

*Birds and beasts which do not have any type of education, have learnt to lead a life of discipline. But alas! Man who is endowed with all intelligence does not lead a disciplined life. What else is to be conveyed, oh people of this august assembly!*

(Telugu Poem)

The Lord shines effulgently in the universe, so also the universe shines in the Lord. The relationship between the Lord and the universe is intimate and inseparable.

(Telugu Poem)

The sacred epic Ramayana is verily the Veda descended from heaven to earth. The Veda is classified into four: Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharvana Veda. The Rig Veda helps, sustains and protects the Yajnas and Yagas. In the Ramayana, Rama symbolises Rig Veda. Lakshmana signifies Yajur Veda, which contains Mantras chanted during the performance of Yajnas and Yagas. When Rama was away in the forest, Bharata stayed in Nandigrama singing His Divine Name day in and day out. Hence, he symbolises Sama Veda. Satrugna was the one who annihilated the Satrus (enemies) and protected the pious. He was obedient to his brothers. He stands for Atharvana Veda. The essence of Atharvana Veda lies in destroying wickedness and fostering sacred feelings and activities. The Ramayana is verily the Veda. The Veda is not different from the Ramayana. True humanness lies in understanding this.

Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Satrugna are the four sons of Dasaratha. Merely knowing this will not suffice. One should enquire and understand the inner meaning. Who is Dasaratha? He represents the human body consisting of ten senses (five senses of perception and five senses of action). Strictly speaking, Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Satrugna are not the sons of Dasaratha and his three wives. We should not think that they were born like mere mortals. They are the Chaitanya Swarupas (embodiments of divine consciousness) who emerged from the sacrificial fire. They set an ideal to parents, brothers and sisters in every family and to humanity at large.

Today, due to the impact of Kali Age, there is no unity and love among brothers in a family. There are conflicts among them leading to disturbances. On the contrary, Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Satrugna had total unity among themselves. They delighted others by their unity. Even while playing games in their childhood, each aspired for the victory of the other. Once the four brothers as young lads were playing a game. Shortly thereafter, Bharata came to mother Kausalya, sat on her lap and started weeping. She asked him, "Bharata, why are you feeling sad? Have you lost the game?" Bharata replied, "Mother, I would have been happy if that were to be the case, but when I was about to lose the game, Rama managed to lose the game and made me the winner. I am upset at the defeat of my elder brother." What an example of fraternal love!

When Lakshmana fell unconscious in the battlefield, Rama was crestfallen. He considered Lakshmana as His very life. He lamented saying, "If I were to search in the world, I may get a mother like Kausalya and a wife like Sita but not a brother as noble as Lakshmana. What is the use of this life without Lakshmana?" The four brothers had such unity, harmony and love among themselves.

When Bharata returned from Kekaya kingdom, he came to know from Sage Vasishtha that Rama had gone into exile and would not return for fourteen long years. He was disconsolate. He went to the Sage, offered his respects and said, "Oh venerable preceptor, I do not want this kingdom which has caused the exile of my brother Rama. Being the eldest son, only Rama has the right to rule over the Kingdom. Hence, at this very moment I shall go to the forest, fall at the feet of Rama and plead with Him to come and take over the reins of Ayodhya." In this manner, each of the four brothers was ready to make any sacrifice for the sake of the other.

In order to uphold the plighted word of His father, Rama was ready to go into exile. He donned the clothes made of tree bark and went to the residence of mother Kausalya to seek her permission. Mother Kausalya, being unaware of the sudden turn of events, was eagerly awaiting Rama's arrival. She was ecstatic thinking of Rama's coronation and expected Him to come to her in royal garments. She was very much worried to see Rama and Sita in bark clothes. "Rama, is this the type of garment you should wear on the day of your coronation," she asked. Rama smilingly replied, "Mother, I have been coronated as the king of Aranya Rajya (kingdom of forest) by My father. I am going to the forest to protect sages and saints who are being put to suffering by the demons. Hence, kindly do not raise any objection to My sacred mission. I have to obey the command of My father." So saying, He prostrated before His mother and sought her permission to go to the forest. Hearing the words of Rama, mother Kausalya was overcome with sorrow. She pleaded with Him, "Son, You are talking of only obeying the command of father. What about the command of Your mother? I am the Ardhangi (better half) of Your father. Hence, it is Your bounden duty to obey my command also. I will not come in the way of Your going to the forest, but let me also accompany You. I have borne You as a result of many rituals and severe austerities performed over a number of years. I cannot live without You even for a minute." Rama pacified her saying, "Mother, it is not proper on your part to leave your husband in this old age. He is getting burnt in the fire of My separation. At this juncture, you should comfort and console him with soothing words. That is your foremost duty. For a wife, husband is God. He is the only refuge for her." Sita, who was standing by, heard this conversation. She at once asked Him, "Rama, is not the Dharma same for all women? Can there be one Dharma for your mother and another for me? You have asked me to stay back and look after Your father and mother. Now You are telling Your mother that serving the husband is the prime duty of a wife. Does it not hold good in my case?" Mother Kausalya was moved by

Sita's argument. She told Rama, "Son, the same Dharma holds good in the case of every woman. It is destined that I have to suffer in this manner. Why should You put Sita to suffering by leaving her behind in Ayodhya? She has given up everything and has decided to go with You to the forest. Do not disappoint her. Take her along with You. It is Your duty to take care of her." One can very well understand the nobility and broad-mindedness of mother Kausalya from this episode.

The Birthday of Rama is celebrated in order to remind us of the ideals which He stood for. We have to ponder over the ideals set before us by Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Satrugna and also by Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi. Sage Vasishtha declared, *Ramo Vighnavan Dharmah* (Rama is the embodiment of Dharma). He described the Divine form of Rama saying, *Pumsam Mohana Rupaya* (one whose form enchants all). "Rama, the beauty and handsomeness that You are endowed with are not limited to Your physical form alone. Your infinite love and compassion give You this blissful form. Even men are attracted by the blissful form of Yours. You are the very personification of Sat-Chit-Ananda." Thus Sage Vasishtha extolled the glory and majesty of Rama. It is your good fortune that you are able to listen to the sacred story of Rama and sing His glory.

As I told you in the beginning, God shines effulgently in the universe and so does the universe in God. The relationship between God and the universe is intimate and inseparable. The universe is full of living beings. Each being is the embodiment of Rama. Do not confine Rama to a particular name and form. All the beings are His forms. Rama means the One who delights. He is present in all. *Easwara Sarva Bhutanam* (God is the indweller of all beings). *Isavasyam Idam Jagat* (the entire world is permeated by God). The world is the very form of God. *Sahasra Seersha Purusha Sahasraksha Sahasra Pad* (God has thousands of heads, eyes and feet). In those days, the population of the world was only in thousands. Considering each of them the form of God, it was declared, *Sahasra Seersha Purusha ...* With the passage of time, the population swelled from thousands to lakhs and from lakhs to crores. Then it was said, God is *Mukoti Devata Swarupa*, meaning He is in the form of three crores of beings. Today the world population has increased to nearly 600 crores. All are the forms of God. Usually people confine Rama to a particular form with a bow and a quiver of arrows. In fact, every man is Rama Swarupa (embodiment of Rama). That is why people are named after Rama, Lakshmana, Krishna, Govinda, etc.

Not only the four brothers, even their consorts demonstrated great ideals. Sita and Urmila were the daughters of King Janaka. Mandavi and Srutakeerti were the daughters of his younger brother. They were women of sterling character and were endowed with supreme sense of detachment. They considered the happiness of others as their own. When Rama was leaving for the forest, Sita insisted that she should be allowed to accompany Him. She said, "Swami, You have come for the redemption of

mankind. I too have a part to play in it. How can I remain here when You are going to the forest renouncing everything?" She removed all her ornaments, wore bark clothes and followed Rama.

Lakshmana's wife, Urmila was a very good painter. Being unaware of the happenings, she was painting the picture of Rama's coronation. As she was deeply engrossed in her work, Lakshmana entered the room all of a sudden and called her in a raised voice. She was startled and at once stood up. In the process, she accidentally spilled over the paint on the picture she was painting. She felt sad for having spoiled the picture. Then Lakshmana remarked, "The coronation of Rama which is meant to bestow peace and prosperity to mankind is stalled because of Kaikeyi and the picture of coronation that you are painting is spoiled because of me." He informed her that he was accompanying Rama and Sita to the forest to serve them and said that he would return only after fourteen years. She was least perturbed with his decision. In fact, she was happy and entreated him to serve Sita and Rama with utmost devotion. Pain and pleasure, sorrow and happiness follow one another. One should treat them with equanimity.

Pleasure and pain, good and bad co-exist, none can separate them. You cannot find pleasure or pain, good or bad to the exclusion of the other. Pleasures result when difficulties fructify.

(Telugu Poem)

Lakshmana took leave of his wife and went to mother Sumitra to seek her blessings. 'Su-mitra' means a good friend. Her character was worthy of her name. When Lakshmana told her of his decision to accompany Sita and Rama to the forest, she, being a noble mother, was very happy. She was not at all worried that either of her two sons would not rule over the kingdom. When her cup of pudding was taken away by an eagle, both Kausalya and Kaikeyi sympathised with her and shared their pudding with her. Lakshmana was born of the share of Kausalya's pudding and Satrughna of the share of Kaikeyi's. Hence, Lakshmana and Satrughna are the aspects of Rama and Bharata respectively. Lakshmana served Rama and Satrughna served Bharata. Sumitra thought that it was her good fortune that her sons were serving Rama and Bharata. She had such noble feelings. Where there is God, there is His devotee. Where God and the devotee come together, victory is assured. Sumitra told Lakshmana, "Son, to be in God's company is the greatest wealth." So, she gave her immediate consent to Lakshmana to accompany Rama and Sita.

When Rama went to Kausalya to take leave of her, she lamented saying, "Son, you are leaving me in

Ayodhya with all the royal comforts and going to Aranya (forest) to lead a life of hardships." To this Lakshmana who was by the side of Rama said, "Mother, this Ayodhya without Rama and Sita is verily the forest. The forest with Rama and Sita is verily Ayodhya. Sita and Rama are my parents. I will serve them and spend my time blissfully."

There was great unity and understanding not only among the four brothers but also among their consorts. They are ideals for every family. Is there a family where daughters-in-law live in amity? Is there a family where brothers live in harmony without indulging in property disputes? Nowhere do we find such an ideal family. This age of Kali has become the age of Kalaha (conflict). In such a scenario, the Ramayana shines as the beacon-light to every family. How should the brothers and sisters conduct themselves? In the Ramayana, we find the demonstration of such great ideals. Merely going through the sacred text of Ramayana is not enough; you have to emulate the ideals. The Ramayana transcends the barriers of time, space, caste and religion. In all nations, at all times and under all circumstances, unity is very essential to find fulfilment in life. Even birds and animals have unity amongst themselves. They do not have the selfishness of hoarding things. Today we find wicked tendencies in man which are not found even in birds and animals. There is not a single instance of internal dispute in the family of Dasaratha. You may question, "Was not Kaikeyi responsible for a family dispute which led to the exile of Rama?" No, it was not a dispute at all. In fact, Kaikeyi had great affection for Rama. She loved Him more dearly than her own son Bharata. But her mind was poisoned because of the bad company of Manthara. Hence, it is said, *Tell me your company, I shall tell you what you are*. Even Manthara was one of good nature. She was only acting under the influence of an incident that happened in her previous birth. She was a deer then. One day she was playing with her husband in the forest. The king of Kekaya had come to the forest on hunting. He saw both the deer playing with each other. In an attempt to capture them, he killed the husband deer with an arrow. The female deer was grief-stricken. She went to her mother and complained about the cruel act of the king. The mother consoled her saying, "My dear child, pain and pleasure, good and bad coexist in this world. We have to withstand the vicissitudes of life with equanimity. You may go to the king to seek justice." Then the female deer went to the king and poured out her anguish thus, "Oh king! We were leading our lives peacefully and blissfully. You have inflicted untold grief on me by killing my husband.

You have ruined my life." The king ruefully said, "Nobody can escape the consequences of his actions. You are grieving over the death of your husband. I can also understand the agony of your mother having lost her son-in-law. As a result, one day I too will suffer from the loss of my son-in-law." The female deer took birth as Manthara and caused the death of Dasaratha who was the son-in-law of King Kekaya.

This life is nothing but an ocean with the waves of union and separation. Everybody has to pass through the adversities of life. It is the nature of Pravritti (outward path). There is another aspect to life, i.e., Nivritti (inward path). A child goes to its mother and says, "I am hungry." The mother who follows the outward path says, "Child, go and eat food. Your hunger will be satiated." This is the Pravritti Dharma. But the mother who treads the inward path does not merely say, "Go and eat food." She would advise the child as to what type of food to eat, when and how you should eat. When you are hungry, you should not eat whatever you like without enquiring whether it is good for health. The Nivritti mother advises you to eat such food which will bestow good health on you. Even the Vedas have dealt with the principles of Pravritti and Nivritti. One may have desires but they should be under limit. They should be based on truth and righteousness. Do not eat whatever you get. Do not speak whatever comes to your mind. You should speak only after proper enquiry. These are some of the lessons that the Ramayana teaches to mankind. That is why the Ramayana is compared to the Vedas. It teaches the Pravritti and Nivritti aspects of life in a beautiful manner. Pravritti is the Swabhava (nature) of Prakriti. Nivritti is the Swarupa (form) of the Atma. Nivritti broadens our outlook, whereas Pravritti does the opposite. Hence, we should base all our activities on Nivritti.

The Ramayana teaches the principles of Dharma and the path of duty to every individual. Though ages and aeons have passed by, the Ramayana remains ever fresh guiding humanity on the path of truth and righteousness. Even today we think of the characters of Ramayana with respect and reverence. You can very well understand its greatness. There is no morality higher than what is depicted in the Ramayana. The Ramayana should be the subject of our Parayana (worship). You should install the principle of Rama in your heart and experience bliss.

Embodiments of Love!

Practise the teachings of Ramayana in your daily life. Obey the command of Lord Rama. It is to understand and assimilate the principle of Ramayana that we are celebrating the festival of Rama Navami today. It is not enough if the celebration is confined to merely partaking of sweet pudding and other delicious items.

Sage Valmiki declared that the Ramayana will be there so long as there are mountains and rivers on the face of the earth. You may wonder, what is the relationship between the Ramayana and the mountains and the rivers. The mountains symbolise men and the rivers women. As long as there are men and women in this world, the glory of Ramayana will continue to illumine the world. Women are compared to rivers because they are the symbols of sacrifice. They flow incessantly quenching the thirst of one and all.

The Ramayana sets great ideals to men. People should contemplate on such sacred story and follow its ideals. The marriage of Rama and Sita was celebrated in Mithila with all festivity and gaiety.

They sang songs inviting people to see the Divine marriage of Rama and Sita.

*Come let us go and see the marriage of Rama and Sita,*

*The sight shall confer great merit.*

*The lives of those who see this marriage will be sanctified.*

*Oh come one and all to see the sacred marriage,*

*Rama, who is riding on an elephant, is shining effulgently.*

*Mother Sita is by His side,*

*The brothers are at their service.*

*Sita and Rama will smilingly enquire of our well-being;*

*What else can we aspire for!*

*Come let us go anon*

*To see the holy wedding of Rama and Sita.* (Telugu Song)

People sang songs like this, rejoicing at the marriage of Rama and Sita. The people of Ayodhya as well as Mithila were greatly delighted. The entire city of Mithilapura rejoiced in great celebration. The divine marriage conferred immense joy on one and all. The story of Rama is mysterious, sacred and blissful.

*Embodiments of Love!*

The story of Rama is not an ancient one. It is eternal and ever new. It is full of auspiciousness. May you fill your heart with the sacred ideals of the Ramayana! May you give up hatred and all differences! May you live in peace and harmony! When you contemplate on Rama incessantly, you derive great joy and delight.

Bhagawan concluded His Discourse with the Bhajan, "*Rama Rama Rama Sita ...*"