

SAMVARDHINI :- 01/06/2025

Volume – 7

Issue – 1

(ISSN ONLINE:- 2583-7176)

<https://samvardhini.in>

The Yogic Spirit of the Sundarakāṇḍa of Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa

Dr. Nagarajan V

ABSTRACT

The *Sundarakāṇḍa* of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* is renowned not only for its poetic grandeur and narrative brilliance but also for its profound philosophical and spiritual undercurrents. Among all the *kāṇḍas*, it uniquely serves as a concentrated exposition of yogic ideals and inner transformation. This study explores how *Sundarakāṇḍa* represents the essence of Yoga - not just as a philosophical doctrine, but as a lived spiritual journey. Drawing parallels from the *Bhagavad Bhagavatgītā*, *Pātañjala Yoga Sūtras*, and traditional Bhakti texts, this article interprets Hanumān's odyssey as a yogic pilgrimage, reflecting central concepts like *tapas*, *dhyāna*, *vairāgya*, *śraddhā*, and *bhakti*. Through symbolic analysis, scriptural parallels and philosophical interpretation, the paper positions *Sundarakāṇḍa* as a rich manual for the spiritual aspirant.

KEY WORDS

Sundarakāṇḍa, *Hanumān*, *Tapas*, *Śraddhā*, *Vairāgya*, *Dhyāna*, *Bhakti*, *Yoga Sūtra*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Paramātmā*

Dr. Nagarajan V

Assistant Professor

Div. of Yoga and Spirituality

S - VYASA Deemed - to - be -

University

Jigani, Bengaluru - 560 105

Cell: 9894641226 / E - mail:

drnagarajan.v@svyasa.edu.in

1. INTRODUCTION

The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki stands as one of the foundational epics of Indian civilization, shaping not only the religious and ethical imagination of the subcontinent but also its aesthetic and philosophical sensibilities. Among its seven kāṇḍas or books, the Sundarakāṇḍa occupies a unique and celebrated position. While other kāṇḍas focus on the grandeur of Rāma's divine incarnation, the dilemmas of dharma, the politics of kingship and the cosmic battle between good and evil, the Sundarakāṇḍa offers a deeply intimate and spiritually charged narrative centred almost entirely on Hanumān's solitary journey to Laṅkā in search of Sītā.

The Sundarakāṇḍa, literally "Beauty," is itself philosophically provocative. What constitutes Sundara (beauty) in this context? The Vālmīki's choice invites interpretations that move beyond the merely aesthetic. Is it Hanumān's valorous leap across the ocean, the poetic elegance of the narrative or the emotional poignancy of Sītā's sorrow that is beautiful? Or does the beauty reside in the deeper spiritual message embedded within the story - the beauty of unwavering devotion, selfless service, disciplined action, and the gradual uncovering of the soul's innate divinity?

This article proposes that the Sundarakāṇḍa is best understood as a profound allegory of the yogic path - a spiritual journey encoded in poetic narrative. Hanumān is not merely a heroic figure or mythic warrior; he is the yogi par excellence, whose inner and outer journey mirrors the archetypal pilgrimage of the seeker toward liberation. His flight over the ocean, his encounters with illusion and fear, his discovery of Sītā in the Aśoka Vana, and his ultimate return to Rāma represent not just a heroic mission, but stages of yogic realization.

The philosophical substructure of the Sundarakāṇḍa resonates with key elements of classical Yoga, as codified in Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras, as well as with the synthetic vision of the Bhagavad Bhagavatgītā, where action (karma), knowledge (jñāna), and devotion (bhakti) are harmonized into a holistic path of liberation. Hanumān's conduct throughout the narrative - his courage, discernment, humility, discipline, and unshakable devotion to Rāma - exemplify these yogic ideals in action. His mission becomes a dramatization of karma yoga, jñāna yoga, and bhakti yoga, not as separate paths but as integrated dimensions of a single spiritual reality.

Moreover, the metaphysical symbolism of the Sundarakāṇḍa lends itself to a Vedantic reading: Rāma as the Paramātmān (Supreme Self), Sītā as the Jīvātmān (individual soul) trapped in māyā (illusion), Rāvaṇa as the ahaṁkāra (ego-principle) that falsely claims ownership over the soul, and Hanumān as the awakened spiritual faculty - the buddhi or inner guide - that bridges the apparent separation between the divine and the human. The ocean that Hanumān leaps across can be seen as the vast and turbulent field of saṁsāra, while the fire he unleashes in Laṅkā becomes the purifying fire of tapas that burns away ignorance.

In traditional Indian practice, reciting the Sundarakāṇḍa is believed to bring courage, peace, and spiritual upliftment. This experiential and devotional efficacy is not accidental - it arises from the deep symbolic charge carried by the text. What modern readers often miss is that the Sundarakāṇḍa is not only narratively satisfying but philosophically profound. It is a layered scripture that offers teachings on the human condition, the nature of the soul, the obstacles to inner freedom and the means of overcoming them through yogic virtues.

The objective of this article, therefore, is twofold: first, to analyse how the Sundarakāṇḍa embodies the core principles of classical Yoga and spiritual philosophy; and second, to illuminate Hanumān's journey as a template for the aspirant's own inner quest. Drawing from textual analysis, traditional commentaries and the broader philosophical context of Indian spirituality, we aim to uncover the deeper strata of meaning embedded in this "Book of Beauty" - a text that is as much a guide to inner transformation as it is an epic of divine adventure.

2. HANUMĀN AS THE IDEAL YOGI

Hanumān is perhaps one of the most complex and spiritually potent figures in Indian mythology. In *Sundarakāṇḍa*, he does not just play the role of a messenger; he becomes a yogic archetype - embodying the synthesis of *karma*, *jñāna*, and *bhakti yogas*. Each phase of his journey reveals an aspect of yogic realization.

2.1 Karma Yoga – The Path of Selfless Action

Hanumān's entire mission is motivated not by personal desire, but by a commitment to Rāma's cause. His actions epitomize *niṣkāma karma*, or detached action, as defined in the *Bhagavad Bhagavatgītā* (2.47): “Your right is to perform your duty, but not to the fruits

thereof.” He displays no pride after crossing the ocean, burning Laṅkā, or defeating Rākṣasas. This non-attachment to outcomes while performing challenging duties defines the spirit of *karma yoga*.

2.2 Jñāna Yoga – Wisdom and Discrimination

Even in moments of crisis, Hanumān demonstrates extraordinary *viveka* (discrimination). He weighs options, reflects before acting, and constantly prioritizes righteousness. Before approaching Sītā, he deliberates: Should he speak immediately? Should he remain hidden? These internal dialogues show his steady intellect (*sthita-prajña*) - a mark of the *jñāna yogi* described in Bhagavatgītā 2.56: “The wise person is not agitated in sorrow, nor elated in happiness.”

2.3 Bhakti Yoga – Devotion as Liberation

Hanumān’s devotion is total and consuming. It is *ananya bhakti* or undivided love, where the self dissolves in the object of adoration. Bhagavatgītā 9.22 describes: “To those who are constantly devoted, I carry what they lack and preserve what they have.” Hanumān’s constant remembrance of Rāma, his surrender, and his joy in being Rāma’s *dāsa* (servant) make him the embodiment of devotional yoga. His love is not merely emotional - it is liberating, transformative and absolute.

3. YOGIC VIRTUES IN HANUMĀN'S CHARACTER

Beyond abstract ideals, Hanumān illustrates the daily challenges and triumphs of a true *yogi*. The Yoga Sūtras (I.20) outline key traits for yogic success: *śraddhā*, *vīrya*, *smṛti*, *samādhi*, and *prajñā*. Hanumān’s personality and journey bring these concepts to life.

3.1 Tapas – Spiritual Heat and Discipline

Tapas, or austere effort, is central to Hanumān’s mission. Facing monstrous oceanic creatures, mountain-size obstacles, and internal dilemmas, Hanumān persists without complaint. His burning of Laṅkā with his ignited tail serves as a vivid metaphor: the spiritual fire (*tapas*) that consumes ignorance (*avidyā*) and lights the path of transformation.

3.2 Śraddhā – Unwavering Faith

In the face of uncertainty, Hanumān exhibits *Śraddhā*, defined in Yoga Sūtra I.20 as the foundation of inner progress. He never doubts Rāma's cause or his own purpose. His faith is neither blind nor passive - it is luminous, energizing and aligned with divine will.

3.3 Vairāgya – Detachment from Ego

Despite possessing unmatched powers, Hanumān shows no arrogance. He attributes all his accomplishments to Rāma, echoing Yoga Sūtra I.12: "The mind is stilled through *abhyāsa* (practice) and *vairāgya* (detachment)." His humility is not merely moral - it is metaphysical, grounded in the understanding that the ego is not the true self.

3.4 Dhyāna – Yogic Concentration

Hanumān's *ekāgratā* (focused approach) is apparent throughout his mission. Though not in meditative posture, his mind is fully absorbed in the divine purpose. In Yogic terms, this dynamic concentration is a form of *dhyāna* in action - a moving meditation rooted in sacred duty.

4. SĪTĀ AS THE INNER SELF: METAPHYSICS OF MĀYĀ

In the deeper allegorical structure, Sītā represents the *jīvātmā* - the soul or the pure inner consciousness - temporarily lost in the realm of *māyā*. Lañkā, though glittering with wealth and power, is a fortress of illusion and bondage. Rāvaṇa, in turn, personifies *ahaṁkāra* (ego) and *avidyā* (ignorance) - forces that claim ownership over the soul.

Hanumān's search for Sītā becomes a spiritual metaphor: the journey inward, through discernment and discipline, to locate and liberate the pure self-buried under illusion. The *Aśoka Vana*, where Sītā resides in grief, becomes a sacred site for *darśana* the yogi's recognition of the Self amid worldly confusion.

5. THE ALLEGORICAL STRUCTURE OF THE SUNDARAKĀṇḌA

Element	Yogic Interpretation
Rāma	Supreme Self (<i>Paramātmā</i>)
Sītā	Inner Self (<i>Jīvātmā</i> or pure awareness)

Element	Yogic Interpretation
Hanumān	Yogi or spiritual seeker (<i>Sādhaka</i>)
Rāvaṇa	Ego, Ignorance (<i>Ahaṁkāra</i> , <i>Avidyā</i>)
Laṅkā	Māyā, illusory world
Ocean	<i>Samśāra</i> , field of testing and struggle
Fire of the tail	<i>Tapas</i> , yogic heat and purification

This mapping reveals the *Sundarakāṇḍa* as a sophisticated allegorical text. It functions simultaneously as a divine story and a treatise on liberation through Yoga.

6. COMMENTARIAL AND TRADITIONAL SUPPORT

Numerous traditional voices have echoed the spiritual dimensions of *Sundarakāṇḍa*. Swami Chinmayananda highlights Hanumān as the inner guru (*antar-guru*) - one who, through devotion and discrimination, awakens the dormant spiritual energies. Tulasīdāsa in his *Rāmcaritāmāsa* portrays Hanumān as the ideal devotee whose *bhakti* leads to *jñāna* - not as abstract knowledge, but as intimate knowing through love.

In the Advaitic framework, Hanumān's *dāsyā-bhāva* (servitude) becomes a path where the duality between the self and God eventually dissolves. His love for Rāma leads not just to reunion, but to oneness - *abheda bhakti*. Thus, *bhakti* becomes not a limitation but a culmination of Yoga.

7. CONCLUSION: THE YOGIC HEART OF THE RĀMĀYAṆA

The *Sundarakāṇḍa* is more than a mythological adventure - it is a luminous spiritual path charted in poetic form. Through Hanumān's journey, the text articulates the full spectrum of yogic practice: action without attachment, wisdom with discernment, effort without ego, and love without condition.

Its narrative encodes a perennial truth: the soul, though lost in illusion, can be guided home through the grace of divine remembrance and the fire of inner effort. The fusion of *karma*, *jñāna*, and *bhakti* in Hanumān's character provides an enduring model for seekers of all paths.

For this reason, the *Sundarakāṇḍa* continues to be revered not just as a literary gem, but as a scripture in its own right - one that speaks directly to the soul's yearning for transcendence. In the inward leap of Hanumān, we find our own leap across the ocean of *samsāra* - fuelled by faith, anchored in wisdom, and crowned by love.

REFERENCES

1. Patañjali. **The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali** (with Vyāsa's commentary, trans. Swāmī Hariharānanda Āraṇya). SUNY Press, 2001.
2. Śaṅkarācārya. **Bhagavatgītā Bhāṣya** (trans. Swāmī Gambhīrānanda). Advaita Ashrama, 2003.
3. Tulasīdāsa. **Rāmcaritmānas: Sundarākāṇḍa** (trans. Philip Lutgendorf). Oxford University Press, 2010.
4. Vālmīki. **The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: Sundarākāṇḍa** (trans. Sheldon I. Pollock). Princeton University Press, 1999.

Sivananda, Swami. **Essence of the Rāmāyaṇa**. The Divine Life Society. 1st Ed. 1943