



Sundara Kānda - Hanuman's Odyssey

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If Mahabharata's Bhagvad-Gita is taken as a philosophical guide, Ramayana's Sundara Kānda is sought for spiritual solace. What is more, many believe that reading Sundara Kānda or hearing it recited would remove all hurdles and usher in good tidings! Well miracles apart, it's in the nature of Sundara Kānda to inculcate fortitude and generate hope in one and all. After all, isn't it a depiction of how Hanuman goes about his errand against all odds! Again, won't it portray how Seetha, on the verge of self-immolation, overcomes despair to see life in a new light? Besides, how Hanuman's Odyssey paves the way for Rama to rescue his kidnapped wife! One is bound to be charmed by the rhythm of the verse and the flow of the narrative in this *sloka to sloka* transcreation of Valmiki's *adi kavya* - the foremost poetical composition in the world. After all, it was the saga of Rama that inspired Valmiki the barbarian to spiritualize the same as Ramayana in classical Sanskrit!

Dedicated to -

Childhood friends, Nittala Rama Rao, who envisaged that I transcreate in English this momentous episode of the *adi kavya* and Erramilli Rohini Kumar, who, besides encouraging me to undertake the challenge, came up with the book jacket besides Katlin Darnall of the World Public Library for the enriching editing."

Canto 1 - Hurdles in Skies

Egged on by peers Vayu's son
Enshrined by man as Hanuman
Enthused himself to shoulder
Search of Seetha, Rama's spouse
Snared whom Ravan to Lanka
Sea across that hundred leagues.

With his head then held so high
Gained he size for task on hand.

On that Mahendra mountain then
Colossus like he sauntered there.

Uprooted were trees all those
Brushed as with his chest that strong.

Varied hues of elements there
Made that mountain resplendent.

Grace angels those hill ranges
For their honeymoon so near moon.

At length he reached that hilltop
Lay where elephants in their scores.

Besides Brahma 'n Surya

Prayed he Indra and Vayu.

Facing east he sought blessings
Of Vayu then his Wind God dad
And grew more by turning south.

Grew as Hanuman more and more
To cross that sea vast as it roared
With full tides of full-moon night
Came he face to face with clouds.

As though to test that mountain
Whether it's right for his take-off
Tapped it Hanuman with his feet.

Shook that mountain his impinge
Shed trees flowers of hues varied.

Flowers all fell then covered it full
Spread they fragrance far and wide.

Welled out water in thick springs
Such was pressure of Hanuman's feel.

From the cracks it developed thus
Creaked out molten metals varied.

While huge boulders slid in scores
Out came smoke in thick columns.

With that squeeze it came under
Cried all creatures in their caves.

Frightened was no less wildlife
Heard were their howls world over.

In their state of confusion
Serpents with all fiery fangs
Marks of swastik on their hoods
Spewed then venom in profusion.

Venom they spit was fireball like
Turned to tiny stones there rocks.

Herbs of anti-venom were there
Turned though antidote none of them.

Felt all yogis spirit at play
Took to their heels demigods then.

Not to speak of vessels of gold
In their fright gods left all goods.

In panic they left mid-meal
Thought they none of gold armour.

In their sodden demeanours then
Reached they all their heavenly homes.

Amorous angels in their scores
Built their love-nests in those skies.

Ascetics of earth ascended
For bird's eye view of Hanuman's feat.

Heard all averments of siddhas
As well seers all stationed there.

Hill like Hanuman is all set
Agile as ether to cross seas.

It was vanar Lord Sugreev
That sent him on Ram's errand.
Angels there who heard those words
Looked at Hanuman then wide-eyed.

Raring to go then Hanuman
Slapped his thighs and roared like clouds.

Stretched he full then his long tail
Jerked it like would eagle its prey.

Circled Hanuman his tail then
Looked that eagle-clawed serpent.

Set to take off on that flight
Stance he took for task that tough.

In that as he shrugged himself
Seemed he eager and vigorous.

Stared he long at his flight route
Deep breathed he for take-off then.

All set to go Hanuman then
Thought it fit to them address
Folks his who were so anxious.

Spoke he thus to assure them:
Won't I dart like Ram's arrow
To Ravan's land there lay yonder?

No sooner than I set foot
Find I Rama's spouse Seetha.

Were I to happen to fail there
Won't I rush to heaven itself?

Were I to land in blind alley
Won't I go back to Lanka?

Prevail I over Ravan then
And fetch Seetha unfettered
With him in tow but in chains.

As he took-off he declared
Comes it ever if to the brink
Uproot he would all Lanka
And bring it as gift to Lord Ram.

By the thrust of his take-off
Sucked in were trees into flight.

As he flew at jet speed then
Tailed him trees with birds on them
And buds that flowered in between.
In truck with him all of them
Seemed they relatives at send off.

Sal trees then too followed suit
Seemed he spearhead of large force.

With the flowers and birds in tow
Made then Hanuman wondrous sight.

In time weakened as the pull
Dropped all trees in those waters.

Covered as he by flowers and all
Hanuman flew then glowworm like.

As he shrugged off in mid-air
Fell some flowers on salt waters.

Turned as flower-bed sea that vast
Seemed it then like star filled sky.

Flowers of varied hues on him
Rainbow on move made him seem.

Sonic boom of Hanuman's flight
Scattered flowers on those waters

Seemed then that sea sky at dawn.

Arms his outstretched in his flight
Looked like serpents with five hoods.

Filled his shadow shore to shore
Though he picked up Mach two speed.

Sparkled his eyes as in flight
Seemed some lava there in flow.

Wide open were his bright eyes
Seemed they sun 'n moon in skies.

With his rosy nose-tip then
Looked he like the setting sun.

In flight his tail that was long
Banner then of Indra seemed.

With the sparkling teeth of his
And the tail thus well coiled
Sun like aura Hanuman had.
Blood red as those Hanuman's hinds
Seemed they red hills well sundered.

Wind as passed through his armpits
Roared it then like lightning clouds.
Mistook him then sky watchers
For some meteor that was rare.

In flight he looked like elephant
With its tail spread round its waist.

Shadow that he cast on seas
Seemed to all a speeding boat.

Concord like he moved in skies
Caused he whirlpools in the seas.

With his broad chest Hanuman did
Ward off sea tides that reached him.

As he speeded in his flight
Formed a cyclone in the skies
Caused that storm then in the seas.

Mean sea level as rose to skies
Made he light of all those tides.

As he sped he seemed to count

Mountain tides that so neared him.

Splash from tides as foamed the skies
Gave that silver coat to space.

Torn as thus the water sheet
Felt all fish as turned naked.

Water snakes as sighted skies
Feared they eagle was on prowl.

Thick and wide was his shadow
Seemed so symmetric to one's eyes.

Sped as he past in high skies
Seemed his shadow like a cloud.

Looked then Hanuman in motion
Like a mountain with huge wings.

Split as that sea in columns
Cruisers they seemed in his chase.

Coursed as he thus Garuda like
In those skies that filled with birds
Wind like then he scattered clouds.

Clouds as all then went askance
Shone they well in colours varied.
In and out of clouds Hanuman
Seemed he like the moon on course.

In awe celestial beings then
Myriad flowers they showered on him.

Filtered Surya his heat then
While made easy breeze Vayu.

Sang his praises seers all there
Awestruck angels his prowess.

Wondered at his endurance
Angels all who watched him then.

Felt thus Sagar, Lord of Seas
For whom Rama's cause came first.

Were I to fail to help Hanuman
Make I myself blameworthy.

Won't I owe my reign and all

To Ram's ancestor, my namesake?

For he exerts for Ram's cause
Bound am I to help Hanuman.

Spoke then Sagar to Mainak
Prince of hills with golden peaks
Made who ocean bed his home.

Confined were thou by Indra
On my bed for ever so long
Barrier though as to netherworld.

Demons all for that lay therein
Block thou approach to this world.

Prowess such is unique thine
Expand thou the way thy wish.

Behold Hanuman as he flies
Head over mine for Ram's sake.

Owe that I his ancestor
Seek I now thy helping hand
To let our Hanuma serve Rama.
Fail if we to help him out
Enrage we might angels all.

Shoot up forthwith in his path
To let him rest on peak thy high.

Hanuman is so long in flight
Feel I time he rests a while.

Lighten if thou his burden
Brings it end to Rama's plight
Agony as well of his spouse.

Shoot up now O golden hill
Graced by varied vegetation.

Came out then as Mainaka
Depths of sea from that so deep
Scene it made like mid-day sun
Came out as it from thick clouds.

In the midst of sea that vast
Shone then Mainak like Surya.

Lovers all there as lay languid
Skimmed its peaks the rim of skies.

With his golden peak Mainak
Shone he then like rising sun.

In time as he showed up full
Dazzled he like suns in scores.

Mistook Hanuman for hurdle
Mainak who rose to the skies.

Not the one to get daunted
Hanuman toppled Mainaka
With his bare chest that was strong.

Turned as he all turtle then
Mainaka was so dumbfounded.

So as a way to woo Hanuman
Assumed Mainak human form.

It's my request O Hanuman
That thee rest on my shoulder.

It was Rama's ancestor
Helped who seas all to expand
That's why grateful Lord of Seas
Sent me to help thee take rest.
Well it's adage that so old
Help we must all those us help
Sees thus Sagar as favour
Rest if thou on my shoulder.

Wants me Sagar make thou feel
At home on my peak utmost.
Pray thee break now on my back
Non-stop flight leagues eight hundred.

Might as well thou savour now
Smell-well fruits of rarest taste.

Have as we such ties us bind
Consent thou to strengthen them.

Cross as thou sea Concord like
Proud are all of us of thee.

Make as thee our V.I.P
Guests all we give due respect.

Amongst demigods rank thee high
Speed thine no less than thy dad.

Let if am I to serve thee
Feel I served thy dad as well
Hold I whom in special esteem.

Had all mountains wings in yore
Hovered thus they all three worlds.

Scared all angels and sages
Mischance could well cause us crash.

It's thus Indra clipped our wings
With the diamond sword of his.

Came in time as my own turn
Unsheathed Indra diamond sword,
Spiriting me off with gale wind
It's thy dad that saved my wings.

Owing to thy parent's grace
Wings mine escaped Indra's wrath.

See in this I golden chance
Debt to repay benefactor.

Pray thee give a chance to us
Redeem that we age old debt.
Now thou consent O great soul
Rest have thee as our dear guest.

Hanuman at that told Mainak:
Words though thine me move no end
Precedence takes now Rama's cause.

Stop if I now in mid-flight
How am I to meet deadline?
Token then as of his love
Caressed Hanuman Mainak's head.

Moved were Sagar 'n Mainak
At the way thus Hanuman placed
Lord's his interest above all else.

Bidding adieu to them both
Picked up Hanuman height in flight.

While on course in skies Hanuman
Looked at them both in reverence.

Well in awe at what they saw
Praised all angels Hanuman then.

Standing ovation gave Indra
With other gods to Mainaka.

Heartened then by his gesture
Addressed Indra Mainak thus:

Pleased as gods all Mainaka
Feel at ease as I leave thee free.

In spite of the threat I posed
Came out thou to aid Hanuman.

In thy bid to help Hanuman
Tried thee to aid Rama's cause.

Indra as thus assured him
Breathed then easy that mountain.

Cherished as Mainak his freedom
Sped past Hanuman by him then.

Thought it fit then gods to put
Hanuman to test in his quest
Spoke they thus to mother of snakes:

Well O Surasa see Hanuman
Flies he how to find Seetha
Sea this across to Lanka!

Pray posit thyself in his way
Obstruct him with ogress frame.

Test we must the mettle in him
Moves on or he beats retreat.

Egged on thus by gods themselves
Suras came to confront him.
With its ogress look Surasa
Addressed Hanuman in mid-air.

Gods all destined thy large frame
Serves as sumptuous meal for me.

Without a twitch of his eyelids
Addressed Hanuman that ogress.

Let me tell thee what happened
To Ram 'n Seetha as they stayed
With Lakshman in tow in Dandak.

Sent evil Ravan Maareecha

Decoy as to lure Rama
And snared his spouse to Lanka.

Set as I on Seetha's trial
And live as thou by Rama's grace
Pray thee not put stop to that.

Eye me if thou as thy prey
As soon as I finish my task
Return I would to oblige thee.

Surasa made him then privy
Boon which Brahma gave to her
That none can ever pass her by
Until and unless she lets go.

Having ignored Surasa's threat
Kept as Hanuman his own course
To test him thus she engaged him.

None there is an escape route
Settled it all that Brahma's boon
As and when I come in way
Pass all through but mine own mouth.

Enraged Hanuman dared Surasa
See if she could swallow him.

Neared as she with hill like mouth
Outgrew Hanuman mountain like.

Stretched she jaws then undaunted
Tides that took and clouds in stride.

Stalling Surasa's great swallow
Assumed Himalayan size Hanuman.

Stretched she into troposphere
Touched he then the stratosphere.
None less was the mother serpent
Mouth she widened enough for him.

Hanuman to thwart her for all
Raised himself to heaven itself.

Snarled then she her mouth awful
Enough to engulf heaven and earth.

With his presence of mind Hanuman
Turned then simian with thin tail.

Before she could drop her jaws
Traversed Hanuman through her mouth.

Gaped as Surasa spoke Hanuman:
Came out as I from thy mouth
Boon of Brahma thus fulfilled
Feel I am a free bird now.

Seemed he then to Surasa's eyes
Like the moon that's past eclipse.

Spoke thus Surasa to Hanuman:
Go on with no hindrance now
And bring Seetha back to Ram.

Looked all worlds in wonderment
Hanuman's feat that third in row.

Having tricked that Surasa thus
Then in high skies flew Hanuman.

Celestial singers there he saw
Stable of Airavat as well.

With features of earth's wildlife
Saw he flying beasts in skies.

With their aura of angels
Lived all righteous people there.

Went he near to sun 'n moon
Saw he Agni conduits who
Oblations to gods all there.

It's the region that ruled by
Visvavas the king that fair
Live where angels 'n such like
Besides good souls after death.

Entered he then that region
Serves as canopy of three worlds,
Path there sun 'n moon doth share
With Indra's stable of white elephants.
Saw them he all in their turn
Martyrs all of great battles.

Clouds of myriad colours in skies
Scattered were by Hanuman's thrust.

Clouds with playing hide and seek
In skies then he shone like moon.

Flying non-stop in high skies

Looked he like a winged mountain.

Seeing Hanuman thus speeding
Fiendish Simhik turned greedy.

Was there ever a prey like this?
What a sumptuous meal it makes!

Gripped she then him by shadow
Cast which Hanuman coast to coast.

Ship in sail as up the wind
Slowed down Hanuman in his course.

At last as he looked for clue
Found his shadow in fiend's grip.

Recalled he in dismay then
What Sugreev said at outset
That one fiend had aptitude
To grip its prey by mere shadow.

Stuck as he got in spite of
Effort his great to speed up well
Realized that he was its prey.

Grew he then to fill the skies
Cast his shadow on all earth.

At that Simhik came jumping
At him with her cave-like mouth.

Sensed as he then her intent
Hanuman thought then better of it.

As with Surasa so with her
Turned he simian in no time
And thus entered her wide mouth.

Seen in awe by all angels
It was as if moon eclipsed.

Into Simhik as he went
Vitals her tore with his nails.

Moaned as she then in great pain
Opened she wide mouth her large,
Came out as he from her then
Stopped she moaning as she died.

Torso as her sank in seas
Flight he resumed in those skies.

Saw all demigods his great deed
Showered they praises then on him.

Blessed him angels nonetheless
Wished him well on his errand.

Felt all Hanuman's great passion
Search for Seetha, Rama's spouse
Worth it was for Hall of Fame.

Flew as he leagues eight-hundred
Saw he yonder some island.

On that horizon came to sight
Found he tree-lines touching skies.

Landed he soon on high peak
Of the Malaya mountain range.

Like a mountain on the move
Sauntered Hanuman on that high.

Felt he then that his giant size
Won't make spying his easy.

It's thus Hanuman thought it fit
Better he assumed simian shape.

It was akin to Vishnu
Becoming pygmean to push down
Bali into depths of earth.

Before he turned a small fry then
Looked he at his huge frame though.

Climbed he Lamba Mountain then
Had which countless coconut crowns.

For the close up of the town
Jumped onto ground then Hanuman.

Sea across that miles and miles
In the end then thus Hanuman
Made his way to Ravan's land.

Canto 2 - City in Clouds

On the landmass of Lanka
Chitrakoot was the king mountain

Kissed its peaks all clouds in skies
Reigned Ravan from peak foremost.

Climbed as Hanuman that mountain
Rained all trees then flowers on him.

Such was stamina of Hanuman
Fresh he looked from that short rest.

Felt he had still left in him
Strength to circle earth itself.

Flying wonder that Hanuman
Powerful soldier none the less.

Green all yonder found Hanuman
Reached as he that mountain range.

Valleys all of that hill range
Had thick trees 'n wide gardens.

Had he thus a full measure of
Land of Ravan that was green.

Bore all trees there fruits varied
Besides date palms and santras.

Thick were bushes on those hills
Fragrant flowers all bloomed therein.

Birds well nestled on trees all there
Rustled leaves were by southern breeze.

Graced flowers lotus tanks all those
Swans in them swam with rare grace.

Grew fruits well in all seasons
Well-grown farms in scores there lay.

Itching to search Ravan's town
Hanuman in time reached its gates.

Lest Rama should sneak in there
On high alert were Ravan's troops.

Bricks of gold made Lanka's wall
Kissed its castles clouds in skies.

Mansions it had in millions
Wide 'n well laid were there roads.

Climbed creepers green gold arches
Looked like Lanka heaven on earth.

Seemed as Lanka city in clouds
Lay dwellings on mountain peaks.

Built it was by gods' builder
Earned it fame in Ravan's reign.

Lankan fort in that sea then
Seemed like saree clad maiden,
Compound wall its laid in gold
Looked like virgin's narrow waist,
Long-range guns its plaits parted
Seemed as gables gold ear-rings.

Moved as Hanuman languidly
Thought he thus in wonderment:

Sky scrappers these of Lanka
Won't they lead to heaven itself!

None but Kubera owned it once
But vile Ravan grabbed from him.

Demons then came to own this place
Teeth that protrude seem them fiends.

Such as reside in Lanka
Circled by seas as it were
Foe to fear made king Ravan.

Came as cropper demigods all
Of what avail Rama's vanar force!

Maginot line that Ravan built
Find would Rama hard to breach.

Rich as Lankans 'n powerful
Bribe 'n bravery might not work.

But for Angad, Neel 'n Sugreev
Rest might get stuck at these gates.

Place why horse before the cart
Makes it sense to strive my best.

So felt Hanuman it's proper
Handled he better task on hand.

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