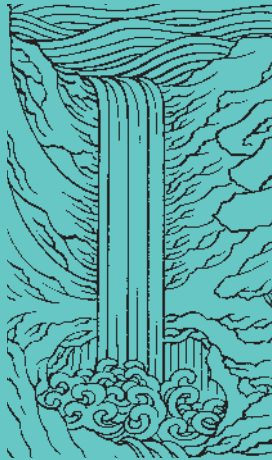


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Rama's Last Act

by Bhava·bhuti



Translated by
SHELDON POLLOCK

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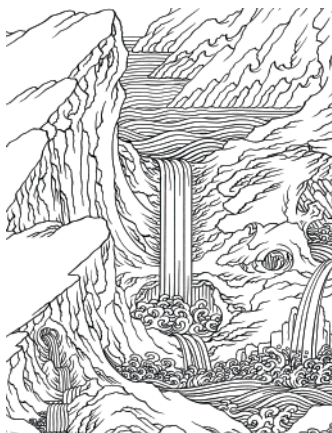
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CONTENTS

Sanskrit alphabetical order	7
CSL conventions	7
Preface	15
Foreword by Girish KARNAD	17
RAMA'S LAST ACT	
Introduction	27
Prologue	63
Act I: AT THE PAINTING EXHIBITION	73
Prelude to Act II	125
Act II: THE ENTRANCE INTO PANCHA-VATI	143
Prelude to Act III	163
Act III: THE SHADOW	173
Prelude to Act IV	233
Act IV: THE MEETING OF KAUSÁLYA AND JÁNAKA	241
Act V: THE YOUNG MAN'S VALOR	283
Prelude to Act VI	315
Act VI: THE RECOGNITION OF THE YOUNG MEN	325
Act VII: REUNION	359
Paraphrase of Prakrit (<i>chāyā</i>)	391
Notes	407
Index	443
Sandhi grid	452

ACT III
THE SHADOW

NEPATHYE: pramādaḥ! pramādaḥ!

*tataḥ praviśati puṣp' / āvacaya / vyagrā, sa / karuṇ' / autsukyam
ākaraṇayanti SĪTĀ.*

SĪTĀ: ॠammahe, jāṇāmi pia|sahī me Vāsantī vāharadi?

NEPATHYE:

3.25 Sītā|devyā sva|kara|kalitaiḥ
śallakī|pallav' | āgrair
agre lolaḥ kari|kalabhako
yaḥ purā poṣito 'bhūt, [6ab]

SĪTĀ: ॠkim tassa?

PUNAR NEPATHYE:

vadhvā sārdhaṃ payasi viharan
so 'yam anyena darpād
uddāmena dvirada|patinā
sannipaty' ābhiyuktaḥ. [6cd]

SĪTĀ: (*sa / sambhramam kati cit padāni dadhati*) ॠajja|utta,
parittāhi, parittāhi mama taṃ puttaam! (*smṛtim abhi-
nīya, sa / vaiklavyam*) ॠhaddhī, haddhī! tāiṃ jevva cira|
paricidāiṃ akkharāiṃ Pañcavaḍi|daṃsaṇeṇa maṃ ma-
nda|bhāiṇiṃ aṇubandhanti. hā ajja|utta! (*mūrchatī*)

TAMASĀ: (*praviśya*) vatse, samāśvasihi samāśvasihi.

OFFSTAGE: Danger! Danger!

Enter SITA engrossed in picking flowers and listening with growing pity and anxiety.

SITA: What, is it the voice of my beloved friend Vasánti that I'm hearing?

STILL OFFSTAGE:

The elephant that long ago
Queen Sita raised as a calf
on *shállaki* leaf tips picked by hand—
and how impatient it stood before her—

3.25

SITA: What about him?

STILL OFFSTAGE:

was busy playing with his mate
in the river when an elephant,
a wild bull, fell upon him
in the most brazen attack.

SITA: (*in alarm taking a few steps forward*) Husband, save my little son, save him! (*miming the return of her memory; crestfallen*) Oh dear god, the sight of Panchavati has brought back to me, cursed as I am, those words familiar from long ago. Oh my husband! (*falls faint*)

Enter TÁMASA: My child, compose yourself, I beg you.

3.30 NEPATHYE: vimāna|rāja, atr' āiva sthīyatām.

sītā: (*āśvasya, sa/sādhuvas'/ôllāsam*) ʃammahe, jala|bharida|
meha|manthara|tthaṇida|gambhīra|maṃsalo kudo ṇu
eso bhāradī|ṇigghoso bharanto kaṇṇa|vivaraṃ maṃ pi
manda|bhāiṇiṃ jhatti uddhūsarei?

TAMASĀ: (*sa/smit'/āśram*) ayi, vatse,

a|parisphuṭa|nikvāṇe
kutastye 'pi tvam īdṛṣī
stanayitnor mayūr" īva
cakit' |ōtkaṇṭhitaṃ sthitā? [7]

sītā: ʃbhaavadi, kiṃ bhaṇāsi, «a|paripphuḍaṃ» ti? mae uṇa
sara|saṅjoeṇa paccabhiṇidaṃ ajja|utto jjevva vāharadi,

3.35 TAMASĀ: śrūyate: «tapasyataḥ sūdrasya daṇḍa|dhāraṇ' |ār-
tham Aikṣvāko rājā Janasthānam āgataḥ» iti.

sītā: ʃdiṭṭhiā a|parihīṇa|rāa|dhammo kkhu so rāā,

NEPATHYE:

yatra drumā api mṛgā api bandhavo me
yāni priyā|saha|caraś ciram adhyavātsam,
etāni tāni bahu|nirjhara|kandarāṇi
Godāvarī|parisarasya gires taṭāni. [8]

ⁱ An ancestor of Rāma; the name is also used for Rāma's dynasty.

ACT III: THE SHADOW

OFFSTAGE: King of chariots, station yourself right here. 3.30

SITA: (*regaining her composure; with a flash of panic*) Why, how is it that this sound of human speech, rich and deep as the low rumble of a water-laden cloud, should fill my ears and all of a sudden unsettle* me, cursed as I am?

TÁMASA: (*smiling and crying at once*) Ah my child,

How can someone like you become so uneasy and wistful
at a sound so indistinct and uncertain, like a peahen
at distant thunder?

SITA: Blessed one, why do you say “indistinct”? It can only be my husband speaking, I recognize the sound of his voice.

TÁMASA: I’ve heard that an Ikshváku¹ king has come to Ja- 3.35
na-sthana to punish a Shudra for practicing austerities.

SITA: How fortunate the king has not renounced the practice of kingly *dharma*.*

OFFSTAGE:

A place where the trees and beasts themselves were
kinsmen,
where I sojourned so long with my beloved...
there are the mountain slopes by Godávari
studded with caves, crisscrossed by rushing streams.

SĪTĀ: (*dr̥ṣṭvā*) ॥hā kadham, pabhāda|canda|maṇḍal' |āvaṇ-
 ḍura|parikkhāma|dubbaleṇa āāreṇa aam̐ ṇia|somma|ga-
 mbhīr' |āṇubhāva|metta|paccabhiāṇaṇiō ajja|utto jjevva.
 tā mam̐ dhārehi. (TAMASĀM *āślisya mūrchatī*)

TAMASĀ: (*dhārayantī*) vatse, samāsvasihi, samāsvasihi.

3.40 NEPATHYE: anena Pañcavaṭī|darśanena

antar|līnasya duḥkh' |āgner
 ady' ōddāmaṃ jvaliṣyataḥ
 utpīḍa iva dhūmasya
 mohaḥ prāg āvṛnoti mām. [9]

hā, priye Jānaki!

TAMASĀ: (*sva|gatam*) idaṃ tad āśaṅkitam̐ guru|janen' āpi.

SĪTĀ: (*samāsvasya*) ॥hā, kadham̐ edam̐?

3.45 NEPATHYE: hā devi Daṇḍak' |āraṇya|vāsa|priya|sakhi. hā Vi-
 deha|rāja|putri.

SĪTĀ: ॥haddhī, haddhī. maṃ manda|bhāiṇiṃ vāharia āmīla-
 nta|ṇetta|ṇīl|uppalo mucchido jjevva. hā kadham̐ dhara-
 ṇi*|vaṭṭhe ṇirussāha|ṇisahaṃ vipalhattho? bhaavadi Ta-
 mase, parittāāhi, parittāāhi. jīvāvehi ajja|uttam̐. (*pāda-
 yoh̐ patatī*)

ⁱThe Gaṅgā.

ACT III: THE SHADOW

SITA: (*observing*) Oh, what in the world... a form pale, wasted, and weak as the disk of the moon at dawn but with a gentle yet profound bearing all its own—the only thing that enables me to recognize... yes, it must be my husband. Take hold of me. (*falls faint in TÁMASA's embrace*)

TÁMASA: (*holding her*) My child, compose yourself, I beg you.

OFFSTAGE: The sight of Pancha·vati

3.40

Rekindles now the fire of sorrow
that had long been dormant in my heart
but first, like a dense pall of smoke,
a delirium envelops me.

Oh my beloved Jánaki!

TÁMASA: (*aside*) This is exactly what my guru¹ feared.

SITA: (*regaining her composure*) Oh, how is this possible?

OFFSTAGE: Oh my queen, beloved companion in my so- 3.45
journ in Dándaka wilderness. Oh princess of Vidéha.

SITA: Dear god, with my name on his lips—the name of cursed me—his dark blue lotus eyes rolled back and he fainted dead away. How can we leave him lying sprawled upon the naked ground, friendless and helpless? Save him, Támasa, save him. Bring my husband back to life. (*falls at her feet*)

TAMASĀ:

tvam eva nanu kalyāṇi
 sañjīvaya jagat|patim.
 priya|sparśo hi pāṇis te
 tatr' āiva niyato bharaḥ. [10]

sītā: ॠjaṃ bhodu taṃ bhodu. jadhā bhaavadi āṇavedi, (sa/
 sambhramaṃ niṣkrāntā)

tataḥ praviśati bhūmau nipatitaḥ s'āśrayā sītayā sprśyamā-
 naḥ s'āhlād'ōcchvāso RĀMAḤ.

3.50 sītā: (kim cit sa|harṣam) ॠjāṇe puṇo vi paccāgadaṃ via jīvi-
 daṃ telloassa,

RĀMAḤ: hanta, bhoḥ, kim etat?

praścyotanaṃ nu hari|candana|pallavānām?
 niṣpīdit'ēndu|kara|kandala|jo nu sekaḥ?
 ātapta|jīvita|punaḥ|paritarpaṇo me
 sañjīvan'|auśadhi|raso nu hṛdi prasiktaḥ? [11]

ACT III: THE SHADOW

TÁMASA:

But surely only you, my lovely child,
can bring the lord of the world back to life.
Beloved is the touch of your hand
and on it alone the entire burden rests.*

SITA: Whatever will be will be. As the blessed one wishes.
(exit in alarm)

*The scene opens on RAMA, collapsed on the ground, being stroked
by the weeping SITA, and recovering with an expression of
bliss.*

SITA: *(with muted joy)* I feel as if the life of the entire uni- 3.50
verse has returned.

RAMA: But, what is happening here?

Is this some kind of distillation
of heavenly sandalwood leaves,
or are these droplets come from stalks
of moonbeams squeezed in a press?
Or is someone dripping on my heart,
to soothe again a life once burned,
the extract of the magic herb
that brings the dead back to life?

sparśaḥ purā paricito niyataṃ sa eṣa
 sañjīvanaś ca manasaḥ parimohanaś ca,
 santāpa|jāṃ sapadi yaḥ pratihatya mūrchām
 ānandanena jaḍatāṃ punar ātanoti. [12]

SĪTĀ: (*sa/sādhvasa|karuṇam apasṛtya*) ८ ettikaṃ jevva dāṇiṃ
 me bahudaraṃ.

3.55 RĀMAḤ: (*upaviśya*) na khalu vatsalayā devy” ābhyupapanno
 ’smi?

SĪTĀ: ८ haddhī, haddhī. kiṃ ti ajja|utto maṃ bhaṇisadi?

RĀMAḤ: bhavatu, paśyāmi.

SĪTĀ: ८ bhaavadi Tamase, osaramha! jadi dāva maṃ pekkhi-
 ssadi tado aṇ|abbhaṇuṇṇāda|saṇṇidhāṇeṇa adhiyaṃ ma-
 ma rāā kuppissadi.

TAMASĀ: ayi vatse, Bhāgīrathī|vara|prasādād devatānām apy
 a|drśyā saṃvṛtt” āsi.

3.60 SĪTĀ: ८ āṃ. atthi edaṃ.

RĀMAḤ: priye Jānaki! nanu priye Jānaki....

SĪTĀ: (*sa/manyu|gadgadā*) ८ ajja|utta, a|sarisaṃ khu edaṃ
 imassa vuttantassa. ८ (*s’/āśram*) ८ aha vā kiṃ ti vajjamaā
 jammantare vi puṇo a|sambhāvida|laddha|daṃsaṇassa

ACT III: THE SHADOW

Surely I am familiar with this
from long ago, this touch
that both restores my consciousness
and induces a deep delirium:
no sooner does it dispel the faintness
arising from my anguish
than it produces the stupefaction
of an absolute bliss.

SITA: (*withdrawing in apprehension and pity*) This is as far as
I should go for now.

RAMA: (*taking his seat*) Surely it cannot be that the queen in 3.55
her affection for me has come to my aid?

SITA: Oh dear, why should my husband be talking* about
me now?

RAMA: Well, let me just look around.

SITA: Tāmāsa, we must leave! If the king sees me he'll be
furious I am here without his permission.

TÁMASA: But dear child, the grace of Bhagi-rathi has made
you invisible, even to gods.

SITA: Ah yes, you are right. 3.60

RAMA: Beloved Jánaki! Surely, beloved Jánaki...

SITA: (*her voice breaking with anger*) My husband, really,
this is hardly in keeping with all that has happened.
(*tearfully*) But then why should I be so hard-hearted and
pitiless toward my husband when it is me, cursed me,
he's affectionately addressing and when I never thought

maṃ jevva manda|bhāiṇiṃ uddisia vacchalassa evvaṃ|
vādiṇo aṃja|uttassa uvari ṇiraṇukkosā bhavissaṃ? ahaṃ
edassa hiaaṃ jāṇāmi, mama eso tti.

RĀMAH: (*sarvato 'valokya, sa/nirvedam*) hā, na kaś cid atra.

SĪTĀ: 'bhaavadi Tamase, tadhā ṇikkāraṇa|pariccāiṇo vi eda-
ssa evvaṃ|vidheṇa daṃsaṇeṇa kīlisīo via me hia'āvatthā
tti ṇa āṇāmi.

3.65 TAMASĀ: jānāmi vatse, jānāmi.

tata|sthaṃ nairāśyād,
 api ca kaluṣaṃ vipriya|vaśād,
 vivyoge dīrghe 'smiṇ
 jhaṭīti ghaṭanāt stambhitam iva,
prasannaṃ saujanyād,
 dayita|karuṇair gāḍha|karuṇaṃ,
 dravī|bhūtaṃ premṇā
 tava hṛdayam asmin kṣana iva. [13]

RĀMAH: devi,

prasāda iva mūrtas te
 sparśaḥ sneh'|ārdra|śītalaha
ady' āpy ānandayati māṃ.
 tvaṃ punaha kv' āsi, nandini? [14]

ACT III: THE SHADOW

for a moment that I would see him again,* not even in a future life? I know his heart—as he knows mine.

RAMA: (*looking all around; despondently*) No, no one is there.

SITA: O Támara, though he disowned me like that so groundlessly, when I see him in this state my heart reacts in ways I cannot understand.

TÁMASA: I know, my child, I know.

3.65

Cold because of your despair,
bitter because of his unkindness,
in a state of near paralysis
at meeting after long separation;
forgiving because of your goodness,
with deep sympathy for all your husband's pathos,
melted by love—such is your heart
and all, it seems, in a single moment.

RAMA: O my queen,

Your touch is like forgiveness incarnate,
cool as it is and moist with love.
It is there to delight me in spite of all—
but where are you, my heart's delight?

SĪTĀ: 〔ede kkhu de a|gādha|daṃsida|siṇeha|sahāā āṇanda|
 ṇīsandiṇo Sītāmaā ajja|uttassa ullāvā jāṇaṃ paccaeṇa ṇi-
 kkāraṇa|pariccāa|sallido vi bahu|mado me jamma|lāho.〕

3.70 RĀMAḤ: atha vā kutaḥ priyatamā? nūnaṃ saṅkalp'ābhyāsa|
 pāṭav'ōpādāna eṣa Rāmasya bhramaḥ.

NEPATHYE: pramādaḥ! pramādaḥ!

Sītā|devyā sva|kara|kalitaiḥ
 śallakī|pallav'āgrair
 agre lolaḥ kari|kalabhako
 yaḥ purā poṣito 'bhūt, [I 5ab]

RĀMAḤ: (*sa|karuṇ'āutsukyam*) kiṃ tasya?

PUNAR NEPATHYE:

vadhvā sārthaṃ payasi viharan
 so 'yam anyena darpaḍ
 uddāmena dvirada|patinā
 sannipaty' ābhiyuktaḥ. [I 5cd]

3.75 SĪTĀ: 〔ko dāṇiṃ abhiujjissadi?〕

RĀMAḤ: kv' āsau, kv' āsau durātmā yaḥ priyāyāḥ putrakam
 vadhū|dviṭiyam abhibhavati? (*utthiṣṭhati*)

VĀSANTĪ: (*praviśya, sambhrāntā*) kathaṃ, devo Raghu|nan-
 danaḥ?

ACT III: THE SHADOW

SITA: My husband's protestations over Sita are filled with a deep affection and overflow with love's bliss. To believe them is to make me think that being born was worth it—however sharp the arrow of having been groundlessly disowned.*

RAMA: But then, what would my beloved be doing here? 3.70
This is a pure delusion on Rama's part, brought on by his long-honed skill in wishful thinking.

OFFSTAGE: Danger! Danger!

The elephant that long ago
Queen Sita raised as a calf
on *shállaki* leaf tips picked by hand—
and how impatient it stood before her—

RAMA: (*with growing pity and anxiety*) What about him?

STILL OFFSTAGE:

was busy playing with his mate
in the river when an elephant,
a wild bull, fell upon him
in the most brazen attack.

SITA: Who can come to the rescue now? 3.75

RAMA: Where's the wretch that dares assault my beloved's
little son and his mate? (*stands up*)

Enter VASÁNTI in alarm Can it be king Raghu-nándana?

SĪTĀ: ॠkahaṃ, pia|sahī me Vāsantī,᳚

VĀSANTĪ: jayatu devaḥ.

3.80 RĀMAḤ: (*nirūpya*) kathaṃ, devyāḥ priya|sakhī Vāsantī.

VĀSANTĪ: deva, tvaryatāṃ, tvaryatām. ito Jaṭāyu|śikharasya
dakṣiṇena Sītā|tīrthena Godāvarīm avatīrya sambhāva-
yatu devyāḥ putrakam devaḥ.

SĪTĀ: ॠhā tāda Jaḍāo. suṇṇaṃ tue viṇā Jaṇaṭṭhāṇaṃ,᳚

RĀMAḤ: ahaha, hṛdaya|marma|cchidaḥ khalv amī kath" |ôd-
ghātāḥ.

VĀSANTĪ: ita ito devaḥ.

3.85 SĪTĀ: ॠbhaavadi, saccakaṃ jevva vaṇa|devadā vi maṃ ṇa pe-
kkhandi,᳚

TAMASĀ: ayi vatse, sarva|devatābhyaḥ prakṛṣṭam aiśvaryaṃ
Mandākinī|devyāḥ. tat kim ity āśāṅkase?

SĪTĀ: ॠtado aṇusaramha,᳚

parikrāmataḥ.

RĀMAḤ: bhagavati Godāvāri, namas te.

ⁱThe Gaṅgā.

ACT III: THE SHADOW

SITA: Why, it's my beloved friend Vasánti.

VASÁNTI: Long live the king.

RAMA: (*looking*) Why, it's the queen's beloved friend Vasánti. 3.80

VASÁNTI: Hurry, my lord, hurry. If you head out from here and go down to the Godávári by Sita's Ford to the south of Jatáyus' Peak you will see the queen's little son.

SITA: Oh father Jatáyus. Without you Jana·sthana is empty.

RAMA: Ah, allusions that tear at my heart's soft core.

VASÁNTI: This way, my lord, this way.

SITA: Blessed one, it's really true, even the forest deities can't see me. 3.85

TÁMASA: Dear child, Mandákini'sⁱ power far surpasses that of all other deities. There's no need to worry.

SITA: So let's follow behind.

The two walk about.

RAMA: Blessed Godávári, homage to you.

3.90 VĀSANTĪ: (*nirūpya*) deva, modasva vijayinā vadhū|dvitīyena
devyāḥ putrakeṇa.

RĀMAḤ: vijayatām āyuṣmān.

SĪTĀ: ॠammahe, īdiso so saṃvutto,

RĀMAḤ: devi, diṣṭyā vardhase.

yen' ōdgacchad|bisa|kisalaya|
snigdha|dant'āṅkureṇa
vyākṛṣṭas te, su|tanu, lavalī|
pallavaḥ karṇa|mūlāt
so 'yaṃ putras tava mada|mucāṃ
vāraṇānāṃ vijetā
yat kalyāṇaṃ vayasi taruṇe
bhājanaṃ tasya jātaḥ. [16]

3.95 SĪTĀ: ॠa|viutto dāṇiṃ diḥ'|āū imāe somma|daṃsaṇāe bho-
du,

RĀMAḤ: sakhi Vāsanti, paśya paśya. kānt''|ānuvṛtti|cātur-
yam apy ardhmaṃ śikṣitaṃ vatsena:

līl''|ōtkhāta|mṛṇāla|kāṇḍa|kavala|
cchedeṣu sampādītāḥ
puṣyat|puṣkara|vāsitasya payaso
gaṇḍūṣa|saṅkrāntayaḥ
sekaḥ śikariṇā kareṇa vihitāḥ
kāmaṃ virāme punar
na snehād an|arāla|nāla|nalinī|
patr'ātapatraṃ dhṛtam. [17]

ACT III: THE SHADOW

VASÁNTI: (*looking*) My lord, rejoice that the queen's little son along with his mate has won the day. 3.90

RAMA: Victory and long life to him.

SITA: My, how big he's grown.

RAMA: My queen, how fortunate you are.

That son of yours, my lovely wife,
who once would pluck the *lávali* leaf
from behind your ear with his budding sprout
of a tusk glossy as a lotus petal
has now won a victory
over rutting bull elephants—
clearly he continues to enjoy
the good fortune* of his childhood.

SITA: Long may he live and from this day on may he never be separated from his kindly mate. 3.95

RAMA: Look, friend Vasánti, look: The child has almost learned the art of deferring to his beloved.

In the intervals between her chewing morsels
of lily stalks dug up in play,
he offers her mouthfuls of water scented
with just-blooming lotuses,
spraying water from his drop-filled trunk.
And yet at rest he fails to show
the proper concern by shading her
with the leaf of a straight-stemmed lotus.*

sītā: ʻbhaavadi Tamase, aaṃ dāva īdiso jādo. te uṇa ṇa āṇā-
mi Kusa|Lavā ettikeṇa kāleṇa kīdisā via honti.᳚

TAMASĀ: yādṛśo ʻyaṃ tādṛśau tāv api.

3.100 sītā: ʻīdisī ahaṃ manda|bhāiṇī jāe ṇa kevalaṃ ṇirantaro
ajja|utta|viraho putta|viraho vi.᳚

TAMASĀ: bhavitavyatʻ ēyam īdṛśī.

sītā: ʻkiṃ vā mae pasūdāe jeṇa tādisaṃ pi mama puttakā-
ṇaṃ īsi|kalida |virala|komala|dhavala|dasaṃ|ujjala|kavo-
laṃ aṇubaddha|muddha|kāalī|vihasiḍaṃ ṇibaddha|kāa|
sihaṇḍaṃ amala|muha|puṇḍarīa|jualaṃ ṇa paricum-
bidaṃ ajja|uttena?᳚

TAMASĀ: astu devatā|prasādāt.

sītā: ʻbhaavadi Tamase, ediṇā avacca|sambharaṇeṇa ussa-
da|paṇhuda|tthaṇī tāṇaṃ ca piduṇo saṇṇidhāṇeṇa kha-
ṇa|mettaṃ saṃsāriṇi mhi saṃvuttā.᳚

3.105 TAMASĀ: kim atrʻ ôcyate? prasavaḥ khalu prakarṣa|paryan-
taḥ snehasya. paraṃ cʻ āitad anyonya|saṃśleṣaṇaṃ pi-
troḥ.

antaḥ|karaṇa|tattvasya
dampatyoh sneha|saṃśrayāt
ānanda|granthir eko ʻyam
apatyam iti badhyate. [18]

ACT III: THE SHADOW

SITA: Tāmāsa, when I see how much he has grown I think about Kusha and Lava and what they might look like after all this time.

TĀMASA: They are just like him.*

SITA: How cursed can I be to have been so cruelly separated 3.100
not only from my husband but from my sons as well.

TĀMASA: So was it meant to be.

SITA: What good was having children if my husband will never be able to kiss the faces of his sons—faces like two fresh lotuses, shining with the glow of a few delicate bright white teeth just appearing,* the innocent laughs and lips and tufted hair of childhood?

TĀMASA: May the deities show their grace.

SITA: Tāmāsa, at the mere memory of my children my breasts swell with milk, and the presence of their father makes me feel, for a moment, as if I were back among the living.*

TĀMASA: What is there to say? A child marks the highest 3.105
degree of love, and the source of the parents' ultimate bonding.

Because it is the common object of a couple's love*
a child is a knot of bliss that ties their hearts
together.



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RAMA'S LAST ACT is one of the earliest theatrical adaptations of Valmiki's epic masterpiece, and the most confident. Bhava-bhuti makes great claims for poetic prowess in general and for his own rights to Valmiki's fame. Pity is here the dominant emotional state engendered in the reader, together with delight at savoring the author's brilliance.

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