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TV Serial *Ramayana* as a pedagogical tool for Japanese Students

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Ramanand Sagar's TV Serial entitled *Ramayana* was one of the longest-running and the most popular series on TV(Doordarshan) in India. The serial ran for about a year and a half on a regular basis (from January 1987 to July 1988). It enchanted most spectators regardless of ethnicity and class throughout and outside of India. The serial consists of twenty-six video cassettes.

I edited the printed version of this serial, which comprised two volumes. The total length of the work is one thousand and eighteen pages. The credit for the Hindi transcription of the text goes to Dr. Girish Bakhshi. The work was published in 1992 by the Osaka University of Foreign Studies, Osaka where I have been teaching. Since then it has been used as a pedagogical text with the help of the videos in the Intermediate Hindi class in the language laboratory. The video will be helpful to students because it examines the linguistic and cultural difficulties Japanese students may encounter while attempting to learn Hindi.

This is the sixth academic year since we began using the video. So far we have finished showing and explaining up to Episode 25(Volume 9), where in the assembly held by King Janak in Chitrakut it is decided that Bharat should rule Ayodhya on behalf of Ram until he comes back from the forest after 14 years.

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The students have taken 10 units (that is to say, five 90-minutes class sessions for 30 weeks a year). Although not all the students are familiar with the Hindu mythology and episodes, they are encouraged to conduct their own outside reading. In any case it was difficult and took a lot of time to explain the meaning of the first song to the students. The passage is as follows:

**'sārad ses mahes vidhi āgam nigam purāṇ
neti neti kahi jāsu gun karahī nirantar gān'** (p.3)

It was also difficult to explain what **dānav**, **nāg**, **kinnar**, and **gandharv** (p.9) are. The following terms proper to Hindu culture were also difficult for the students to understand: **muhūrt**(p.11), **kuldevtā**(p.11), **trikāldarśī**(p.12), **putrkāmeṣṭhi** (p.12), **mūlādhār cakr**(p.39), **kopbhavan**(p.178), **agnihotr** (p.191), **chaṭhī kā dūdh**(p.204) etc.

Even small sentences, though easy to understand grammatically, require plentiful explanations as in :

**us ahaṁkār ke kāraṇ usne vardān māṅte samay manuṣya
aur vānar ke hāthō na marne kā vardān nahī māṅā thā.**
(p.10) 'Because of that egotism, when he had a chance, he did not avail of it to seek the boon that he should not be slain by man or monkey.' The concept of **vardān** was difficult for the students to understand.

kyā hamāre bād pitarō ko pānī dene vālā koī na hogā ?
(p.11) 'After me (after I expire), isn't there anyone who will give water to our ancestors ?' Of course, **pānī denā** is not just 'to give water'. Unless you know the family system of traditional Hindus, you cannot understand this sentence. The female form **dene vālī** of **dene vālā** cannot exist.

koī mā kahne vālā na ho to strī apne āp ko pūrṇ nahī

samajhtī.(p.11) 'When there is no one who calls her *mother*, then women do not regard themselves as whole.' The female form **kahne vālī** of **kahne vālā** could be impossible, either. This sentence is very important to understand the mentality of traditional Hindu women.

cārō bhāiyō kī kuṇḍalī mē grah-nakṣatr kaise haī ? (p.16) 'What is the astrological chart for the horoscope of the four brothers?' The concept of **grah-nakṣatr** is also very important to understand Indian culture.'

vidyā kā vrat lekar baṭuk brahmacārī ke lie savārī varjit hai. (p.30) ' Once a Brahmin student who is practicing brahmacarya took an oath of learning, it is prohibited for him to ride a vehicle.' The students were naturally inquisitive why they had to go on foot!

I teach neither Sanskrit nor Awadhi because of the short time span. Also, the aim of this class is to acquaint students with modern Hindi and Indian culture. At the students' leisure, they are to refer to the back of the text for translation and annotation. The students are advised to prepare their lessons prior to class. They may do so by consulting Hindi-English or Hindi-Japanese dictionaries.

I begin by calling on some student to read the text and translate it into Japanese. Students may notice a change of scene from the spacing of the paragraphs. At times it will be difficult to determine what the abstract *vah* 'it' or *yeh* 'this' means without seeing the scene. Even the name of a character **saryū**, a subordinate of the king of the Nishad, could not be judged only from the written text(p.229).

Besides the cultural context, most of the students find it

difficult to understand long sentences, and especially relative-clauses constructions, which do not exist in Japanese. For example: **dhartī par jab bhī koī zālim prāṇī mātr ko apne caraṇō mē jhukne par majbūr kar detā hai, to ek saccā insān uske sāmne jhukne se inkār kar detā hai kyōki use viśvās hotā hai ki ūpar śakti hai jo uske sāth nyāy karegī, uskī rakṣā karegī.** (p.10) 'Whenever some tyrant comes to the earth to compel the beings to vow to his feet, one truthful human being refuses to do so, because he believes there is some power above which will see that justice is done to him and will protect him.'

ham apnī kalāō sahit ayodhyā-nareś daśarath ke ghar mē janm lēge aur asurō ke atyācārō se prithvī kī rakṣā karēge tāki dhartī par jahā bhī log satya aur dharm kā sāth dē vahā unhē ek hī viśvās ho ki ant mē saccāī kī jay hogī.(p.11) ' With all my arts I will take birth in the house of Dasharath, the king of Ayodhya, and protect the earth from the tyranny of Asuras so that wherever people may side with the truth and righteousness on the earth, there they may have only this faith that in the end, only the truth will win.'

In this connection, there are obviously two mistakes in the use of relative pronouns on the part of scriptwriters, as follows:

jiskā pati sansārik māyā ko jītkar videh kahlātā ho uskī rānī aisī adhīr ho jāe, yeh ucit nahī lagtā. (p.138) 'It is not proper for a queen whose husband has conquered the worldly illusion (affairs) and is, thus, called 'Videha' to feel so disheartened.' **jiskā pati tapasvī-veś mē rahegā uskī patnī rājsī thāth se jīvan bitāe kyā usko śobhā degā ?** (p.219) 'Will it befit a wife whose husband will live in ascetic dress, to live her life with

royal grandeur ?' In both sentences **uskī** should have been **vah** grammatically.

From the viewpoint of a standard grammar, **karie**(in 'ayodhyāpati kī or se mahārāj janak kī sevā mẽ nivedan **karie ki hamē āpkā nimantraṇ svīkār hai.**(p.113)('On behalf of the king of Ayodhya, please inform King Janak that we will accept his invitation.') is mistaken , which confused the students.

The sentences uttered by **vaśiṣṭh** was in Sanskrit, namely **saubhāgyavatī bhava** (p.221) 'Be a happy woman.' This is very effective to create the atmosphere, but difficult for non-Sanskrit students to understand.

Also, there were two ways of addressing Sita and Kaushalya as **sīte** or **sītā** and **kaśalye** or **kaśalyā** respectively. This inconsistency (the former is Sanskrit, the latter is Hindi.) is also a fault.

The highly-Sanskritized style of Hindi is the most literal in print, far from the spoken Hindi used among the common people in North India. Diligent or honest (sometimes inflexible?) students may be laughed at when around native speakers if they try to recite faithfully a sentence like **jahā āp jaise puṇy-vibhūti ke caraṇ-kamal ā jāē, vahā sab maṅgal hai. āp ke āgaman se merā ghar tīrth ho gayā, merā jīvan dhanya ho gayā.**(p.58) 'Where the lotus-feet of the virtuous supreme-being like you will fall, there will be auspiciousness all round. With your arrival, my house has become a place of pilgrimage and my life has been blessed.'

Of course I warn them not to use such a rigid and formal sentence in daily conversation.

During the first day of class I explain to the students how

Hindi differs from so-called Pure Hindi and conversational Hindi. However, memorizing short sentences which are wise or apt sayings is very helpful for a command over the language. For example, the following sentences may well be used even orally and the listeners would be much impressed.

mā to bhāvnā kī mūrti hotī hai parantu pitā ko to kartavya ke path par calnā hī parṭā hai.(p.31) 'Mother is an idol of emotion, but as for father, he has to follow the path of duty.'

āp se hārne mē bhī merī jīt hai. (p.106) 'Even in my defeat at your hand is my victory.'

yeh hamārī beṭī kī sasurāl hai. yahā se kuch lenā nīti aur paramparā ke viruddh hai.(p.114) 'This is the house of the in-law's of my daughter, to accept anything from here is against the ethics and the tradition.'

vivāh vyaktigat kārya nahī hai, yeh ek sāmājīk saṃskār hai. (p.121) 'Marriage is not a personal deed but a social sacrament.'
tū saut kā viṣ nahī jāntī. saut miṭṭī kī bhī ho, vah bhī zahrīlī nāgin hotī hai.(p.173) 'You do not know how poisonous co-wives are. Even if they are made of clay, they are poisonous like female snakes.'

itnī akasmāt to bijlī bhī nahī girtī. (p.199) 'Even a thunderbolt does not strike all of a sudden.'

sukh aur dukh to keval man kī sthiti kā nām hai. (p.217) 'Happiness and sorrow are nothing but the names of mental states.'

krūrṭā kī bhī ek sīmā hotī hai. (p.218) 'Even cruelty has its own limit.' etc.

Certain sensitive words like **caṇḍālīnī** (p.223) must be

carefully explained. I differentiate between words that are taboo in Japanese yet not in Hindi to prevent any problems from human rights organizations. '**girtī dīvārē**', a famous novel by Upendranath Ashk was translated into Japanese by Yuichiro MIKI and published by Daido Life Foundation, Osaka in 1991. Some portions had to be eliminated by the publisher fearing of attack from human rights organizations. For example, the following passages in the original text were completely deleted on the basis of 'occupational discrimination'.

subah kā vaqt thā, aur cāhe myūnisipal kameṭī ke bhaṅgī aur bhiṣṭī apnā kām pūrā kar gaye the, kintu gandagī kī gāriyā bhī apnā kartavya pālan kar rahī thī. vāstav mē ghoṛō ke astabalō, gandī gāriyō ke ahātō aur gūjarō, caṅgalō, bhaṅgī tathā camārō ke gharō ka sāmipyā hone ke kāraṇ bhiṣṭī cāhe lākh chirṅāṅ kar jāē, aur bhaṅgī cāhe lākh safāī kar jāē, caṅgaṛ muhalle kī daśā mē kabhī koī antar nahī ātā.(upendranāth aśk **girtī dīvārē** cauthā saṃskaraṇ, 1967, Allahabad, p.134, line3-8)

The longest deletion was between page 410 line 4 and page 415 line 10, beginning with **saṛak ke kināre baiṭhe** and ending with **naī nasl kā āvirbhāv kamā hogā**. This part, they say, included many discriminating terms against leper and other sick. Needless to say that there is no censorship in Japan, but this was 'voluntary control' on the part of the publisher, for which the translator felt sorry.

I could easily explain **caṇḍālīnī** (including **guru-caṇḍālī doṣ** in Bengali) orally, but I should be careful when I publish the translation in Japanese.

Finally, due to the copyrights of the videos, students may

not take the video home to copy. However, they are welcome to bring their own audio tape and copy the proper pronunciation.

Also in this text, interestingly, the Arab-Persian loan words are not to be totally neglected. For details see Tomio Mizokami, 'Urdu Vocabulary in T.V.Serial *Ramayana* ', *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* Vol.43, No.1, December 1994, Tokyo, pp.520-524