Birds of the Ramayana

Sampati

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About the book

The Birds of the Ramayana is a series that presents the most prominent bird-characters associated with the Ramayana. Sampati, brother of Jatayu, waited for more than an age to await the arrival of the vanaras to show them the route to Lanka and be of help to Rama.

About the author

Bharat Bhushan

Forever, the story of Sampati seems to begin and end with the discussion with Angad, Jambavan and Hanuman in the Kishkinda Kaanda of the Ramayana. Most references begin explaining Sampati, and before you know it, the story of Sampati is over. When I began working on the “Birds of the Ramayana” project, most friends and experts who knew the Ramayana pointed out that I would have to work on Jatayu, and maybe, just maybe, Garuda. The presence and drawn out involvement of Kakabhushundi, the sage-crow, in the Ramayana had not even been noticed, much less remembered. Friends, who know birds, and those who are ornithologists, presumed that the Ramayana was choc-a-bloc filled up with birds, and perhaps that was the reason why I had started on the project.

The story of Sampati is similar in the scale of familiarity about Kakabhushundi. Those familiar with the Ramayana may have even forgotten about the meeting of the vanaras with Sampati in their search for Sita, after Sugreeva had sent them with a time limit of a month. It is indeed not so. Sampati and Jatayu have extremely tremendous allegorical relevance in Indian mythology.
and are splendidly representative of the reverence to bird life in our scriptures. Their stories mingle at one moment, and then they go their separate ways. It is so, for they were brothers. And yet, their later stories are completely different. They could not be more diverse. Though closely related to Garuda, they are a paradox.

They were all blessed by their devotion and thoughts about Vishnu, and in the case of Jatayu and Sampati, with their single-minded devotion and wait for the avataar of Rama. The brothers, Jatayu and Sampati, are placed strategically in the great story of Ramayana, to occupy their ecological niche and utilise it. Jatayu fights his most famous battle with Ravana in the skies, when he tries to escape to Lanka after having abducted Sita away from Panchavati. The battle is entirely in the skies, and then comes down to the land when Ravana’s flying chariot is destroyed.

Sampati had lost his wings earlier and resided in a cave. Yet, he was very sharp of hearing and of sight, as would be most vultures, of which he is regarded as the progenitor in the scriptures. He is not able to fly, and he wishes he could have, for he would have also given a justifiable battle to Ravana. But, he is able to see, and he speaks of places beyond the horizon that other eyes cannot see or perceive. He does not meet Rama, unlike Jatayu or Garuda or Kakabhushundi. The good deed that he does for Rama does bless him, and he regains his wings and flies away. That is indeed the last we know of him from the scriptures and mythology.

His story is not so simple. It does not seem to begin just about when Angad, Jambavan and Hanuman and the other vanaras meet him. The recitation of the Kishkinda
Kaanda in the Ramayana has the story of Sampati go back and forth, to various places, and has stories and teachings within them, layer below layer. It is intricately made up, and the joy that the reader and devotee gets in understanding the extremely crucial presence of Sampati in the Ramayana is bliss.

There is a delightful small verse that attempts, in English, to depict the conversation between Sampati and Angad, near the cave, in the Kishkinda Kaanda. Hanuman, Jambavan and Angad are accompanied by the group of vanaras that had traveled south at the instructions of Sugreeva to search for Sita. Rama stays behind with Sugreeva and agrees to wait for the groups of vanaras to return from their search. The other groups have gone north, east and west. Angad and Hanuman inform Sampati about the death of Jatayu at the hands of Ravana, as he was traveling after abducting Sita. In answer to Angad’s queries, Sampati, the aged and injured veteran, informs them that Sita would be found in Lanka, and says, as depicted in verse –

“A hundred leagues your course must be,
Beyond the margin of this sea;
Still to the south your way pursue,
And there the giant Ravan view.”

(in Wilkins, W. J.)

The Adhyatma Ramayana describes the discussion between Angad’s group of vanaras and Sampati in detail. The vanaras come to know from Sampati, that he was Jatayu’s elder brother, and had been waiting, injured and battered, ageing, in the cave, waiting for the blessings from his service to Rama. They get curious and ask Sampati to tell them more about him and Jatayu.
Sampati speaks to Angad, Hanuman, Jambavan and the vanaras and informs them that he and Jatayu, were brothers. Jatayu was the younger. The Adhyatma Ramayana speaks of Jatayu as Jatayusha. In their youth, Sampati and Jatayu, decided to take on the challenge of flying high into space, beyond the skies, and reach out and grab the Sun. They flew for several thousands of yojanas, straight upward, in their attempt to reach the Sun. Jatayu, the younger, flew higher, and got his wings scorched from the heat of the Sun. Wanting to protect his younger brother, Sampati flew faster and higher and covered Jatayu. In this attempt, Sampati’s wings and feathers got badly damaged. Both the brothers fell down to the earth and became separated.

Sampati fell on the top of the Vindhya mountains, and because of the impact of his fall, he stayed unconscious for more than three days. On regaining consciousness, Sampati realised that he could not fly again, and therefore could not search for Jatayu. Walking about in the Vindhyas, the huge bird came to the ashrama of the sage Chandrama. The sage was astonished at seeing Sampati in such a condition. He knew Sampati from earlier times, and knew of his power and strength. Looking at his scorched out wings, the sage asked Sampati about the reason for such misery.

The great Sampati spoke of the ill-thought adventure of trying to grab the Sun with his younger brother Jatayu and of the result. He told the sage that he did not know about what may have happened to Jatayu. He explained that he could not fly now, and perhaps, the sage Chandrama may be able to advise him about what was to
be done, and how he could achieve his former strength and abilities.

The sage Chandrama had tears in his eyes, on hearing the plight of the great Sampati. But, the law of creation and of the universe could not be disobeyed, he told Sampati. You are suffering the result of what you set out to achieve, good or bad, sincere or false in intentions. He said, “Your sorrow has been caused by your perception of the ability and greatness of your own body and strength. You thought that it was ‘I’ who was responsible, and that you could achieve what you wished to, all by yourself. This is not allowed in this creation. You will need to suffer the results and consequences of such a thought.”

The Adhyatma Ramayana and the sage-poet Tulsidas’ Ramacharitamanas describe various aspects of the great Sampati, his earlier life, the interaction with Angad, Hanuman and Jambavan, and of the crucial role played by the ageing and injured bird in pointing the way to Lanka. There are various parts to the story of Sampati in the Ramayana. The “entry” of the great Sampati in the legend of Rama and his search for Sita is brought about very intricately.

The story comes to an abrupt end in its narration. Ravana has taken Sita to Lanka, but nobody knows about the place. Rama does not know that Sita has been abducted to Lanka. Jatayu knew the direction vaguely, but his battle with Ravana was at Panchavati, near modern-day Nashik. The entire southern regions of India were to the south of Panchavati, when Jatayu pointed southwards. Sugreeva sent out four groups of vanaras to search for Sita or information about her. They do not
succeed. Sugreeva and Rama had high hopes of Hanuman, for they felt instinctively that he might be able to succeed in locating Sita. Rama also gives his ring to Hanuman to show to Sita, if he would meet her and would wish to prove that he was indeed a messenger from Rama.

Angad, the crown prince, son of Vali, the elder brother of Sugreeva, leads hanuman’s group of vanaras. Jambavan, the bear-warrior was also with the group with his bear-warriors. The time limit of one month had gone past, and Angad’s vanaras had not succeeded. They were tired, starving and desperate. Beyond being tired, they were frightened to return to Kishkinda and face Sugreeva with failure. Angad was terrified that Sugreeva may grab the excuse and kill him, since he may think that it would be a good opportunity to remove Vali’s legacy. In such a point of no return in the story, the vanaras come to a beach below big caves, and lie down, hoping that they would all die slowly of starvation.

The story of the Ramayana comes to a halt at this point. There is no escape route for the story’s heroes to figure out the location of Sita. For, Lanka was an island, and it was beyond the horizon, south of the Indian subcontinent. The great Hanuman did not know that he had super powers, and that he could fly through space and reach lands beyond the seas. The sages that he had disturbed during their prayers had cursed him. They had declared that Hanuman would not be aware of his powers. That is another story, of course.

At this point, the great Sampati enters the Ramayana, when the story has come to an absolute halt, and everyone is at a loss. This is indeed classic storytelling,
of bringing forth an eminent character, who did not exist earlier, but is absolutely appropriate, within its own ecological niche, to be able to get the story moving ahead.

Sampati, the great bird, is sitting inside his cave, in the Mahendra Mountains, injured and unable to fly, because of his scorched wings. He is not able to move around and has to wait for his prey to reach him, and this is quite rare. Since he does not get to eat frequently, Sampati has weakened considerably, and waits for his time to die. He remembers Jatayu frequently, and thinks back to the guidance of the sage Chandrama, and wonders if the prophecy would come true someday, that he could be of service to the human avatar of Vishnu, when he would walk about in this land.

He hears the vanaras talking outside the mouth of his big cave. He hears them moaning and complaining of their hunger and fear of returning to Kishkinda. He realises that a large group of vanaras were getting ready to die on their own, just outside his cave. Sampati gets to be happy, and is described as becoming gleeful at the opportunity that has presented itself, of bringing about such a large helping of food, that he could eat slowly, and regain his strength.

Hearing the vanaras grumbling, Sampati comes out of his cave. He is described in the Adhyatma Ramayana as a bird of extremely large size, almost the size of the mountain itself. He sees the great Angad, Hanuman and Jambavan and other great leaders. Each one of these great warriors, *maharathis*, is extremely large, by themselves. Looking at their sizes and body volume, the great Sampati is described as becoming extremely
delighted. Pleased with the size of Angad and Hanuman, the great Sampati plans to pace his eating, day by day, so that he would not run short of his food supply, that seemed to have walked by itself, right upto the mouth of his cave.

Angad speaks to Jambavan, understanding the great Sampati’s plans to devour the vanaras and the bear-warriors. Angad says, “We are indeed blessed, that we need not wait to starve to death. This big vulture looks like it would eat us, and it may be the right path for us, like Jatayu, to give ourselves up to death. Jatayu was truly blessed. He could be of service to Rama. We are not even able to render service to Sugreeva. Jatayu was a true follower of dharma, and yet, he achieved salvation that even the great yogis cannot achieve. Let us accept our fate, and prepare to die peacefully, and be of some use to this aged and injured vulture, so that we may not feel the pain of death, when the vulture begins to eat us up.”

Hearing his younger brother, Jatayu’s name, and realising from Angad’s words that the great Jatayu was dead, Sampati falters. He becomes sad, and speaks out to Angad and the vanaras. He asks, “Who are you, O warriors among vanaras, who are you that speak about my younger brother, of the great Jatayu? Why do you speak of him in the past tense? I did not know of his life, and did not know of his death. Pray do not fear me, for I will not eat you. Just hearing about my brother, Jatayu, is like ‘nectar’ to my ears.”

Angad, the crown prince among the vanaras, replied, “O great bird, hear then, of Rama, the son of Dasharatha, and of his exile from Ayodhya with his beautiful wife,
Sita, and his dutiful brother, Lakshmana.” And thus, Angad recounts the story of Rama, of his exile, and of his life in Panchavati, and of the abduction of Sita by Ravana in an aerial vehicle, a vimana.

“Your great brother, Jatayu, the great yogi, had been staying at Panchavati, near the asrama of Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana. He had given an assurance to Rama that he would protect Sita with his life, if it was required, for that was the purpose of his life on earth, as he thought it to be. When Ravana went by in his vimana, Sita cried out – ‘Rama, Rama’ – and the great Jatayu gave immediate battle.”

“Sita cried out to Jatayu, reminding him of his promise to Rama to defend and protect her from danger. She reminded him that it was because of his presence that Rama went inside the deep forests, for he was confident that Jatayu would protect his Sita.” This is depicted, by a verse –

“Oh see, the King who rules the race of giants, cruel, fierce and base!
Ravan, the spoiler, bears me hence,
The helpless prey of violence!”
(in Wilkins, W. J.)

“The battle was tremendous and Jatayu destroyed Ravana’s vimana. The battle in the skies was easy for Jatayu, and Ravana could not defeat him, even by using his magical powers. When the vimana was destroyed, Ravana and Sita fell on the ground, and the battle was fought on land. Here, Ravana was more powerful and he defeated the great Jatayu, after a long battle. Finally,
your brother had to give up the battle, in the service of Rama of Ayodhya.”

Angad continued, “O great bird, your brother struggled and managed to stay alive until he was found by Rama and Lakshmana in their search for Sita. He was able to explain to Rama about how Sita was abducted by Ravana and the direction in which Ravana flew by himself with Sita after his vimana was destroyed. O great bird, your brother achieved the best of blessings, for none other than Rama himself cremated him. Thus, Jatayu has achieved the eternal status of ‘Savuya’ – of eternal companionship – to Rama, and his friendship was made permanent for all ages to come, in the presence of the sacred fire.”

“Later, Rama met Sugreeva and Hanuman and heard about his exile from Kishkinda at the hands of my father, the great Vali, the King of the Vanaras. It is said that my father had once fought battle with Ravana and had won. Through their pact of friendship by the sacred fire, Sugreeva and Rama chose to be friends and thereby, Rama decided to kill my father, the great Vali, who was the King of Kishkinda. We are now come here, in search of Sita, who was abducted by Ravana. I fear that if we return without news about Sita, Sugreeva will find it to be a good reason to kill me, since he suspects me, as I am my father’s son.”

Angad continued, “We have failed to locate Sita. We do not even have any news about her. We had come out of Kishkinda, hoping to wage battle with Ravana, for we have great warriors among us. Why would we want to fight? Just Hanuman and Jambavan, among us, are enough to defeat any army of Ravana. Even I would not
have to fight. But we do not know where to search. We do not know where Ravana would be in hiding. We have not met anyone who knows of his location and we have reached the southernmost part of the region.”

The great Sampati was in tears, and was sad and happy at the same time. He was saddened by the news that his younger brother, Jatayu, was no more. Yet, he was happy for Jatayu, that he had fought valiantly, and died in battle, with none other than Ravana, who was considered to be a supreme warrior. He was also happy that he would now be able to be of some service to Rama, for was that not the part of his prophecy, that he would regain his wings, youth and strength, if he would serve the avatar of Vishnu, in his human form.

Sampati speaks to Angad, Hanuman, Jambavan and the vanaras and the bear-warriors, and says, “O great warriors, do not fear. Your troubles are over. For, I am he who knows about Ravana and of his abduction of Sita, and of the location of his kingdom. I will tell you, for tell you, I must. It is within the reason of my existence in this land, in this bhooloka, to be of service to Rama, for that I may serve him in his search of Sita, and would thereby, regain my youth, my strength and my wings, and be able to fly again.”

“But, do wait for a moment, O warriors of Rama, for it is in us, in our purpose of our existence, to serve that Rama, who is but the human avatar of Narayana himself, on earth. Let me first offer my prayers to my younger brother, Jatayu, and offer him memorial worship, shraadha, at the waters of the Sea, and allow him to proceed on his journey to the other worlds. For,
that is in my duty to perform. Do help me, and carry me to the sea’s waters, for I am not able to walk.”

Angad bows to the great Sampati, and immediately agrees to carry him to the sea’s waters. The great Hanuman and Jambavan follow them, with the vanaras and the bear-warriors. Who would be able to seek such a privilege, and be offered one, when one did not search for such an opportunity, thought Angad. To be able to participate with the great Sampati, in offering him the traditional prayers and memorial worship at the waters of the great sea, to the great yogi and maharathi, the great Jatayu, was a heaven-sent opportunity.

The great Sampati completed his prayers to allow the soul of Jatayu to be liberated from bhooloka and to travel to the great worlds beyond. Having completed the prayers, Sampati bathed in the great sea, joined by Angad, Hanuman, Jambavan and all the vanaras and the bear-warriors. Angad carried the great Sampati again, from the beach, back to the cave. The great warriors, Angad, Hanuman and Jambavan, bowed in respect to the great Sampati, and requested him to help them by telling them about Sita, and of the location of Ravana.

The great Sampati spoke to the vanaras, “O maharathis, it is not due to lack of effort, courage or strength that you are unable to locate Ravana or Sita. Each one among you is easily capable of searching for her on your own. The reason that you are unable to locate her is because she is not here. She is on an island, the Lanka of Ravana, more than a hundred yojanas across the great Sea. There, on the island of Lanka, is the kingdom of Ravana on the top of the Trikuta Hill. Inside the city kingdom of
Ravana, he has kept Sita in isolation, and she grieves for Rama.”

“She is surrounded by women Rakshasas, and they are meant to serve her and prevent her from escaping. Each one of these women Rakshasas can devour an entire army. Ravana has chosen the best of women warriors to surround Sita. I can see that far, even if the island is beyond the horizon, for I am a vulture, and it is in my nature to be able to see beyond the horizon.”

The great Sampati continued, “If I would have been strong, and if my wings were intact, I would have alone gone to Lanka, and killed Ravana. I would have been enough for him. But it is now in your fortune and you are all blessed to be able to serve Narayana by helping him in his human avataar on this bhooloka by locating Sita. You will help the great Raghupati in protecting his Vaidehi, and you will help him with the great Lakshmana, who is the tremendous serpent, Sesha, himself, and you will wage a mighty war and defeat Ravana.”

“But, first, one among you should go to Lanka, check for yourself that Sita is indeed at Trikuta, and is in good health. You should make sure and return, and inform Rama that you have personally made certain of her location. Who will do the journey? Who is strong among you to be able to do the journey to Lanka and return in good strength to be able to meet Rama and inform him about Ravana, his island kingdom of Lanka, and of the presence of Sita?”

It is in this manner that Sampati is brought into the Ramayana, given a crucial role in locating Sita, and
helping the vanaras return to Rama with the proof that she was alive, and in Lanka. Having played his part, Sampati is allowed to explain about his predicament. His presence is justified in the Ramayana and the vanaras are a medium to enquire about his past and explain the reason for his existence to help Narayana.

Sampati begins to explain about his youth, with Jatayu, and of his ambition to grab the Sun, and of his accident. He informs the vanaras about the sage Chandrama and of his guidance that one should not assume that any living being is able to act or conduct oneself on their own. Creation has been established for all living beings, human and non-human, to interact with one another, and to participate in the good and bad, evil or sincere actions of one and all.

The sage Chandrama explained, to Sampati, “It is the ‘I’ that is the source of all ego in living beings. All beings are without intelligence, and without beginning, for it is the ‘I’ that is without any origin. On achieving intelligence and knowledge, the ‘I’ begins to be transformed like an iron heated at the fire, and the living being assumes that one has been transformed to a higher state of knowledge. This assumption is ego. The ‘I’, which is without beginning, is transformed into the assumption that ‘I am the Body’, and this is the journey from ignorance to ahankar, of ‘ego’. This is the falsehood on which all living beings thrive, and this is to be removed.”

“One forgets that one is here as part of a greater design, and upon assumption of the ownership of one’s own soul, the person begins to assume that they are responsible only for their own actions, and are not
willing to accept ownership of the results of their actions.”

It is thus that the sage Chandrama explains to Sampati and guides him about the need to be careful in one’s own actions and to understand about the impact that it may have on others. He is told, “One may choose one’s actions, and be extremely careful and assure oneself to be content, that with the accumulation of all good actions, one would be rewarded with a good life in the other worlds. This may not be directly causative of the good deeds of one’s life in this world.”

“One has to realise that giving cause to a relationship that results in the birth of a child, that one is also responsible for the actions of that child, through a careful upbringing and instilling good values and ethics.” Thus, the sage Chandrama is depicted in explaining to Sampati of the various stages of the fertilisation of the embryo and the growth of the unborn child thereafter within the womb of its mother. The stages of embryonic growth are explained in extreme detail through a series of about twelve verses. It is however, the stages of human birth that is described, which seems strange, for the explanation and guidance is being given to the great Sampati, who is later known as the King of Vultures.

The significance is established through the verses that explain that the embryo is to be made aware of its responsibility this is done by blessing it with the bountiful devotion to Narayana. It sounds quite vague, and one is not able to make out the relevance of explaining embryology and human anatomy to the
vulture king, but there may be reasons far beyond for us to comprehend.

Finally, the sage Chandrama confesses that he had risen in fame because he kept accumulating fortune through good and unfair means and therefore he would not be able to obtain the blessing of being able to interact with the divine presence of Narayana, though he has now been totally immersed in his devotion. But, it would be the great Sampati, who would have this blessing.

The sage Chandrama informs Sampati, “It would be in the *Treta Yuga*, that you would be blessed with the opportunity of helping Narayana, when in his human avatar, as Rama, he would require your support. Ravana would abduct his wife, Sita, who is none other than Mahalaxmi herself, and therefore you would receive her blessings also. Sugreeva, who would be the King of the vanaras at that time, would send his vanaras in search of her, and they will meet you and ask you for guidance in locating Sita and Ravana.”

“It is at that moment, when you would inform and guide the vanaras in their mission to serve Rama, that you will begin to regain your wings. Two new wings will emerge and they will be as strong as the wings that you have lost. And, at that moment, you will be truly blessed by Rama.”

Thus did the great Sampati speak to Angad, Hanuman, Jambavan and the vanaras and the bear-warriors and tell them about his presence and the reason for his existence in the Mahendra hills. Indeed, as he spoke, Sampati began to sprout two new wings, and in their very presence, the wings grew to enormous size, and covered
him completely. He regained his youth and strength, and was back to Sampati, of early years.

Finally, Sampati counsels the vanaras, and says, “I shall leave you now, for the reason of my existence on this bhooloka is over. You will need to travel to Lanka and locate Sita and return to inform my dear Narayana, who is lost on this world without his Mahalaxmi. You are all truly blessed, and so will be the one among you, more blessed and more precious to Rama, for he would be the one to travel to Lanka and return, having made sure that Sita is indeed alive and well, and living in the island of Lanka, the city-kingdom of Ravana.”

It is later, when Hanuman has arrived at Lanka, and located Sita in the Ashoka Vana forest-grove, within the city-kingdom of Ravana, that Sampati is mentioned again in the Ramayana. Once before reaching Lanka, Hanuman in his flight to the island kingdom, has a moment of doubt, judging the distance between the two lands, and wonders if Sampati could have been wrong. After a long search in Lanka, Hanuman finally spots her in the Ashoka Vana. Sita is described as being despondant, for Hanuman has not met her as yet, and she is keen to hang herself, and leave the world. She feels that she has been forgotten, and Rama would not be able to reach Lanka, and Ravana would forcefully take Sita to be his consort in place of Mandodari, as he had promised to do so, within a certain period of time.

Understanding Sita’s plight, Hanuman is in a quandrarry. For he knows that Sita would not believe him to be a messenger of Rama, for the Rakshasas, and especially Ravana, were known to assume any form, human or non-human. Appearing before Sita, as a vanara, would
definitely spook her to become more terrified than she was. Thus, Hanuman assumes the appearance of a small monkey, dressed in finery, and sits upon the tree, hidden within the lower branches, and begins to recite the story of Rama in a very soft melodious voice.

It is in this recitation that Hanuman explains to Sita that Rama and Lakshmana were able to understand the general direction of Ravana’s flight southwards, through the help of Jatayu. And, alas, the great Jatayu was no longer alive, and he was blessed by the action of Rama in performing his last prayers and releasing his soul. Thereupon, Hanuman informs Sita about Rama’s meeting with Sugreeva, the friendship pact, the battle with Vali, and the search by the vanaras. Finally, he informs Sita, that it is due to the guidance provided by the great Sampati, King of Vultures, and the elder brother of Jatayu, that they came to know that Ravana was at Lanka. And it was due to Sampati’s encouragement and prodding, that Hanuman had got to remember his super powers, and he was able to leap across the seas to Lanka, and he was close to her, and would be able to help her and thereby help Rama.

There is no other mention of Sampati in the Ramayana. There are however other references about Sampati and Jatayu in the Indian scriptures and Puranas. Some contemporary books have errors in tracing the genealogy of Sampati and Jatayu. One book mentions Sampati and Jatayu to be the sons of Garuda. It is often truly depicted, for that of Garuda, in being the transport, *vaahana*, of Vishnu. There is the Garuda Purana, a collection of many stories about the King of Eagles and his association with Narayana. There is no other mention of Sampati or Jatayu in any other purana or other
scriptures. This does seem to be strange, for the two brothers are indeed good creatures.

There is a detailed record of the ancestors of Garuda, Jatayu and Sampati, and their lineage is traced all the way back to Brahma himself, through Daksha and Kashyapa. Garuda is also known as Superna, the King of the feathered tribes, and the enemy of snakes.

The lineage is thus. Daksha Prajapati, the son of Brahma, father of Sati, gave thirteen of his daughters to the sage Kasyapa. Of the thirteen daughters, one of them, Vinata, gave birth to two celebrated sons, Garuda and Aruna. While Garuda became the *vaahana* of Vishnu, Aruna became the charioteer of Surya, the Sun. One of the other daughters, sister of Vinata, was Kadru, who gave birth to a thousand multiple-headed snakes, who were quite powerful. The Kasyapa lineage, including the children born of Vinata and Kadru, read like a lecture in genetics and evolution, albeit, seemingly explained like instant creation. Several aspects can be analysed for certain.

It is thus written that Vinata gave birth to Garuda by having laid an egg that was incubated for several years. And, since Garuda was born of an egg, he has a bird-like form. Syeni was married to Aruna and gave birth to Jatayu and Sampati. It is often mistakenly said that Jatayu and Sampati are Garuda’s children. It is not so, in the scriptures and the puranas.

The mythological records of creation, evolution and speciation in the Hindu scriptures are written in detail. Some of the daughters of Daksha given in marriage to Kasyapa were Aditi, Diti, Danu, Kalika, Tamra,
Krodhavasa, Manu and Anala. Aditi gave birth to the Devas. Diti gave birth to the Danavas or Asuras. Tamra gave birth to five daughters, Kraunci, Bhasi, Syeni, Dhrtarastri and Suki. Kraunci gave birth to the Owls. Syeni gave birth to Syenas, i.e., the Vultures, Kites etc. Krodhavasa gave birth to ten daughters. Of them, Mrgamanda gave birth to trees and plants. Her sister, Hari, gave birth to the lions and monkeys. Another sister, Matangi, gave birth to elephants, while Sarduli gave birth to tigers. Krodhavasa’s daughter, Surabhi, gave birth to Rohini and Gandharvi. Rohini gave birth to the cows, while Gandharvi gave birth to the horses. So, as you can all realise, there is an extremely detailed story of animal and plant classification out there.

Syeni, wife of Aruna, was a bird. And it was but natural, in our ancient puranas, to have the charioteer of the Sun to be wed to a great bird, and to allow her, Syeni, to give birth to two of the greatest birds in India’s mythology. It is thus, that Jatayu introduces himself in the Adi Parva, of the Valmiki Ramayana, and says, “I am Jatayu, son of Aruna and Syeni, and Sampati is my elder brother.” The Kamban Ramayana, in the Kishkinda Kaanda, names Syeni as Mahasveta, and perhaps they were the same individual.

There is a mention in some references that the great Sampati later finds refuge and protection with the sage Nisakara, after having received guidance from the sage Chandrama, and therefore he moves to the Mahendra Mountains from the Vindhyas, where he falls after the challenging flight to grab the sun, with his younger brother, Jatayu.
There are also two other people with the name of Sampati in the Ramayana. The vanara physician Sushena, calls upon one of the vanaras as Sampati, and speaks of him knowing about herbs and medicines, but knows that he could not possibly fly to the Kishkinda hills and get back in time to save Lakshmana, after he had fallen in battle. Sushena therefore decides to ask Hanuman to go in search of the herbs.

The other Sampati is one of the four trusted ministers of Vibhishana at Trikuta, the city kingdom of Ravana in Lanka. The three great rakshasas, Malyavan, Sumali and Mali settled in Trikuta at the advice of Vayu, the god of wind. They married Sundari, Ketumati and Vasudha, the three daughters of Narmada. Anala, Anila, Aha and Sampati were four sons born to Mali and Vasudha and these brothers served Vibhashana. They left with him when he was asked to leave Lanka by Ravana upon suspecting his intentions to be servile to Rama.

There is a twist to the story in the Ramayana, and is reported from other books. This is during the discussion between the great Sampati and Angad, Hanuman, Jambavan and the other vanaras and the bear-warriors. In a reference away from the Adhyatma Ramayana and the Kamban Ramayana, it is thus written (in Sehgal) that Sampati said, “I saw Ravana flying across the sea with Sita. One of my sons had also flown out and challenged him.”

Sampati had two sons. They would fly about and seek food for their father and bring it back with them. One of the sons, Suparsva, had gone out in search of food on that day, and returned without having found any. Since he knew it would be difficult for his father to survive
without food, Sampati’s son went out to perch on the high peaks of the Mahendra Mountains and waited for prey to pass by or to be sighted. It was at that moment that Ravana came flying by, with Sita in his arms. Sampati’s son challenged him to give up Sita and fight him.

It is thus written that Ravana did not wish to fight and requested Suparsva to allow him to pass on to Lanka. Realising that Ravana or Sita would not be the appropriate meal for his father, Sampati’s son allowed him to pass by. Later, on recounting the situation to the local sages at the asrama of Nisakara, Sampati’s son comes to know that it was Ravana who went by after having abducted Sita from Pancavati.

The sage Nisakara spoke to Suparsva and cautioned him to wait in patience, because he was worried that the young son of the Vulture King may fly out to Lanka and challenge him in war. The sage Nisakara knew of the prophecy about Sampati, and that it would be in his responsibility to seek redemption of his foolish actions by helping Rama in his search for Sita.

It is however left to Sampati to describe Sita to Angad, Hanuman and Jambavan. The great Sampati does describe her, while being held by Ravana in his flight to Lanka, and by gazing over the horizon on to the island and spotting her at the Ashoka Vana. The Valmiki Ramayan writes of Sampati’s description of Sita while held by Ravana in his flight as sarvabharanabhusita, i.e., with all her jewels adorning her. Sampati describes her later condition at the Ashoka Vana as not being dressed in finery and sitting as a common woman would, and yet, looking beautiful.
It is perhaps, like in the case of Kakabhusnundi that Sampati is chosen as the example of devotion. Here was an individual who had to be immersed in the devotion of Rama, even before the Treta Yuga, when the human avataar of Narayana came upon the bhooloka. He never got to meet Rama, and never had the opportunity to worship him. He had to wait his turn, at the right place, and wait for ages, with the immense faith and devotion that Rama’s work would require his participation. It was this faith that made him stay at the Mahendra Mountains, waiting for the vanaras to arrive. For, the prophecy was very specific, and the sages Chandrama and Nishikara had guided him about its importance.

Sampati is regarded in India’s mythology and scriptures as the King of Vultures. There is a place in Madhya Pradesh, the Gandhamadhana Mountain, which is even now regarded with reverence as his dwelling place in modern times. This mountain has been spoken of in later literature with much respect. Vultures fly about in the region to this day. Hopefully, not the last ones.