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Arise! Awake! And stop not till the Goal is reached.

## THUS SPOKE NARADA ABOUT SHRI RAMA

The sage Valmiki, chief among the munis and the most eloquent of men, constantly engaged in the practice of self-control and the study of the holy scriptures, enquired of Shri Naranda:

“Who is there in the world to-day, endowed with excellent and heroic qualities, who is versed in all the duties of life, grateful, truthful, firm in his vows, an actor of many parts, benevolent to all beings, learned, eloquent, handsome, patient, slow to anger, one who is truly great; who is free from envy, and when excited to wrath can strike terror into the hearts of celestial beings? O Sage, I would hear of such a man from thee, who art able to describe him to me.”

Narada, acquainted with the past, the present and the future, pleased with the words of the Sage Valmiki, answered him saying:

“Rare indeed are those, endowed with the qualities thou hast enumerated, yet I can tell thee of such a one. Born in the family of Ikshwaku, he is named Rama.

“Equal to Brahma, the Protector of his people, pleasing to look upon; supporting the universe; the destroyer of those who contravene the moral code; the inspirer of virtue; the giver of special grace to his devotees and to those who duly observe sacrificial rites and are charitable; conver-

sant with the essence of the Vedic philosophy; an adept in the science of warfare; skilled in the scriptural law; of infallible memory; beloved of all; of courteous disposition; incapable of cowardice; acquainted with the laws of this world as also of the other worlds.

“As the rivers hasten to the ocean, so do men of virtue ever approach him.

“Equal to Vishnu in valour; grateful to the sight as the full moon; when stirred to righteous anger, resembling all-consuming death; in patience like the earth; in generosity like Kuvera; in truthfulness the personification of virtue. Such are his great qualities—Rama, the beloved heir of King Dasharatha, possessing every excellent attribute, benevolent to all, devoted to the welfare of every living being.”

He who reads the story of Rama, which imparts merit and purity, is freed from all sin. He who reads it with faith and devotion is ultimately worshipped together with his sons, grandsons and servants at his death.

A brahmin reading this becomes proficient in the Vedas, and philosophy; a kshatriya becomes a king; a vaishya grows prosperous in trade; a shudra, on reading this will become great in his caste.

(The *Ramayana* of Valmiki  
Bala kanda, Ch-1)

## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL is on Shri Rama and the other heroes in the Ramayana by Valmiki.

WOMEN'S RIGHT FOR SCRIPTURAL STUDY AND SPIRITUAL LIFE by Srimat Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj is his last speech read out at the Ramakrishna Mission Annual General Meeting.

INDIVIDUALITY AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH by Swami Ranganathananda is taken from a speech that Revered Swamiji delivered in American Club, Tokyo, on 7th May, 1986.

SHRI RAMA—THE ABSOLUTE BRAHMAN OF RAMACHARITA MANASA is by Swami Ramanujananda, Ramakrishna Mission, Bombay.

UNIVERSAL MESSAGE OF THE RAMAYANA—A DEVOTIONAL SCRIPTURE by Raj Prabhakar, MA phil., MSS, who is practising holistic counselling at Lubbock, U.S.A., is a lucid and illuminating article on the universal message of the Ramayana, which modern man and woman, especially of the West, can appreciate and imbibe.

THE HINDU WAY OF LIFE AND LIBERATION is by Swami Ajitatmananda of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati.

A TRIP TO JAPAN is by Dr. Amit Tarafdar, a young Ophthalmologist of Bareilly, U.P.

SAINT TULASIDASA, a short study on the life and teachings of the saint, is by K.S. Nagaraja of Bangalore.

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## SHRI RAMA IN THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

(EDITORIAL)

The Ramayana of Valmiki is India's quest for the ideal man. The poet Valmiki sets forth the goal of the great classic at the very beginning. In search of an ideal man he asks Narada, the celestial sage, if there is any man in whom all the highest qualities of life have been embodied.

Narada answers that such a man is rare indeed. Only one such is there. He is Rama.

Born in the family of Ikshwaku, he is named Rama; one renowned, fully self-controlled, valorous, and illustrious, the Lord of all. Wise, conversant with the ethical codes, eloquent, fortunate, a slayer of his foes, broad-shouldered, long-armed, possessing a conch-shaped neck and prominent chin, eminent in archery, with a muscular body, arms extending to the knees, and a noble head and brow; of mighty powers; possessing well-proportioned limbs and skin of bluish tint, one renowned for his virtue; of prominent eyes, deep-chested, bearing auspicious

marks; one who protects those who take refuge in him and is ever-mindful of the good of those dependent on him; true to his promises, benevolent to his subjects, omniscient, renowned for his good deeds, pure, and ever responsive to devotion; meditative on his own essence.

Narada goes on describing Rama's qualities at length and finally adds, "As the rivers hasten to the ocean, so do men of virtue, ever approach him." Rama is the beloved heir of king Dasharatha "possessing every excellent attribute (*Shresthagunairyuktah*). The epic<sup>1</sup> is not just a depiction of valour and struggle like Homer's *Illiad* and *Odyssey*, but is the vision of Superman in man. Valmiki says that "by the power of spiri-

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<sup>1</sup>. Hariprasad Shastri (Tr.) *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, Vol. I, 1952; Vol. II, 1957; Vol. III, 1959), Shanti Sadan, 29 Chepstow villas, London W-11, 1952; Balakanda, Ch-1.



tual meditation and yoga", he composed this epic of twenty four thousand verses in six chapters, to which one more chapter, the Uttara Kanda, was also added by later sages.<sup>2</sup>

Rama is not a creation out of Valmiki's imagination. The poet composed the great epic 'while Rama was still the king of Ayodhya'.<sup>3</sup> It was the fortunate Shatrughna, the heroic brother of Rama, who first heard the musical recitation of the 'enchanted symphonic poem', in the quiet retreat of the sage Valmiki.<sup>4</sup> Soon it was sung in full in accompaniment of lyre by the two child-ascetics Lava and Kusha in the court of Rama who was transported to ecstasy, and identified his own twins born of the ever-pure Sita.

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Valmiki's ideal man Rama belongs not to any supernal region, but to this vale of tears, this life of the world with all its joys and sorrows, ecstasies and agonies, attainments and bereavements, love and separation, war and peace, fight and friendship, birth and death, ascetic struggle for holiness and devilish rush for lust and greed, willing acceptance of suffering for truth, blind abandonment to sense-pleasures in delusion, rebirth through the ordeals of life, and extinction through blind surrender to pride and unrighteousness. Rama is the faithful son of an unfortunate father, the all-loving husband for the eternally pure and chaste wife, all-protecting, all-sacrificing elder brother to faithful youngers, the valiant warrior, undaunted and victorious in the most terrible war, the most beloved and popular king of his subjects, the adored friend-protector for holy ascetics and sages, the death-like punisher of titans and the unrighteous ones.

Valmiki's Rama is also a human being with human weaknesses. His lamentation for Sita moves even the most unemotional reader to tears. His anger in failing to rescue Sita, drives him to a mood of total destruction of the world. His preference for 'good name' as a king drives him to banish Sita a second time, despite his fully knowing that Sita is pure. But through these trying situations his higher self soon gains over the mistakes, and Rama makes amends for them without any mercy to himself either.

And above all, he is the embodiment and upholder of Dharma, Truth, and righteousness which are the goals of Indian life. And with all these, Rama emerges as the most beloved personal God of India. Through the Ramayana one recognises the way of Indian life. Through the god-centred way of Indian life one understands what the Ramayana stands for.

That Rama was an uncommon human being is clearly hinted right from the beginning. In the opening chapter, *Bala Kanda*, when the child Rama saves Ahalya from the curse of sage, kills the female demoness Taraka, and breaks the bow of Shiva, he emerges like a hero of superhuman dimension in whose presence even Vishwamitra of world-shaking penance pales into insignificance.

As the story unrolls, the moral and spiritual qualities of Rama become manifest. The Ayodhya palace which Valmiki describes as "a lake filled with lotuses visited by innumerable birds,"<sup>5</sup> suddenly faced the reversal of fate. Dasharatha, though mortally afflicted by Kaikeyi's tricks, ultimately declared the most painful truth that Rama would have to go for a fourteen years' exile in the forest and Bharata would be crowned as king. "Not a muscle moved on the noble countenance. It shone in full lustre as it always did," said Valmiki of Rama. He

2. Ibid., Ch-4.

3. Ibid., Ch-4.

4. Ayodhya kanda, Ch-7.

5. Ayodhya kanda, Ch-5.

saw everything and spoke like a Jnani, "Of the three *purusharthas*—*Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama*, I now see, watching my father and his behaviour, that *Artha* and *Dharma* take their place below *Kama*."<sup>6</sup> His submission to father's will is not that of a timid, spineless man, but of one who is afraid of wrongdoing. At once he got ready to honour his father's words. The terrible reversal of fortune 'failed to impair the serenity of Ramachandra' who resembled a 'great yogi'.<sup>7</sup> Sita, despite hearing all pains of forest life from Rama, followed him with the words, "I shall not experience happiness in the other world without thee."<sup>8</sup> Lakshmana, the brother ever-devoted to Rama, followed the same way and said, "Make me thy humble attendant. ... Thus shall my highest desire be accomplished. ... I shall proceed thee pointing out the way. ... Sleeping or waking, I shall do all for thee."<sup>9</sup> Rama's image inspired Sumitra to advise her son Lakshmana to look after Rama as father and Sita as mother. Lakshmana admitted that to him Rama was alter ego (*Dwitiya Antaratma*).

Rama's great popularity was witnessed when his departure brought an uproar of lamentation from the masses. Brahmins entreated Rama not to go. People running beside the royal car, cried to Sumantra: "O Charioteer, drive slowly, draw in thy steeds, so that we may see the face of Rama so soon to be hidden from us."<sup>10</sup> The Brahmins said, 'Not we alone, birds and trees, entreat thee to return; have pity on all these. Trees desiring to follow thee, prevented by their roots which penetrate deep into the earth, implore thee not to depart, their branches bending low in the wind.'<sup>11</sup> Terrible grief

gripped the royal palace. Dasharatha, crest-fallen and broken, cried out, "Without Rama, I am sinking in this bottomless sea, living; I am unable to cross over it."

Overwhelmed with a broken heart Dasharatha died with the last words on his lips, "O Sole Remover of my pain, O Darling of Thy Sire, O My Master, My Son, where art thou? O Kaushalya, O Virtuous Sumitra, I depart. O My Cruel Enemy Kaikeyi, destroyer of my family's felicity!"<sup>12</sup>

\* \* \* \*

The great journey of Rama for fourteen years is a journey of purgatorial suffering, ascetic penances, ecstasy in nature's grandeur, agony of helpless abduction of Sita, preparation for the great war, crossing of the seas to Lanka, and the final victory over the unrighteous and mighty Ravana. One by one Valmiki exposes the heroic adventures of the mighty forest-dweller Rama, and takes the readers along the entire strip of the Indian sub-continent right from the Northern Ayodhya to Southern most Lanka. The second, third and fourth cantos based on the forest life of India describe the flowers, the trees, the birds, the beasts, and the various seasons of this wonderful land of tropical beauty. To Sita, Rama glorified the Indian tradition of ascetic living in the forest in order to attain divine life; "Our ancestors such as Manu have held that residing in the forest is the means of acquiring the form of the gods." With a poet's delight he said to Sita, "Behold, O Princess, yonder mountain, adorned by thousands of rocks blue, yellow, purple, and white. At night, the healing herbs shine like fire, lighting the crags with their radiance."<sup>13</sup>

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Returning home and knowing all that had happened, the 'guileless Bharata' turned

6. Ibid., Ch-53.

7. Ibid., Ch-7.

8. Ibid., Ch-29.

9. Ibid., Ch-31.

10. Ibid., Ch-40.

11. Ibid., Ch-45.

12. Ibid., Ch-64.

13. Ibid., Ch-94.



like a fire ball on his own mother and called her 'sinful one' and the 'destroyer of the family', and spoke almost like a curse, "Thou shalt not know happiness in this or any other world. ... Having brought back Rama, I shall inhabit the forest."<sup>14</sup> Though banished, Rama's spirit hovered over the royal palace. When Shatrughna went to punish the devilish counsellor Manthara who was the brain behind the sad state of affairs, Bharata reminded Shatrughna that Rama would never forgive such a treatment on a woman however devilish she might be.<sup>15</sup>

Bharata's first reaction of the banished Rama is touching. Seeing Rama seated with Sita and Lakshmana on a platform of kushagrass, Bharata fell at his feet and cried out in agony. Like an ever-affectionate elder brother, Rama first enquired his welfare and the subjects of Ayodhya. Then he instructed Bharata on the art of kingship, "O Wise One, do the learned pundits and the citizens pray daily for thy welfare? O Bharata, dost thou abjure the fourteen failings a sovereign must eschew? Atheism, dissimulation, anger, inattention, procrastination, neglect to the wise, indolence, surrender of the senses to external objects, disregard of counsel, consulting those who advocate evil, the deferring of that which has been resolved upon, the concealment of counsel received, the abandoning of righteous conduct, the offering of respect equally to the low and high born, and the ruthless conquest of other lands."<sup>16</sup>

The meeting of the royal family with the banished princes and Sita brought an uproar of lamentations which frightened the beasts and birds of the Chitrakuta forests. Valmiki describes, "The air was filled with birds, and the earth with men, rendering both

beautiful."<sup>17</sup> The attention then was focused on Sita. Seeing the emaciated daughter of Janaka undergoing the privations of her exile, Kaushalya cried out, "O Janaki, ... I am being consumed by the pain, arising from this, like a piece of wood slowly consumed by fire."<sup>18</sup> Valmiki shows the contrast of the three queens, Kaikeyi, the heartless intriguer, Sumitra silently sacrificing her son for Rama, and Kaushalya, the ideal mother and mother-in-law.

Bharata's sincerest persuasion failed to bring back Rama who said, "The gods and sages esteem truth as the highest principle. He who utters truth attains the supreme state. ... I shall devote myself to the fulfilment of my father's will."<sup>19</sup>

Bowing down at his feet Bharata begged to carry on his head the sandals of Rama, as the emblem of Ayodhya's kingship. Rama blessed Bharata, "That genuine humility which thou hast demonstrated will furnish thee with sufficient courage to govern the kingdom."<sup>20</sup> At Nandigram, on the outskirts of the capital, Bharata settled down as a hermit like his elder brother, to serve the subjects of Ayodhya. "My brother, Shri Rama, gave his kingdom to me as precious trust. Verily these sandals decorated with gold shall represent him."<sup>21</sup>

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The *Aranya Kanda*, the third Canto, is Valmiki's music of pain and penance. On one side Rama lost Sita who was abducted away helplessly by the mighty titan Ravana leaving Rama and Lakshmana merged in a sea of grief and lamentations. On the other hand, the ascetics and sages of the forests found fulfilment of their life-long penance by meeting God who came to them in the

14. Ibid., Ch-73.

15. Ibid., Ch-78.

16. Ibid., Ch-100.

17. Ibid., Ch-102.

18. Ibid., Ch-102.

19. Ibid., Ch-109.

20. Ibid., Ch-112.

21. Ibid., Ch-115.

form of Rama. Entering Dandakaranya Rama saw huts of the ascetics. ... "Blazing with spiritual effulgence."<sup>22</sup> Valmiki, himself an ascetic and a sage, tells us of the "entrancing solitude of the Dandaka forest where those hermits dwell whose souls are purified by renunciation." Troubled frequently by demons, the ascetics of the forest sought the protection of Rama,— "Whether living in the capital or the forest, thou art our Sovereign, O Master of the world."<sup>23</sup> These sages requested Rama to offer protection. Rama agreed to their request. He saw his mission in the forest life and revealed it to Sita, "O Sita, it is on account of the ascetics of severe penances, beset with perils in the Dandaka Forest, who have sought my protection, that I have come hither. ... it is my bounden duty to protect the sages ; how much more so now."<sup>24</sup>

The great ascetic Sharabhanga was preparing for his final departure after having attained the merit of severe penances. Seeing Rama, he welcomed him to the hermitage, "O Foremost of Men, know for certain that I had no desire to enter Brahmaloaka ere I had enjoyed thy gentle presence." Through the words of the ascetics, Valmiki deftly suggests the divinity in Rama's human form. Rama's answer to Sharabhanga now revealed his divinity clearly, "I myself have conquered the worlds ; yet in accordance with the command on me, I have chosen to dwell in the great forest."<sup>25</sup>

Sutikshna, the renowned sage, offered Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita, hospitality. The great ascetic Agastya whom Rama went to visit personally, saw in the exiled prince God Himself incarnate in order to protect the sages and uphold dharma. He said to Rama, "O Lord of the Universe, observer

of thy duty, warrior of the Great Caste, who art worthy of all honour and respect, thou art come at last and art my beloved guest."<sup>26</sup>

The female ascetic 'virtuous Shabari' who was practising penances since her childhood by serving the 'pure-souled ascetics' had attained such a height of holiness that even gods revered her. When Shri Rama stepped at her doorstep, Shabari at once realised that she had reached the goal of her life. The aged Shabari stood before Rama, offered him homage, and said, "Blessed by thy presence, I have acquired perfection and my asceticism is crowned. Today, my birth has borne fruit and the service to my Gurus has been fully honoured. Today, my pious practices have found fulfilment. O Foremost of Men, Greatest of the Celestials, worshipping thee I shall attain the heavenly realm." (*Twayee Devavare Rama pujite Purusharshabhe.*)<sup>27</sup>

The poetic impulse in Rama is revealed frequently in this forest life. Seeing the lake Pampa he said with the joy of a lover of nature, "O Saumitri, see how marvellous is the brilliance of the flowering trunk of the Karnikara on the ridge of the mountain to the right of Lake Pampa. Those ravishing trees with their flowers, stripped of leaves, seem to set the mountain ridges on fire ; whilst those growing on the banks of the lake, that irrigates them, give off a delicate perfume."<sup>28</sup>

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The sudden abduction of Sita by Ravana made Rama overwhelmed with inconsolable grief. Through a number of chapters in the epic Valmiki describes in all vividness the intensely human bereavement of the man who was even a little earlier being worshipped as God.

22. Aranya kanda, Ch-1.

23. Ibid., Ch-1.

24. Ibid., Ch-1.

25. Ibid., Ch-1.

26. Ibid., Ch-7.

27. Ibid., Ch-12.

28. Ibid., Ch-17.



"Thus did Rama lament, and calling Sita, ran from grove to grove, sometimes turning like a whirlwind, sometimes appearing like one who had lost his wits."<sup>29</sup> Finally his lamentation turned to wrath when Rama with his superhuman strength wanted to destroy the Universe. Lakshmana at once reminded Rama that he should never destroy the world for the sake of one man's devilish designs, and that in the height of wrath, a man of his stature could not shed his natural benevolence to all creatures, just as the sun and moon cannot shed their effulgence.

When all search for Sita failed, Rama realised the power of destiny, "There is nothing that weighs so heavily on man as destiny. Even the brave, the mighty, the great and skilful warriors on the field of battle, overtaken by destiny, are swept away like banks of sands!"<sup>30</sup> Rama's lamentation brought sympathy even from Sugriva who consoled him, "He who is overwhelmed by despair is in danger. Banish thy sorrow, O Indra among men, and revive thy courage; let it be fully restored."<sup>31</sup>

In the wake of renewed self-confidence, destiny came to Rama's help. Hanumana, the heroic follower, appeared in the picture. At the very first meeting Rama found Hanumana an 'eloquent' and 'warm-hearted' speaker versed in Rig-Veda, Sama-Veda and Yajur-Veda, "who spoke with admirable felicity." Before the flight to Lanka, we hear Hanumana's words of promise, "Either achieving success, I shall return or uprooting Lanka from its foundation, I shall bear it hither, together with Ravana."<sup>32</sup>

Hanumana's moral conscience made him an ideal follower of Rama. While searching for Sita, he cogitated, "beholding the wife

of another while she is sleeping, is undoubtedly an infringement on the moral law. Verily, to look on another's wife was never my intention."<sup>33</sup>

Bali was even mightier than Hanumana but without Hanumana's conscience. Rama killed him from behind when Bali was fighting with Sugriva. When Bali, who had abducted his younger brother Sugriva's wife, asked Rama to feel ashamed of "this reprehensible deed," Rama answered that moral law sanctions death for one who makes his sister-in-law an object of lust.<sup>34</sup>

Valmiki's description of the formation of Sugriva's army is interesting. At Sugriva's command three kotis (crores) of black monkey came from Mt. Anjana, the golden monkeys came in ten kotis, those with the colour of lion's manes came in thousand. From Himavat mountain came tens of millions, from Vindhya hills came thousand of millions, and from the whole of India came they in numbers which could not be counted. At Sugriva's command two hundred thousand monkeys began now to search for Sita in all hills, dale, city, forests, and every nook and corner of the subcontinent. They searched in the countries of the Saurastras, the Bahlikas, the Chandrachitras, the lands of Mlecchas, Pulindas, Shurasenas, Prasthalas, Bharatas, Kurus, Madrakas, Kambojas and Yavanas, the cities of Shakas, the Varadas, and the regions of Himavat.<sup>35</sup>

Angada, the son of Bali, accepted Rama as Master. Rama with his insight into human nature, found in him eightfold intelligence and four powers, physical power, mental power, power of resources and that of making friends, and fourteen salient qualities that distinguish a man of integrity and culture.

Hanumana's success in discovering that

29. Kiskindhya kanda, Ch-1.

30. Aranya kanda, Ch-62.

31. Ibid., Ch-69.

32. Kiskindhya kanda, Ch-28.

33. Sundara kanda, Ch-1.

34. Ibid., Ch-1.

35. Ibid., Ch-10.

Sita was still alive, brought a silver-lining to Rama's feelings of gloom and made him utter, "As dry land draws its vegetation from marshy ground, so do I exist in the knowledge that Sita still lives."<sup>36</sup> Hope and faith are the two props on which even the dead seeks to survive. With a deep sense of gratitude Rama embraced Hanumana, the only reward he could offer in this forest life.

When Lakshmana lay unconscious in the war-field, Rama lamented more for Lakshmana now than he had so long done for Sita, "Of what use to me is the recovery of Sita or even life itself, since my brother, now lying before mine eyes, has been struck down in the fight? It were possible for me to find a consort equal to Sita in this world of mortals but not a brother, friend and comrade in arms such as Lakshmana!"<sup>37</sup>

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Valmiki's Ravana is a great power combined with lust and greed. By practising superhuman austerities for a thousand years Ravana pleased Brahma, the creator of the world, and was granted a boon. Ravana sought immortality which was, of course, refused.

The Uttara Kanda of the Ramayana hints at the eternal truth that even the mightiest austerities when tinged with worldly desires can never bring immortality. Finally Ravana prayed, "May I not be slain by Suparnas, Nagas, Yakshas, Daityas, Danavas, Rakshashas, nor by the gods. O Eternal One, O Lord of Beings, I do not fear other creatures who with men, I look upon as mere straws." The boon was granted. Overjoyed, he developed inordinate pride and began to insult his dear God Shiva Himself. Shiva smiled, saw the fatal arrogance of the mighty titan, and pressed Ravana with the forefinger of his feet. 'Imprisoned under

rock' Ravana gave up such a loud cry that struck terror in all the worlds. From that day he was known as 'Ravana' which means one who causes the world to cry out.<sup>38</sup>

Destiny was waiting for him in the form of man and monkey whom Ravana considered nothing more than straw. Lanka was burnt. One by one his generals who were sent to fight Rama, were killed in the battle-field. When Vibhishana, the younger brother, offered him the counsel to return Maithili to Rama, Ravana answered, "I see no cause for fear anywhere! Rama shall never regain Maithili! Even were Lakshmana's elder brother upheld by the gods with Indra at their head, how could he withstand me in the field?"<sup>39</sup> But darkening clouds began to gather bringing one sad news of defeat after the other. Ravana anticipated destruction, "A great flood is about to be struck by the enemy." Yet he neither understood his folly nor cared for the sane advice of others.

Kumbhakarna, the giant younger brother, was awakened from sleep untimely in order to fight the enemy. But seeing Ravana's fatal infatuation for Sita, he openly indicted Ravana, "On first seeing Sita, the consort of Rama, who is accompanied by Lakshmana, she who was brought here by force, thy mind was wholly possessed by her as the waters of the lake are filled by the Yamuna. O Great King, this conduct is not worthy of thee. Those undertakings that are carried out carelessly and against the scriptural law turn out badly, like unto impure offerings poured into the sacrificial fire by those who are heedless."<sup>40</sup> Ravana still remained unmoved. When Vibhishana still implored Ravana to give back Sita, Ravana gave his well-known answer, "It were better to live as a declared enemy or

36. Kiskindhya kanda, Ch-43.

37. Uttara kanda, Ch-16.

38. Yuddha kanda, Ch-49.

39. Ibid., Ch-10.

40. Ibid., Ch-12.



with an enormous serpent than to dwell with one who, under the guise of a friend, is in league with the foe... Of the perils, those that spring from relatives are the worst that is known to us."<sup>41</sup>

When Hanumana first saw Ravana, he spoke in wonder, "What splendour, what power, what glory, what majesty, ... Were he not evil, this mighty monarch of the titans could be the protector of the celestial realm and Indra himself."<sup>42</sup>

Evil is power of the Self only misdirected by obdurate pride and lust. Ravana surrendered himself to the grip of an inordinate, and self-destructive pride. Even his spies like Shardula and others whom Ravana had sent to spy into Rama's battalion, came back to report that they were caught red-handed and were going to be killed but for the magnanimous Rama who saved them. A disillusioned Shardula humbly requested Ravana to return Sita. Ravana's own mother, an 'aged-counsellor' to whom Ravana was devoted, insisted again and again that Vaidehi should be returned. But all counsels failed. Obstinate infatuation now paved the sure way to his doom. Ravana spoke like a drunkard in delusion, "How canst thou hold a mere man like Rama, who is single-handed, without any support,...cast off by his sire and exiled to the forest, to be of my stature, I, the Lord of the Titans, the Terror of the gods? Dost thou then consider me to be destitute of power?"<sup>43</sup> One by one, all the generals of Ravana fell in the war. Ravana himself came to fight. Seeing Lakshmana before him he threw a mighty missile which at once struck Lakshmana and threw him on the ground. When Ravana came to bear him away to kill him, he could not bear to lift him up. Lakshmana, says Valmiki, "recollected that he was of the substance of Vishnu

himself." At once Rama rushed towards Ravana 'like Vishnu with his mace rushing to Virochana', and threw a weapon 'like a thunderbolt on Mt. Meru' which made Ravana swoon on the ground. Rama could have killed him, but said, "Now thou art weary, I shall not put thee under Death's power with my shafts. Leave the fray and return to Lanka; I grant thee this reprieve."<sup>44</sup>

The day of last meeting of the greatest of Titans and the Superhuman man finally arrived. Ravana's resplendent appearance dazzled even Rama who said to Vibhishana, "Ah! What glory, what exceeding majesty is Ravana's, the Lord of the Titans! As one cannot gaze on the Sun, neither can the eye rest on him, such is the blinding strength of his magnificence! Neither Devas nor heroes possess a body equal to his! Who can rival the brilliance of the King of the Titans?"

On the last day Rama looked like a 'sun piercing the clouds.' Valmiki describes the mightiest of man, "With his body the pivot, his strength the lustre, his arrows the spokes, his bow the felly, the twanging of the chord and the gauntlet the sound, the force of his intelligence its radiance, its splendour the impetus of his weapon, its circumference the circle traced by Rama, while he was massacring the titans, he resembled the Wheel of Time in the eyes of all beings."

After a second attack on Lakshmana, Rama realised that time had come to finally kill Ravana. In wrath he uttered, "Today in this duel, the three Worlds with the Gandharvas, the Siddhas and Charanas will recognize Rama's attributes! I shall accomplish a feat that the world with all beings who move or do not move, as also the gods, will recount as long as the earth exist!" Rama's missiles at once drove Ravana away

41. Ibid., Ch-16.

42. Yuddha kanda, Ch-30.

43. Ibid., Ch-36.

44. Ibid., Ch-59.

"terrified" "like a great cloud driven by a tempest." Before striking the final blow, Rama in fury addressed Ravana "in mocking and ironic words", "Having carried away my consort against her will in Janasthana, imposing on her ignorance, thou art verily no hero! Bearing away by force, Vaidehi who was wandering forlornly in the great forest far from me, thou thinkest 'I am a great hero'!...To-day the head with its dazzling earrings, severed by my weapon, shall roll in the dust on the battlefield where the wild beasts will devour it."

The greatest and the last fight brought tumult in heaven and earth. Valmiki gives every detail to portray the ferocity of the mighty war at length, and finally says, "The sky resembles the sea, and the sea the sky, but the fight between Rama and Ravana resembles nought but itself!"<sup>45</sup>

How could a human Rama win before such a world-shaking titan? Valmiki tells that it is the infinite power and knowledge of the Self (*Sarvani Viditatmanah*) within, that was the strength behind Rama, while behind Ravana was only a mass of weapons and mortal warriors.

Valmiki writes, "Then all the celestial weapons belonging to Raghava, versed in the science of the Self, presented themselves before him and in his joy, that illustrious hero felt the dexterity of his touch increase."<sup>46</sup> The power of the Spirit and moral supremacy ultimately destroyed even the mightiest power on earth.

After victory Rama showed no exuberance of joy, neither did he rush to meet Sita. The eternal upholder of dharma, first observed his duty to the slain enemy. He asked Vibhishana to perform the last funeral rites. When Vibhishana said that Ravana did not merit this homage from him, Rama gave the reply, "He was magnanimous and powerful,

this oppressor of the worlds. Death brings enmity to an end; we have accomplished our purpose. Let us perform the obsequies; it is meet for me, as well as for thee, to do so. In accord with tradition, this ceremony should take place in thy presence. Perform this pious act speedily; thou wilt receive much glory therefrom."<sup>47</sup>

\* \* \* \*

In the midst of great exuberance of joy, Sita was taken by chariot to meet his beloved Lord. The monkeys, the good-souled titans, Lakshmana, and virtually everyone, were eagerly waiting for this union. It is for this moment that they had offered such a mighty war for Rama. Sita herself came with all the expectation of a starved soul pining for her master and god. It is then that Valmiki gives a poignant stroke of the epic. Rama spoke the most terrible words that Sita, the least of all, could dream of, "A suspicion has arisen, however, with regard to thy conduct, and thy presence is as painful to me as a lamp to one whose eye is diseased! Henceforth, go where it best pleaseth thee, I give thee leave, O Daughter of Janaka, O Lovely One, the ten regions are at thy disposal; I can have nothing more to do with thee! What man of honour would give rein to his passion so far as to permit himself to take back a woman who has dwelt in the house of another? ... This is the outcome of my reflections, O Lovely One: Turn to Lakshmana or Bharata, Shatrughna, Sugriva or the Titan Vibhishana, make thy choice, O Sita, as pleases thee best."<sup>48</sup>

A reward, indeed, for all the terrible sufferings for the sake of chastity! It is not just rejection alone, but direct denegation of Sita as a possible consort to others. Everyone stood awed and silent. None dared, says Valmiki, "To speak a single word or even look at Rama's face who had

45. Ibid., Ch-94,101,104,109.

46. Ibid., Ch-104.

47. Ibid., Ch-113.

48. Ibid., Ch-119.



established his moral supremacy over the world unquestionably." Now it was Sita's turn to answer. Without offering any defence of herself, she asked Lakshmana to prepare the sacrificial fire and entered right into the flames to prove her purity. Gods showered blessings. The world rejoiced, and Rama was the happiest to accept Sita. Now he spoke not as a husband but as the ideal king in order to explain his apparent heartlessness, to all assembled, "On account of the people, it was imperative that Sita should pass through this trial by fire; this lovely woman had dwelt in Ravana's inner apartments for a long time. Had I not put the innocence of Janaki to the test, the people would have said: 'Rama, the son of Dasharatha is governed by lust'! It was well-known to me that Sita had never given her heart to another and that the daughter of Janaka, Maithili, was ever devoted to me....Her purity is manifest in the three worlds; I could no more renounce Maithili, born of Janaka than a hero his honour."<sup>49</sup>

\* \* \* \*

The bliss of returning to Ayodhya along with Sita, Lakshmana, Hanumana and others, was short-lived. Soon Rama overheard the public criticism of Sita from various quarters, "How does he not shrink from a woman who has been taken to Lanka by a Rakshasa by force and who has lived with Rakshasa?"<sup>50</sup>

Rama refused to accept the criticism. Through the fire-ordeal he had already asserted the purity of Sita. "My heart tells me that she is pure and of good fame," he said. (*Antaratma ca me vetti Sitam Shuddham yashashwinim*).<sup>51</sup> But moments later, he realised that he was the king whose slight criticism of conduct, would be mortally painful, "A man who has lost his fame on

earth is abandoned by gods." They also slander him. Hopeless, he decided to "kill himself and all the three brothers rather than shrink for ill fame."<sup>52</sup> What did he think of Sita? Valmiki shows that to Rama the honour and self esteem of a whole empire, is superior to the duty even to the chaste wife. He told the brothers, "When we are going to die what consideration for Sita?" (*Kim Punah Janakatmajam?*)<sup>53</sup> Instantly he decided to banish Sita and told the brothers, "Do not you talk to me about the matters and do not contradict me. I have made up my mind."

After Sita's banishment Valmiki brings the episode of the final glorification of Sita which illumines the entire Ramayana. The coming of two child-ascetics Lava and Kusha and their narration of the Ramayana and Valmiki's inspired defence of Sita, put an end to all controversy and upheld the greatness of the royal dynasty. Rama felt doubly glorified after Sita's return and his two children. When the final reconciliation was attained, Sita finally decided to end her long life of ceaseless suffering by entering into Mother Earth from where she had one day taken her birth. After Sita's death what remained was only the final departure of Rama from the great drama of life.

Being cursed by Durvasa, and realising that time had come for him to depart, Rama first asked Lakshmana to accept a spiritual death by drowning himself in Sarayu; then he himself followed the same course. The entire Ayodhya followed Rama to the final point of death. Rama asked Hanumana to live for ages and chant his glory, and Vibhishana to go back to Lanka and rule in the way of dharma. Knowing fully well that the 'moon of Ayodhya,' the most beloved Rama was going to leave his body in the river, the vast multitude followed him

49. Ibid., Ch-120.

50. Uttara kanda, Ch-17.

51. Ibid., Ch-45.

52. Ibid., Ch-45.

53. Ibid., Ch-109.

in joy. Valmiki tells us that "in that multitude, none was sad, downcast or unhappy, but a universal felicity filled all to the highest degree. ... Not a single being, not even the least of them, was to be seen in Ayodhya; even those born of animals followed in Rama's wake."<sup>54</sup>

\* \* \* \*

Indians refuse to believe that Rama and the heroes of Valmiki belong to the past. The tales of the Ramayana are the eternal lores of Indian life, 'the voice and music of India', as the poet Tagore said. They belong to the "soul of India like Jahnavi-Ganga and the ice-crowned Himalayas. ..." Time and again, the eternal themes of this epic have been revived by sages, saints and poets, until a divine halo, a distinct stamp of Immortality is cast round each of these heroes and Shri Rama is accepted as the

most adored personal God of India. In the opening of the epic Valmiki says that Lord Vishnu, the sustainer of the Universe, decided to incarnate himself as Rama and the three sons of Dasharatha, in order to establish dharma or righteousness over unrighteousness. Following this trend of thought Veda-Vyasa composed the Adhyatma-Ramayana and Tulasidasa composed his famous Ramacharitmanasa. Number of Ramayanas in India's local languages have also been composed by eminent poets, until the tales of the Ramayana have penetrated into every hut of the Indian subcontinent, and the glory of Shri Rama as God in man, has entered into the heart of every Hindu. The very name of Rama stands for all that is holy and auspicious. His exploits symbolising the ultimate conquest of dharma above everything else in life, have been the object of meditation for devout Indians throughout the ages.

<sup>54</sup>. Bala kanda, Ch-15-16.

## WOMEN'S RIGHT FOR SCRIPTURAL STUDY AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

SWAMI GAMBHIRANANDA

(Speech of Revered Maharaj read out on 25th December 1988 at the Ramakrishna Mission Annual General Meeting)

*Friends,*

Some women devotees come to me with the question, "Sir, can I utter the word Om, because many say that women are not entitled to do so?" My answer is, "Do so a hundred thousand times." The question is reminiscent of the old orthodox view that non-brahmins and women are not entitled to read or hear the Vedas. If a shudra hears a Veda, his ears should be plugged with molten lead! To us of the modern age, the question is a wholly academic one. Anyone who has adequate knowledge of

Sanskrit and can spare the necessary time and money is eligible for reading the Vedas. Max Muller, a non-brahmin, saved the Vedas for us. Ramesh Chandra Dutta, a kayastha translated the Rig-Veda into Bengali. People reading the Chandi read also the Devi Sukta and the Ratri Sukta along with it without any restriction of caste. Other Vedic Suktas and verses are sung or recited by many people, and many mantras for japa have Om as a part of them. Nowadays, almost anyone can take Sannyasa after performing homa with Vedic mantras. As for us of the Ramakrishna Mission, the norm



was set by Swami Vivekananda when he studied the Vedas under pundits, and in his own turn explained Vedic texts to his disciple Sharat Chandra Chakravorty. Thus, though the question of eligibility for reading the Vedas is purely an academic one, still one likes to know how our ancestors thought about it in the middle ages.

According to the Taittiriya Brahmana, '*Vasante brahmanam upaniyeta, grishme rajanyam, Sharadi Vaishyam*', the investiture with the sacred-thread should be performed for the brahmanas in Spring, for the kshatriyas in Summer and for the vaishyas in autumn. This investiture was meant for qualifying the person concerned for the study of the Vedas and the performance of Vedic rituals. So the eligibility of the three upper castes for Vedic study cannot be questioned. In the Rig-Veda one hymn is referred to as having been seen by Krishna, a kshatriya. But the eligibility of the shudras is denied by orthodox writers, though modern scholars raise doubts. In the Chandogya Upanishad, for instance, King Janashruti, a seeker of Vedic knowledge, is dubbed as a Shudra by the Rishi Raikwa when he approaches him the first time. The second time also, when Janashruti approaches with more gifts and his own daughter as a bride, Raikwa again calls him a Shudra, though he imparts him Knowledge. Commentators and annotators say that the word Shudra does not mean a caste-shudra but "one who is overwhelmed or hurries on being inflicted with sorrow: *Shuchat dravati iti shudrah*." This derivative meaning does not satisfy the modern critiques. They argue that even if the derivative meaning be justified in the first instance, it is unbecoming in the second case, unless Janashruti was a caste-shudra.

Then there is the instance of Satyakama Jabala who is believed by modern critiques to have been the son of a maidservant with unknown fatherhood. Satyakama Jabala,

an erudite Vedic scholar in the Chandogya Upanishad, asked his mother when going to a teacher for Vedic learning, "What gotra do I belong to?" Jabala, his mother, replied, "I got you in my youth, *bahu-charanti*, (i.e.) when I was very busy with work," or, "when I was engaged in serving many", "and so I do not know your gotra. But I am Jabala. So, call yourself Satyakama Jabala." Satyakama introduced himself to his teacher Haridrumata Gautama with the whole background as narrated by Jabala. The teacher said, "I accept you as a student, for no non-brahmin can be so truthful." Old commentators still say that Satyakama was a brahmin though he was known by his mother's name as Satyakama Jabala, and not by his father's gotra which was the usual norm.

As for the eligibility of women for reading the Vedas, the matter is equally controversial, though we find Gargi and Maitreyi in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad presented as Brahnavadinis. And Vak, the daughter of the sage Ambhrina, is mentioned in the Rig Veda as the seer of the hymn Devi Sukta. The writers of the Smritis seem to have depended on the *Sankhyayana Brahmana* sentence, "*na veda patnim vanchayati*: he shall not teach the Veda to his wife." The word for 'wife' is *patni* and not *stri*. Hence it is illogical to generalize the meaning of *patni* as all women. Besides, the prohibition in question along with some other prohibitions applies to a person who is engaged in a specific Vedic rite. Therefore the generalization has no basis. Further, there is positive proof of the eligibility of women for Vedic study as in, "*Purakale kumarinam manujabandhanam ishyate, adhyapanam cha vedanam savitri-vachanam tatha*: In older times it was an accepted custom that unmarried girls were invested with sacred-thread made of munja-grass, were taught the Vedas and were also initiated with the gayatri-mantra", which is

from Yamasmriti quoted in the commentary on Gobhilagrihya-sutra.

Moreover, we should remember that in some Vedic rites and rituals the wives accompanied their husbands. And at times they also had to perform their separate

duties.

Thus it seems that from olden times onward social norms have been changing according to the exigencies of time. But the spiritual urge has been chalking out its own path, irrespective of prohibitions.

## INDIVIDUALITY AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA\*

In my five books, *THE MESSAGE OF THE UPANISHADS* and the four volumes of *ETERNAL VALUES FOR A CHANGING SOCIETY*, I have explained this Vedantic idea of the spiritual growth of children. These ideas revolve round two terms and concepts, namely, INDIVIDUALITY AND PERSONALITY, and the growth of man into the first, and from the first into the second.

When a baby is born, you educate it by strengthening its sense of individuality. Before birth, it had no individual identity, but was part of its mother's body; at birth, it gets its physical identity and individuality. And when the datum of the ego appears in the child at about the age of two or two-and-a-half, it begins to develop a psychic individuality in an ego or self; and the next education of the child is the strengthening of this ego, the focus of its self-awareness, that it is not just an object among objects but that it is a subject, a self.

So, when the baby shouts, makes noises, people around it clap hands to encourage its development of psychic individuality, to strengthen its sense of ego. This ego or self-awareness is a profound datum appearing in evolution only at the stage of man; it is

not manifest in the whole range of cosmic and organic evolution.

And, with its appearance in a human child, a new science also appears, namely, the science of the self, *Atma-Jnana*, which is an investigation into the status of his new datum and of its growth and development. Science tells us that that ego is only an initial datum, and that man should realise its deeper and vaster possibilities in the course, and in the context, of his or her life, work, and inter-human relations. And India's ancient and living philosophy and spirituality, namely, the Vedanta, comprehensively expounds this subjects of *Atma-Jnana* as 'the science of human possibilities'. Till the appearance of this little 'I' or ego in the baby, which both Vedanta and twentieth-century biology treat as an initial datum only, with tremendous possibilities of growth or unfoldment ahead, a baby will refer to itself only as this—this wants this, this wants that; but after the appearance of the ego, it will start saying—I want this, I want that.

That development registers the demarcation between all prehuman species and a human child. When this self-awareness appears in a child, it develops a new focus of energy and resource, making it capable to control animals far bigger and physically stronger than itself, like a horse or an

\*The article is based on a talk given by the author at the American club, Tokyo, on 7th May, 1986.



elephant. *Atma-Jnana*, Self-knowledge, has begun to unfold in the child in a small way. Neurologist Grey Walter, in his book, *The Living Brain* asking, 'What would happen if the tiger or the lion develops this new focus of awareness?' answers humorously: 'We won't be here then to answer that question!'

We help the human child to strengthen that new focus which, at that stage of development, is still in thralldom to its genetic system. This is *individuality*, the first stage of human growth where individual freedom and self-importance become stressed.

Today, millions of people all over the world are realising this sense of individuality, of individual worth and dignity, through the spread of secular education. Till now, they were all submerged in a feudal social order, were all submerged in the crowd, in the caste, in the collectivity. Man is breaking through all such limitations, and attaining that first stage of human growth through education. No animal can have, or need, this prolonged education. Only a human child can have it and can benefit from it.

Up to the age of about five, you strengthen this individuality through that type of education, instilling in it the sense of: 'I am not an item among items.' Today, millions of children everywhere are experiencing this sense of individuality. That is why, with respect to children, authoritarian approaches will not be suitable today. In them, we are dealing with individuals and not with things; and we have to respect the freedom of the individual and strengthen it. Proclaims Swami Vivekananda, 'Liberty is the first condition of growth.'

This is a beautiful idea of human development. But Vedanta says, and modern biology also echoes it, that that is only the first stage of human development. That *individual*, from about the age of five onwards, must mature that individual freedom into social responsibility, by spiritually

growing into a *person*. These are two meaningful words: *Individuality and personality*. In Hindi and Sanskrit, we use *vyaktitva* and *vikasita vyaktitva* for these two words.

When does a child grow into a person? When it is able to add a little sense of social responsibility to its already attained sense of individual freedom; when it is able to communicate happily with other children and people, to give love to others and evoke love from others. *That represents its spiritual growth from individuality to personality*. The self or the ego, which is conditioned and limited by its genetic constitution, is slowly detached from that genetic tethering and limitation, and is expanded to embrace, in love and concern, other children around it. That is the direction of its thinking and feeling, vague in the beginning but clear and firm after the age of 12, that registers that growth from individuality to personality, that signifies the awakening of ethical and humanistic awareness in the child.

A wonderful qualitative enrichment comes to the child at that stage. We recognise in it the second great spiritual development of a human child—*this growth into a person*. What is meant by the words 'person' and 'personality'? I shall give the definition given by Sir Julian Huxley:

'Persons are individuals who transcend their (mere) organic individuality in conscious (social) participation.'

When a child can *participate* in the life of other children and people around it, that child has become a person; and that capacity for conscious participation comes from its *transcendence* of that organically limited individuality which it had attained earlier.

Suppose a child does not develop into a person, but remains an individual. What happens? The late Bertrand Russell, the great agnostic British thinker, compares

such individuals to billiard balls. A billiard ball has only one relationship with other billiard balls, namely collision; they cannot enter into each other.

So, a child at individuality level becomes a billiard ball, colliding with other similar children and the world around it. Such children cannot enter into each other, communicate with each other. That should not be; they should learn to love others, establish happy relationship with others, and live in peace with others. This capacity comes only when the child grows from individuality to personality.

So put all children, says the spiritual and scientific wisdom of mankind, on the road of their spiritual growth from individuality to personality, on the road of their psycho-social evolution. That betokens the beginning of a tremendous inward march of the child to the ever-present spiritual truth within, and the steady setting in of its by-product, in the form of an outward march, of an expansive humanist concern, love, and service. These two, therefore, constitute the beautiful science of total human growth, development and fulfilment.

Physical growth and expansion has a limit. It is not good to have body-weight of more than, say, 80 to 100 kg. for any human being. Intellectual expansion also has a limit; it is better to train the mind to scout for knowledge and information, and to discover their meaning and inter-relationships, than to stuff it with information loads. But spiritual expansion calls for no such limits; it is infinite in scope. That is what you see in a Buddha, in a Jesus, in a Shri Ramakrishna, in a Gandhi—infinite expansion of love and compassion.

#### *Psycho-social Evolution as Spiritual Growth:*

The Sanskrit word *Mahatma*, as applied to Gandhiji, signifies spiritual expansion. *Maha* means great and *atma* means self—to

self which has broken through its organic limitations and expanded in love, sympathy, and humanistic passion to encompass wider and wider segments of beings.

That is the line of human evolution, says twentieth-century biology; says also India's ancient Vedanta, which also discovers that as the central truth emphasized by the spiritual dimensions of all the world religions. That is the direction of human evolution as spiritual growth. The beautiful concept of psycho-social evolution of man in twentieth century biology is essentially an echo of Vedanta's concept of the spiritual growth and unfoldment of man. Swami Vivekananda, accordingly defines the science of religion as *the manifestation of the Divinity already within man*.

In the Chicago Science Congress, Julian Huxley and others elaborated and threw light on this wonderful theme. I have said before that what science calls psycho-social evolution is what Vedanta calls the spiritual growth of man, or the manifestation of the divinity already within man. That wonderful growth is characterized 'spiritual' because it takes man beyond the pulls and pressures of his or her organic system.

We detach our psyche from this tiny organic or genetic system and expand it in love and concern for other psyches in society. That is called psycho-social evolution; that is called spiritual growth; and that is the direction of human growth and evolution. We have to put every child on that long road of its psycho-social evolution, and guide it in the initial stages, and leave it to guide itself when mature. At the end of it, you will find a Buddha coming out of him or her. Buddha had achieved this wonderful quality of infinite expansion. Values like love, compassion, peace, character-energy, come only out of that spiritual development of children, out of that personality expansion, out of that psycho-social evolution.



Today, our beautiful children all over the world must be put on that long and fascinating road of spiritual growth, so as to make them manifest more and more beauty, truth, and goodness, *pari passu* with their physical and intellectual growth. That will call for putting, as twentieth-century biology demands, and the world's great religions have always emphasized, less emphasis on *quantity*, and more and more emphasis on *quality*. Can you love? Are you at peace with yourself and with others? That is quality. I have a car; I want two more; I want this and I want that. That is quantity. We are today presenting before children only this philosophy of quantity. That is why they and we are in trouble; there is not that emphasis on the philosophy of quality to foster growth and creativity.

In his lecture on *The Evolutionary Vision*, Jullian Huxley said (Evolution After Darwin, Volume III, Issues in Evolution, p. 259).

"Once we truly believe...that man's destiny is to make possible greater fulfilment for more human beings and fuller achievement by human societies, utility in the customary sense becomes subordinate. Quantity of material production is, of course, necessary as the basis for the satisfaction of elementary human needs—but only up to a certain degree. More than a certain number of calories or cocktails or TV sets or washing machines per person is not merely unnecessary but bad. Quantity of material production is a means to a further end, and not an end in itself."

### *The Problem of Values*

We may note that this devaluation of quantity, and stress on quality, is coming, not from a man of religion, but from a famous modern scientist. Religions have always stressed quality over quantity. We are today under that tyranny of quantity. We have now to bring quality as the crite-

rium of human life and development. The whole of education has to be directed to the qualitative improvement of man and society, so that there will be peace and fulfilment everywhere. That is the direction that human evolution must achieve in this modern period.

Science and technology and the socio-political processes are meant to give us only a firm base for our life, with a view to helping its take-off to higher levels of evolution. We should not get stuck up at the base. But today's sensate civilisation makes man stuck up at the organic base level of his or her life.

Life must take off from that base and fly to higher levels in order to unfold values higher than the sensory ones—the whole range of aesthetic, moral and spiritual values, including a mankind-awareness and sympathy, that lie hidden in every child.

We are confronted today with the problem of values, and with the problems also of the source of all values. These values are not to be sought for in matter or its transformations. They are not in nature outside; they do not emerge from machines piled on machines. Let me quote what Bertrand Russell has to say about it. If a man of religion says it, modern man may not accept. But if an agnostic scientist says it, he or she will be inclined to accept. Says he,

"The machine as an object of adoration is the modern form of Satan and its worship is the modern diabolism. ... Whatever else may be mechanical, values are not, and this is something which no political philosopher must forget."

Values do not emerge from external physical nature and from the technology that manipulates it. We have to search for values in the human spirit; we have to stir its depth dimension and unfold its precious hidden values like love, peace, compassion. That is a beautiful concept of human deve-

lopment, and we have to guide the growth of our children in the context of this beautiful idea of total human development. We have to ask our children:

‘Are we growing?’ He or she will answer: ‘Physically I am growing.’ ‘Are you growing intellectually?’ ‘Yes, I study books, increase my fund of knowledge, and get good marks at examinations.’

Then comes the most important question:

‘Are you growing spiritually? Can you

love others? Can you feel your oneness with others? Have you peace within yourself and do you radiate it around you?’

That is called spiritual growth, which is stimulated by meditation, inwardly, and by work done in a spirit of service, outwardly. That is the way to advance in one’s psychosocial evolution. These are some of the most beautiful ideas about child development coming from the combined wisdom of the ancient spiritual and modern scientific heritage of humanity.

## SHRI RAMA—THE ABSOLUTE BRAHMAN OF RAMACHARITAMANASA

SWAMI RAMANUJANANDA

To the people living in the north of the Vindhyas, there is one book as sacred as the Vedas. That is *Ramacharitamanasa* written by Goswami Tulasidasa. We can hear this poem being chanted with reverence by scholars and men in streets, young and old, rich and poor. This book has a universal appeal for all except perverts and cynics. Deep spiritual truths are embedded in the poem, which narrates the story of Rama, son of Dasharatha. For Tulasidasa, Rama is the Absolute Brahman, Personal God and prince of Ayodhya at the same time. The *Ramacharitamanasa* is considered a classic in Hindi literature. But to-day it is remembered more for its beauty in revealing spiritual truths by simple similes and metaphors. Its fame has crossed the boundaries of India. It is appreciated even by devout Muslims and Christians. Its message is for both householders and monks. In it devotees find their Lord, seers get illumination and sinners find a ray of hope. Tulasidasa provides us with a handbook of spirituality in the story of the Prince of Ayodhya. It does not exclude anyone. Agnostics are asked to read

this poem considering the poet as their own child. Sinners are consoled that Rama does not forsake one who surrenders at His Feet, even if the person has committed crores of sins. Perverts are asked to read this because it would give them at least an opportunity to laugh.

The *Ramacharitamanasa* is a book dealing with devotion. It is too much to expect anything about Absolute Brahman in a book of devotion. But, surprisingly, there are many utterances in this poem about Brahman, the Absolute. Even though it is a book on devotion, there are some Advaitic scholars, who think that the *Ramacharitamanasa* is a classic on Advaita also.

Advaita philosophy declares that the Reality is one, called Brahman. Brahman is the Absolute and that is the only Reality. Through the glass of Maya the Absolute appears as the Universe; the Infinite becomes finite, as it were. Advaita asserts that in reality the Absolute does not become finite. It is only an appearance. To the question why the Absolute appears as the



universe, there is no answer. Philosophers declare that the question itself is illogical. But a difficulty arises with this answer. If the question is illogical, there would not be any philosophy. All philosophical enquiries begin with this question "why". Not being satisfied the questioner seeks other avenues.

Tulasidasa narrates the story of Rama, the prince of Ayodhya, and depicts the highest spiritual truths. To him Rama is Brahman, Personal God and Divine Incarnation at the same time. His *Ramacharitamansa* is a series of dialogues between Shiva and Parvati, Yajnavalkya and Bharadwaja, Kakabhushundi and Garuda, Tulasidasa and his own mind. The poem gets the name Ramacharitamansa because it depicts the way the life of Shri Rama was manifested in the manasa (mind) of Shiva, the Great God. The poet also compares the poem to the lake Manasasarovara calling Ramacharita (the story of Rama) as Manasa. The four dialogues are the four ghats of the lake. The northern ghat called Rajghat (used by royal personalities) represents Shiva-Parvati dialogue stressing the Jnana aspects. It can be seen that Rajghat is not used by the common man and similarly the path of knowledge is only for men of renunciation. The eastern ghat called Panghat (used by women) represents Kakabhushundi-Garuda dialogue stressing the Bhakti aspect. Now we can remember Shri Ramakrishna's words that Bhakti is a woman who is allowed to enter all apartments in a household. The western ghat called Panchayat ghat (used by all citizens) represents Yajnavalkya-Bharadwaja dialogue stressing the Karma aspect. Karmayoga is the performance and dedication of all work to God for the purification of mind. The southern ghat called Goghat (used by cows) represents surrender of the poet at the feet of his Lord Rama. Thus the lake Manasa of Ramacharita having seven steps and four ghats, is built.

It is an Indian tradition that the beginning and concluding verses of a poem should be in adoration of the Supreme Being. Such verses are called *Mangala shlokas*. In *Ramacharitamansa* we find that the most important mangalashloka is advaitic in nature. "I salute Lord Hari, who is beyond all causes and who is called Rama, under whose maya is the whole universe including gods like Brahma and all demons, because of whose existence all this (Universe) appears real just like a serpent on a rope, and whose feet are the only boat to cross the ocean of worldly existence." The example given in the verse that the appearance of serpent depends on the existence of the rope—clearly shows that the approach is advaitic.

The *Ramacharitamansa* follows the *Adhyatma Ramayana* in many respects. Here also Shiva narrates the story and Parvati is the listener. Parvati raises doubts now and then. Her first doubt in Her Incarnation as Sati was: "Can Brahman, who is All-pervading, Unborn, without desires, beyond all differentiation without sins, and whom the Vedas know not, can assume body and become man?" Here also Brahman is described in advaitic terms.

When Guha laments that Rama, the Darling of Ayodhya is sleeping on grass under trees, Lakshmana consoles him that the world is unreal like a dream.

In dream the king becomes a beggar and a poor man becomes the Lord of Heaven. But on waking up there is neither gain nor loss; likewise this world is. All being sleep at night and in delusion see many dreams. In this night of mundane existence, Yogis who seek the Absolute and who are unattached to the world, are awake. Know that person as awakened, when there is in him non-attachment to all types of sense enjoyments. When there is discrimination, delusion disappears. Then only is love for the feet of Raghunatha. O friend, love for Rama's feet by words, thought and deed—this is the Supreme Truth. Rama is Brahman, the Supreme, Unmani-



fest, Undifferentiated, Beginningless, devoid of all deformities. The Vedas always point out at Him by the process of Neti (not this, not this).

There is a famous shloka attributed to Shankara: *Shlokardhena pravakshyami yaduktam granthakotibhih / Brahmasatyam jaganmithya jivo Brahmaiva naparah.* (By half a shloka I shall utter what has been declared in crores of books. Brahman alone is real and the world is illusory. Jiva is none other than the Brahman Itself). We can see a similar statement in the *Rama-charitamanasa*. Shiva says, "O Uma, Rama is beyond the gunas, Indwelling Spirit and the Lord of all creatures. I am telling you my own experience. Devotion to God is real; the whole world is a dream." The shloka has put it as knowledge of Brahman, and the poet calls it devotion to God. The message is the same.

The poet sees in his vision the northern ghat of the Lake of Ramacharita representing the dialogue between Shiva and Parvati. Shiva replies to the questions of His beloved consort. The answers reveal Brahman the Absolute. That is why the northern ghat is called Rajghat (royal ghat), as the path of Knowledge is suitable only to men of renunciation.

Parvati asks, "O Lord, sages who meditate on the Absolute say that Rama is beginningless Brahman. Shesha, Saraswati, the Vedas, the Puranas—all of them eloquently praise Raghupati. And you, destroyer of Kama, always repeat the name of Rama. Is this Rama the same prince of Ayodhya? Or Brahman the Unborn, Unknown beyond all gunas is different? If he is prince, how can he be Brahman? If he is Brahman, why did he have mental agony on being separated from his wife? Seeing his actions and hearing the praises lavished on him, my intellect gets confused. If desireless, Omnipresent, Omnipotent Brahman is different, O Lord, kindly explain the same to me."

Shiva, the God of gods, was extremely pleased to listen to the guileless words of Parvati, the daughter of the Himalayas.

The exploits of Rama appeared before His vision. There was horripilation and He shed tears of love. The form of Rama appeared in His heart and He experienced Supreme Bliss. He was absorbed in meditation for two hours and then He brought down the mind to normal consciousness and began to relate the story of Rama, "Without knowing Him the unreal appears real just like a rope which appears as a snake. Knowing Him the world disappears just like a dream on waking up." In the mangala-shloka the poet had referred to the snake-rope illustration. Now, again he cites the example. At the same time, Rama's Saguna aspect is not forgotten. He says, "I salute that Rama as a child, repeating whose name realisation is possible. He, who plays in the courtyard of Dasharatha, is an abode of auspiciousness and remover of inauspiciousness."

Tulasidasa differs from those who assert that the Supreme Being is without qualities (Nirguna) only. Shiva tells Parvati, "There is no difference between Saguna and Nirguna aspect of the Lord. Thus declare the Vedas, Puranas, sages and wise men. Who is unborn, formless, without qualities, unmanifest, has become Saguna due to the love of devotees. One who is Nirguna (without qualities) becomes Saguna (with qualities) just like water and ice." It is to be noted that Shri Ramakrishna gives the same example to show that the paths of Knowledge and Devotion lead to the same goal. Tulasidasa writes,

Now, Tulasidasa defines Brahman. For Him what delusion, whose name is the sun for the darkness of illusion? Rama is the sun of Existence, Knowledge, Bliss. There is not even a trace of darkness of ignorance. His nature is to illuminate and He is the Lord; there is neither the dawn nor the dusk of knowledge (vijnana). Happiness and misery, knowledge and ignorance, consciousness of the ego—these are the characteristics of Jiva. Rama is Brahman, the Omnipresent, Eternal, the Supreme Lord, of the nature of Supreme Bliss."



Here the Advaitin will have no difficulty as the expression is not different from advaitic texts. In the *Bhagavadgita* we find the same terms for Brahman—"He who meditates on the Omniscient, the Ancient, the Ruler, subtler than the subtlest, the ordainer of everything, of inconceivable form, effulgent like the sun, and beyond darkness—(he) attains the Supreme Person". Arjuna says to Shri Krishna, "You are the Supreme Brahman, the Supreme Light, the Supreme Sanctifier. All the sages as also the divine sage Narada, Asita, Devala and Vyasa call You the Eternal, Divine Person, the primal God, the birthless, the Omnipresent; and You Yourself verily tell me (so)."

Tulasidasa says, "Sense objects, senses, presiding deities of senses, Jiva—these get enlightened, one with the help of the other. The kindler of all these is Rama, the Beginningless, king of Ayodhya. The universe is to be enlightened; Rama is the Enlightener, Lord of Maya and abode of Knowledge and Virtues." Similar ideas occur in the shloka (3. 42), "They say that the organs are superior (to the gross body); the mind is superior to the organs; but the intellect is superior to the mind. However, the One who is superior to the intellect is He."

The poet again gives the example of mirage for this phenomenal world. Shiva says,

Because of His existence, the unreal Maya appears real with the help of delusion, like the appearance of silver in the shell and water in sunshine (mirage). Even though this appearance is unreal in the past, present and future, this illusion is irremovable. Thus this universe is dependent on Hari. Even though it is unreal, it gives misery. If one's head is chopped off in dream, the suffering is not removed without waking up. O Girija, He with whose grace this delusion is removed, is that Rama; none finds beginning nor limit of His. The Vedas just point out at Him thus:

He moves without feet, He hears without ears. He does work without hands. Without tongue He enjoys all food and He is a great orator at the same time. Without body He touches, without eyes He sees, without nose He enjoys every fragrance. Thus in every way His actions are mysterious. His greatness is beyond description. He whom the Vedas and the wise men thus declare, whom the sages meditate upon, for the sake of the devotees, is the son of Dasharatha. He is the King of Ayodhya and the Lord of all."

It may be said without contradiction that the poet is echoing the *Bhagavadgita*.

"That (Knowable) which has hands and feet everywhere, which has eyes, heads and mouths everywhere, exists in creatures by pervading them all. Shining through the functions of all the organs, (yet) devoid of all organs; unattached, and verily the supporter of all; without quality, and yet the perceiver of qualities;

Existing outside and inside all beings; moving as well as non-moving, It is incomprehensible due to subtleness. So also, It is far away, and yet near.

And that Knowledge, though undivided, appears to be existing as divided in all beings, and It is the Sustainer of all beings and also the devourer and originator.

That is the Light even of lights; It is spoken of as beyond darkness. It is Knowledge, the Knowable and the Known. It exists specially in the hearts of all.

Commenting on the above shlokas, Shankara says, "Since the knowable (Brahman) is not an object of the word or thought of 'being' there arises the apprehension of Its non-existence. Hence, for dispelling that apprehension by establishing Its existence with the help of adjuncts in the form of the organs of all creatures, the Lord says: That. Because of the superimposition of the organs like hands, feet, etc. which are adjuncts, lest there be the misconception that the Knowable is possessed of them (adjuncts), the (next) verse is begun: Shining."

In the similar vein Goswami Tulasidasa explains:

"One who does not know Maya, Ishwara and his own nature, is called Jiva. The Dispenser of bondage and liberation, the Prompter of Maya is Ishwara who is beyond all phenomenal existence. ... One who is Unborn, and who is beyond knowledge, words, senses, mind, gunas and Maya is that Sacchidananda playing as Man. ... That Rama is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, Condensed, Unborn, Abode of strength and lustre, of the nature of consciousness, Omnipresent, Undivided, Infinite, Omnipotent, the Lord. He is Great, beyond words and senses, Omniscient, Deathless, Unconquered, Eternal, Formless, Stainless, without attachment and delusion, and Abode of Bliss. He is Brahman,

the Lord dwelling in every heart. He is without destruction, without desire, without contamination, beyond nature; on Him there is no possibility of superimposition of delusion. Can darkness go before the sun? For the sake of the devotees, Rama, the Supreme Being assumed human form as prince and did exploits which are very auspicious, like an ordinary man.

Thus the *Ramacharitamanasa* is a source both of devotion to the beloved Personal God Rama, and Knowledge of Absolute Brahman appearing as Rama.

## UNIVERSAL MESSAGE OF THE RAMAYANA— A DEVOTIONAL SCRIPTURE

RAJ PRABHAKAR

### *Introduction:*

The *Ramayana* is a very widely read scripture in India. From the high palaces of maharajas to the humble cottages of the poor, one finds this epic a part of people's daily life and guidance. In the West people are more familiar with the teachings of Lord Krishna in the *Bhagvad Gita*. The *Ramayana* is relatively unknown. But to understand the Indian culture and to get an insight into the Indian values and ways of life it is very important to study this great scripture. It is one of the longest epics in Sanskrit containing 24,000 verses in six parts and is called the *Adi Kavya*—the First Poem. It is a literary masterpiece with a very lofty spiritual ideal. The composer Valmiki is not only a poet, he is a seer with a heart full of devotion, and the epic springs forth from the depth of his being. In and through poetry, in and through mythology, one finds nuggets of gold which transcend space and time and have universal

appeal. Sri Ramachandra is the hero in this epic. For the Hindus the *Ramayana* is primarily a devotional scripture and Shri Ramachandra is an incarnation. He above all is the Lord and God of Bhakti—devotion.

The *Ramayana* has been written in all the major Indian languages and translated in many foreign languages. In the sixteenth century Sant Tulasidasa composed *Ramacharitamanasa* in Hindi. In an article entitled 'Tulasidasa, Poet and Religious Reformer' published by the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1903, Grierson writes, 'If we take the influence exercised by him (Tulasidasa) at the present time, he is one of the three or four great writers of Asia.... Over the whole of Gangetic valley this work is better known than the Bible in England.' In the *Cultural Heritage of India* Srimati Chandra Kumari Handoo writes, "*Ramacharitamanasa* proved to be a great force in preventing the disintegration of the Sanatana Dharma, and helped in giving



back to the people confidence in themselves and faith in their own culture which had been shaken by the foreign rule.”<sup>1</sup>

In this age of supersonic travel and high speed communications the world has become a global village. This has brought about much interaction among the various cultures and value systems and the resultant value and role confusion. However one can look upto this great saga to find eternal values with universal applicability. The *Ramayana* provides examples of how one can deal with one's life situations from a spiritual dimension with peace, balance, equanimity, inner strength, dignity and poise. The great Swami Vivekananda's comments on the *Ramayana* are eloquent and beautiful. He says, “there have been great incarnations....and those that are worshipped most in India are Rama and Krishna. Rama the ancient idol of the heroic ages, the embodiment of truth, of morality, the ideal son, the ideal husband, the ideal father, and above all the ideal king, this Rama has been presented before us by the great sage Valmiki. No language can be purer, none chaster, none more beautiful and at the same time simpler than the language in which the great poet has depicted the life of Rama. And what to speak of Sita? You may exhaust the literature of the world that is past, and I may assure you that you will have to exhaust the literature of the world of the future, before finding another Sita. Sita is unique; that character was depicted once and for all. There may have been several Rama, perhaps, but never more than one Sita. She is the very type of the true Indian woman, for all the Indian ideals of a perfected woman have grown out of that one life of

Sita; and here she stands these thousands of years, commanding the worship of every man, woman and child throughout the length and breadth of the land of Aryavarta. There she will always be, this glorious Sita, purer than purity itself, all patience, and all suffering. She who suffered that life of suffering without a murmur, she the ever chaste, and ever pure wife, she the ideal of the people, the ideal of the gods, the great Sita ... And everyone of us knows her too well to require much delineation. All our mythology may vanish, even our Vedas may depart, and our Sanskrit language may vanish for ever, but so long as there will be five Hindus living here, even if speaking the most vulgar patois, there will be the story of Sita present. Mark my words: Sita has gone into the very vitals of our race. She is there in the blood of every Hindu man and woman; we are all children of Sita.”<sup>2</sup> This in essence sums up the gist of the *Ramayana* and its significance to Hindus and to humanity at large.

#### *Universal Message:*

When concepts of nihilism, existentialism, pragmatism and expediency are affecting human thought and character, when in spite of all the material comforts and affluence, life is meaningless, when stress and burning out keep us running to retreats and therapists, we can find strength and meaning in the teachings of the *Ramayana*. When there is overemphasis on dry intellectualism and analysis, this great scripture provides the eternal spring of nectar for our parched hearts. The *Ramayana* imparts significance and purpose to human life along with providing guidelines for our conduct. It is in maintaining the ideal rather than the

1. Srimati Chandra Kumari Handoo: *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. IV. Published by The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta. Second Ed. 1956 Part 11 Article Title “Tulasidasa and His Teachings.” P. 398.

2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* Vol. I, Ninth Ed. 1964. Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati. Pp. 255, 256.

instant gratification of desires that makes life meaningful. There is a special meaning and sweetness in our trials and in our uphill struggles of life, when there is devotion in our hearts and there is an ideal to uphold. The values imparted in this ancient epic are eternal and universal, because they are the values of Sanatana Dharma—the Eternal Religion. The guidelines are not rigid or static. The path of dharma is actually dynamic and very challenging. It requires, a deeper understanding of the teachings, objectivity that comes from detachment and strength of mind to follow through. For example the code of conduct for Bharata in relation to his elder brother, *Maryada Purushottama* Shri Rama is different from that of Vibhishana, Ravana's younger brother. Bharata's love, dedication and reverence for Shri Rama is following the path of supreme dharma. While in the case of Vibhishana doing the same would be unrighteous. Though Ravana is a good brother, he is also brave and a scholar. He has also performed many spiritual practices and austerities. But blinded by desire he violates the code of morality in abducting Sita. So in Vibhishana's case deserting Ravana and going to Shri Rama is the right action. Clannish loyalty to the unrighteous brother is superseded by the demands of and loyalty to a higher dharma. Blindly obeying his brother and his king he cannot be an accomplice to his brother's misdeeds. Vibhishana is a righteous man. He leaves Ravana only after making a sincere effort to persuade him to return Sita to Shri Rama and apologise for his misconduct. When all efforts on the part of Vibhishana to make Ravana act in a moral way fail then and only then Vibhishana leaves Ravana. In taking that step, besides knowing the right from wrong, Vibhishana also displays great detachment, will power, and courage. Of course his devotion to Shri Rama is the most significant factor in his understanding of dharma and in his strength to follow

through. In the language of the devotees this is called grace of God. The epithet *maryada purushottama* for Shri Rama needs elaboration. The beautiful word 'maryada' is comprehensive and hard to translate in one word. It means propriety, it also implies respecting and honouring social and scriptural injunctions in following a well defined code of moral and ethical conduct and much more. 'Purushottama' means supreme among men. Shri Rama is supreme among men in exemplifying 'maryada', or the eternal, moral values.

In following the path of dharma constant watchfulness is very important. Ravana's indiscretion was of Himalayan proportions, and the resultant holocaust was of that magnitude too. But what about a little innocent desire, if there is such a thing as that, of Sita to own that exotic, that 'cute' golden deer as her pet? She had given up the splendour and luxury of royal palaces without any hesitation, in following her dharma as Shri Rama's wife. Just a little frivolity on her part brings so much agony, so much suffering to herself, to her dear Shri Rama and to many others. Following the path of dharma is like walking on the razor's edge. Constant alertness and equanimity of mind are very essential. One thing leads to another. Mother Sita of great poise becomes anxious about Shri Rama's safety, while he is out there chasing the golden deer. That anxiety clouds her usually calm mind and she uses some very harsh words and unfair accusations towards Lakshmana, who reveres her like a mother. What about the injunction of staying within our boundaries, our boundaries in many roles that we play as human beings? Sita crossed the limit marked by Lakshmana and look what happened. Though her motive in doing so was benevolent still it is very important to know our limits, our boundaries and to understand that there is great danger in overstepping those lines.



If that Sita whom Swami Vivekananda glorifies as "This glorious Sita purer than purity itself, all patience and all suffering", can also sometimes overstep her boundaries, can lose the equanimity of her mind, can become impatient and act like ordinary people then what about people like us? That in a way is very comforting and encouraging. It is the ordinary human behaviour of these great ones, these glorious ones, that makes it possible for us human beings to connect with them. We can identify with and relate to their ordinary human behaviour and hopefully move on to their extraordinary qualities and incorporate those in the long run. As Shri Rama wanders about in the forest weeping and searching for Sita we can relate to his agony. They laugh and weep and express human longings and desires just like the rest of us.

#### *Devotion Does it all:*

The important point is that Shri Rama is the all merciful Lord. We do not have to be perfect to go to him. If only we can go to him whatever our shortcomings and take refuge in him, he will uplift us, he will redeem us. In the *Ramacharitamanasa* in Balakanda, Sant Tulasidasa, glorifying the power of Rama's name, says, "His devotees are able to conquer the formidable army of error by lovingly remembering His name. The name of Rama is a wish-yielding tree, the very home of beatitude in the age of Kaliyuga. The name repeated either with good or with evil intentions (Ravana), in an angry mood or even while yawning diffuses joy in all directions. ... The Lord never cherishes in his mind, the lapses, if any, on the part of a devotee". As mentioned earlier Rama is above all God and Lord of devotion. Tulasidasa stresses upon devotion as the main means to the goal of salvation. In Aranyakanda when Lakshmana requests Shri Rama to instruct him on spiritual wisdom Shri Rama's answer is "That which melts

my heart quickly, dear brother, is Devotion, which is the delight of my devotees. It stands by itself and requires no other prop. ... Devotion, dear brother, is incomparable and the very root of bliss".<sup>3</sup> The power of Rama's name makes available to all what the incarnate Rama could make available only to some. Tulasidasa lays the greatest stress on the repetition of the name for cultivating devotion. Paramahansa Shri Ramakrishna, while conversing with the devotees regarding faith and devotion says, "There is a popular saying that Hanumana jumped over the sea through his faith in Rama's name, but Rama himself had to build a bridge. If a man has faith in God, then he need not be afraid though he may have committed sin—nay, the vilest sin". He continues, "Faith and devotion. One realizes God easily through devotion. He is grasped through ecstasy of love,"<sup>4</sup> In another context again Shri Ramakrishna says, "The most important thing is faith.

As is a man's meditation, so is his feeling  
of love ;

As is a man's feeling of love, so is his  
gain ;

and faith is the root of all.

If one has faith one has nothing to fear.  
...One should constantly repeat the name  
of God. The name of God is highly effective  
in the Kaliyuga."<sup>5</sup>

There is this tremendous *akarshana shakti*—magnetic power of an incarnation. Once we open our hearts to that power, then we are automatically drawn into his orbit by this shakti. Then the forces of our

3. Goswami Tulasidasa: *Ramacharitamanasa*: Published by the Gita Press, Gorakhpur. Descent 111 Aranyakanda Chau. 13, 15.

4. "M", *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda) Fifth Printing, Pub. by the Ramakrishna Vedanta Center, New York. P. 107.

5. Ibid ; P. 342.

lower nature can no longer pull us downward. Just as the gravity of earth loses its pull once we get into the orbit of the space, similarly, we are protected from the pull of the lower forces by entering into the orbit of his grace. Once the needle of our mind is turned towards the love magnet of Rama, other attractions lose their hold on us. In his book '*Shri Ramakrishna the Great Master*' Swami Saradananda says, "If an ordinary man approaches an incarnation of God with devotion and reverence, he ascends unknowingly to the higher and higher planes of consciousness....Of course he gets that power of ascension owing to the incarnation's wonderful powers."<sup>6</sup> Regarding the incarnation of God Shri Ramakrishna says, "But those who follow the path of devotion seek an incarnation of God, to enjoy the sweetness of bhakti. The darkness of mind disappears when God is realised. In the Purana it is said that it was as if a hundred suns were shining when Rama entered the court....As the lotus blooms when the sun rises, so the lotus of the heart of the people assembled in the court burst into blossom". He continues, "Ordinary people do not recognise the advent of an incarnation of God. He comes in secret.... That Rama was both Brahman Absolute and a perfect incarnation of God in human form was known only to twelve rishis.... The whole thing in a nutshell is that one must develop ecstatic love for Satchidananda. What kind of love? How should one love God? Gauri (a devotee) used to say that one must become like Sita to understand Rama....I saw Sita in a vision, I found that her entire mind was concentrated on Rama. She was totally indifferent to everything: her hands, her feet, her clothes, her jewels. It seemed that Rama had filled every bit of her life and she could not remain alive without

Him."<sup>7</sup> Shri Ramakrishna himself prayed to the Divine Mother, "O Mother, make me like Sita, completely forgetful of everything—body and limbs—totally unconscious of hands, feet, and sense organs—only one thought in her mind, 'Where is Rama'?"<sup>8</sup>

#### *Nine Kinds of Devotion:*

In the *Ramayana* there is this beautiful episode when Shri Rama wandering through the forests goes to Shabari's hermitage. Shabari is a tribal woman, unsophisticated, perhaps unlettered, but full of love for Shri Rama. She has waited for Shri Rama for years and years, gathering wild fruits and berries every day for her dear Lord, hoping and praying for his coming. She says to Shri Rama, "How can I extol You, lowest in descent and the dullest of wit as I am?" Shri Rama replies, "Listen, O good lady, to my words, I recognize no other kinship except that of devotion."<sup>9</sup> And Shabari's devotion is legendary. Then Shri Rama goes on describing nine kinds of devotion to her.

*First* in order is the fellowship with saintly people.

*Second* is fondness for my stories and deeds.

*Third* is humble service of the lotus feet of one's preceptor.

*Fourth* is singing my praises and glories with a guileless purpose.

*Fifth* is remembering my name with unwavering faith.

7. "M", *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda) Fifth Printing, Pub. by the Ramakrishna Vedanta Center, New York. P. 346-437.

8. Ibid ; P. 342.

9. Goswami Tulasidasa: *Ramacharitamansa*: Published by the Gita Press, Gorakhpur. Descent 111 Aranyakanda Chau. 30.

6. Swami Saradananda: *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master*: Third Ed. 1963. Published by Sri Ramakrishana Math, Mylapore, Madras, P. 99.



*Sixth* is practice of self-control and virtue desisting from manifold activities and ever pursuing the course of conduct prescribed by the saints.

*Seventh* is seeing the world full of Me without distinction and regarding the saints as even greater than myself.

*Eighth* is remaining contented with whatever you get and never detecting other's faults.

*Ninth* is to be guileless and straight in your dealings with everybody, cherishing in one's heart implicit faith in Me without exultation or depression.

Shri Rama says to Shabari, "Whoever possesses any one of these nine forms of devotion, be he a man or a woman or any other creature—sentient or insentient—is most dear to me, O good lady." Then Shri Rama compliments her saying that she is blessed with unflinching devotion of all these types and the prize which is hardly won by the yogis is within her easy reach to-day.<sup>10</sup>

Devotion to the Lord can be expressed in innumerable ways. *Eleven Forms of Love*. In his Bhakti Sutras, extolling love of the absolute, eternal truth as the greatest, in sutra eighty two, Narada describes eleven forms of love.

1. Love of the glorification of the Lord's blessed qualities.
2. Love of His enchanting beauty.
3. Love of worship.
4. Love of constant remembrance.
5. Love of service.
6. Love of Him as a friend.
7. Love of Him as son.
8. Love for Him as that of a wife for her husband.

9. Love of self-surrender to Him.

10. Love of complete absorption in Him.

11. Love of the pain of separation from Him.

However, Narada qualifies his statement by further explaining that it does not mean that there are only eleven types of love only. There are possibilities of as many types as there are human relationships. He further points out that even if externally they appear different, they are all manifestations of love, which in itself is **only one**.

One sees the expression of these different attitudes and relationships with Shri Rama in the *Ramayana*. Different attitudes may be found in the same person also at different times. The last one, pain of separation from the Lord is a common experience of all devotees. Because it is in the very nature of intense love that it cannot bear separation. According to Narada this one is the supreme test of devotion.

*Four Goals of Devotion*: Tulasidasa describes these as follows:

1. *Sameepya*, Experiencing the nearness and presence of God.
2. *Salokya*, Dwelling in the sphere of God.
3. *Sayujya*, Union with the Lord of our devotions.
4. *Sarupya*, Oneness in form, as contemplated by the devotee.

According to Tulasidasa love of Rama is superior to knowledge as means of salvation. He does not condemn knowledge. His point is that it is fulfilled by bhakti, and knowledge without love is of no value at all. He says, "Fie on the pleasures, actions and dharmas wherein there is no love for Rama's Feet. Yoga is useless, and knowledge is ignorance wherein Rama's love is not supreme". "Devotion is independent and needs no other support. Nothing but love

<sup>10</sup>. Ibid; Descent 11 Aranyakanda Do. 35, Chau. 31.

is dear to Rama, let him who would understand understand."<sup>11</sup> In Aranyakanda Shri Rama says to Lakshmana, "That by which I am easily pleased, O brother, is bhakti to me, which gives happiness to my devotee. It is independent and not dependent on anything; jnana and vijnana are under its control."<sup>12</sup>

The realm of devotion transcends the requirements of a particular time or place. Thus it has an abiding and eternal significance. No matter where we are living and what our obligations and duties are, we can always find sustenance from this great

scripture. Even if our understanding is limited and sometimes clarity about the right action is lacking, or we do not have the strength to follow the high ideal of dharma, only if we can cultivate love for the Lord and go to Him as we are, he accepts us and guides us. He uplifts us. He is '*Patita Pavana Sita Rama*'. His legendary greatness is in redeeming the fallen. We conclude with what Mahatma Gandhi has to say, "I have accepted all the names and forms attributed to God as symbols connoting one formless omnipresent Rama. To me, therefore, Rama described as the Lord of Sita, son of Dasharatha, is the all powerful essence whose name inscribed in the heart removes all suffering—mental, moral, and physical."

11. Ibid., Descent 111 Aranyakanda 137, 1.

12. Ibid., Descent 111 Aranyakanda Chau. 14.

## THE HINDU WAY OF LIFE AND LIBERATION

SWAMI AJITATMANANDA

A significant contrast strikes any visitor to the caves of Ellora, when he sees the two portrayals of life, one according to the Hindu tradition, and the other according to the Buddhistic tradition. The famous Kailash cave which depicts the well-known episode of Shiva and Parvati begins with a huge image of Shiva in transcendent meditation. Then follow the other sculptures depicting Shiva's marriage with Parvati, the birth of Ganesha, the fight between the gods and the demons, the conquest of the gods, and finally Shiva's return to the same realm of transcendence.

In the most impressive Buddhistic caves, the scene is one of strange serenity. Under the huge image of a meditating Buddha, or a Buddha in the posture of giving instructions to monks with shaven head, old and young, and receive the message of Nirvana,

the total renunciation. The Hindu way of life wants to take the masses through the four successive stages of life—*Brahmacharya* (student life of celibacy and contemplation) *Garhasthya* (family life), *Vanaprastha* (the stage of getting detached from worldly life), and finally *Sannyasa* (renunciation of the worldly life and total dedication to God for liberation from the bondages of life). The Buddhist way of life inspires even the masses to enter Sannyasa right from the stage of the students' life. This state of total renunciation early in life has always been possible for a chosen few. Right from the days of the Upanishads until today, the masses in the Hindu tradition have learnt to pass through the earlier three stages of life before reaching the final stage of sannyasa. Krishna advocated four stages for liberation, while Buddha granted the vow of sannyasa to any one who sought it. The Hindu con-



cept of Dharma takes the totality of life and leads individuals through gradual steps to perfection.

Hindu philosophers have always sought to indicate the *summum bonum*, the highest good in life, and the ways to attain it. Keeping this highest end in view, a social order rooted in the *Varnashramadharma*<sup>1</sup> was evolved in India which enabled the members of the various social groups to help each other, protect each other, and provide scope to all to achieve the highest end of life which is total freedom or *Mukti*.

This total freedom was believed to be the result of total renunciation. Though in the scriptures like the *Gita*, renunciation is regarded more as an attitude towards life than as a separate way of life, as time passed, renunciation came to be more and more associated with the monastic institution which had its own impact on the Indian society. The ideal of renunciation appeared to be a world-negating one compared to the ideal of working for the society we live in. Swami Vivekananda wanted a harmonious combination of these two ideals. While addressing the western audience, he once remarked: "... You are always striving to change yours to something better, and before a millionth part of the change is carried out, you die. The western ideal is to be doing; the Eastern to be suffering. The perfect life would be a wonderful harmony between doing and suffering."<sup>2</sup> In the same vein Vivekananda again said, "The Greeks sought political liberty. The Hindus have always sought spiritual liberty.

Both are one sided. The Indian cares not enough for national protection or patriotism, he will defend only his religion; while with the Greek and in Europe (where the Greek civilisation finds its continuation) the country comes first. To care only for spiritual liberty and not for social liberty is a defect, but the opposite is a greater defect. Liberty of both soul and body is to be striven for."

Sister Nivedita elaborated on this idea of her master,

"The weak point of European society lies in the absence of the monastic ideal. True. But equally sure is it that the weak point of Hinduism is the want of emphasis on the ideal of the householder and the citizen. The reason lies largely in the fact that when our texts were formulated our society was as rich in virtue as in material resources. When the last of these deserts us, it is difficult to prevent the decay of the former; and what is wanted today is a deliberate recapture of both."

One must try to understand the concept of Dharma which the lawgivers of India formulated as the base of a stable social order. The *Mahabharata* (XII. 256.4) says in one place that Dharma is but purity of character. Shankaracharya in the beginning of his introduction to the *Gita*, says that Dharma is of two kinds, one for worldly prosperity and the other for spiritual liberation.

After projecting this world, and desiring to ensure its stability, He, the Lord, first created the Prajapatis, viz Marichi and others, and made them follow the dharma (virtuous path) characterized by action (rites and duties) as revealed in the Vedas. And then, having created others, viz Sanaka, Sanandana, and so on, He made them espouse the dharma characterized by renunciation and distinguished by Knowledge and detachment. For, the dharma revealed in the Vedas is of two kinds—one characterized by action, and the other by renunciation. That dharma, which is meant for the stability of the world and is the direct means to both secular and spiritual welfare of

1. *Varna-ashrama-dharma*, the religion based upon the two-fold division of Varnas (castes) and Ashramas (stages of life). Varna, in its origin, rested on the division of society into four castes or self-contained social groups, the Brahmin, the Kshatriya, the Vaishya and the Shudra.

2. Swami Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda: A Biography* (Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1971), p. 289-290.

living beings, continues to be followed by Brahmanas and others belonging to different castes and stages of life, who aspire after the highest.

Shabara defines dharma as what conduces to shreyas (*shreyaskara eva dharma*). Ishwarakrishna in his *Samkhya-karika* says that "which takes us upwards is dharma" (*dharmana gamanamurdhvah*).

Dharma means that which supports one to live a meaningful life. And again Dharma means 'righteousness' or doing one's own duty in the honest way. Nivedita wrote, "There must be a recognition of *Righteousness*, as well as of holiness. *Righteousness* lies in duty done; holiness requires renunciation. A thousand good citizens are necessary, as the background of one great sannyasin. There must then be a philosophy of citizenship, as well as sannyasa."<sup>3</sup>

The *Mahabharata* (Shanti Parva, 184/10) elaborates the dharma of the householder's life, "The householder's stage is ordained for those who have returned after completing student life, having married and desired to have the fruit of practising piety together. Having considered that the acquisition of *dharma*, *artha*, and *kama* is the means to the attainment of the triad, the householders should perform the duties of *garhasthya* by acquiring money through means which are not condemned. That is called the source of all *ashramas*. The residents in the preceptor's house, wandering mendicants, all those who are engaged in observing the resolved vow, and practising rules, of them alms, offerings, and distribution of food proceed from this (i.e. *garhasthya*) alone."

Buddha preached and practised the well-known dictum: *Ahimsa paramo dharmah*—'Non-injury is the highest religion'. Ashoka expanded the Buddha's concept of Dharma to social well-being. One can, for instance,

note that in the Buddhistic period Ashoka established order in his kingdom through his Edicts on Dharma or *Dharma-lipi*. He said in Rock Edict XI thus: 'King Priyadarshi says: there is no gift that can equal the gift of Dharma, the establishment of human relations on Dharma, the distribution of wealth through Dharma, or kinship in Dharma, *Dharma-sambandha*'.<sup>4</sup> Dharma is thus action and principle of action. It is a principle which is based on the clear perception of the inseparability of an individual to the collective. Dr. Radhakrishnan observed in the same vein, "Human society is an organic whole, the parts of which are dependent in such a way that each part in fulfilling its distinctive function conditions the fulfilment of function by the rest, and is in turn conditioned by the fulfilment of its function by the rest. In this sense the whole is present in each part, while each part, is indispensable to the whole."<sup>5</sup> It is only when the individual becomes aware of this fact that he can understand what his duty towards the society is. And it is only by discharging his duties properly that an individual can foster his growth. Due to differences in temperament and capacity of the individuals, varieties in social groups or castes have been formed. People who are inclined to the pursuit of knowledge and intellectual culture upholding higher values of life, have been called Brahmins. Similarly the administrators, and the rulers are called Kshatriyas. The merchant-group is known as Vaishya. And people skilled in labour are known as Shudras.

Hence the same kind of duty cannot be binding on all at all times. It is difficult to give an objective definition of duty which varies according to the caste and capacity

3. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Sister Nivedita Girls' School, 1973), Vol. III, p. 378.

4. Prof. N. A. Nikam, 'Liberty and Community' in *Entretiens: International Institute of Philosophy and Indian Philosophical Congress* (Mysore, 1959), p. 51.

5. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu view of life* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1927), p. 107.



of the individual. Yet there is always an idea of duty from the subjective side. This idea is clarified by Swami Vivekananda. Swamiji wrote: "...one class of society thinks that certain things are among its duty, while another class thinks quite the opposite and would be horrified if it had to do those things." "...Therefore we see that it is not the thing done that defines a duty. To give an objective definition of duty is thus entirely impossible. Yet there is duty from the subjective side. Any action that makes us go Godward is a good action, and is our duty; any action that makes us go downward is evil, and is not our duty."<sup>6</sup> In another context Swamiji said, "Doing good to others is our duty" for "the desire to do good is the highest motive power we have, if we know all the time that it is a privilege to help others...yet it is work through the sense of duty that leads us to work without any idea of duty; when work will become worship—nay something higher..."<sup>7</sup> A brahmin will go Godward by unselfishly imparting knowledge, the rulers by selflessly protecting and maintaining the subject, the merchant by bringing as a dedicated service the economic development, the Shudras by offering labour in a spirit of worship. But according to Vedanta no one is superior to the other. Perfect performance of duty makes a Shudra superior to an imperfect brahmin who is insincere in his own duties.

When individuals discharge their duties in such a spirit, production is bound to increase. Propagation of knowledge establishes *Dharma*. Production of wealth or *Artha* (or economic basis of life) is an important factor for the maintenance of *Dharma*. This is recognized by Kautilya in his *Arthashastra*. This is what the Marxists call the 'economic

determination of life.' Dr. Radhakrishnan observes, "Artha takes note of the economic and the political life of man, the craving for power and property. The urge which gives rise to property is something fundamental in human nature. Unless we change the very constitution of the human mind we cannot eradicate the idea of property. For most men property is the medium for the expression of personality and intercourse with others."<sup>8</sup>

But an inordinate urge to possess property will degrade the individual and the social group, if it is not guided by the principle of righteousness which we have described above. In other words, any economic system should not only make individuals prosperous but also secure distributive justice for all in the society. A successful economic system should minimize its members' external struggles between the haves and the have-nots. We, kill our brothers not only by weapons but we put many to slow death by our strong selfishness. Sometimes stagnant wealth is more harmful than no wealth. Our body falls off if blood is centred in one place. Accumulation of wealth in certain places is a sign of paralysis of any nation. Therefore, it should be distributed to each part of the nation as blood is supplied to each cell of the body. It is our own nature. We do not do it consciously. Similarly when the proper distribution of wealth will be spontaneous and natural, then and then alone society remains healthy. This is the function of *Artha* in the Hindu tradition.

It is through wealth that man is able to fulfil most of his desires. The *Dharma Shastras* which are treatises on law and morality, recognize *Kama* (fulfilment of legitimate desire) also as a value and as a motive force of human action. Fulfilment of the desires like eating, clothing, and perpetuation of dynasty are the primary

6. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1970), Vol. I, p. 64.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 76 and 66.

8. *The Hindu View of Life*, op. cit., p. 80.

stages of man's journey to liberation. But even the way of *pravritti* or worldly enjoyments must have an altruistic basis. Man must share his wealth with others. "He who enjoys his own wealth is a thief." (*Gita*, 3.14). Since an individual, as we have already mentioned, is a part and parcel of the social group, he must adjust his individual desires with his social perspective. When man becomes ignorant of this social responsibility, he delusively shrinks into an insular unit, a non-human ego. It is this delusion which makes him deprive others of their legitimate enjoyments of life and he becomes selfish. Shankaracharya in his commentary on the first verse of the *Isopanishad* says that one should not covet not only others' wealth, but his own wealth, too. (*Swasya parasya va*). When man gets involved in the larger social life for common welfare, he becomes free from the shackles and bondages of a self-centred life, and progresses in the right way to liberation. Fulfilling one's desires in a way which is not against righteousness or *Dharma* is *Kama*. *Bhagavad-Gita* says, '*dharmaviruddho kamosmi*' (7.11).

It is by fulfilling the stage of *Abhyudaya* or worldly prosperity following the path of *Dharma*, that freedom becomes meaningful to man. What is the nature of this freedom? Due to the ignorance of his true nature, man is bound by a limited vision of himself and tries to isolate himself from the rest of the community. It is because of his ignorance of *Dharma* and Knowledge that man exhibits vanity, selfishness, and indifference to the needs of others. Freedom from the bondages and ignorance is the greatest end of life. Such a freedom is to be attained not in some unknown, distant corner of the cosmos, but as a state of consciousness where an individual's psychophysical bondages are gone for ever. It has to be achieved through a process of inner growth and maturity in life. It consists in spiritual,

and not physical strength. Freedom really means living and acting out of the infinite strength and purity, and the infinite freedom and goodness within which command all the diverse energies of a perfected or liberated life.

But the liberated individual has further to evolve himself as the universal man which means that his experience of true freedom must spread itself to society. Otherwise the seeker after individual liberation will always look upon this world as something resistant and uncongenial, and look forward to another world alone as the proper home for the full exercise of his freedom. A liberated individual must extend his spirit of liberation to the other members of his society. Then only he can achieve higher integrations in his own life and society. Such an individual will be able to inspire the true spirit of *Dharma* and *Moksha* in the society.

The concept of *Moksha* or liberation has a broad universal basis. Man lives in society which is an intricate web in which all living beings are interlinked in a vast system of ever-changing, interdependent, and interacting modes of relationships. There is one law that unites all the living beings and that is the Oneness of existence. The liberated individual who is working for the liberation of all is really moving towards this basic oneness of existence. There is controversy on whether a cosmic liberation is possible or not. Most of the Indian philosophers advocated freedom for all, though not at a time. Freedom of all to be attained at the same time (*sarvamukti*)<sup>9</sup> is also an idea maintained by a few philosophers. Vivekananda speaks of the essential solidarity of life, and says in the background of Advaita or Monistic Vedanta that this liberation is itself universal love, and it must be

9. 'Liberation of all' (Editorial), Prabuddha Bharata (Mayavati, Vol. 89, January 1984), p. 3.



based on the feeling of the essential solidarity of the universe.

"When at last, the central idea is, however, arrived at that the sum total of all love is God, that the sum total of the aspirations of all the souls in the universe, whether they be free, or bound, or struggling towards liberation, is God, then alone it becomes possible for any one to put forth universal love. God is the Samashti, and this visible universe is God differentiated and made manifest. If we love this sum total,

we love everything."

"We and He are one. Every one is but a manifestation of that Impersonal, the basis of all being, and misery consists in thinking of ourselves as different from this Infinite, Impersonal Being; and liberation consists in knowing our unity with this wonderful Impersonality."<sup>10</sup>

10. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati Memorial Edition), Vol. III, p. 81-82, 129.

## A TRIP TO JAPAN

DR. AMIT TARAFDAR

On 15th August 1987, we, three Indian doctors, took a Japan Airline Flight from New Delhi to Tokyo for a study trip at Kiryu Eye Institute of Clinical Ophthalmology. Kiryu is situated at Gunma prefecture, hundred miles away from Tokyo. Kiryu Institute of Clinical Ophthalmology is one of the best of its kind in the world, with all modern facilities and equipments. Dr. Akira Momose is a giant in the field of ophthalmology. He is the director of the Institute and arranged the study trip for our group of three Indian ophthalmologists. Dr. Momose is a well-known personality in the medical field of Japan. He is small built, hardly 5 feet 2 inches tall, strong and stout. Extremely hard working and dedicated yet witty, Dr. Momose created this Institute of Clinical Ophthalmology which is a hundred-bedded eye hospital with facilities for research.

Every Indian acquainted with Swami Vivekananda, must have read about his first impression of Japan. From Yokohama, he wrote on 10th July, 1893 to his young Madras disciples to come to Japan and see the progressing nation.

"What a contrast: The Japanese are one of the cleanliest people on earth. Everything is neat and tidy. Their streets are nearly all broad, straight, and regularly

paved. Their little houses are cage-like, and their pine-covered evergreen little hills form the background of almost every town and village. The short-statured, fair-skinned, quaintly-dressed Japs, their movements, attitudes, gestures, everything is picturesque. Japan is the land of the picturesque! Almost every house has a garden at the back, very nicely laid out according to Japanese fashion with small shrubs, grass-plots, small artificial waters, and small stone bridge.

The modern race for progress has penetrated even the priesthood. I cannot write what I have in my mind about the Japs in one short letter. Only I want that numbers of our young men should pay a visit to Japan and China every year. Especially to the Japanese, India is still the dreamland of everything high and good."

Today nearly hundred years after Vivekananda wrote this letter tremendous changes, especially after the atomic devastation of the Second World War, have occurred all over Japan in every field of their life. But the basic qualities of patriotism, intense dedication to work, a natural sense of beauty, and their respect for India, the birth-land of Lord Buddha, still remain intact. The Japanese spirit of spontaneous dedication to perfection in all work of life, is an outcome of the teachings of Zen

Buddhism. Fritz Capra in his best-selling book, *The Tao of Physics*, has beautifully summed up the spirit of Zen and its impact on Japanese life.

"In Zen, satori means the immediate experience of the Buddha nature of all things. First and foremost among these things are the objects, affairs and people involved in everyday life, so that while it emphasizes life's practicalities, Zen is nevertheless profoundly mystical. Living entirely in the present and giving full attention to everyday affairs, one who has attained satori, experiences the wonder and mystery of life in every single act:

How wondrous this, how mysterious!

I carry fuel, I draw water.

The perfection of Zen is thus to live one's everyday life naturally and spontaneously."

My trip of Japan confirmed what Vivekananda had one day written of Japan. The progress made by this little nation, an island in the Pacific, especially in modern technology, will impress any visitor to this country. The Zen perfection in each little action in Japanese life is manifest everywhere. And this perfection we witnessed in many ways during this short trip to Japan.

From Narita Airport we were taken to Kiryu Eye Institute by a car sent by Dr. Momose. Around 10 pm. when we reached Kiryu, we felt that a long-cherished dream of our life was going to be fulfilled. Earlier when we landed at Tokyo, it was for us a great change in the mode of work, behaviour, courtesy, personal relation and respect to each other. The sense of beauty right from the airport to villages, towns, roads, and footpaths impressed us immediately. Flowers decorated in 'Ikebana' style and flower-pots even on footpaths moved us. People are warm, affectionate, very courteous and have deep regard for our country. India is a holy land where Lord Buddha was born. To Japanese people, India is vast, India is great. Immediately we, too, became conscious

of our national heritage, and our responsibility to hold it up.

In the Institute, the first thing we found was that all the staff members had breakfast together in the Institute itself at 7-30 a.m. Doctors, pharmacists, optometrists, Sisters, sweepers, drivers all gather in one cafeteria. Then one by one all went to their respective departments sharp at 8 a.m. All of them are fully dedicated to their own job. None is critical of others. Devoted to their work, it seems they are meditating on their subjects.

We were staying at 'Capital height', a flat owned by the Institute at the down-town of Kiryu. Every morning, Institute bus used to come. We used to wish each time with Japanese welcome '*Ohio Godaimasu*'—which means "Good Morning". Japanese punctuality is incredible. You can correct your watch by their bus and train timings.

From 8 a.m. onwards we used to go to Post-operative Examination room, where all indoor patients used to come only by one, and sisters used to make them sit in a queue. There used to be two SLIT lamps side by side. In one, Dr. Momose used to examine first and then he used to send the patient to our side where three of us used to examine one by one and discuss. Patiently, he used to reply to all our queries. At 10 a.m. we used to go to 'Operation theatre'—which is one of the best in the world. There was a closed-circuit T.V. filled with the operative Microscope. Cases of Entropion, cataract for intraocular implants, vitreo-retinal surgery, posterior seloral-support for high myopia—all these operations were done perfectly. We used to tell him as if a rubber stamp of Dr. Momose was made on every eye. The operation would be so perfect. Once he had operated thirty four cases of intra-ocular implants in one day.

It was thrilling to see him working like a race horse at the age of about 55. After finishing the examination of out-patients or sometimes even in between his normal work,



he used to go to his library or office room—read, write, dictate for conference paper etc. What a dedication: I wish all the Indian doctors should go and see a doctor like him working.

On two Sundays we had the occasion to visit Nikko—where ancient Buddhist temples were there. Also another Sunday, we went to Tokyo Disney land. In Nikko, there is a village where they arranged things to show how Japan was hundred years before. We found lots of similarities with present-day India. Huge image of Lord Buddha reminded us of the vastness of our country and its thoughts.

We were sent to two more cities—Nagoya and Osaka, to work with Dr. Miyake, and Dr. Okihiro Nishi. Both of them are of international fame. Miyake hospital with its reading room and library was something worth seeing. I remember their warmth, kindness, co-operation and excellent surgical skill.

Inside local train, so many people were travelling, especially during office hours, without a bit of indiscipline. Even the school children were reading silently. What a discipline!

In Nishi Eye Hospital at Osaka, Dr. Okihiro Nishi, one of the youngest and fastest eye surgeons of Japan asked me to assist in 19 cases. When we did it successfully he appreciated me to boost my moral. Dedication, sincerity, hard work, and appreciation for all the good qualities of human character—I found in Japan. My spontaneous prayer went for this blessed country. I only wished that all of us take it as an example.

Once I asked Dr. Momose about the commonest religion prevalent in Japan. Very interestingly he told me, “See, when a child

is born we take him to a ‘SHINTO’ temple where we worship nature. When a person is married, we take them to a church. And when a person dies we go to a Buddhist temple for mental peace. So we follow all religions.”

Once I saw a small cottage with usual flower decoration. Inside a hall in the cottage there were six to eight weaving machines which were operated electrically. An old man of 70 was supervising all the machines all alone. This reminded me of the ‘soft technology’ and small cottage industries which modern thinkers are advocating all over the world. Japan’s phenomenal progress in technology is due to this perfection in the ‘soft technology’ of cottages.

The Toshogu shrine and the Nikko Mausoleum are gorgeous, ornate buildings situated in a beautiful forest. They look like bright jewels set in the midst of giant trees. Amid these carvings are found such favourites of Japanese art, as “the sleeping cat”, and the world famous simian trio—the three monkey with their hands over ears, mouth and eyes, popularly known as “Hear no Evil, Speak no Evil, See no Evil.” Though Japan is famous for decoration of natural surroundings, the Japanese are almost equally devoted to the preservation of Nature in her pristine purity. There is a romantic, even religious respect for solitary mountains, lovely forests, and deserted plains. Though such spots are admittedly hard to find in the overcrowded Japan of today the old Japanese veneration for unspoiled Nature has not changed. This love for nature has resulted in the over-all reverence for life and its activities, which distinguishes Japanese culture, and the Japanese way of life in general.

# SAINT TULASIDASA : A SPIRITUAL LOKANAYAKA

K. S. NAGARAJA

Saint, poet, philosopher and a household name in the Hindi heartland, Goswami Tulasidasa, the author of *Ramacharitamansa* and several other compositions is a legendary figure. For the ordinary man his works are as good as the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita.

From Tulasidasa's poem *Kavitta-Ramayana*, one can learn that his original name was Rambola, his wife's name Ratnavali, and his son's name was Tarak. The name Tulasidasa was probably given by his Guru Naraharidasa, who was a monk.

Though Tulasidasa was a householder, he needed no sudden vision of God to bring him to the life of devotion. A simple chiding by his wife did it all. She once said to Tulasidasa, "If you entertain towards Rama at least half the love that you have for my fleshy body you would have surely been freed from the fears and sufferings of human life." This single sentence transformed his whole life into the life of a saint. That very moment Tulasidasa left his home and depending on the holy name of Rama, he embraced the life of a wandering monk. Travelling through different pilgrimages he ultimately settled as a saint-poet at Varanasi. After he left the worldly life his wife wrote him a letter cautioning him not to fall in the grip of other women. Tulasidasa answered that he had already been bound with the tuft of his hair to Shri Rama, and was now drinking the nectar of the holy name of Shri Rama. The wife got the message. Many years after once Tulasidasa, the aged-monk, came to his own village and own house. Although he could not recognise either his own house or his relations, his wife recognised him. Seeing that Tulasidasa still had in his bag all essentials of food and clothes, the wife revealed herself and said that when he was taking all

things into his little bag, he could as well take his wife along with him. Tulasidasa realised his mistake, gave his only bag to a brahmin, and became a saint of total renunciation. His married life was just an interlude in the Pilgrim's progress towards spiritual self-realisation.

Though Tulasidasa travelled widely visiting the spiritual centres from North to South, his main centres of attraction were around Prayag, Chitrakoot, Ayodhya, Kashi, Mithila, etc. Though he had been the author of at least twelve immortal works, his important ones are the *Ramacharitamansa* and the *Vinaya Patrika*. Though his major compositions are in Avadhi, he made free use of Bhojpuri, Bundeli, Braj, Khariboli, Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian.

His recital sessions of Rama were exhilarating and attracted large crowds. It is said that once he saw the image of Hanu-man in a leper who attended regularly his Katha or recitations on Rama. He caught hold of his feet and begged to help him see Shri Rama face to face. The reply was—'wait and watch'. When once he was at the seat of meditation he could see two horsemen riding swiftly pass through before his eyes. The leper confirmed that they were Rama and Lakshmana!

The main theme of all his compositions is the victory of righteousness over darkness and evil. Pitching Shri Rama's life as the goal of human race, Tulasidasa said that he fervently believed he was writing the *Manasa* under divine inspiration. The basic urge, he tells us, is "the satisfaction of my own soul" and "to dispel the darkness of my own heart".

The utter seriousness, the wide canvas, the record of the accumulated wisdom, culture and experience of the Hindu race, are depicted in *Ramacharitamansa*. He



could not resist the temptation of introducing plenty of dialogues, invocations and prayers. The whole purpose was to elevate, cleanse, and purify the mind of the masses, by glorifying the life and message of Shri Rama.

Extolling the power of the name of Rama, he writes: The Name and He for whom the name stands are one, but they are related as master and servant. He continues to plead: "The living Rama could only bless the people in the Dandaka forest, but innumerable are the human hearts which his name has purified and redeemed."

He reveals in the description of his blue coloured deity a thousand details of His lotus eyes, lotus feet, pink palms and yellow robes. The weapons with which Tulasidasa's Rama fights and wins are courage and fortitude, discrimination and self control, a mind calm and unruffled, and a heart full of love and compassion. He explains that devotion is a difficult thing to achieve, "It is a difficult job—this devotion to Rama."

*Vinaya Patrika*, Tulasidasa's another famous composition, is a thesis of love and devotion to the Lord. Addressing himself, he narrates: "Is there any one who is as keen about your welfare as the Lord? Put to test the fraud behind the relative's hypocritical professions of love; the acts of piety and religious merit too are fruitless. Unless inspired by Him, and without divine love, it is like making sacrificial offerings over a heap of ashes or like the rains pouring down on barren land; Wretch, how can you find rest or peace, if you forget the ONE who is the dearest, the very life of your life, the supreme benefactor, the one who purifies the lowliest and the wicked?"

He advises that in the service of God whatever comes as an obstacle, must be given up. *Vinaya Patrika* refers to the communication from Mira Bai that she was being obstructed in her devotion to Shri Krishna by people in her home. She asked

the advice of Tulasidasa on what was to be done. His reply was:

'Jako priya na Rama Vaidehi So tajiye koti vairi sama yadyapi parama sanehi'—"Who does not like Rama-Vaidehi, as his object of devotion, consider him to be ten million times an enemy, and give him up though he may be in other respects extremely near and dear to you." Mira abandoned all her near and dear ones and set about in the service of Lord Krishna.

Tulasi developed deep love for Varanasi, the place where he lived for the major period of his life. In his works, *Kavitavali*, he said: "Drinking the water of Bhagirathi and repeating the name of Rama is my daily routine."

Tulasidasa was born in an inauspicious hour. His parents, therefore, rejected him. The monk who became his Guru afterwards, took his responsibility. With this guru he travelled to many centres of pilgrimage. Himself a life-long wanderer, Tulasidasa knew the pangs of hunger and rejected life.

The poet in him was, therefore, moved by the sight of 'The Ravana of poverty' holding the society in his grip. He drew a graphic picture of people in dire distress asking one another, "Where shall we go? What shall we do?" He saw how people in hunger had given up the right path and arrived at the conclusion that "there are no fires more devastating than the fire of hunger." Tulasidasa came to the conclusion that there is no religion for men higher than the service of the people who are afflicted. He dispelled the mist of pessimism and abstract speculation which darkened and enveloped the lives of the people. He gave them a healthy positive direction, the keynotes of which are hope, joy, faith and fulfilment.

The metrical form—the *Dohas*—which had been used for a long time, was used by Tulasidasa to a great effect in *Rama-charitamanasa*. Thirty four Dohas in a set is known as 'chatak chauta'. The Dohavalis



of Tulasidasa contain a great deal of worldly wisdom based on close observation of trends in society, men and affairs.

After the period of Shri Rama, the Mahabharata period saw the degradation of the values of life. Intermittent fights and challenges also occurred between the two major communities—the brahmins and the kshatriyas. The rulers turned selfish, arrogant and supporters of vice and thus adharma began to have its sway. As days passed, further deterioration set in and more persons had to put their shoulders to the wheel of dharma to bring it back to a normal state. Confusion arose within the tenets of Bhakti and Karma and this had to be balanced, explaining that Jnana, Karma and Bhakti were essential as the modes which one has to tread in unison. Thus the way was paved for the birth of Shankara, Ramanuja and the like to fulfil what had been wanting. Tulasidasa belongs to this class of men. His spiritual eminence was known far and wide. The great commentator Madhusudana Saraswati became a close friend of Tulasidasa. Todarmal, the revenue minister of Akbar, became his ardent devotee. King Mansingh and Jagat-singh, eminent Hindu Kings of those days, used to come to meet him and get inspired by his devotion to Shri Rama.

In fact, Tulasidasa was bent upon securing to the people *Samanvaya* (Harmony) of the thoughts preached by several saints and philosophers. In the midst of different modes of worship, a balanced view of life was to be brought about. He was destined to become a Lokanayaka, a leader. A real leader is one to whom the people are attracted; one for whom the people do not have fear but treat him as a friend, guide, and philosopher.

How and why Tulasidasa had to play the role of a Lokanayaka can be well understood when we look at the historical background of his times. It was mid-seventeenth century and the hold of the Moghuls on the

country and its destiny was complete. The Hindu Society was torn and disorganised. No lofty ideal inspired it to action on the right lines. The first rung of the society—the intellectual—had been attracted by the ruling elite and had turned to be utterly selfish and frivolous. The uneducated and the poor were oppressed to the hilt. More than anything, the ruling class obviously, had their hold in every sphere of life, and the Hindu, belonging to any class or cadre, was stamped down. There were, however, some efforts to reverse this trend by saints like Kabir. But the onslaught continued.

This was the situation which Tulasidasa had to face. He stood firm to preach the way of Shri Rama by crying a halt to cowardice. Rama's prowess, character, intellect and above all his love towards the oppressed came in full swing through his writings, discourses, conversations and consolations. Tulasidasa became a symbol of healing touch to the masses. The renderings of Tulasidasa came as a boon and a stamina to stand against injustice and fight out wickedness in the political, social or religious fields. Tulasidasa's words began to ring in the ears of the masses.

Jab jab hoyi Dharm ki hani Baadahi Asur  
maha abhimani  
Tab tab dhira prabhu manuja sarira har  
hi kripanidhi sajjana peera.

—(Whenever there is danger to dharma and the asuras take to bad ways, God will take the form of man and He the merciful shall protect the good).

Some people describe that Tulasidasa protected the Hindu society from the onslaught of the Muslim rule. But that was not the whole truth. His greater concern was that the Hindu society was bereft of noble ideals and it was this which he wanted to set right. He believed that the sins of the Hindu society were very much of its own; it would be more appropriate to infer that he protected the Hindu society not



only from the Moghul clutches but also from its own inner misfortunes and trifles ; and from its internecine differences and feuds of hatred and disbelief.

The vision of *Samanvaya* he preached brought into the life of the nation new vigour of righteous living in the political, social, religious and spiritual fields. He was explicit in determining the role of the ruler and the subjects. He clarified that the roles that the people were to play—that of

the ruler, subject, father, mother, son or daughter etc., were not to be conflicting but harmonious. His teachings cried a halt to the social degradation and religious bigotry which were the bane of the day.

Tulasidasa, a born philosopher, played the role of a religious leader and guide, a Lokanayaka, in times of need. His life and teachings remain a beacon light even to this day.

## PRACTICAL HINTS FOR SPIRITUAL LIFE

### MEDITATION

Bhakti is not destructive ; it teaches us that no one of the faculties we have been given in vain, that through them is the natural way to come to liberation. Bhakti does not kill out our tendencies, it does not go against nature, but only gives it a higher and powerful direction. How naturally we love objects of the senses : We cannot but do so, because they are so real to us. We do not ordinarily see anything real about higher things, but when a man has seen something real beyond the senses, beyond the universe of senses, the idea is that he can have a strong attachment, only it should be transferred to the object beyond the senses, which is God.

It is supposed that a man's character emanates from him, as it were, like a physical force, and whatever he touches is affected by it. So we must take care who touches our food when it is cooked ; a wicked or immoral person must not touch it. One who wants to be a Bhakta must not dine with people whom he knows to be very wicked, because their infection will come through the food.

A good many of the wicked deeds done in this world are really done through attach-

ment to certain persons. So all attachment, excepting that for good works should be avoided ; but love should be given to everybody.

There should be no jealousy in regard to objects of the senses ; jealousy is the root of all evil, and a most difficult thing to conquer.

If the wife help us to attain God, she is a good wife ; so with a husband or a child. If money help a man to do good to others, it is of some value ; but if not, it is simply a mass of evil, and the sooner it is got rid of, the better.

The first of everything should go to the poor ; we have only a right to what remains. The poor are God's representatives ; anyone that suffers is His representative.

Despondency is not religion, whatever else it may be. By being pleasant always and smiling, it takes you nearer to God, nearer than any prayer. How can those minds that are gloomy and dull love ? If they talk of love ; it is false ; they want to hurt others.

They would deluge the whole world in blood tomorrow if it would bring them power. By worshipping power and making

long faces, they lose every bit of love from their hearts.

In our everyday life we find that the less the sense-enjoyments, the higher the life of the man. Look at the dog when he eats. No man ever ate with the same satisfaction.

And the lower the man also, the more delight he finds in the senses. As he gets higher, the goal becomes reason and love.

(Compiled from *Bhakti Yoga*)  
Swami Vivekananda

PRABUDDHA BHARATA: 90 YEARS AGO

Arise! awake! and stop not till the goal is reached! Katha Upa. I. iii. 14

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### INTERVIEW WITH SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON THE BOUNDS OF HINDUISM

HAVING been directed by the Editor, (writes our representative) to interview Swami Vivekananda on the question of converts to Hinduism, I found an opportunity one evening on the roof of a Ganges houseboat. It was after nightfall and we had stopped at the embankment of the Ramakrishna Math, and there the Swami came down to speak with me.

Time and place were alike delightful. Overhead the stars, and around the rolling Ganges. While on one side stood the dimly lighted building, with its background of palms and lofty shade trees.

"I want to see you, Swami," I began, "on this matter of receiving back into Hinduism those who have been perverted from it. Is it your opinion that they should be received?"

"Certainly," said the Swami, "they can and ought to be taken."

He sat gravely for a moment, thinking, and then resumed. "Besides," he said, "we shall otherwise decrease in numbers. When the Mohammedans first came, we are said—I think on the authority of Ferishta, the oldest Mohammedan historian,—to have been six hundred millions of Hindus. Now we are about two hundred millions. And then, every man going out of the Hindu pale is not only a man less, but an enemy the more.

Again, the vast majority of Hindu perverts to Islam and Christianity are perverts by the sword or the descendants of these. It would be obviously

unfair to subject these to disabilities of any kind. As to the case of born aliens, did you say? Why born aliens have been converted in the past by crowds, and the process is still going on.

In my own opinion this statement not only applies to aboriginal tribes, to outlying nations, and to almost all our conquerors before the Mohammedan conquest, but also to all those castes who find a special origin in the Purans. I hold that they have been aliens thus adopted.

Ceremonies of expiation are no doubt suitable in the case of willing converts, returning to their Mother-Church, as it were; but on those who were only alienated by conquest,—as in Kashmir and Nepal,—or on strangers wishing to join us no penance should be imposed."

"But of what caste would these people be, Swamiji?" I ventured to ask,—“They must have some, or they can never be assimilated into the great body of Hindus. Where shall we look for their rightful place?"

"Returning converts," said the Swami quietly, "will gain their own castes, of course. And new people will make theirs. You will remember," he added, "that this has already been done in the case of Vaishnavism. Converts from different castes and aliens were all able to combine under that flag, and form a caste by themselves,—and a very respectable one too. From Ramanuja down to Chaitanya of Bengal, all great Vaishnava teachers have done the same."