

RECITING THE RAMAYANA: WHEN AND WHY?

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Abstract of the paper

The Ramayana has claimed greater reputation, rapport and respect among the Indians. The secret of the popularity lies in its appeal and influence. The whole book reveals the establishment of the *dharma* in this world. There are proper periods too fixed for its perusal, in the span of a year. In the *Uttarakhanda of The Skandapurana* which speaks of the importance of *The Ramayana*.

Key Words: Ramayana, faith, values, moral degradation, wise, silence.

Unshakable is the faith of the Hindus in the two great ancient epics of this country namely the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The two texts have influenced their manners, beliefs and celebration in many ways. Often the ancient texts of a country act as the guardians of the traditions of a race. They have been held holy by the whole Hindu community. With aa the solemnity and reverence many recite them. On several occasions the two books are reverentially read and listened to either in part or full as a discipline.

Of the two books, *The Ramayana* has claimed greater reputation, rapport and respect among the Indians. The secret of the popularity lies in its appeal and influence. The whole book reveals the establishment of the *dharma* in this world. There are proper periods too fixed for its perusal, in the span of a year. In the *Uttarakhanda of The Skandapurana* which speaks of the importance of *The Ramayana*. There is a sloka;

चैत्रे माघे कार्तिके च सिते पक्षे वाचयेत् ॥

नवाहः सुमहा पुण्यं श्रोतव्यं च प्रयत्नतः ॥¹

[*The Ramayana* must be recited and / listened to with all the efforts, especially in the months of *Chaitra* (spring) *Kartika* (Autumn) and *Magha* (Winter).]

In the full moon part of the month of *Chaitra* (spring) itself the birthday of Sri Rama (*Ramanavami*) is celebrated. The spring is the season of floral beauty and fragrance. The flower is the promise of fruition and life. The incarnation of Sri Vishnu as Rama in the form of a human being is the promise of protection and proceeding of *dharma*. Therefore the observance of the ceremonies on the occasion is quite symbolic.

There are many stories as to fruits of reading to the *Ramayana* during these fixed / proper periods. The sage Garga narrated the story of Sri Rama during the month of *Sudasa*. And on listening to it he was relieved from the curse of his guru *Goutama*. And in the same way the king *Sumati* and his wife *Satyavati* got perennial wealth and glory on listening to the *Ramayana* in the month of *Magha*.

An interesting story is told about the fruit of listening to the story of Rama in the month of *Chaitra*. In the past there was a ruthless hunter and highwayman by name *Kalika*. Always he used to attack the innocent travelers and ransack them of their valuables and wealth. When he could not find any pilgrim or a traveler he would enter into the town and rob the houses. Thus, once he went to a town called *Souveeranagara*. It was a beautiful town with illustrious edifices and pleasant parks. In the middle of those pleasant parks there was a beautiful temple of Lord *Keshava*. It was decorated with many cupolas of gold. On seeing the temple, the robber thought of stealing the valuable cupolas by night. When he entered the temple in the dark night, he saw a sage rapt in deep penance. The name of the sage was *Uttanka*. The thief thought the sage the thorn on the path of his theft. So, he caught hold of the sage and tried to murder him. Then the sage *Uttanka*, who was the moving treasure of knowledge and penance said that it was wrong to steal that which belongs to gods. Further he also advised the

thug in the Vedantic terms. The sage said that the *maya* is the source of desire and action. The man who is surrounded by the *maya* does many things which are considered as anti-social and inhuman. The man caught by the *maya* gets involved in innumerable dark deeds with the intention of making his family and friends happy. But they all attach value for him until he ceases to supply all their demands. But the man does not understand the underlying truth that he, and he alone has to face the consequences of his wrong doings. When the cold-blooded murderer heard these words, a sort of realization dawned upon him. He soon fell at feet of the holy man and begged to show him the path for his redemption. Then the sacred soul, the sage, said that he must listen to the *Ramayana* in the month of *Chaitra*, so that he would be relieved from all evil effects of his wrong doings. Saying so the sage Uttanka himself narrated the pleasant Ramacharita before the thief. The ruffian was forgiven and was sanctioned salvation by the almighty.

Though it sounds an exaggeration and amusingly miraculous in this age of ours, an age of science and objective enquiry into everything. One can not deny the fact that the masterpiece has a soothing effect. As Hudson says, "A great book grows directly out of life; in reading it, we are brought into large, close and fresh relations with life; and in that fact lies the final explanation of its power. Literature is vital record of what men have seen in life, what they have experienced in it, what they have thought and felt about those aspects of it which have the its immediate and enduring interest for all of us. It is thus fundamentally an expression of life through the medium of language" *****Because every character that appears in the book is an icon of undeniable and enduring values. Certainly, if anybody listens to or ponders over the behavior of the characters one wonders how wise, how meaningful, and how humanistic is the move they make. The instances culled at random reveal this fact. Popular deification of Rama in the *Ramayana* has in fact blinded us to the essential fact that Rama himself was a man. In fact he was superman who satisfied the accepted definition of an ideal man of his time in every way [perhaps even now] when the time demanded he hastened towards hermitage without any hesitation. He is an oriental superman. The superman of the occidental concept would perhaps have pushed away the old ruler [Dasharatha] from the throne and installed himself in his seat and dictated terms on the people of Ayodhya. But 'Rama stood for the ideals like monogamy, truth, protection of the poor and exploited and destruction of the wicked and vile, high souled simple living, these qualities brought him adoration by all'. His moving away from Ayodhya claimed for him universal popularity and lowered the other party in public esteem. This holds up the mirror to his wordly wisdom. His alliance with Sugreeva and Vibheeshana, his decision to fight with Ravana after a year's waiting reveal the fact, he was a pacifist by nature. Thus, he becomes a giver of conduct and maker of the path for the humanity. Thus, he demonstrated the *dharma* to the world while practicing it himself. Even the move made by Bharata in the venerated text is of no less importance. It is full of politic and political implications. He knew the feelings and respect cherished by the subjects of Kosala towards Rama. He knew still better the seriousness of the situation. Hence, without hastening to take the charge of kingship he trod the throny path of Chitrakoota to meet his venerated brother. He sought *Ramapaduka* and ruled the kingdom as a viceroy in Nandigram, a hamlet. Instead, had he tried to rule even for a day, he would have been torn to pieces by the citizens of Ayodhya. Lakshmana is the model of brotherly affection. He followed his brother to forest leaving his newly wedded wife. He wanders in the forest with her brother and Seeta as their shadow. After Seeta's abduction when in Kishkindha the servants of Sugreeva brought some ornaments and showed them to the brothers. Then Rama asked Lakshmana to identify the jewels. But the replay given by the Lakshmana is:

नाहं जानामि केयूरे नाहं जानामि कुण्डले ।
नूपुरेत्वभिजानामि नित्यं पादाभिवन्दनात् ॥²

[I don't know the hair diamond, I don't know the ear-rings but I can identify certainly the toe-ring because I would see it every day while saluting her (Seeta's) feet].

In the whole text of the *Ramayana* we see him obedient all the while. Seeta is a paragon of womanly virtue. She had full knowledge womanly behaviour patterns. Hanuman represents the values like loyalty, fidelity, obedience etc., thus every character represents one or the other value.

We are living in the age of moral degradation. There is fear in every heart about one or the other thing. Today we find the courage and virility among the youth slackened. They are not determined and decisive in their moves and makings. The qualities like sacrifice, selflessness are sliding away slowly from the human character. Everywhere we witness the devilish dance of selfishness and corruption. The masses are divided. The wise are withdrawing while the wiseacres have become wordy, winning and victories. Its really a dangerous predicament for a nation. The careful study of the *Ramayana* is very helpful in developing the positive values while

controlling and curbing the negative once. That is why Gandhiji yarned for Ramarajya where every individual is freed from the fetters of all sorts of evil and fear. Rama declared:

...अभयं सर्व भूतेभ्यो ददाम्येतद्गतं मम ॥³

[I sanction *abhaya* for every creature and that is my promise and oath.]

There fore it is now time for we the Indians to contemplate over our ancient epics and inculcate the values revealed in them to make the life worth living

References

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