexual Sitā is described. Verses 39-42 highlight the perfect beauty of the heroine, but note that her description in these verses, as in verses 26-28, is carefully framed to refer back to an earlier time, the time when Rāma last saw her, before her abduction. Finally, verses 39-46 present her again in the *aśokavana*, but now the jewels and gold, silken garments are removed from her body.

The jewelry is absent just in those places in which Sitā's sexuality must be understood as repressed, while, when Hanumān describes her as a potentially sexual, i.e., as the rightful wife of Rāma, she is depicted as wearing jewelry or being associated with it. At least some of the commentators, who are generally unconcerned with this issue, indirectly support this in their comments to verse 39. The phrase, "beautifying her limbs," is troublesome to them, as they are apparently worried about the presence of jewelry on Sitā. The word "limbs" (*gātra*), in the critical edition in verse 39 is marked as uncertain. The commentators aligned with Govindarāja, i.e., Maheśvaratīrtha, Rāmānuja, and Uḍāli read instead *śākhā*, "branch," thus reading "beautify a branch." In commenting on this verse, Maheśvaratīrtha

notes, "By this expression ("beautifying a branch") we are to understand that because of the impropriety of wearing jewelry while separated from Rāma, Sitā had removed her ornaments and placed them on a branch." Govindarāja has a similar explanation. Even so, the true potency of the jewelry cannot be allowed and it is "blackened," or tarnished so that it is present but occluded.

Before concluding, I would like to examine one more scene, a scene central to the epic narrative, in light of the above discussion. At sarga 36 of the *Sundarakāṇḍa*, during the conversation between Sitā and Hanumān, Sitā gives Hanumān a special token of recognition to take to Rāma, it is her hair ornament, her *cūḍāmaṇi*. Giving Hanumān her message to Rāma, she says:

"You must rescue me, my hero, whom wicked Rāvaṇa has imprisoned through deceit, just as Kauśikī was rescued from the underworld Pātāla." Then, taking out an exquisite, heavenly hair ornament she had kept wrapped in her garment, Sitā gave it to Hanumān with the words, "You must give this to Rāghava." The heroic monkey took that unsurpassed and magnificent gem and placed it on his finger, for he could not put it on his arm. (5.36.51-52)

That this piece of jewelry is a hair ornament is particularly significant in this context.⁴⁰ Hair and how it is worn are symbolic of sexuality.⁴¹ Thus women whose husbands are alive and well wear their hair ornamented and well coifed. When one's husband is away or departed one wears one's hair in a style called the *ekavenī*, one single plait down the back, untied and unkempt hair, like that *rākṣasīs*, indicates unrestrained sexuality. The grabbing of hair, especially of women's hair is equated with sexual assault (note that Rāvaṇa grabs Sitā's hair in 3.47.16). Thus, the fact that Sitā's ornament has been secreted away even more intensely associates it with sexual activity.

This hair ornament, we are to learn in the next sarga, has a history and is very special to both Sitā and Rāma, for she tells Hanumān that the jewel "will remind Rāma of three people: my mother, King Daśaratha, and myself." (5.37.2). Of all her jewelry, this piece is most prized by Sitā. It is the one, unlike the others, that has not been discarded, or lost, or even tarnished. Instead it has been kept hidden away wrapped inside of Sitā's garments where no one could see

it. It is the jewel that only the closest members of her family know about, her mother, her father-in-law and her husband.⁴²

Now in the context of the epic narrative, Sītā has already provided Hanumān with an *abhijñāna*, or a token of recognition, to give Rāma: in the form of the intimate narrative of the crow.⁴³ Why then is there need for a second *abhijñāna*, or is this second token merely redundant? Let us momentarily re-examine the larger context of the Hanumān-Sītā episode-Hanumān initially provides Sītā with a verbal testimony that he is a messenger of Rāma, by reciting the history of and description of Rāma, secondly he gives Sītā Rāma's signet ring, an implement with which one marks possessions. Sītā is, as it were, marked as belonging to Rāma. In return, Sītā first provides as a token of recognition for Rāma, a parallel oral testimony, the story of the crow. The story is intimate; one which only Rāma and Sītā (and the crow) know about. Secondly, Sītā provides her most precious jewel, her *cūḍāmaṇi*, clearly a parallel token to Rāma's signet ring, but one that has a substantially different meaning. For this jewel represents the closest and most intimate location, secreted away on her body, wrapped in her garments, one known only to a few people. This is no ordinary jewel, but one that sends a clear message to Rāma that Sītā has protected and hidden her sexuality. She has saved it for her lord and husband. For Vālmīki then, the *cūḍāmaṇi* is the quintessential marker of Sītā's sexual viability-protected by her mother, passed on to her father-in-law and then to husband, kept hidden away during her abduction and imprisonment until it could be returned to her husband. As Sītā gives the jewel to Hanumān, the transfer signals for the audience the symbolic return of Sītā or rather of her sexuality to Rāma, and so marks the turning point of the epic. Vālmīki can thus symbolically allow his heroine to be "sexual" provided that her sexuality is hidden and kept intact to be returned to her husband.

If we return momentarily to Pollock's original question, we can now acknowledge that there is a clear significance to the seemingly excessive association of *rākṣasas* and jewelry. It is not accidental that women and *rākṣasas* are most frequently associated with such ornamentation. Women are traditionally considered hyper-sexualized beings so are *rākṣasas*-traditionally defined as: *nāri pratyakṣarākṣasī* (a woman is nothing but a *rākṣasī*); and the jewelry they wear becomes symbolic of that sexuality. This association is not accidental on the part of Vālmīki but is integral to the internal logic of his larger

narrative. It is one that, taken in a larger context, shows a pattern that is consistent and meaningful throughout the epic. It is only for us as *rasikas* of the poem and students of the epic to pause long enough to appreciate that narrative logic.

Notes

¹ Alf Hildebeitel, correctly in my opinion, aligns the wearing of jewels with auspiciousness, and a woman's status as a *sumanigālī* (Hildebeitel 1981).

² For example *Rgveda* 10.125.

³ In fact, in Vālmīki, *rākṣasīs* are rarely mentioned as wearing ornaments, an issue that is addressed below.

⁴ All references are to the critical edition of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. All translations are taken from the Princeton translation of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (Robert P. Goldman, et al) unless otherwise noted. The omitted verses are:

A hero invincible in combat with gods, *gandharvas*, spirits, or great seers, he looked like Death himself with jaws agape. He carried lightning-bolt wounds received in clashes with gods and asuras. His chest was seamed with scars where Airāvata's pointed tusks had gored him. (3.30.6-7)

⁵ Pollock 1991, p. 150-151.

⁶ Goldman and Sutherland Goldman 1996, p. 135.

⁷ Goldman and Sutherland Goldman 1996, pp. 247-48.

⁸ See too *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* 1.10-28.

⁹ Goldman and Goldman 1996, pp.17-19. For an example of a detailed anatomical description of Rāma, see *Sundarakāṇḍa* 33.

¹⁰ Don't forget that Rāvaṇa is the abductor and ravager of women as well. See *Sundarakāṇḍa* 5.7.5; 5.10.22 and Goldman and Goldman 1996, pp. 357,583 and *Uttarakāṇḍa* 17,24,26.

¹¹ 5.7.30- 63.

¹² See R. Goldman's paper in this volume, (XXX p. 15 of original). In the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, Rāvaṇa's sexual excess is again brought to the forefront. See for example *Uttarakāṇḍa* 17, where Rāvaṇa ravishes Vedavati, 24, where he abducts women and ravishes them, and 26 where he ravishes Rambhā.

¹³ *Uttarakāṇḍa* 42-47 and Goldman and Sutherland Goldman 1996, pp. 70-74.

¹⁴ 2.4.32-33.

¹⁵ 2.12.7.

¹⁶ This becomes an issue later as well, where Kausalyā begs Rāma to take her to the forest, but he refuses because she is married and should stay and serve her husband. *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* 21, especially verses 20-21.

¹⁷ Goldman 1998.

¹⁸ Sutherland 1991.

¹⁹ See Goldman and Goldman 1996, pp. 157-58. The women are described again in similar terms at 5.20.31-33

²⁰ Goldman Forthcoming

²¹ The only possessions mentioned of these women are their weapons, weapons of war, weapons that carry with them phallic symbolism (*Sundarakāṇḍa* 22.10-11). Weapons are masculine implements for Vālmiki as testified to by the fact that Rāma and Rāvaṇa are described in terms of their weapons and their prowess, their manliness as it were, is projected onto their weapons. For a description of male *rākṣasas*, who are members of Rāvaṇa's forces, see 5.3.29-33. Especially note verse 22, where they are said to be adorned with "the finest ornaments [*varābharaṇabhūṣitān*]."

²² Note that Kausalyā gives Mantharā a piece of jewelry (2.7.28). See footnote below.

²³ The power of ornamentation to transform its possessor into an object of desire is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in Kaikeyī's promised rewards to Mantharā. Here, Mantharā, deformed and marked as evil because of that deformity, virtually takes on a new persona once she is marked with jewelry and associated with the color gold.

Kaikeyī, pleased with Mantharā, says:

"There are hunchbacks who are misshapen, crooked and hideously ugly—but not you, you are lovely, you are bent no more than a lotus in the breeze. Your chest is arched, raised as high as your shoulders, and down below your waist, with its lovely navel, seems as if it had grown thin in envy of it. Your girdle-belt beautifies your hips and sets them mingling. Your legs are set strong under you, while your feet are long. With your wide buttocks, Mantharā, and your garment of white linen, you are as resplendent as a wild goose when you go before me. And this huge hump of yours, wide as the hub of a chariot wheel—your clever ideas must be stored in it, your political wisdom and magic powers. And there, hunchback, is where I will drape you with a garland made of gold, once Bharata is consecrated and Rāghava has gone to the forest. When I have accomplished my purpose, my lovely, when I am satisfied, I will anoint your hump with precious liquid gold. And for your face I will have them fashion an elaborate and beautiful forehead mark of gold and exquisite jewelry for you, hunchback. Dressed in a pair of lovely garments you shall go about like a goddess; with that face of yours that challenges the moon, peerless in visage; and you shall strut holding your head high before the people who hate me. (2. 930-38)

²⁴ 2.10.11-12.

²⁵ 2.28.18-20-2.29

²⁶ 2.33.10

²⁷ 2.34.15.

²⁸ 2.110.20

²⁹ *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* 2.4.77-78 acknowledges this itself, when Sitā begging Rāma to let her accompany him to the story, finally falls back upon the story itself, and says, "I will tell you something else, which having heard, you will take me to the forest. Repeatedly *Rāmāyaṇas* have been heard by many twice-borns; You tell me in which one does Rāma go to the forest without Sitā?

Therefore, I will go with you as your companion in every way." See too Ramanujan 1991, p. 33.

³⁰ 3.44.33.

³¹ 3.50.13

³² Sitā and Kaikeyī are both described as golden. Later, Sitā is again called "golden" by Rāvaṇa at 3.45.23 "Now that I have set eyes on you, flawless, golden lady dressed in silk, I shall no longer take any pleasure in my own wives." Mandodarī, the chief queen of Rāvaṇa, is also described as "golden-skinned (5.8.48)." It is clearly a trait of sexually-viable, attractive women (and men).

³³ See too Rāvaṇa's seduction of Sitā in the *Sundarakāṇḍa* 5.18.

³⁴ I would argue that the monkeys are important here as well, as they are associated with "sexuality" and aggressive sexual behavior (R. Goldman 1989). It is no accident that the monkeys keep the jewels hidden in a cave

³⁵ 4. 147*, lines 3, 4:

nāhaṃ jānāmi keyūre nāhaṃ jānāmi kuṇḍale/
nūpure tv abhūjānāmi nityaṃ pādābhivandanāt//

³⁶ Goldman 1997.

³⁷ Goldman Forthcoming.

³⁸ The commentators themselves are at pains to explain away the seeming contradiction.

³⁹ The discussion occurs on the commentary to 5.13.39 (See Goldman and Goldman 1996, p. 394; notes on 13.39). Kaṭaka, on the other hand, vigorously repudiates this reading and the inferences that underlie it. He defends his reading as *pāṅktah*, "authentic," and denounces the reading of Maheśvarafirtha and Govindarāja as ridiculous and contradictory to the stated facts. He argues that if Sitā had really divested herself of the jewelry described by Rāma and placed it on a high branch, then Hanumān, not seeing them, would have inferred that this was clearly not Sitā. Moreover, he argues, the following verses make it very clear that she is wearing her jewelry. He refutes the contention of Govindarāja and Maheśvarafirtha that Sitā would have removed her jewelry in the conventional gesture of grieving for a lover from whom one is separated, on the grounds that her jewelry, like the earrings and armor of Karṇa, were born with her and were thus apparently not to be removed. He adds further that it would have been impossible for her [in her present circumstances] to have placed the ornaments anywhere with confidence: Finally, he notes that she would have kept her jewelry on as a means of recognition, if, by chance, an emissary [of Rāma] should come. It may be noted, however, that Nagojibhaṭṭa seems not to object to the several passages in which Sitā is unambiguously described as being devoid of ornamentation

⁴⁰ For a discussion of the significance of hair in the Asian context, see Miller and Hitebeitel 1998.

⁴¹ Hara 1986.

⁴² There is, surprisingly, a considerable amount of confusion and disagreement as to the identity of the three people of whom Rāma is to be reminded by seeing

the ornament. The verse appears to lend itself most easily to the reading we have given it, and this reading is also proposed by Śiromaṇi who states that in a story told in the Purāṇas, Sītā's mother presents Sītā with the jewel in Daśaratha's presence at the time of her marriage to Rāma. Among the translations consulted, we find this interpretation in Shastri (1957, p. 430), Raghunathan (1981, p. 437), and Roussel (1903, p. 582). The wording of *pādas* cd, however, is not entirely unambiguous. Since the poet has chosen to use the *karmaṇi śeṣe ṣaṣṭhī*, "the objective genitive," to denote the object of Rāma's recollection, it is difficult to distinguish among the four terms in this case or between the objective genitive and possible partitive genitive. Thus, the words *jananyā mama* can mean either "my mother" or "mother and me." If one selects the latter reading, it is then not clear whether the reference is to Sītā's mother or Rāma's. In addition, the words *rājño daśarathasya* can mean either "King Daśaratha" or "the king [i.e., Janaka] and Daśaratha." As a result of this ambiguity, the commentators have compiled a number of different lists, sometimes criticizing the formulations proposed by others. Nagojibhaṭṭa states: "At the time of the wedding of Sītā and Rāma, her father [Janaka] took the jewel from the hand of her mother [Janaka's wife], who then placed it in the hand of Daśaratha to be Sītā's hair ornament." "Thus," he concludes, "these are the three people Rāma will remember [i.e., Sītā's mother, Janaka, and Daśaratha]." Maheśvaratīrtha slightly modifies Nagojibhaṭṭa's tale of the gem's history. He claims that "Sītā's mother took it from Janaka's hand in Daśaratha's presence and gave it directly to Sītā." Therefore, he concludes, the people of whom it will be a reminder are Sītā's mother, Daśaratha, Janaka, and Sītā herself." This is a reasonable proposition, except for the disquieting fact that the list of three now contains four names. Evidently what Maheśvaratīrtha means to suggest is that the jewel will remind Rāma of those three people as well as of Sītā herself. Govindarāja mentions two possible lists, rejecting one as incorrect. His notion of the gem's transmission is as follows: "At the time of the marriage, Sītā's parents gave her the ring; and she accepted it. Therefore, the three people would be Janaka, Janaka's wife, and Sītā." Govindarāja, however, goes on to say, "At the wedding ceremony itself, the gem was first formally presented by her mother-in-law and father-in-law [i.e., Kausalyā and Daśaratha] to Sītā to place in her hair." Daśaratha, Kausalyā, and Sītā would then constitute the threesome. This is, in fact, the list found in Dutt (1892, p. 1006), Tapasyānanda (1983, p. 170), and Simon (1934, p. 148). Govindarāja ascribes this latter list to an unnamed commentator and rejects it as inconsistent with two other pieces of data. These are 1) that according to the version of the story mentioned by Rāma later (5.64.4 = 5.66.4 GPP), the gem was given to Sītā by his in-laws (i.e., Janaka and Janaka's wife); and 2) according to Govindarāja, Rāma's mother was not present at the wedding. See 5.64.4-5. Cf. 5.26.8.

^b *Sundarakāṇḍa* 5.36.12-32, 65.2-17. See Goldman and Sutherland Goldman 1996, pp. 10-11, 216-18, 292-293, 454-58, 540-41.

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