

7. The play of the Divine

Oh Mind! Ever remember

The nectar-like name of Rama

Which is sweeter than Sugar,

Pleasanter to the tongue than honey.

THE Ramayana is not merely the story of Rama. It is an epic which proclaims the greatness of three cities--Mithila, Ayodhya and Lanka. The Rama Principle has brought out and demonstrated the significance of these three cities.

Rama is the embodiment of Dharma (righteousness), Lakshmana is the embodiment of Sraddha (dedication). Bharata embodies *Bhakti* (devotion), Shatrughna personifies Sakti (valour). Dharma is associated with Sraddha. The protecting cover for Bhakti is Sakti. Hence Rama and Lakshmana were always together as a pair, and Bharata and Shatrughna as another.

Hardly had Rama reached the age of sixteen when sage Viswamitra arrived on the scene. With his coming, the epic career of Rama (Rama-ayana) began. From then on the destruction of the *Raakshasas* started. Beginning with the protection of Viswamitra's *yajna* (religious sacrifice), it is one continuous saga of ceaseless action' liberating Ahalya from her curse, proceeding to Mithila, breaking Siva's bow, marrying Sita (the incarnation of *Maha Maya*), humbling of Parasurama on the way to Ayodhya, leaving for the forest as an exile, searching for Sita, invading Lanka, destroying Ravana, installing Vibhishana on the throne, and triumphantly returning to Ayodhya. During all this period, Rama's career was filled with action and adventures with no respite.

Ramayana is the joint epic of Rama and Sita

The term "Rama" means one who is pleasing and lovable. "*Ayana*" means movement or journey. "Ra" refers to Atma and "Ma" refers to Mind. The Rama Principle means merging the mind in the *Atma*. "Ramayana" means suffusing the world with the bliss of the Rama Principle. But it is not Sri Rama alone that is involved in this process, Sita is also an epic personality. "Rama" is another name for Sita. The Ramayana is thus a joint epic of Rama and Sita or Sita-Rama Ramayanam.

Rarely in the world do we see married couples who are identical---man and wife--in their physical features, their qualities, behaviour, thoughts and capacities. But in the case of Rama and Sita the similarity was complete in every respect. There were no differences in features, qualities or other aspects. The truth of this is evident from what Hanuman experienced. Once Hanuman happened to look at Sita when she was alone. He got a doubt whether Rama himself had assumed a feminine form. Looking at Sita, he thought it was Rama himself. Hence Rama and Sita should be regarded as one identical entity and not as separate beings.

Role of three cities in Ramayana

The inner significance of the Sita-Rama story will be clear when we consider the role of the three cities in the Ramayana. First comes Mithila. Emperor Janaka was its ruler. He was a *Brahmajnaani* (one who possesses knowledge of identity of individual self with the cosmic being) who had renounced everything. Like water on a lotus leaf, he was completely detached, with no concern for worldly things. Having no children of his own, he brought up with great love

a foundling (Sita). There were two powerful entities in his kingdom' Siva's bow and Sita. Once, while engaging in play, Sita lifted the giant bow of Siva with astonishing ease. Struck by this feat, Janaka decided that Sita should be given in marriage only to one who could handle Siva's bow and be worthy of Sita's hand. With this resolve, he invited princes for Sita's *svayamvara* (self selection of a husband by the bride herself). Rama arrived and lifted Siva's bow as lightly as Sita had done. Janaka realised that Rama and Sita were well matched in every respects---beauty, character and strength.

Sita was no ordinary woman. She was the embodiment of *Maha Maya* (supreme divine illusion). Rama acquired *Maha Maya* as his mate. Sita, for her part, sought oneness with the *Atma* principle represented by Rama. The marriage of Rama and Sita represents the association of the *Atma* and the *Maya*. It is in this combined form of *Atma and Maya* that Rama entered Ayodhya.

"Ayodhya" means "invincible". Its ruler was Dasaratha. Dasaratha means one who has made his ten *indriyas* (sense organs) the five organs of action and the five organs of perception--his chariot. Allegorically, this means that Dasaratha represents the body, with its ten organs. These sense organs are related to the three *gunas* (qualities) *Satwa*, *Rajas*, *Tamas*. Dasaratha's three wives--- Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi---symbolise these three *gunas*.

Dasarata's four sons represent four Vedas

When one is influenced by *gunas*, he develops desires. The four sons of Dasaratha were the embodiments of his desires. Rama, Lakshmana, Bharatha and Shatrughna symbolise the four Vedas *Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama* and *Atharvana*. The *Rig Veda* figures in the *Yajur* and *Sama Vedas* to varying extent. It is the embodiment of *Dharma*. *Yajur-Veda* embodies *mantras* (sacred formulae). Lakshmana was continually engaged in contemplating about Rama and immersing himself in the Rama *mantra*. Bharata was one who could not bear separation from Rama and who was ever dwelling on Rama's name and form. He was the embodiment of *Sama Veda*. Shatrughna was one who had mastered all the sciences and used his powers for protecting his brothers. He was skilled in the use of all kinds of weapons. Thus the four Vedas, taking the form of the four brothers, were sporting in Dasaratha's palace.

Symbolic meaning of characters of Ramayana

Soon after his entry into Ayodhya in the company of Sita as *Maya*, Rama had to enter the jungle of life. These ordeals are the concomitants of those who are associated with *Maya*. As a result he had to embark on a search for Sita. On the way, he met Sugriva. Sugriva and Vali--the brothers...represent the qualities of *Viveka* (discrimination) and *Dheeratva* (valour). Rama made common cause with Sugriva to overcome Vali. He got the friendship of Anjaneya who symbolises *Dhairyam* (dauntless courage). With the help of Sugriva and Hanuman, Rama crossed the ocean of *moha* (delusion) to enter Lanka. Once again he encountered the three *gunas*--*Satwa*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* (qualities of serenity, passion and passivity), in Lanka in the form of Vibhishana, Ravana and Kumbhakarna. He vanquished Ravana and Kumbhakarna (*Rajo* and *Tamo gunas*) and crowned Vibhishana (*Satwa guna*) as King. He recovered Sita who now assumed the form of *Anubhavajnana* (wisdom born of experience) and reentered Ayodhya with her.

The Ramayana epic carries these significant messages when the symbolic meaning of the characters and events in it are properly understood.

Here the unique features of Lanka may be noted. Its ruler was the ten-headed Ravana. Although he was endowed with all powers, he was perpetually immersed in *Moha* (infatuation for women). He had the appellation "Dasagriva"---the one with ten heads. In Ayodhya, Dasaratha was the ruler and in Lanka it was Dasagriva. Dasaratha had ten *indriyas* (sense organs) as his chariot. Ravana was the one who was enjoying the ten senses as a sensualist. Whatever one's scholarship or wealth or strength, if he has no control over his senses, he descends to the depths of degradation. Without control over his senses, a person who may have conquered the three worlds, will be a slave of his impulses. The bad traits of Ravana were shared by all the people of Lanka. As is the ruler, so are the subjects, says the adage. When the ruler indulges in sensual pleasures, the subjects also do likewise. Lanka was thus immersed in carnal pleasures. The people were not aware of human virtues, much less of divine qualities. Pleasures of the flesh were their sole preoccupation. But at the same time, they carried on ritualistic practices like *yagas* and *yajnas* (sacrificial rites and rituals).

Transformation of demonic nature to divinity

Witnessing the grandeur and beauty of Lanka with its huge mansions and beautiful gardens---and seeing the sacrificial fires burning in every home, Hanuman at first wondered whether the ruler of such a paradise on earth could commit the heinous crime of abducting Sita. Later Hanuman realised that Lanka was like the fig fruit, which is very attractive on the outside but is full of worms inside. In spite of all its external beauty and grandeur, Lanka contained within it, forces of evil and wickedness. The conversion of such an abode of evil into a kingdom of righteousness by the installation of Vibhishana is the climax of the Ramayana story.

Good exists in the midst of evil and vice-versa

The epic theme of the Ramayana is the transformation of the demonic nature to divinity. During the war in Lanka, an arrow released by Lakshmana struck a child whom its mother was carrying. Lakshmana noticed that the mother, instead of caring for the dead child, was fleeing to save herself. He remarked to Rama that this callous lack of maternal affection revealed the demonic nature of the woman. Rama counselled patience and told Lakshmana that the woman's heart had been purified by seeing Rama. She had given up all desires and attachments. He asked Lakshmana to beckon her and ascertain whether she was running away for the sake of personal safety or for higher reasons. A monkey was sent to fetch her. When questioned, the woman said: "Ramachandra, it is not as if I have no love for my child. Unfortunately, for the decree of fate it has passed away, while I have survived. I wish to live so that, after defeating Ravana, when Rama takes the *Rakshasas* to Ayodhya, I shall be able to serve Rama and feast my eyes on him. Some day Rama will bless the people of Lanka and take them to Ayodhya. I shall then be able to render service in Rama's palace. I am keeping alive only with this hope."

The moral of this episode is that there is good in the midst of evil and evil in the midst of good. Likewise purity prevails amidst impurity and impurity exists in the midst of purity. That is why the answer to the question, "Where is the Lord to be found?" is "Out of unrest peace ensues; from peace results illumination; that illumination reveals the supreme effulgence of the Divine; in that effulgence is Divinity." Thus *Santhi* (peace) exists within *asanthi*(restlessness). But it is said that no one who lacks peace cannot have happiness. This is not quite correct. Instead of bemoaning the state of peacelessness one should strive for real peace with courage and faith. This is the difference between the optimist and the pessimist.

Looking at a glass half full of water, the pessimist says, "the glass is half-empty." The optimist says, "it is half-full". The pessimist sees only the thorn in the rose stalk, while the optimist enjoys the beauty of the rose. Everyone should develop a hopeful and optimistic outlook. The hopes' should be centered not on worldly things but on self-realisation. Even in the *Rakshasa* dominion of Lanka there were seekers of *the Atma*. In Ayodhya all persons appeared to be virtuous and pious devotees of God. But even in such a sacred land, there were some petty-minded men who were ready to cast aspersions on Divinity itself and find fault with God's ways. It was a washerman's disparaging remarks against Sita and Rama which led her banishment to the forest.

Three persons were aware of Rama principle

There were three persons who were aware of the Rama principle. They were Hanuman, Sumitra and Viswamitra. Hanuman was no ordinary person. He was a high-minded, powerful figure endowed with immense knowledge and wisdom. He was well aware of the divinity of Rama. Kausalya despite her *Satwic* (serene) nature, was not aware of Rama's divine power as much as Sumitra. Kausalya shed copious tears on hearing about Rama's exile to the forest. Sumitra, on the contrary, enjoined her son Lakshmana to accompany Rama and told him: "Wherever Rama is, there is Ayodhya, where Rama is not, that is the real jungle. Rama is verily Lord Narayana Himself. Go and serve Rama and Sita with my blessings." Sumitra explained to Lakshmana how he was an aspect of Rama from the circumstances of his birth.

Ramayana is a guide on human relationships

Among the four brothers there was boundless love and regard for each other. When Rama went to the forest and was in Chitrakuta, Bharatha came there to entreat him to return to Ayodhya and reign as the legitimate heir to the throne. Rama refused to return, saying that Bharatha should rule over Ayodhya in accordance with the promise given by Dasaratha. The argument between the two was ultimately resolved by Sage Vasishta who told Bharatha: "Do not cause any pain to Rama, who is Divinity itself and who has come down to protect the good-and uphold *Dharma*." Bharatha pleaded for taking Rama's sandals and administering the kingdom in Rama's name till he returned to Ayodhya.

There are a series of episodes in the Ramayana to show how deep was the love between the four brothers and how devoted were the younger brothers to Rama. Such fraternal love is an example to the world for all time.

The Ramayana is a guidebook on the ideal relations between mothers and children, between husband and wife, between brothers, between the ruler and the people, between the master and the servants and many other human relationships Rama showed compassion to the dying eagle Jatayu, which had fought with Ravana when he was carrying Sita away to Lanka and Rama gave refuge to Vibhishana, even against the fears expressed by Lakshmana. These are examples of Rama's supreme benevolence and magnanimity towards anyone who revered him or sought his protection. Rama declared to Lakshmana "Anyone who comes to me in a spirit of surrender, whoever he might be, is mine and I am his. I shall give him asylum. This is my vow." Rama was a man pledged to one word, to one wife and to a single arrow.

Devotees should install Rama in their hearts and celebrate Ramanavami for achieving *Atmic* bliss. Going through the Ramayana epic they should reach the state of "*Atma-Rama*" (oneness with the Universal Spirit). In such a state there is no *Ahamkara* (ego-sense).

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When the road ends and the goal is gained, the pilgrim finds that he has travelled only from himself to himself, that the way was long and lonesome, but the God that led him unto it was all the while in him, around him, with him, beside him!

BABA