



**Performance Outlines
of the Ramayana
and the Mahabharata**
by Kathy Foley

These outlines are examples of those a *dalang* might write concerning major points to be covered in a rod puppet (*wayang golek*) performance. The text is usually a mixture of narrative and notes on dialogue; it is the basis upon which the dalang improvises a performance using the stock elements: opening, closing, and transitional mantras; mood songs; and the rules of character types, which dictate that some characters speak in formal, polite language and others in colloquial language. The Ramayana outline given here covers material that would in actual practice be broken into two or three stories. The outline closely resembles what would be seen today in dance drama versions: the narrative is presented in one performance, from the kidnapping of Sita (Sinta) to her release from Lanka (Alengka). In contrast, the outline given here for the Mahabharata episode is much like one that a puppeteer might use for a wayang golek performance.

The Ramayana

Opening mantra: Tell of a county wide and free, tell how it is rich and fertile with all that is needed to feed and house the people. This is the kingdom in the story of Dandaka Forest. It is here that the great Prince Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu, has retreated to live out his fourteen-year exile from his kingdom of Ayodhya (Ayodya). By the work of his hand, with the assistance of his brother Lakshmana (Laksmana) and his beloved wife Sita (Sinta), he has made the dark forest into a place of beauty and safety where gardens bloom and birds call. Tell how at the present he meets with his brother and his wife at the retreat they have made in the dense forest.

Scene 1. Dandaka Forest

Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana talk in the forest about the golden deer Sita has seen. She begs Rama to catch it for her. Rama tells Lakshmana to guard his wife while he hunts and exits. A cry of "Help!" comes echoing through the forest. It is the voice of a demon pretending to be Rama.

Sita: This is Rama's voice. Go help him, Lakshmana, or he will surely die!

Lakshmana: You are mistaken, Lady Sita. That could not be Rama's voice. He is a great hero and needs no one to help.

Sita: Lakshmana, Rama is in trouble and you stay here? Go quickly or I will know for sure that you are not a true brother to Rama. Perhaps you long for his death so that you yourself can marry me, for what other reason would you let him die so piteously!

Lakshmana: How can you think this of me? In your heart you know I love my brother more than all the world. Why else would I have left all riches and luxury to follow him into exile? Still, if you force me, then I must go. For your safety, I will draw a magic circle around your feet. Do not leave its circumference until I return with Rama.

Narrator: Tell how, after Lakshmana leaves, a voice is heard begging for alms. This is the demon king Ravana (Rawana), who has taken up the guise of a wandering beggar in order to trick Lady Sita.

Ravana: Alms for the poor. Food for the hungry. Drinks for the thirsty, and everything good for me! Hey, Lady, what can you give me to eat?

Sita: Poor man, take what you want from the house.

Ravana tries to touch her but is prevented by the magic circle. He tricks her into going out of it by getting her to enter the house for food. As soon as she moves, he grabs her.

Ravana: In case you don't know, I am Ravana, Lord of Lanka. Now you will have the joy of becoming my bride!

Sita: Alas!

Scene 2. Another Part of the Forest

The jesters are waiting as their boss Rama hunts the golden deer. They complain that they hate camping, that the mosquitoes are biting them, and that they long to go back to Rama's palace in Ayodhya. The jester Semar tells his three sons about the golden deer. Petruk threatens to put horns on his head so he can be a decoy. Cepot says he doesn't need horns—all he has to do is lie down and any deer will mistake his nose for a huge horn. Petruk blows his nose, and Cepot says it sounds like a foghorn. The jesters joke on until finally Gareng says, "Shut up! Isn't that Rama coming?"

Rama is returning from hunting the deer. When he shot the deer, it turned into a ferocious demon. Rama encounters Lakshmana and reprimands him for leaving Sita. They find the heroic vulture Jatayus, who was killed by Ravana when he attempted to rescue Sita. Rama vows to find his beloved wife. A monkey enters, and Rama asks who he is. He identifies himself as Hanuman (Hanoman) of the monkey kingdom, Kishkindha (Guha Kiskenda). Rama tells Hanuman that he has lost Sita. Hanuman volunteers to help Rama find her, saying, "I'm a son of the god of the wind. If your wife is anywhere the wind blows, that's a place I can fly with my daddy-o. Don't worry, I will find her. Leave it to me."

The narrator tells how Hanuman leaps into the air and travels on the wind that blows south to Lanka.

Scene 3. The Ashoka (Asoka) Garden

Sita weeps in the *ashoka* (*asoka*) garden. Ravana enters and tells her that Rama is dead and she must prepare to marry him this very evening. Sita says, "Never! I would rather die than become your wife!" Ravana leaves, and Hanuman lands.

Hanuman: Excuse me—Mrs.? Miss? Ms.?—but I couldn't help noticing that you were crying. I'm feeling sort of sad too because I've been looking everywhere and I can't find Lady Sita.

Sita: But I am Sita.

Hanuman tells her he comes from Rama and shows her Rama's ring. She sends him off, telling him to return quickly with Rama.

Scene 4. Lanka

Ravana intercepts Hanuman. The demon beats the monkey and tries to set his tail on fire. Instead, Hanuman escapes and sets the whole city ablaze.

Hanuman: And that's only a preview of what we've got in store for you if you don't return the Lady Sita right away!

Narrator: Tell how Hanuman returns to Kishkindha, bringing Rama and his allies to Lanka. After many months Hanuman's army arrives. Weeks of fighting have already taken place. All the retainers of Ravana have died, sacrifices to the ogre king's folly. Finally, only Ravana remains. He comes forth to fight Rama.

Rama: Return to me, my beloved wife.

Ravana: She will marry me!

Lakshmana: Release my dear sister-in-law.

Hanuman: Come on, you badly-brought-up person, release the lady.

Ravana: Never.

Rama: Prepare, then, to meet your end.

Narrator: Rama and Ravana fight. Divinity and demon are locked in their eternal struggle. Tell how Rama takes forth his discus (*cakra*) which shatters all illusions. As it strikes Ravana, for the first time the demon sees clearly the folly of his furious pursuit of the things of this world. Understanding at last the aim of all existence and shattered by truth, Ravana falls.

Rama: Hanuman, bring forth the Lady Sita,

Rama and Sita are reunited. With Lakshmana and Hanuman they prepare to return to their kingdom of Ayodhya, since the years of their exile have now expired.

Closing mantra: Tell how with this our story ends. The flower is picked; its fragrance spreads. Close the gate to Vishnu's world."

The Mahabharata

Sample episode:

With the puppets, improvise dialogue and play the episode of the gambling.

Scene 1.

With their mother, Kunti, the five Pandava (Pandawa) brothers discuss the bad behavior of their cousins the Kaurava (Kaurawa) brothers. Karna (Kunti's son by the sun god, Surya) arrives. Kunti wonders why Karna looks so familiar. Arjuna is rude to him, and Kunti separates them before they fight. Karna says the Kauravas want to make up with the Pandavas, and Duryodhana (Duryodana), the eldest Kaurava, invites Yudhishtira (Yudistira), the eldest Pandava, to play a game of dice. Yudhishtira agrees. Bhima (Bima), another Pandava, advises Yudhishtira not to play, but he does not listen.

Scene 2.

The Kauravas' uncle, Shangkuni, will play in Duryodhana's stead. Grinning with glee, Duhshasana (Dursasana), another Kaurava, gives Shangkuni a pair of loaded dice. Yudhishtira gambles his kingdom, then his brothers, then himself, and finally his wife. Duhshasana brags that he will tear off Draupadi's (Drupadi's) dress. The narrator tells how Vishnu intervenes to foil this plan.

Scene 3.

The Pandavas take leave of Kunti to go into thirteen years of exile in the forest. Bhima says that though they have lost their riches they still have what is most important: They are brothers. Whatever they face, it will be as a family united.