

Relevance of Ramayana to modern life

*The whole universe is under the control of God.
God is governed by Truth.
Noble souls are the guardians of Truth.
Such noble souls are verily
The embodiments of Divinity.*

[Sanskrit sloka]

Embodiments of Love! All are essentially the embodiments of Divinity. *Eswara sarva bhoothanam* (God dwells in all beings). *Isavasyam idam jagat* (God permeates the entire universe). Where is the need to search for such an all-pervasive Divinity?

*Sarvata Pani Padam Tath Sarvathokshi Shiromu-
kham, Sarvata Sruthimalloke Sarvamavruthya Thi-
sthati.*

[Sanskrit sloka]

How can you search for Him who is moving about with thousands of feet, thousands of eyes, and thousands of ears? It

is utterly foolish to search for God. God is within you. Since you have forgotten your true Self and are carried away by the temporary and transient physical body, you are unable to understand the Divine. When you get rid of body attachment and develop attachment towards the Self, only then you can understand the divine *Atmic* Principle.

Values contained in Rama's story

Embodiments of Love! Life is like a game of chess; not merely that, it is like a battlefield. The story of Rama teaches us the threefold *Dharma* (code of conduct) pertaining to the individual, the family and the society. You have to make every effort to understand the duties of the individual, the family and the society. Rama is the ocean of compassion. He is love personified. It is possible to understand His divinity only through the path of love. Love is the undercurrent of human life. Man will be able to manifest his innate divinity only when he develops love within.

Modern society needs to follow the *dharma* that is contained in the epic *Ramayana*. Why? Today, the son is not paying heed to his father's advice, and the parents are not concerned about the future of the son. Devotion to the *guru* should be the aim of the students. But students are not having regard for their teachers and the teachers are not imparting anything good to them. In such a situation, everyone needs to follow the ideals of the *Ramayana*. The *Ramayana* speaks of the true identity of the individual, the real significance of the family, and the sanctity of the society. The *Ramayana* teaches the importance of human values. Today, corruption is rampant in all fields such as business, education, and politics. Under these circumstances, the principles of the *Ramayana* are very im-

portant. It explains in detail the relationship that should exist between brothers, the father and the son, the preceptor and the disciple.

The moral, social, and spiritual values om Ramayana

All of us live on the same earth. The same sky is above all of us. We breathe the same air and drink the same water. Ignoring this underlying principle of unity man visualizes multiplicity, which is a big mistake. The *Ramayana* centers on the principle of unity in diversity. Today, since man has lost the ability to see unity in diversity, he is immersed in restlessness. What we need today is to see unity in diversity and the divinity behind this unity.

The culture of Bharat says: *Sathyam bruyath, priyam bruyath, na bruyath sathyam apriyam* (speak the truth, speak sweetly and softly, and never utter truth in an unpalatable way). *Sathyam bruyath* is the moral value. *Priyam bruyath* is the social value. *Na bruyath sathyam apriyam* is the spiritual value. So, the moral, social, and spiritual values are all contained in the above statement.

The *Ramayana* teaches these values in the simplest way. But man has forgotten the message of the *Ramayana* and is leading the life of a Ravana. Ravana did not understand this principle of divinity. There was no transformation in him, though he had acquired all forms of knowledge and had done severe penance. He ruined himself on account of excessive desires. Before his death, he gave a message to the people: "O people, with all my skills and expertise in different forms of knowledge I became a victim of desires. I lost my sons, ruined my clan, and burnt my kingdom to ashes, since I could not control my desires. Do not become a victim of desires like me.

Follow the path of truth and righteousness and be like Rama. Experience divinity.”

Put Ramayana's teaching into practice

The relationship that existed between the brothers of Rama is an ideal to the rest of the humanity. They lived in unity in spite of troubles and turmoil. Mother Kaikeyi wanted her son Bharata to ascend the throne of Ayodhya, but Bharata never had any such desire. He went to Chitrakoota mountain, fell at the feet of Rama, and prayed, He, being the eldest, should take over the kingdom of Ayodhya. But Rama did not yield to his request. Quoting the *Vedic* dictum *Mathru Devo Bhava, Pithru Devo Bhava*. He exhorted Bharata to obey the command of the father and fulfill the desire of his mother by becoming king of Ayodhya. Rama promised him that He would render all help and support. That is why even today, people extol Rama as *Sathyavakparipalaka* (one who adheres to truthful speech).

Today, many people read the holy *Ramayana*, but few understand its essence. They spend their time in acquiring bookish knowledge and superficial knowledge but fail to have practical knowledge. There are many people who can explain the teachings of *Ramayana* in a beautiful way, but how many of them obey the command of their fathers in their daily life? Not many! What is the use of reading various texts if we do not put into practice the message contained in them? Can anyone enjoy the taste of various delicious items such as *mysore pak*, *gulab jamoon*, and *jilebi* by merely repeating their names? No. One can enjoy the taste only when one eats them. Mere textual information is of no use. But, today, man is interested only in information and not transformation. Intellect will blossom only when there is transformation.

*If your ambitions are not fulfilled,
do not waver or get depressed.
He is a realized one who is cheerful
in the face of all adversities.*

[Telugu Poem]

One has to face many obstacles in life, but one should never get depressed. Life is a challenge, meet it. Life is a dream, realize it. Life is a game, play it. Life is love, enjoy it. Be cheerful and courageous in the face of adversities; never give scope to any weakness whatsoever. The *Vedanta* declared, *Na Ayamatra balaheenena labhya* (a weak-minded person cannot realize the *Atma*). A weak-minded person cannot accomplish anything. So, be strong-minded. Develop faith in that which is good.

*Since there is no fear of sin and love for God,
Humanness is on the decline in human beings.
This is the cause for lack of peace in the world.*

[Telugu Poem]

Therefore, man should cultivate *Daiva preeti*, *papa bheeti*, and *sangha neeti* (love for God, fear of sin and morality in society). Though Rama and Ravana were equally well versed in all forms of knowledge, sage Valmiki extolled Rama as Divine and condemned Ravana as a foolish one. What is the reason? Ravana did not translate into action the knowledge he had acquired; on the contrary he used it for wicked purposes. On the other hand, Rama translated all his knowledge into action and gave joy to one and all. *Sarvaloka hithe ratah* (Rama was engaged in the welfare of all). *Sarvajnanopasampannah* (He was the master of all forms of knowledge). *Sarvasamudhita guna-*

ihi (He was the embodiment of all good qualities). These are the three aspects that manifested Rama's divinity.

Whoever has these three aspects is essentially divine. In fact, everyone is divine. But because of attachment to the body, man is not able to understand his divine nature. Man can experience and enjoy divinity only by treading along the path of love. Love is God; God is love. So, live in love.

*Start the day with love
Spend the day with love
Fill the day with love
End the day with love
This is the way to God.*

The best sadhana: love everybody

The cause for man's suffering is that he has constricted his love to himself and his family. He should develop the broad feeling that all are his brothers and sisters. Expansion of love is life; contraction of love is death. All are the children of God. All are sparks of the Divine. Lord Krishna declared in the *Bhagavad Gita: Mamaivamso jeevaloke jeevabhutha sanathana* (eternal *Atma* in all bodies is a part of My Being). So, man should have the broad feeling to identify himself with everyone. Humanity can never progress without broad feelings.

*See no evil, see what is good
Hear no evil, hear what is good
Talk no evil, talk what is good
Think no evil, think what is good
Do no evil, do what is good
This is the way to God.*

When there is such an easy path to divinity, why do you trouble yourself by undertaking rigorous spiritual practices such as *japa*, *thapa*, and *yoga*? Divinity cannot be attained by all these austerities. How easy it is to love everybody!

Love all and think of divinity. Moses used to think of Jesus all the time. As a result, his face shone with divine effulgence. He resembled Jesus so much that people used to mistake him for Jesus. Ratnakara, a robber, on being advised by Narada started chanting the name of Rama incessantly, as a result of which the radiance of Rama was seen on his countenance and he became sage Valmiki. Rama is *Lokadatha* (the giver of the world) and Valmiki became *Slokadatha* (composer of the holy hymns). There is no difference between the giver and the composer. The *Vedas* declare, *Brahmavid Brahmaiva Bhavathi* (the knower of *Brahman* becomes *Brahman* himself). So, you should always think good, do good, talk good, and hear good. Only then you can become good. A true human being is one who is good. A wicked person can never be called a human being.

The divine nature in man

There are four qualities in man: the divine, demonic, animal and human. What is the divine quality in man? *Sarvaloka hithe ratah*. (engaged in the welfare of everybody). That is the divine nature. What is the human quality? Always undertake meritorious deeds (*punya*). Never indulge in sin (*papa*). *Paropakara punyaya papaya parapeedanam* (rendering help to others is merit, harming others is sin). Help ever, Hurt never. What constitutes the animal quality in man? *Jnanena sunya pasubhir samana* (devoid of wisdom man is equivalent to an animal). The purpose of human life does not lie in merely eat-

ing, drinking, sleeping, and indulging in materialistic comforts. Even animals indulge in such activities. But unlike man, animals do not possess the evil qualities of amassing, robbing, and stealing. Today man is human only in form, but not in behavior.

Less luggage, more comfort

Janthoonam narajanma durlabham (human life is the most difficult to attain of all living beings). The good that you experience in this life is the result of meritorious deeds done in several past lives. This human life is not new. This message is contained in the word *manava*. *Ma* means 'not'; *nava* means 'new', which means human life is not new.

Today man has degenerated to the level of an animal due to excessive desires. Less luggage more comfort makes travel a pleasure. But, the desires (luggage) in man are multiplying day by day. Human life is a long journey. One should lead a divine life (*divya jeevanam*), not a mean life (*deena jeevanam*). Always be happy. Difficulties do come in life. That is the law of nature. Never get disheartened by them. Difficulties are like passing clouds. Difficulties come and go, but morality comes and grows. Unfortunately, there is decline in moral values in the society today.

Rama stood as a shining example of upholding the moral values in the society. Even when he was asked to leave for the forest at a time when he was supposed to be coronated, he was not perturbed in the least. *Sukhadukhe samekruthva labhalabhau jayajayau* (he is an equal minded one who treats the dualities of life — pain and pleasure, victory and defeat, gain and loss— alike). Rama displayed this virtue of equanimity. Today, man aspires for positions of authority though he does not

deserve them. But Rama relinquished the position even though He deserved it. Rama was courageous in the face of adversities. He never gave any scope for weakness. He led the life of a *dheera* (courageous one), not a *deena* (weak-minded).

The same is the case of one who is in His company. Hanuman, by contemplating on Rama incessantly, became a *dheera*. He displayed this quality of courageousness in the court of Ravana. But the same Hanuman stood like a *deena* (humble one) in Rama's presence. This drives home the point that one should be a *deena* (humble one) in front of divinity and *dheera* (courageous one) in the face of evil.

Control your desire to the extent possible

Annihilate the evil qualities of *kama* (desire), *krodha* (anger), and *lobha* (greed). Ravana ruined not only himself, but also his dynasty because of *kama*. Therefore, to the extent possible control your desires. Today the Government has imposed ceiling on land and property through legislation, but what is essential is ceiling on desires. Not only did Hiranyakasipu refrain from chanting the name of Lord Hari, he also insisted that his son Prahlada follow suit. He developed hatred toward his own son for singing the praise of Lord Had against his wishes. This evil quality of anger led to his doom.

Duryodhana was greed personified. He was not prepared to part with even a small piece of land. He subjected the Pandavas to enormous hardships. What happened to him ultimately? He became a victim of his own greed.

Desire, anger and greed are the greatest impediments in the path of spirituality. Render help to others, if possible. Never hate anybody under any circumstances. The essence of eight-

een *Puranas* is contained in these two maxims: Help ever, Hurt never.

Spirituality promotes spirit of unity

The story of the Ramayana reveals the ideal relationship that should exist between brothers. Lakshmana and Satrughna served Rama and Bharata respectively, with utmost devotion and sincerity. When Lakshmana fainted in the battlefield, Rama lamented, “In this world, I might find another mother like Kausalya, a wife like Sita, but definitely not a brother like Lakshmana.” A brother should be like this —one who respects elders and brings name and fame to the whole family. It is the unity amongst the brothers that brought reputation to the whole family.

The same was the case with the Pandavas also. The five Pandavas could defeat hundred Kauravas because they stood united. Even though Vali and Sugriva were just two, they fell apart because of lack of unity. Rama restored the kingdom to Sugriva, since he completely surrendered to Him. Similar was the case with Ravana, Vibhishana, and Kumbhakarna. Any big task can be accomplished if the five fingers are united. Otherwise even a small task becomes extremely difficult. So, everyone should strive for unity.

Spirituality destroys narrow mindedness and confers unity, cooperation and universal peace.

[Telugu Poem]

Unity is very essential. Through unity, you can understand spirituality. Do not hate anybody. Do not develop ill feelings towards others. Then you can become a true human being. Spiritual practices are just a waste of time if you cannot over-

come your selfishness. Do not engage in spiritual activities aspiring for your own liberation, because it would amount to selfishness. Work for the redemption of one and all. Let everybody attain divinity and experience divine bliss. You should have such broad feelings. Your welfare lies in the welfare of the society.

Spend your life in selfless service

Embodiments of Love! You do not need to undertake any spiritual practices. Experience the innate divinity in everyone by following the path of love. Love is God. Spend your life in selfless service. This is the teaching of Rama.

In order to demonstrate to the world the ideal character of Lakshmana, Rama subjected him to a test. When Sita, Rama and Lakshmana were residing on Chitrakoota mountain, one day Lakshmana went into the forest to fetch some food. Taking this opportunity, Rama decided to test Lakshmana. He asked Sita to play her role in this divine drama. As Lakshmana was returning with food, Sita pretended to be asleep under a tree, keeping her head on the lap of Rama. Rama asked Lakshmana to keep Sita's head on his lap without disturbing her sleep as He had some other important work to attend to.

Rama wanted to observe the feelings of Lakshmana. So, He assumed the form of a parrot and perched on the same tree. Considering Sita as his mother, Lakshmana closed his eyes and went into deep contemplation of Lord Rama. Rama in the form of a parrot started singing:

*It is easy to wake up someone who is fast asleep,
but is it possible for anyone to wake up a person
who is pretending to be asleep?*

[Telugu Poem]

Sita pretended to be fast asleep and even started snoring! In all respects, Sita and Rama were a perfect match for each other. After some time, Rama returned as if from somewhere and 'woke up' Sita. Sita opened her eyes as if from deep sleep and expressed her satisfaction to Rama that she had a sound and undisturbed sleep. The *leelas* (pranks) of God are mysterious, wonderful, and sacred. God tests a devotee in order to shower His grace on him and protect him. Lakshmana fell at Rama's feet and said, "I am Your servant. It is my duty to serve You in the way You want me to."

Lakshaman's sincerity and devotion

When Sita was being taken away forcibly by Ravana, she bundled all her jewels and dropped them from above. The *vanaras* (monkeys) found the jewels and took them to Sugriva. When Rama and Lakshmana met Sugriva, he showed them the jewels and asked if they belonged to Sita. Since Rama did not know, He asked Lakshmana to see. Lakshmana replied, "Brother, I don't know whom these earrings and bracelets belong to. But I am sure that these anklets belong to Mother Sita."

On being questioned as to how he could recognize Sita's anklets, Lakshmana said, "It was my practice to prostrate at her lotus feet every morning. While doing so I had noticed Mother Sita's anklets."

Rama was pleased with Lakshmana's sincerity and devotion and showered praises on him and said that he could not find a brother like Lakshmana anywhere in the world. Later Rama said that it was because of Lakshmana's strength and support that He could defeat Ravana and bring Sita back to Ayodhya.

The *Ramayana* demonstrates that anything can be achieved through sincerity and devotion. The story of the *Ramayana* is so enchanting and captivating that one feels like listening to it again and again. *Bharatiyas* (Indians) have been singing the story of Rama since ancient times. Everyone should try to understand the essence of the *Ramayana*. The *Ramayana* teaches that one should have a good character, one should obey the command of the father and respect the parents, and there should be unity among brothers. If you follow these teachings in letter and spirit, your life itself will become a living *Ramayana*.

Heart is the real temple

Students should understand that God is their best friend. All the worldly friends are lured by your position, power, and self. Once your position and power are gone, gone are your friends too. God is the only friend, in the real sense of the term. The whole world is a book, and your conscience is your real *guru*. Why trouble yourself going after various worldly *gurus*? Follow your conscience and experience divinity. The Principle of the *Atma*, which reveals the secrets of your mind, is your true *guru*. *Guru* is one who is formless and beyond all attributes.

Gurur-Brahma Gurur — Vishnu
Gurur - Devo Maheswara,
Guru Sakshath Param Brahma
Thasmai Sri Gurave Namah.

Consider God as your mother, father, friend, and everything. Take God as your *guru*, follow Him and merge in Him. If you have God as your *guru*, you can achieve everything in

life. Develop love for God and be recipients of His love and grace. Develop friendship with God and the whole world will be under your control. Troubles and turmoil are part and parcel of one's life. Overcome them by chanting the divine name. Be fearless.

Do not restrict God to temples and pilgrimage centers. He is *Hridayavasi* (indweller of the heart). He is in you, with you, above, you, around you. You do not need to visit various pilgrimage centers. Your heart is the real pilgrimage center.

Mira also echoed the same feelings. When her husband asked her to leave the temple premises, she said to Krishna, "None can separate You from me. My heart is Your temple." In the *Gita*, Lord Krishna declared, *Kshetraajnam Chapi Maam Viddhi* (recognise Me as the indweller of all beings). The body is the field, and the *Atmic* Principle is the indweller of all fields. So, the *kshetra* (field) and the *kshetraajna* (knower of the field) are within you. Bliss is not present in a foreign land; it is present within you. In order to experience bliss, develop love in your heart.

You should pray to God to grant you that which He possesses and you do not. What do you lack? Peace and bliss. Ask and it shall be granted. Do not ask God for the fulfillment of mean desires. All the worldly things are fleeting and momentary. Only God is immutable, pure, eternal, and immortal. So, spend your time in singing the glory of God. By sincere prayer, you can discover your latent divinity.

At the time of his departure to the forest along with Rama and Sita, Sumitra counseled Lakshmana thus: "Never be under the impression that you are going to the forest. Wherever Rama and Sita are present, that itself is Ayodhya. This Ayodhya without Sita and Rama is a veritable forest. Consider Sita

and Rama as your mother and father and serve them to the best of your ability with all love, sincerity, faith and devotion.” You cannot find a woman greater than Sumitra in this world. She blessed her son to serve God wholeheartedly. The term Sumitra means good friend (*Su* - good, *Mitra* - friend). Such noble mothers like Sumitra and sons like Lakshmana with total devotion to God are needed today.

Unity is the need of the hour today. It is unity that protects the world. The prosperity and welfare of the society depends upon the individual. Our thoughts are our greatest asset. If the thoughts are sacred, you will have sacred results. Pleasure and pain are the consequences of your thoughts. So, sanctify your thoughts. When thoughts are good and powerful, you can achieve anything.

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