

RAMA—PRINCE AND PRINCIPLE

The name “Rama” is the essence of the Vedas; the Story of Rama is an Ocean of Milk, pure and potent. It can be asserted that no poem of equal grandeur and beauty has emerged from other languages or from other countries until this very day; but it has provided inspiration to the poetic imagination of every language and country. It is the greatest treasure inherited by his good fortune by every Indian.

Rama is the guardian deity of the Hindus. The Name is borne by the bodies in which they dwell and the buildings in which those bodies dwell. It can safely be said that there is no Indian who has not imbibed the nectar of *Ramakatha*, the story of Rama.

The *Ramayana*, the epic that deals with the story of the Rama Incarnation, is a sacred text that is reverently

recited by people with all varieties of equipment, the scholar as well as the ignoramus, the millionaire as well as the pauper. The Name that the *Ramayana* glorifies cleanses all evil. It transforms the sinner; it reveals the Form that the Name represents, the Form that is as charming as the Name Itself.

As the sea is the source of all the waters on earth, all beings are born from “Rama.” A sea sans water is unreal. A being sans “Rama” is without existence, now or ever. The azure Ocean and the Almighty Lord have much in common.

The Ocean is the abode of the Almighty, as myth and legend proclaim; they describe Him as reclining on the Ocean of Milk. This is the reason behind the title given by Valmiki (son of Prachetas) the great poet who composed the epic, to each canto, *Kaanda*. *Kaanda* means water, an expanse of water.

It also means “the sugarcane.” However crooked a cane may be, whichever section you chew, the sweetness is unaffected and uniform. The stream of Rama’s Story meanders through many a curve and twist. Nevertheless, the sweetness of *Karuna* (tenderness, pity, compassion) persists without diminution throughout the narrative. The stream turns and flows through sadness, wonder, ridicule, awe, terror, love, despair and dialectics, but the main undercurrent is the love of *Dharma* (righteousness, morality) and the *Karuna* (compassion) it fosters.

The nectar in the story of Rama is as the “Sarayu river” that moves silently by the city of Ayodhya, where Rama was born and where he ruled. The Sarayu has its source in the Himalayan Manasa-Sarovar, as this Story is born in the *Manasa-Sarovar* (the Lake of the Mind)! The Rama stream bears the sweetness of Karuna; the stream of Lakshmana (his brother and devoted companion) has the sweetness of Devotion, (*Bhakthi*); as the Sarayu river joins the Ganga (Ganges) and the waters commingle, so too, the streams of tender compassion and devotion (the stories of Rama and Lakshmana) commingle in the *Ramayana*. Karuna and *Prema* (love) make up, between them, the composite picture of the glory of Rama. That picture fulfils the heart’s dearest yearning for every Indian. To attain it is the aim of every spiritual striving.

The effort of the individual is but half the pursuit. The other half consists in the Grace of God. Man fulfils himself by self-effort as well as Divine Blessings. The fulfilment takes him across the dark ocean of dualities, onto the Immanent and Transcendent One.

The *Ramayana* has to be read, not as a record of a human career, but as the narrative of the Advent and Activities of an *Avatar* (Incarnation of God). Man must endeavour with determination to realise through his own experience the ideals revealed in that narrative. God is all-knowing, all-pervasive, all-powerful. The words that He utters while embodied in the human form, and acts that He

deigns to indulge in during his earthly sojourn, these are inscrutable and extraordinarily significant. The precious springs of His Message ease the Path of Deliverance for mankind. Do not look upon Rama as a scion of the Solar Dynasty, or as the sovereign of the kingdom of Ayodhya, or as the son of Emperor Dasaratha. Those correlates are but accessory and accidental. This error has become habitual to modern readers. They pay attention only to the personal relationship and affiliations between the characters of the story they read about. They do not delve into the values they represent and demonstrate.

To elaborate this error: the Father of Rama had three wives; the first was such and such, the second was of this nature, the third had these traits! Her maids were of this ugly type....The wars fought by Dasaratha, the father, were characterised by these peculiarities...those specialities....In this manner, fancy leads man astray into the region of the trivial and the colourful, making him neglect the valuable kernel. People do not realise that the study of history must enrich life and make it meaningful and worthwhile, rather than cater to the appetite for paltry facts and petty ideas. Their validity and value lie deep within the facts and fertilise them like subterranean water. Wear the glasses of *Bhakthi* (Reverent Adoration) and *Sraddha* (Steady Dedication); then, the eye will endow you with the pure Wisdom that liberates you and grants eternal Bliss.

As men squeeze juice out of the fibrous cane and drink only the sweetness, as the bee sucks the honey in the flower,

regardless of its symmetry and colour, as the moth flies towards the brightness of the flame, ignoring the heat and the inevitable catastrophe, the Sadhaka, (spiritual seeker) should yearn to imbibe the *Karunarasa* (the expression of the emotion of tenderness, pity and compassion) that the *Ramayana* is saturated with, paying no heed to other subjects. When a fruit is eaten, we throw away the skin, the seeds and the fibre. It is in the very nature of Nature that fruits have these components! Nevertheless, no one will eat these on the plea that he has paid for them! No one can swallow the seeds and digest them. No one will chew the outer rind. So, too, in this Rama-fruit called *Ramayana*, the tales of Rakshasas (demons, ogres and the like) form the rind; the wicked deeds of these evil men are the hard indigestible seeds. Sensory and worldly descriptions and events are the not-too-tasty fibrous stuff. They are the sheaths for the juicy nourishment.

Those who seek the *Karunarasa* in the Rama fruit should concentrate more on the central narrative than on supplementary details that embellish or encumber it. Listen to the *Ramayana* in that mood. That is the best form of *Sravana* (process of spiritual listening).

On one occasion, Emperor Parikshit fell at the Feet of the Sage Suka and asked for instruction on one point that was causing him dire doubt. “Master! One riddle has been worrying me since long. I know that you can solve it for me and that no one else can. I have listened to the narratives

of the lives of my forefathers, from the earliest, the great Manu, down to those of my grandfathers and father. I have studied these stories with care. I observe that in the history of every one of these, there is mention of Sages (Rishis) attached to the monarch, some learned scholar-saints who are members of the court, attending *durbars* and sharing the business of government! What is the real meaning of this amazing association of scholars (who have renounced all attachments and desires, who have realised that the world is a shadow and a snare, and that the One is the only Reality) with kings and rulers playing subordinate roles and counselling them when asked? Those revered elders will not, I know, engage themselves in any activity without sufficient and proper reasons. Their behaviour will ever be pure and unsullied. But this makes my doubt unsolvable. Please enlighten me.”

Suka laughed at the question. He replied, “You have asked a fine question, no doubt. Listen! The great sages and holy scholars will always be eager to share with their fellowmen the truth they have grasped, the sanctifying experience they have won, the elevating deeds they have been privileged to perform, and the Divine Grace they have been chosen to receive. They seek nearness to those who are in charge of administration, those who are adepts in ruling over peoples, with the intention to use them as instruments for establishing and ensuring peace and prosperity on earth. They implant high ideals in their minds, and holy ways of fulfilling them. They prompt the

performance of righteous actions, in accordance with just laws. The monarchs too invite and welcome the sages, seek out the scholars and plead with them to be in their courts, so that they can learn from them the art of government and act according to their counsel. The monarch was the master and guardian of the people; so, they spent their days with him for the estimable purpose of realising, through him, the yearning of their hearts: “*Lokaas samasthaah sukhino bhavanthu*—May all the worlds be happy.” They were eager to see happiness and peace spread over the world. Therefore, they tried to equip the kings with all the virtues, fill them with all the moral codes of discipline, arm them with all branches of learning, so that they may rule the realm efficiently, wisely and with beneficial consequences to themselves and their subjects.

There were other reasons, too. Listen! Knowing that the Granter of Joy to humanity, the Mentor of human morals, the Leader of the Solar line, the Dweller in the Heaven of Eternal Bliss, will take birth in a royal line, Sages who had the foresight to anticipate events, gained entry into the durbars of rulers so that they may experience the bliss of contact with the Incarnation, when It happens. They feared they may not get such access later, that they may miss the Bliss they could well garner. So, they profited by their vision of the future and established themselves in the royal capital, in the thick of the community, longing for the Advent.

“To this venerable group belonged Vashishta, Viswamitra, Garga, Agasthya and the other sages (rishis).

They had no wants. They were monarchs of renunciation. They sought nothing from anyone. They were ever content. They appeared in the audience halls of the emperors of those days, not for polemics and the pomp of punditry or for collecting the costly gifts offered to such disputants and guests, or for decorating themselves with the burdensome title those patrons confer on the persons they prefer. They craved rather for the *Darsan* (Bliss of the Vision) of the Lord and for a chance to uphold Dharma (Righteousness) in human affairs. They had no other objective.

“The kings too in those days were immersed in thoughts divine! They approached the hermits and sages in their retreats in order to discover from them the means of making their subjects happy and content. Often they invited them to their palaces and consulted them about ways and means of good government. Those were days when there were sages with no attachment to self, and scholars with no craving for power. Such were the men who tendered advice to the kings. As a consequence, there was no lack of food or clothing, of housing or good health, for the people of the realm. All days were festival days. All doors were decorated with green festoons. The ruler felt that his most sacred duty was the fostering of his people’s welfare. The subjects too felt that the ruler was the heart of the body politic. They had full faith that he was as precious as their own hearts. They valued him as such, they revered him and paid him the homage of gratitude.”

Suka explained the role of the sages in the royal courts in this clear downright manner before the large gathering that was sitting around him.

Have you noticed this? Whatever is done by the great, whichever company they choose, they will ever be on the path of righteousness, on the path of the Divine. Their acts will promote the welfare of the entire world! So, when the *Ramayana* or other narratives of the Divine are recited or read, attention must be fixed on the majesty and mystery of God, on the Truth and straightforwardness that are inherent in them, and on the practice of those qualities in daily life. No importance should be attached to extraneous matters. The means and manner of the execution of one's duty is the paramount lesson to be learnt.

God, when appearing with Form for the sake of upholding Dharma, behaves in a human way. He needs must! For, He has to hold forth the ideal life before man and confer the experience of joy and peace on men. His movements and activities (*Leelas*) might appear ordinary and commonplace to some eyes. But each of these will be an expression of beauty, truth, goodness, joy and exaltation. It will captivate the world with its charm, it will purify the heart that contemplates it. It will overcome and overwhelm all the agitations of the mind. It will tear the veil of Illusion (*Maya*). It will fill the consciousness with Sweetness. There can be no "ordinary" and "commonplace" in the careers of Avatars. Whatever is seen and taken as of that nature is

really "superhuman," "supernatural," deserving high reverence!

The story of Rama is not the story of an individual. It is the story of the Universe! Rama is the Personification of the basic Universal in all beings. He is in all, for all time, in all space. The story deals not with a period that is past, but with the present and future without end, with beginningless eternal Time!

No ant can bite, without Rama's Will! No leaf can drop from its branch, without Rama's prompting! Sky, wind, fire, water and earth—the Five Elements that compose the Universe—behave as they do for fear of Him, and in tune with His Orders! Rama is the Principle which attracts—and endears through that attraction—the disparate elements in Nature. The attraction that one exerts over another is what makes the Universe exist and function.

That is the Rama principle, without which the cosmos will become chaos. Hence, the axiom: If there is no Rama, there will be no Panorama (Universe).