

The Rāmāyaṇa and Thai Ramakian (Rāmakīrti) : Some of Their Major Differences.

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As evidenced by few bas-reliefs depicting some scenes from the Rāmāyaṇa at the temple of Phimai (Vimāya)(cir. 11th century CE), 60 km east of the city of Nakhon Ratchasima, Nakhon Ratchasima Province, northeastern Thailand, Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa must have been known to the people of the period in the region. It is interesting to note that the Rāmakīrti composed by King Phra Buddhayodfachulālok or King Rāma I (1782-1809) of Chakri dynasty, differs to some extent from the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa. The following are the major differences:



The Temple of Phimai (vimāya)



The Previous Life of Daśakantha (Rāvana)

On Mount Kailāsa, Nandaka, a certain demigod, was given the charge of washing the feet of the gods who came to pay homage to Ísvara (Śiva). He became the object of constant pranks of those gods who pat on his head or pulled his cheeks or plucked his hairs until his head became bald. He was very anguish about his plight hence he asked Lord Śiva for a boon. Lord Śiva granted the boon to him that whomever he would point his finger at would instantly drop death. He became so puffed up with his newly acquired power and played havoc to gods and men. Gods approached Lord Śiva to help. Lord Śiva asked Visnu to destroy Nandaka. Visnu appeared as beautiful celestial nymph before Nandaka who became enamored with the nymph.

Visnu in disguise expressed his reciprocal feeling on condition that Nandaka must beat her in a dance contest. He agreed and danced imitating her dance movement. In the course of the dance the nymph pointed her finger at one of her leg. Nandaka, following the movement, caused his leg to be broken by his own finger, then Visnu turned back to his original form. Nandaka rebuked Visnu for his unfair means to destroy him. Visnu before slaying him told him that in the next life he would be born as human being with one head and two hands and would kill him him would be born with ten heads and twenty hands. Thus Nandaka was reborn as Dasakantha and Visnu incarnated as Rama (SSP:10-11).

This episode in Thai Ramakirti is evidently the inclusion of the story of Bhasmasura in the Śivalīlāmṛta in Marathi (Mani:127).



Mural painting at the corridor around the temple of the Emerald Buddha depicting Nandaka washing the feet of gods.



Vishnu in the form of celestial nymph(mohini) whose dancing is imitated by Nandaka and later he was killed by Vishnu who turned into his original form.



The Birth of Sītā

When King Thosarot (Daśratha) requested Sage Kalaikot (Rsyāśrṅga) to perform the rite for getting his heir, a being appeared out of the sacrificial fire holding a tray of 3 divine sweet balls, the fragrance of which went as far as Lanka, the capital of Thosakanth (Daśakantha). Montho (mandodarī), Thosakanth's queen, had a strong desire to eat the sweet ball. So Thosakanth sent Kākanāśura (Kākānana-Asura), a demoness, to bring the sweet-meat for her. She took the form of a crow and flew to Ayodhya but she succeeded in stealing only one half of a sweet ball. Montho eat the sweet-meat and became pregnant. She, later, gave birth to a girl who was actually the incarnation of Laksmī, Goddess of Fortune.

As soon as she was born the child cried out “destroy whole race of the demons; destroy the whole race of the demons.”

After learning from Phiphek (Bibhisana), the astrologer about the destructive consequences indicated by ominous cry, Thosakanth decided to discard the baby by putting it in a casket and letting it float along a river. The casket containing the child was found by Sage Chanok (Janaka) who was the king of Mithila but left the throne to practice austerity. Thinking the baby should not come in the way of his practice of the austerity he buried the casket with the baby and prayed gods to protect it.

After sixteen years the sage decided to return to his kingdom and wanted to take the baby with him. He ploughed the whole ground to find the baby and he found a full grown beautiful girl. He named her Sita as she was found from the furrow and adopted her (SSP:24-6).

The birth of Sita in the Thai Ramakirti is, faintly similar to the accounts given in the Devi Bhagavata Purana, Kamba Ramayana, Ananda Ramayana and the Adbhuta Ramayana (Mani:721-2).

The stealing of the sweet ball or payasam by Kakanasura does not occur in Valmiki Ramayana (See Rajagopalachari: 3).



Sītā was found during the plowing of the ground by Sage Chanok (Janaka)



The Episode of Ramasūn (Rāmāsura)

At a spring time in heaven gods and goddesses celebrated the season with great merriment. Manīmekhalā, a goddess of the ocean, who had a fabulous gem, also came there. Ramasūn, a demon with unparalleled power, who was also on his way to heaven, saw the goddess playing with the gem. He wanted to possess the gem himself. He, therefore, chased the goddess to snatch away the gem but in vain.

He threw the axe at her but she playfully dodged the axe with the help of the fabulous gem. Till today the chasing is going on, as a result of the throwing of the axe and the playful moving of the gem the flashing and thundering phenomena take place.

At that time a god named Arjuna was also on his way to heaven. Seeing him frustrated Ramasun, caught hold of Arjuna and threw him at Mount Meru causing it to tilt to one side.

Isvara(shiva) asked all powerful beings to put it back to its original position. When the effort of others came fruitless he asked Kākās, the original named of Phālī (Vālin), and Sugrīb (Sugrīva) for help. Both of them were successful in restoring the Mount Meru.

Ramasūn, here, is evidently Parasurāma and Arjuna is Kārtavīryājuna, the king of Hehaya dynasty who had thousand hands and ruled Mahismatī on the Narmada river (See Mani: 393-5).

The confusion of Phālī (Vālin) with Kartaviryarjuna is also seen in the episode where Thosakanth was captured by Phālī. This is how the story goes.

Angada, Phali's son, at the age of ten was taken to a river and was let to play there alone. At that time Thosakanth came there and knowing that he is Phali's son decided to kill the boy. He, thus, turned himself to a huge crab and hidden under water waiting for the opportunity to kill

the boy. The monkeys soldiers who were around noticed that there was a huge crab. They tried to capture it but in vain. They informed Phālī who came to the spot. Seeing Phālī the crab turned back to his real form and fought with Phālī. Thosakanth was eventually captured and kept as captive for seven days becoming the laughing stock and insult of all the monkeys (SSP:22; Mani:394)

Because of the name Phālī (Skt- Bālī) it might have been confused by the Thai authors with Bali, father of Bāna. Bāna also had thousand hands. This Bāna might have been confused with Kārtavīryārjuna. Hence the name Kākās was probably derived from Kārta.

Episode of Thosakanth marrying Montho

Montho (Mondodari) was in the previous life a frog living on the milk given by four Rishis. One day a Nagini from Patala came to the hermitage to take revenge on the rishis for their hitting her tail while she was having sexual intercourse with a Naga. She vomited her venom in the milk bowls of the rishis while they were away. The frog wanted to show her gratitude to the rishis. So she jumped into one of the milk bowls. She died from the Nagini's venom.

When the rishis returned they came to know that the frog's deed saved their life. They revived her and turned her into a beautiful maiden and offered her to be the maid of Uma.

Once Mount Meru tilted to one side on account Virulhaka's throwing his upavita of Nage at it. Shiva asked Thosakanth to restore it to its normal position. Thosakanth did and Shiva wanted to give reward to him. Shiva had to give Uma to him according to his request.

Thosakanth had to carry her to Lanka on his head as the body of Uma was very hot. Vishnu, on his effort to obstruct the act of Thosakanth, turned himself into an old man planting a tree upside down. Thosakanth told the old man that he was foolish. The old man told Thosakanth that he was more foolish as he was taking a woman with hot body who would burn the whole race of the demons. He asked Tosakanth to ask Shiva for Montho instead. He did according to the old man's advice. While carrying Montho flying, he passed over the palace of Phālī (Vālin).

Phālī challenged him for a fight. Tosakanth lost in the fight and had to give Montho to Phālī.

Tosakhan asked his preceptor, Angad, to ask Phali to return Montho to him. Phali agreed and returned Montho but by that time Montho was already pregnant. Angad had to remove the foetus of Montho and put it in the womb of a she-goat.

At the time of delivery the sage took the baby out from the goat's womb, named it Angad and returned it to Phālī.

The Episode of Benyakāy

When the monkey army of Rama was camping on the seashore preparing to cross the sea to Lanka Thosakanth wanted to deceive Rama that Sita was death. He asked Benyakay (Sanskrit-Pañcakāya), Bibhisana's daughter, to transform herself to be Sita and to act as dead body floating in the river near Rama's camp. On seeing the dead body of Sita, Rama and Lakshmana lamented greatly.



Benyakay
daughter of
Bibhāsana

When he saw Hanuman he became angry thinking that Hanuman's burning of Lanka was the instigation that prompted Thosakanth to take Sita's life. At that time Hanuman observed with keen eyes that the body floated upstream he knew immediately that the body was fake one. Consequently he burnt the body to test whether the dead body was real. Benyakay flew away but Hanuman followed and caught her.

As a result Benyakay conceived and a son was born and was named Asuraphad.(SSP:61-2; ;Shastri:222-3).

Series of events on
Benyakay
episode



Floating Benyakay





The body
of
Benyakay
is being
burnt and
she is
flying to
escape

Episode of Suvannamacchā

From Tosakanth's sexual relation with a fish, a daughter with half top part of beautiful girl and lower part of fish was born. He named her Suvannamacchā (Sanskrit-Suvarnamatsyā)

At the time when Rama built a bridge to Lanka Tosakanth ordered his daughter and the school of fish under her leadership to remove all the building materials thrown into sea by the monkey army with the intention to obstruct the construction of the bridge. Hanuman dived into the sea to find out the cause of the disappearance of the building materials. He found the mermaid and prevented her from obstructing the building of the bridge. As a result of the meeting the mermaid conceived and a son was born without the knowledge of Hanuman.

He was brought up by Maiyarab (Mayarabn=Mahirāvana) the king of Pātala, the nether world, he named him Macchānu (Skt-Matsyā+hanu). He found his real father when Hamuman went to Patala to rescue Rama who was carried **away** while he was asleep by Maiyarab to Patala and kept in an iron cage (SSP: 63-4;Shastri:223).



Hanuman capturing Suvannamacchā



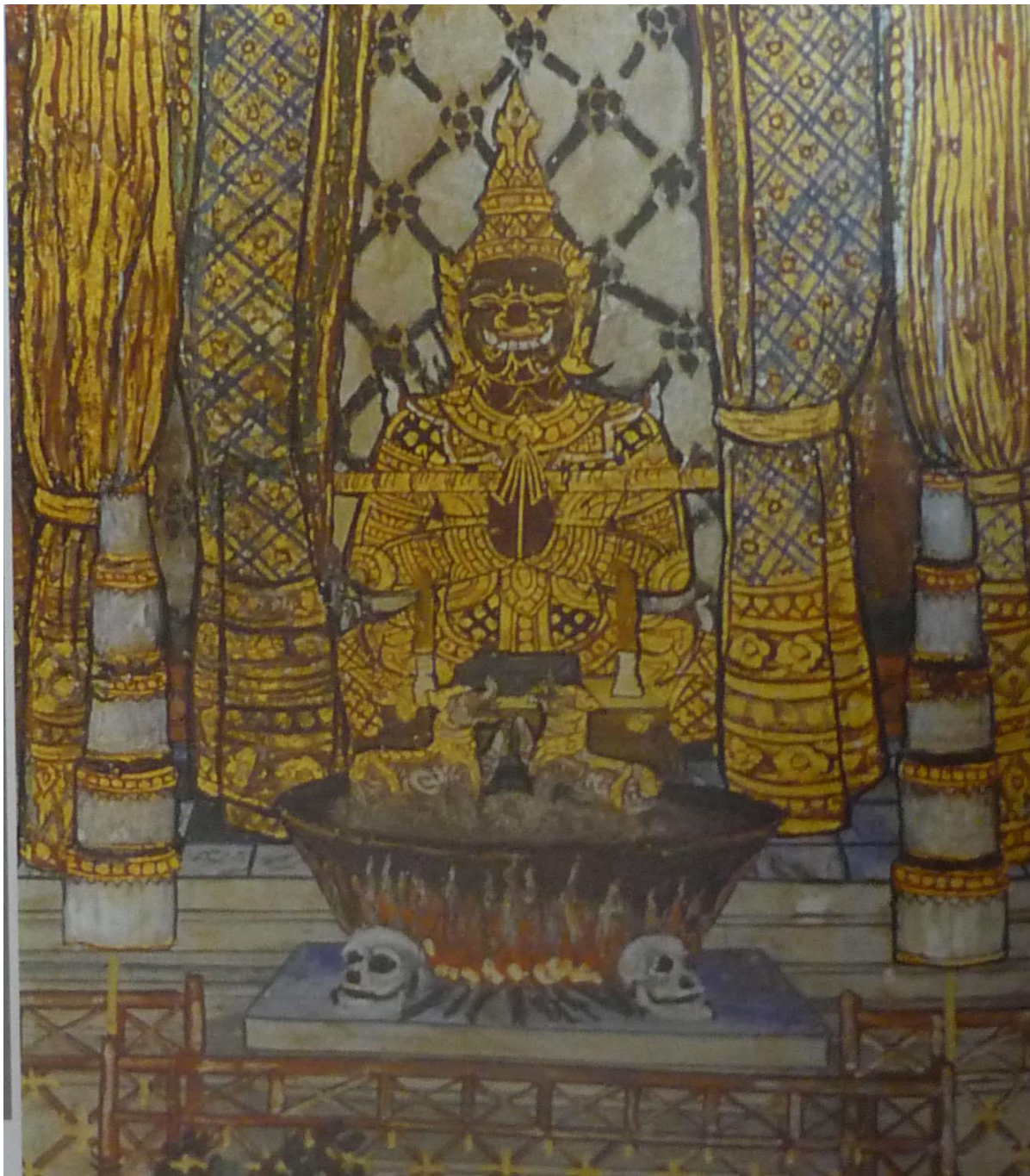
Suvannamaccha delivered her child at a sandy beach (left) and the child was found by Maiyalab (right). From mural painting of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha.

The Episode of Maiyalāb (Mahirāvana)

Thosakanth again sought the help of his relative Maiyarab, who is the king of Patala. He was possessed of all magical power learnt from his preceptor, Sumedh Muni, who helped to remove the heart of Maiyarab, turned it into a bee and hid it in Mount Triguta. He, thus, virtually immune to death. Maiyarab used herb and his magical power to make everybody in Rama's army including Rama himself deeply asleep in spite of the fact that the pavilion where Rama and Laksmana was kept in the mouth of Hanuman. Maiyarab carried Rama to Patala and kept him in an Iron cage.

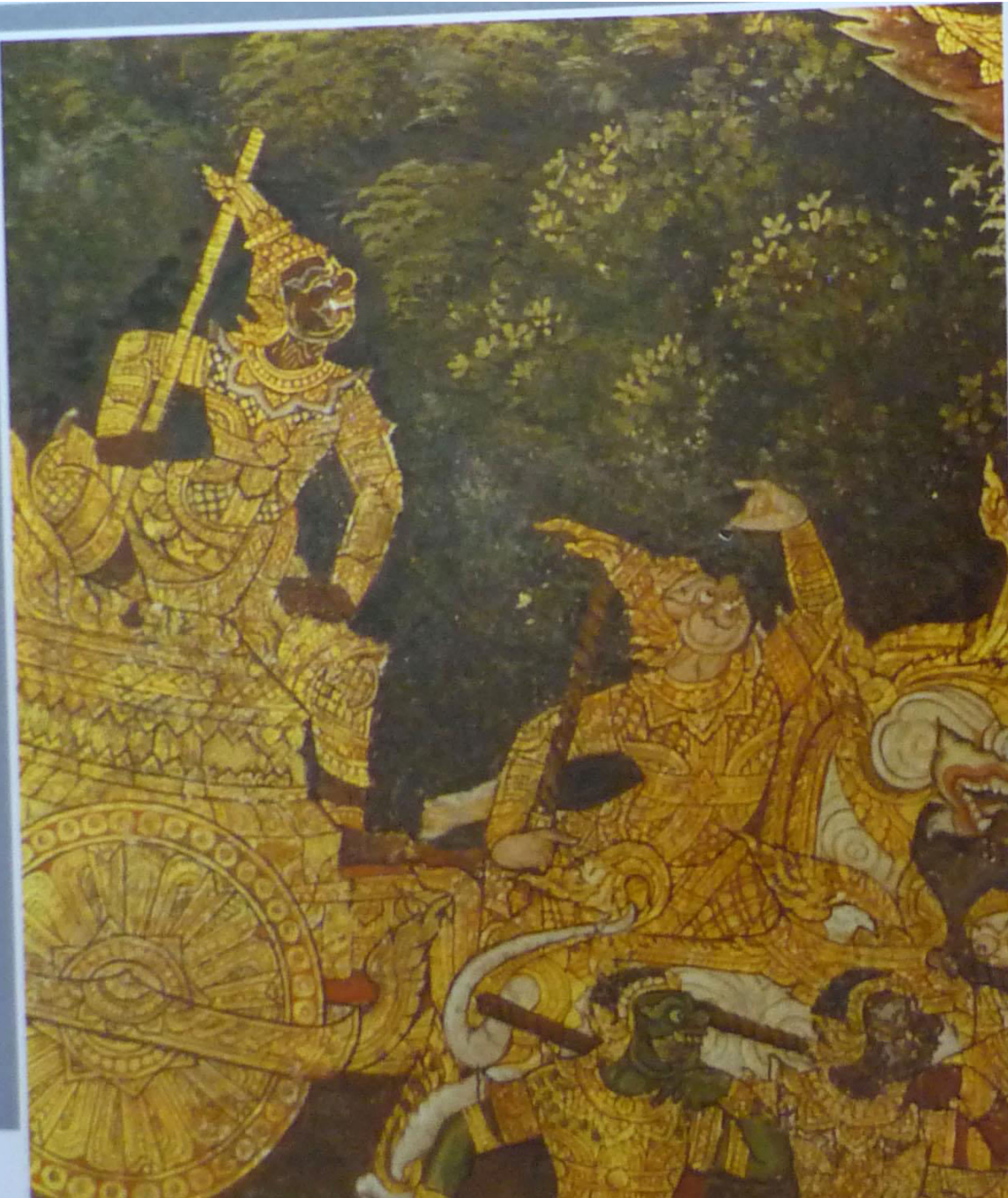
Hanuman, after being freed from the effect of Maiyarab's magic, went to Patala to rescue Rama, passing through various obstructions on the way. He met his son, Macchanu, who guarded on of the outpost to Patala. Hanuman, with the help of Philakuan, Maiyarab's elder sister, who told him the secret about Maiyarab invulnerability, succeeded in slaying the demon and rescuing Rama.

The episode does not exist in the Valmiki Ramayana but it does in Kirtibasi Ramayana (p.711)



Maiyarab
at a ritual

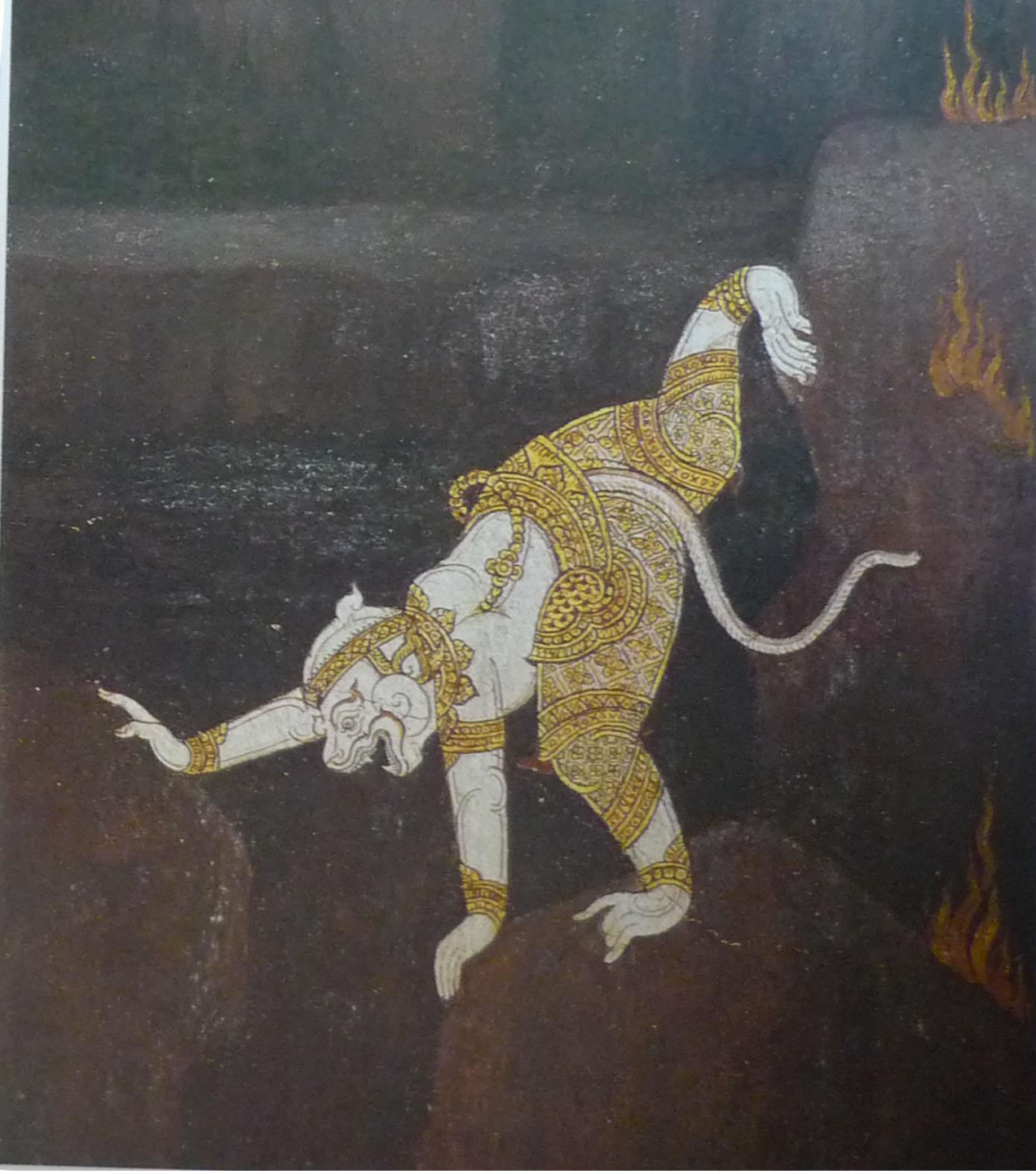
Maiyarab on a chariot





Hanuman keeps the whole pavilion where Rama and Lakshmana stay within his mouth to protect them from being captured by Maiyarab.

Maiyarab uses his magic to make everyone asleep and carries Rama to Patala



Hanuman
finding his
way to
Patala



Hanuman follows him to Patala, kills him and recues Rama

Series of actions of Hanuman in Patala in a mission to rescue Rama





Hanuman
encounters
Philakuan,
Maiyarab's
sister.



Hanuman
hitting
Maiyarab
with tree
trunk



Eventually
Hanuman is
slaying
Maiyarab



Thosakanth
(Daśakantha)

The Birth of Sita

The birth of Sita is mentioned in VP book IV chapter 5. Sīradhvaja ploughing the ground, to prepare it for a sacrifice which he instituted in order to obtain progeny, there sprung up in the furrow a damsel, who became his daughter Sita. Sīradhvaja is identified with second Janaka. The birth of Sita is narrated in Aranyakanda of the Ramayana, Vana Parva of the Mahabharata, in the Vayu, Brahmavaivarta, Kalika and other Puranas (Willson:554).

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