

[Ramayana ANIMATED](#)

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Published by Anonymous on Apr. 01, 1993

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Six Million Dollars, 350 Japanese Artists and an Indian Design Director Produce Beautiful Feature-Length Film of Hindu Epic

A Japanese Ramayana! What? Arigato, but Oh no! Sita will look like a cherry-blossom-white geisha and Ram like a steely samurai. Though such fears were not unexpected, this super high-tech movie overwhelms with so much creativity, color, special effects, delicate detail and Indian artistic input, that even the most priestly guardian of the revered epic will finally retreat and let the film tell the noble tale in its own bold animated way.

Just finished in December, after an eight-year ordeal, and on the eve of global release in English, this first animated version of India's religious classic is a saga of its own. When producer Yugo Sato went to India in 1984, he was simply toying with the idea of a documentary about Ayodhya, revealing its archeological Hindu historicity. The press bungled and said he was doing a new Ramayana. Angered at a foreigner's presumption to intimately handle India's precious jewel, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad protested to the Indian government, demanding an explanation. The government passed the fiery query on to the Japan Embassy, who daintily placed it back in Sako's lap.

Ramayana? Good idea! responded a spritely 61-year-old Sako. Better than a documentary. A mature and sensitive man with Buddhist/Shinto spiritual ideals in total synch with Rama, Sako flew to India. After first clarifying his original movie idea to VHP leaders, he then revealed his new brainstorm - an animated Ramayana, carefully protective of the epic's noble message. Animation is a serious art form in Japan and Sako explained it would enhance, not hurt Ram's divine nature, as well as allow the flying scenes to explode in a display of phantasmagoric cinematography.

The VHP liked what they heard. But despite Sako's Hanuman-like efforts courting 16 government departments for 4 years, India finally rejected his invitation for a bi-nation collaboration. They said the Ramayana is not a "cartoon" - clearly unaware how sophisticated, and popular, this art form has become in the last 20 years.

Mean while, Sako had already recruited India's finest animator, Ram Mohan. So together they flew back to Japan, inspired the president of a giant Japanese youth association to finance the project, hired 350 first-class animators and a Star Wars-calibre special effects crew and made Ramayana - the Legend of Prince Rama. Did Ravanna/Sako abduct the princess/Ramayan to Lanka Nippon? Hardly. Sako loves India and Ram too. His movie motive is sterling. In fact, he secretly envisions Ram becoming a role hero for his own country's youth, presently being misled by culture iconoclasts like Madonna and Michael Jackson.

Soundtracks for Hindi and Japanese editions are presently in final production. For distribution information, contact: Malati Vaidya Associates, 23, Lalit Wodehouse Road, Bombay, India. Tel: 91-22-2852089.

Letter From the Producer

My Dear Hindu Friends,

What urged me on to produce this Ramayana film was that I really sympathize with Indian philosophy. I can't help thinking that in my last life I might have been an Indian, explaining why I love India this much. During the 10 years of making the film when I sometimes worried about raising money or became troubled with aspects of the work, I was encouraged by a confidence that because I was making nothing else but Ramayana, I would have the divine protection of Rama or Hanuman. Now, the work complete, I found that my feeling was right. I appreciate the cooperation of the Indian people and I love India from the bottom of my heart.

I first visited India 25 years ago, and since then many times. I have produced many documentary films about her. I journeyed all along the Ganges from its

sacred source, Gangotri, to its mouth Ganga Sagar. I visited other places to learn about the Kumbha Mela and sadhus. Through my travels, I experienced Indian prayers, lives and many mysteries. This experience made me think about: a) what is the meaning of life and where did we come from; b) tenderness and firmness, adoration for nature and Gods, coexistence of humans and animals and a deep understanding for human beings which India has, and c) Japan's present condition which is much too Westernized.

Wherever I went in India, I could feel that I was familiar with this land or I knew it before. It's like a memory of surprise and puzzlement when we jumped into this universe out from our mother's womb where we were crouching and drifting in dark water. It's the feeling like I want to kneel down and kiss the land. The Hindu world sometimes appears tender and evanescent and sometimes firm and timeless - all the light and shadows made by souls of Indian people who feel a day of three thousands years ago like just yesterday.

Sincerely,

Yugo Sako, Producer Ramayana

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