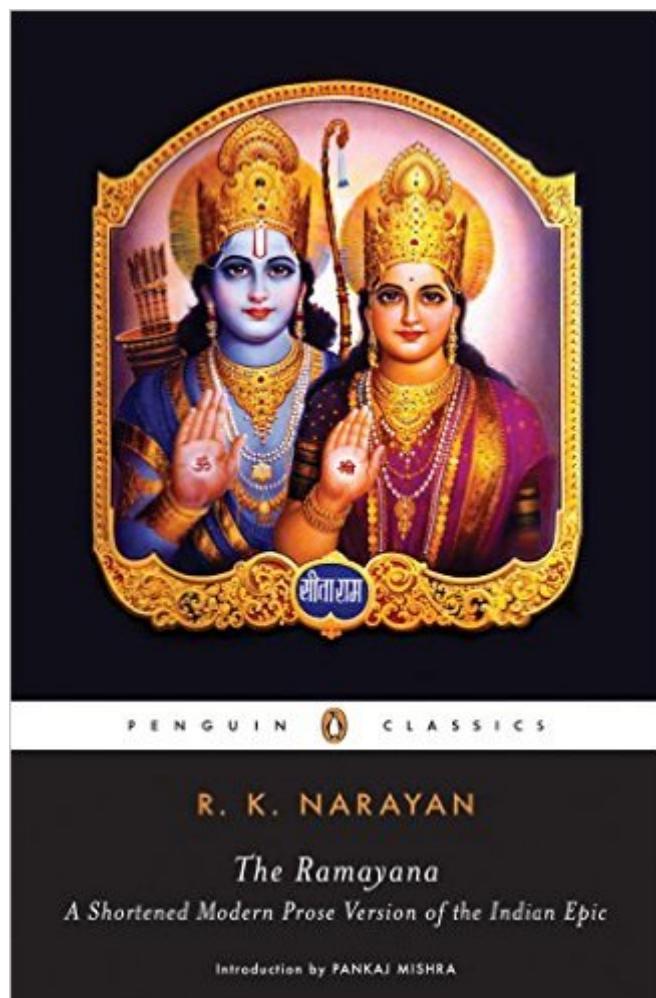


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# The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version Of The Indian Epic (Penguin Classics)



## Synopsis

The greatest Indian epic, one of the world's supreme masterpieces of storytelling A sweeping tale of abduction, battle, and courtship played out in a universe of deities and demons, The Ramayana is familiar to virtually every Indian. Although the Sanskrit original was composed by Valmiki around the fourth century BC, poets have produced countless versions in different languages. Here, drawing on the work of an eleventh-century poet called Kamban, Narayan employs the skills of a master novelist to re-create the excitement he found in the original. A luminous saga made accessible to new generations of readers, The Ramayana can be enjoyed for its spiritual wisdom, or as a thrilling tale of ancient conflict. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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## Customer Reviews

As a fan of Narayan's work, I was fascinated to see how he would tackle the grand subject of the Ramayana, a work that runs through and certainly influences all of Narayan's stories. The result is one of his most delightful and beautifully written novels. I think it is important to approach this book

not as "THE" Ramayana, but one storyteller's unique vision of the timeless epic--even as a variation on one of his Malgudi novels (the characters certainly bare a distinct resemblance). Narayan's writing is extremely sensitive, refined, yet full of humor and charm. Throughout he adopts the tone of a storyteller, openly acknowledging that he is only "retelling" a story by a much greater storyteller, and leaving out the juiciest parts at that. His little asides where he explains, "And here the poet described the scene so touchingly..." are at once reverent and amusing, as Narayan wisely omits anything too excessive or poetic that might derail his narrative. But the story itself is wonderful, a colorful, full-blooded telling of the Ramayana, sparse, fast-moving, but with all the hallmarks of Narayan's style. This book is a must for any fan of Narayan's fiction, Indian writing, or mythology. Narayan effectively conveys the epic's timelessness, with characters and situations that echo throughout literature and film, full of profound human emotions. And this is always one of Narayan's chief strengths, to create believable, complex human characters. In his treatment, even Rama and Sita emerge as sympathetic individuals, not the cardboard cut-outs all too common given their extraordinary powers. In short, this is a magical and engaging work that I know I will read again and again in the years to come. I invite you to do the same!

The story of Ramayana is in the blood stream of everyone from India. The original epic was written in the 4th century BC in Sanskrit, by Valmiki. Poets in every Indian language have retold this story. This present book relying on the Tamil Kamban version, presents before the reader the essential story of Ramayana. R.K Narayan, with the command of the English language and love for fast story movement, narrates the kernel of the epic poem in an engaging manner, for the sake of the English reader not familiar with the original version. Naturally, some of the elaborate details had to be left out and some narratives had to be condensed. This made the enormous epic into an enjoyably gripping story, in less than 200 pages.

This is a condensed version of not the original Ramayana as handed down to us in Sanskrit, but of the Tamil version of the story that Sri Narayanji grew up with. There are versions of the Ramayana in nearly all Indian dialects and languages, and as Tamil is one of the oldest, it is also quite interesting to see a translation from that language. The tale is told fairly faithfully, although much is left out (this is necessary to avoid having to sell several volumes to tell the whole tale, as the original tale is HUGE). I thought that it may have been a rather boring story, especially to a modern reader, but boy, was I ever wrong! This was one of the most entertaining and gripping books that I have ever read. It tells the story of Ramachandra's youth to his betrayal by his stepmother, his journey in

the desert, and how he defeated Ravana, who had kidnaped Sita and brought her to Sri Lanka, as well as Hanuman's revelries. Rama is still an excellent example of Hindoo ideals, but the primary value of the story for me was not so much religious or ethical as much as it was simply a fascinating journey into the vast world of Indian literature. A wonderful read; I would recommend it to anyone.

I should say immediately that I have no background of any kind in Indian culture, myth or religion. So in reading this small volume I was a complete outsider and a complete beginner in the Ramayana epic. For me, this retelling (in prose) was an excellent first step into unknown territory. I was able to follow the thread of the story and at the same time get a good sense of the epic grandeur behind the myth. I learned about the inviolability and power of a promise, no matter how whimsical or ill-conceived it appears when given; the sacredness of all life, even that which appears lowly; the presence of gods among us in a great variety of forms; and at least one idealized view of the relationship between a man and a woman. Oh, and it was a whopping good story, much deeper and more packed with meaning than the Greek and Roman myths I was raised on as a child. As I think back, I can recall the Greco/Roman mythology only as a collection of pleasant stories of gods who behaved like children, made decisions for petty reasons and who liked to interfere in the lives of men simply to cause trouble, fulfill sexual desire or seek revenge. I remember wondering when I read Greco/Roman myths how anyone could have "believed in" such gods or even taken them seriously in the way religion is taken seriously today. The Ramayana conveys a completely difference sense of the divine which, although very ancient, is still significant in the modern world. In the Ramayana gods and humans are always seeking spiritual enlightenment, to do good in all the worlds and to honor each other. The Ramayana is inspiring in the best sense of word. I also found the introduction by Pankaj Mishra very helpful in understanding the history of the epic and its continuing importance to Indians. There is also a useful Cast of Characters with name pronunciations and a small Glossary at the end explaining some important terminology that appears in the book. If you're new to the Ramayana, as I am, I highly recommend this book.

The book accurately translates the epic of journey of Rama with fluidity and is a joy to read. Though the translation is good, much of the Hindu poetry is lost and therefore a vital part of Hindu culture is missing in the translation. I would have liked to see more of music of India come through.

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