

14. Customs and Character

By holding a sword, does a man become a great warrior? By holding a *veena*, will he become a great musician? By holding a pen, will he become a great writer? By holding a bow and arrow, will he become a great archer? Even though the ladle is in the sweet, it cannot experience its flavour. Can frogs that move around the lotuses in the water, enjoy the honey in the lotuses? Can a stone on which sandalwood paste is made, experience the fragrance of the sandalwood pieces? Can a blind man see his beauty in a mirror? These are situations over which we should ponder.

The mighty Himalayas are in the north of India, Indians should compare these mountains to *sathya*, *dharma*, and *ahimsa*. We must consider *sathya*, *dharma*, and *ahimsa* as manifesting themselves to us in the form of silvery mountains. The great Ganges, which is considered sacred, takes its birth on this mountain. The culture of India is just like the stream of the Ganges. There is no impurity in Indian culture. We see that even Indians are trying to exterminate Indian culture. This is not possible. Those ignorant people, who want to do such a thing, can be compared to those who want to make the Ganges run dry. Just as the Ganges can never become dry, so also Indian culture can never be rooted out.

While Indian culture can be compared to the Ganges, the deeds we do can be compared to the sacred Yamuna. Saraswathi, the third river, is the spiritual stream that flows in our lives like blood in our bodies. We see that the blood of the Indians is the Saraswathi river, the deeds of Indians is just like the Yamuna and their cultural life is like the Ganga. The combination of these three rivers is the country of India. We cannot say that an Indian is a combination of just flesh and blood or a combination of earth and water. We should regard an Indian as the combination of the three rivers Ganges, Yamuna and Saraswathi. Many Indians are trying to go in an improper

way because they are not aware of the sacred stream flowing in them internally. This stream is full of knowledge. Saraswathi does not represent only literature but also is the Goddess who gives us perfect bliss or *ananda*. She will root out the impurity in man and make him sacred and pious. This Saraswathi will establish the *Atma Thathwa*, and is the stream connecting man with God. We must consider her as the stream flowing internally and never as the stream flowing externally.

Man today lives a life from which sacredness, modesty and all other good qualities have disappeared. Though he has some good qualities, he does not make any use of them. There are good books in India, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharatha*, which teach us our culture. The *Ramayana* is a version of our daily life and it gives us extreme bliss. It proclaims how members in a family should behave towards one another and towards society. The *Ramayana* has three alternative names and these are “The Killing of Ravana”, “The Story of Sita”, and “*Srimad Ramayana*”.

We must know why these names have been given to the *Ramayana* and the meaning in each case. It is called *Srimad Ramayana* because it describes the qualities of Sri Rama. Sita is an ideal woman possessing all the qualities that an Indian woman should possess, such as chastity, purity and so on. Because the *Ramayana* describes all these qualities perfectly, it is called “The Story Of Sita”. Sita is the embodiment of all the *dharmas* that are found in the world. She is called Bhoojata, daughter of the Goddess of earth and she has the qualities of her mother. The main characteristics of Sita are chastity, patience and virtue. When necessity arises, she is also able to teach Rama the path of *dharma*. As an illustration of this, we may consider the situation when Rama said to Sita: “You are very delicate and cannot face the conditions in the forest. I shall return soon and I request you to stay in Ayodhya and take care of your mother-in-law and father-in-law.” Prior to that, Rama went to his mother and told her that he was going into the forest for fourteen years to vindicate the promises of his father and asked her to give

him her blessings. The mother then said that she could not leave him for a moment and she too would follow him into the forest. Rama taught some principles of *dharma* even to his mother saying, "Mother, father is old. Stay and serve him. I am going into the forest for his sake and will be back after fourteen years. Serve my father who is like a God to us. To you, your husband is greater than everyone else and must be looked after. While I am away, look after his health." Recalling this, Sita said, "You have taught some principles of *dharma* to your mother and you have asked her to stay and look after her husband. Does not the same apply to me, your wife? Should I not follow you and serve my husband? Looking after one's husband is as important to Kausalya as it is to me. Husband is God to a wife. I consider you as God and I must follow you to the forest." Rama tried then to pacify her in another way. He said, "You may be able to bear all the conditions in the forest but if you come with us, you will be a great responsibility on our shoulders because the forest is full of wild animals and we will have to protect you as well as ourselves. Stay at home and do not cause us trouble." Sita replied, "You say that there are many cruel animals in the forest and the most cruel animal amongst them is the lion, the king of beasts. When the lion of my husband is with me, how can other animals harm me?" He said, "Even if there are no animals that may harm you, I will have to leave you at times to go and get something to eat. If at that time, some harm comes to you, it will be very difficult for me or my brother to protect you." At once, Sita replied, "Rama, you are a great warrior, a great hero and a very capable person. This fact was proved when you broke the bow of God Siva. I know your abilities fully. The words you spoke to me just now are not befitting your dignity. If Rama is not able to protect one person, how will he protect the whole world? Even to protect you from such infamy, I should follow you into the forest."

Rama could not say much more. He quietly said to her, "My mother will be stricken with grief at my going away. It would be better if you stay behind and console her." Sita then said, "You are

Rama and I am Sita. You are the moon and I am the moonlight. If the moon is in the forest how can moonlight be in Ayodhya? Where there is moon, moonlight will always be there.” Rama could not reply. Rama tried to tell her to stay in Ayodhya but Sita did not listen to those words. She said pitifully, “Rama, I am very young. You will be away for fourteen years while your brothers enjoy the company of their wives, and the maids of the palace enjoy the company of their husbands. Seeing this, I will get jealous and bad ideas will form in my mind. To rid me of such thoughts, take me with you.” There is no possibility of such bad thoughts ever entering Sita’s mind. Rama said, “Your heart is pure, your character is perfect and I know that such bad ideas will never enter your heart.” She then fell at his feet and said: “You are going into the forest where there will be many thorns on the way. Because my mother is the goddess of the earth, she will be very kind to me. I can request her to let you go happily on your way. At least for this take me with you.” I have narrated this sequence of incidents leading to Sita falling at the feet of Rama because Rama’s heart melted only when she fell at his feet.

A similar situation also occurs in the *Mahabharatha*. Arjuna argued with Krishna and put many logical ideas before him. During that time, Krishna did not teach him the sacred *Gita*. Only after he surrendered completely, did he teach Arjuna the *Gita*. If you want to make some jewellery and do not give the goldsmith any gold, then he will not be able to make anything. If you give him the gold and tell him not to melt, beat and hammer it, he will still not be able to make anything out of the gold. If we offer the gold of our minds to God and tell him not to interfere with it, how can God prepare the jewel of peace? If you allow Him to do whatever He wants, then He will prepare the ornament of peace for you.

If you, in any seriousness, ask what is yours here, you will get the answer that nothing really belongs to you. You are under the mistaken idea that one thing or another is yours, but this is incorrect. If this body is yours and some limb is ill, why can you not rectify the sickness? When you are not able to rectify a small defect in your

body, is it yours? If the mind is yours and if you can put it under control, why does it act like a monkey? Why do you think that this world is yours? If it is yours, how does it move without your permission? Life is not yours.

We think that the world is binding us, but the world is lifeless. It is desire that binds us. Those who catch monkeys prepare a pot with a small opening in it and fill it with some sweet. The monkey who desires the food, will put his hand inside the pot and take a big handful of the food. Then the monkey becomes unable to draw his hand out through the opening. Only on releasing the grip on the food will the monkey be able to take his hand out. It is his desire for the food that has bound his hands. This wide world is like that pot and our *samsaras* or the families are like the narrow top. Our desires are the sweets in the pot. Man puts his hand in the pot and gets bound. When he sheds his desires, he will be able to live in the world freely. To get freedom, the first thing to do is to sacrifice. In philosophical terms, this is called renunciation.

If any man possesses *dharma* along with wealth, power, and riches, there is none greater than him. However learned we may be, if we have no morality, we shall become the brothers of Ravana. Because he left the path of *dharma*, he had to fight the monkeys who in the end killed him. When he was about to die, his wife, Mandodari, came to him and said to Rama, "I am not sorry that Ravana has died and been separated from me, but I wonder at the fact that such a great man, possessing such great strength had been killed by the monkeys. This must be because my husband gave himself up to bad desires and he had to fall." When bad ideas, which are like seeds in our hearts, are not removed, they will grow into big trees. Only he, who does not succumb to desires, will obtain the state of *Brahman*.

We come to the same conclusion in the story of the Kauravas. They had greater wealth and a larger army compared to the Pandavas. Because they did not follow the path of *dharma*, they waged war on the Pandavas, who had many good qualities. Whatever kinds of strength we have, if we do not have the strength of *dharma*,

all is futile. Real strength is *Daiva Bala* and *Dharma Bala*, the strength that comes from God and from *dharma*. The Pandavas were prepared to sacrifice their lives in the pursuit of righteousness. Where *dharma* is, God is and where God is, there will be victory. Where God is not, it is impossible to gain success.

The customs and manners that go with Indian culture make us respected and there is no need to abandon them. Young people, with their peculiar dress imitating the westerners, appear just like clowns. There is nothing wrong in wearing rich and beautiful clothing, but they should be in harmony with our Indian culture and be such as will create respect for our country. Some bush shirts are made of cloth used for furniture, bed sheets, and so on. When men walk with such bush shirts, even animals will be afraid. If little boys wear such clothes, there is some meaning. Indians must be very careful about the way they dress and the fashions they adopt. Indians traditionally look at the forehead of a baby when it is born, and if it is very broad, they presume the child is very fortunate. They think that God writes the future on the forehead. But people now try to cover their foreheads with their hair. This is not beautiful either. Some people close one eye with their hair. This is not proper either. We must be able to look well and see things in a proper way. Our sight is *drushti* and *srishti*, or creation, is our *drushti*. *Drushti* is also called knowledge. We are ruining our knowledge with the mistaken idea that what we do makes us very beautiful. Among the students here, there are no such people; but I should ask that when you go out of here, you should never do such things. Protect your respect and honour.

Wherever you walk, never walk in the middle of the road. Nowadays young people walk abreast on the road, thus blocking the road and obstructing the vehicles. Follow the rules of traffic and behave in such a way that you do not inconvenience others. Students are prone to go on strike meaninglessly. Students going out of here must never partake in strikes. For what purpose do you admit yourselves into a college? Follow that purpose first. If you take part in

strikes, the teaching course, which is generally two years, stretches over to five, thus wasting the money your parents send you. In the name of strikes, people throw stones on buses and hit innocent persons also. This is not right. We have established this summer course to put an end to such agitations so far as you are concerned. You should behave properly in future. The *guru* is Brahma, Vishnu, Eswara and even Parabrahma. We must go to the preceptors who educate us in a humble manner. Please your *gurus* and they will bless you and you will become good. Do not follow these ideals simply because I ask you to do so. You must ponder over them and get them firmly fixed in your minds. I am only reminding you how to behave in future.

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