

**T**he most valuable contribution of *Vālmīki* to the time honoured tradition of *Rāmāyaṇa* cult and culture is the name '*Rāmāyaṇa*' chosen by him for his immortal composition. We do not normally go into its etymology as the name is very simple, catching and homely even for the illiterate. But the main concern of the sage poet in writing this epic poem will reveal itself to us only when we try to understand the genius behind this coinage.

Literally, the word '*Rāmāyaṇa*' means the '*ayanam*' of *Rāma*. By '*ayanam*', the poet perhaps means abode, path, movement, goal or simply march. Thus *Rāmāyaṇa* will mean the '*March of Rāma*'. This also implies that the *Rāmāyaṇa* as conceived by the poet is not a mere story, but much more than that. It is true that even as a story, the epic composition is superb, fascinating and captivating even for children. But it is the '*ayanam*' or the '*March*' part of it that is more significant. The sage poet wants us to realise this real significance of his treatise by carefully observing how '*Rāma*', the Man of his vision acts and reacts responding to the normal and natural course of events that encounter him in his life. **What** he does is not so much important as **how** he does it. How he takes things as they approach him and tries to face the problems as they face him is to be studied properly to understand the beauty of his magnificent March in search of truth, justice, love, compassion, dignity, decency, dedication and humanity that can excel even divinity.

A discerning reader of *Rāmāyaṇa* will appreciate that there is an inbuilt rhythm in the great grand March of *Rāma* which the poet chose to call *Rāmāyaṇa*. It is this rhythm that brings grace and grandeur to the



movements of *Rāma* making the March sing for itself. This movement or march transforms the events both pleasant and unpleasant-into sweet melodies that spring from the hearts of those who act and also those who observe. It is this point of view that makes us feel that *Rāmāyaṇa*, the first Indian epic presented by *Vālmīki* reads like a song, the language of the heart. That is why *Vālmīki* is often compared to a cuckoo chanting the name of *Rāma* in a voice that is sweet in sense and spirit.

There is one more point worth noting in the nomenclature of the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*. The two component words- *Rāma* and *ayana* are so combined in the name *Rāmāyaṇa* that the *ayana* can be applied to both *Rāma* and *Rāmā* (meaning *Sītā*). In fact *Vālmīkī* uses the word *Rāmā* (रामा) to denote *Sītā* on several occasions. Thus the word *Rāmāyaṇa* can easily mean the march of both *Rāma* and his life companion *Sītā*. Practically what we see in the *Rāmāyaṇa* is a coordinated march of *Rāma* and *Sītā*. They are two faces of the same coin. A strange, surprising and amusing identity between the two characters- both in physical form and in mental set up was noticed by *Hanumān* when he sees her for the first time in *Laṅkā*. He exclaims.

अस्या देव्या यथारूपं अङ्ग-प्रत्यङ्ग-सौष्ठवम् । रामस्य च यथारूपं तस्येयमसितेक्षणा ॥

अस्या देव्या मनस्तस्मिन् तस्य चास्यां प्रतिष्ठितम् । [वा० रा० ५.१५.५१-५२]

*asyā devyā yathārūpaṁ aṅgapratyaṅga sauṣṭhavam ।*

*rāmasya ca yathārūpaṁ tasye-yamasitekṣaṇā ॥*

*asyā devyā manaśtasmin tasya cāsyāṁ pratiṣṭhitam ।* [vā. rā. 5.15.51-52]

[This noble lady closely resembles *Rāma* even in minute physical features. There is absolutely no difference between the two. Their minds also must be thinking on the same lines and in the same wave-length.]

*Rāmāyaṇa* is therefore, a coordinated march of *Rāma* and *Sītā* whose sole mission in life was to promote this cosmic rhythm in all our activities. In spite of unsurmountable problems and untold suffering at every stage in their missionary march, they ultimately succeeded in establishing truth and



justice as the permanent solutions for all problems in life. *Sumantra*, the royal charioteer, makes a significant observation while consoling *Daśaratha* and *Kauśalyā* not to feel depressed on account of the suffering to which *Rāma* and *Sītā* are subjected. He assures them that their suffering is going to create a story in the history of mankind which will be sung and celebrated for all time to come,

इदं हि चरितं लोके प्रतिष्ठास्यति शाश्वतम् ।

[वा० रा० २.६०.२१]

*idaṁ hi caritaṁ loke pratiṣṭhāsyati śāśvataṁ ।*

[vā. rā. 2.60.21]

As a song of life, *Rāmāyaṇa* reaffirms the universal truth that it is suffering that gives rise to any lyrical expression. *Vālmīki* himself experienced this when he saw the couple of birds shot at mercilessly by a cruel hunter. Suddenly he burst into emotional ecstasy which took the form of a metrical expression which happened to be the inaugural verse composed by the poet without himself being conscious of it. This oft-quoted verse has become immortal as it transformed pathos into poetry.

As if to highlight the dynamic nature of the March of *Rāma*, *Vālmīki* introduces *Viśvāmitra* in the same canto (*Balakāṇḍa*-18) in which he describes the advent of *Rāma*. *Viśvāmitra* approaches King *Daśaratha* with a request to spare the services of his son *Rāma* for protecting his *yajña* from the terrorism of two demons, *Mārīca* and *Subāhu*. *Daśaratha* hesitates to comply with this request as he feels that his son, hardly 16 years, can not be deputed for such a challenging task. But *Viśvāmitra* tells him that his son *Rāma* is not an ordinary prince but a great soul (*mahātmā*) born with immense potentialities deriving his full strength from Truth Eternal (*satya-parākrama*). But the affectionate father almost refuses to do this and instead offers himself for this perilous task. Then his family priest *Vaśiṣṭha* intervenes at the instance of *Viśvāmitra* and tells *Daśaratha* that the sage *Viśvāmitra* has not come merely to seek his help; but his real intention is to project the potential divinity of *Rāma* and present him as a universal figure. Convinced that the challenging task that has come on its



own is not only in the personal interests of *Rāma* but more significantly in the larger interests of the destruction of evil forces and resurrection of human values, the king ultimately sends *Rāma* with his brother *Lakṣmaṇa* for this first assignment sponsored by the greatest sage of his times, *Viśvāmitra*. This marks the beginning of the March of *Rāma*. It was a feast for the eyes of both gods in the heaven and saintly personalities on earth to see the two princes *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa* following the foot-prints of *Viśvāmitra*, the seer of *Gāyatrī*.

Though *Viśvāmitra* wanted *Rāma* for ten nights, the itinerary extends up to 24 days till *Rāma* and his three brothers get married in *Mithilā*. In the early hours of the 25<sup>th</sup> day *Viśvāmitra* leaves for his native hill-station in the North (*jagāmottara-parvatam*) having accomplished his mission of inaugurating the March of *Rāma* for the betterment of humanity. Though the original task contemplated was just to protect the *yajña* from the two demons, several other adventures also await the arrival of *Rāma*. *Viśvāmitra* equips *Rāma* with all the weapons of offence and defence on the way to enable him to meet the challenges. It was in a way a refresher course for the young prince potentially divine and temperamentally inclined to do anything to promote universal good under the guidance of the great sage *Viśvāmitra*.

The spiritual diplomacy with which *Viśvāmitra* conducts the tour is marvellous. Though he does not spell out the various items and events he had in mind, he executes the plan in a systematic way. We come to know that the *Ahalyā* episode had already been planned by him only when *Śatānanda* enquires about it on seeing *Viśvāmitra* in *Mithilā*. The *Tāṭakā* episode was also a pre-planned one because when *Rāma* hesitates to kill her, *Viśvāmitra* insists on the execution of his orders. *Rāma* 's hesitation was that as his first adventure under the stewardship of *Viśvāmitra*, he was to kill a woman however devilish and dreadful she might be. But very soon he realises that it is his duty to obey the orders of his father and the preceptor. He expresses this in clear terms before he takes up his arms.



He says:

पितुर्वचन-निर्देशात् पितुर्वचन-गौरवात् ।

वचनं कौशिकस्येति कर्तव्यमविशङ्कया ॥

[वा.रा. १.२६.२]

*piturvacana-nirdeśāt piturvacana-gauravāt ।*

*vacanam kauśikasyeti kartavyamaviśaṅkayā ॥*

[vā. rā. 1.26.2]

The subtle point underlined in this event is that *Tātakā* being the mother of *Mārīca* should be dispensed with before handling *Mārīca*. This paves the way for the main task of protecting the *yajña*. *Mārīca* figures again at the time of abduction of *Sītā*. *Rāma* saves him on his first appearance despatching him to a distant land and teaching him a lesson which he remembers throughout his life. His first encounter with *Rāma* brings about a total change in his outlook. He tells *Rāvaṇa* that *Rāma* is an embodiment of *Dharma* (रामो विग्रहवान् धर्मः- *rāmo vighrahavān dharmah*) and any attempt to confront him is inviting total destruction. Thus this incident, the first adventure in the March of *Rāma*, forms the basis for the ultimate goal of *Rāma*.

Even the trip to *Mithilā* was unspelt, though not totally unscheduled. After the protection of *yajña* was over, the sages of *Siddhāśrama* suggest that the two princes should be taken to *Mithilā* so that they can see another *yajña*, *dhanur-yajña*, which King *Janaka* was performing there. *Viśvāmitra* immediately accepts the suggestion and the party proceeds to *Mithilā*.

The question arises whether the sage *Viśvāmitra* was justified in extending the term beyond 10 nights as mentioned by him in *Ayodhyā*. The answer lies in two things. Firstly, when *Viśvāmitra* went to *Ayodhyā*, the royal family and the elders were discussing about the marriage of the four princes and the arrival of the sage is reported to King *Daśaratha* exactly at that moment. Secondly, *Vasiṣṭha* also hints at this when he assures the King that it is in the interest of *Rāma* that he should accompany *Viśvāmitra* (तव पुत्र हितार्थाय - *tava putra hitārthāya*). These two things provide full justification for the decision taken by *Viśvāmitra* regarding the extended trip to *Mithilā*.



But the most remarkable feature about the whole story of *Viśvāmitra's* intervention (and a timely one) is that the main character *Rāma* who is not only benefitted but also has benefitted others maintains a modest and poised outlook towards all events. He has no aspiration or ambition for his own sake. He is never excited even when he breaks the bow of Lord *Śiva*. He waits till his father approves the proposal of his marriage. He just performs his duty as per the instruction from his elders. The only area in which he shows keen interest is in learning more and more from the sage *Viśvāmitra*. He listens to the stories narrated by him for hours together with rapt attention sometimes till midnight. In course of his casual conversation with the sage, he equips himself with the basic knowledge about the cosmic order and the role of an individual in the universal set up. He never expected that the sage would initiate him into the most mystic powers like *Balā*, *Atibalā* and number of missiles that would be kept at his beck and call. But all these achievements showered on him voluntarily by a sage who was penance personified only add to his humility. He is never conscious of his assets and achievements. His only concern is the service he is able to render to the vast mass of humanity.

All this shows that he has recognised the inbuilt rhythm in the cosmic music which, if closely followed and promoted makes the lives of all living beings blissful- transcending the layers of pain and pleasure, distress and delight.

After *Viśvāmitra* leaves for his abode, *Rāma* faces a fierce encounter with *Paraśurāma*. He manages this independently without getting upset and also without causing any embarrassment to his formidable opponent. On the other hand the incident results in spectacular success for himself and immense relief and redemption to the opponent.

Thus the inaugural March of *Rāma* from *Ayodhyā* to *Mithilā* and back strikes a pleasant and promising note for the smooth running of the future events. *Sītā*, the embodiment of grace (*śrīśvarūpiṇī*) also joins him in his march in search of service before self. As the most fitting life companion



of *Rāma*, she adds fragrance to his sweetness, beauty to his truth and patience to his penance. *Vālmīki* says while referring to their mutual understanding that they speak in the language of their hearts so that their hearts can speak for themselves making their union a song of life.

The real music of life starts in *Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa* when the proposed coronation of *Rāma* takes the form of his exile for fourteen years on a trivial ground. As the crisis originates from lust for power on the part of *Kaikeyī*, the most beloved of all the queens of *Daśaratha* and *Daśaratha* was helpless and miserably caught in the meshes of the two boons granted by him to *Kaikeyī* way back, it poses a threat to the prestige of the royal family and also to the basic human values and the norms of the state-administration. The crisis starts at midnight when *Kaikeyī* takes a firm stand and some amicable solution had to be found before the sunrise as the whole of *Ayodhyā* was eagerly waiting for the most exciting event of the coronation.

The moment *Rāma* comes to know of this terrible crisis, he resolves it in a minute offering himself to fulfil the desires of his stepmother *Kaikeyī*. The conflict between truth and justice discussed throughout the night by *Daśaratha* and *Kaikeyī* ends with one sentence spoken by *Rāma*. Without any hesitation, he said, 'Here I go, let the proposal stand as desired' (*evamastu, gamiṣyāmi*). The contrast between the shameless selfishness of *Kaikeyī* and the spirit of selfless sacrifice on the part of *Rāma* is so striking and surprising to the whole of *Ayodhyā* that the news spreads to the remote corners of the city in seconds after *Rāma* decides to leave *Ayodhyā* the same day before sunset. The people who spent the whole night eagerly waiting for the sunrise and the enthronement of *Rāma* that was to follow receive the news of exile with a shock, a rude shock as no one could expect such a turn of events overnight from the royal family headed by *Daśaratha* who cared more for his word than for his life. But the irony is that nobody was to be blamed because everyone including *Kaikeyī* was justified and their entire brunt of the cruel destiny had to be



taken upon him by *Rāma* with a genuine smile converting the crisis into a challenge. This is what makes *Rāmāyaṇa*, the March of *Rāma*, a song of life. Taking things in their normal course with a spirit of confidence in himself and those who have a heart to feel and brain to think in the right direction is what projects *Rāma* as the most cherished member of the world of humanity (*lokābhirāma*).

When *Kaikeyī* feels nervous that the departure of *Rāma* may be slightly delayed awaiting the arrival of *Bharata*, *Rāma* catches the hint and clarifies her doubt and his stand saying:

नाहमर्थपरो देवि लोकमावस्तुमुत्सहे । विद्धि मामृषिभिस्तुल्यं विमलं धर्ममाश्रितम् ॥ [वा.रा. २.१६.२० ]

*nā-ham-arthaparo devi lokamā-vastum-utsahe ।*

*viddhi mām-ṛṣibhistulyaṁ vimalaṁ dharmam-āśritam ॥* [vā. rā. 2.19.20]

[Dear mother, I am not after the material possessions and positions. I am eager to join the world community and culture sanctified by the great sages. I prefer staying in the forests along with them to relaxing in the royal palace. I bank upon the blissful and the benevolent 'dharma' (righteous conduct) which supports and sustains this universe].

This declaration of *Rāma* marks the beginning of the second phase of his March.

The way *Rāma* tries to pacify his angry brother *Lakṣmaṇa* not to blame *Kāikeyī* for this tryst contemplated by her with destiny. When *Lakṣmaṇa* expresses his strong feeling that this injustice done should not be tolerated, *Rāma* tells him that in his view there is absolutely no difference between ruling *Ayodhyā* and living in the forests, and expresses his hope that the forest life may perhaps prove to be more satisfying as there can be wider openings there for serving humanity and promoting the basic values of truth and justice.



To convince *Sītā* that she should stay back looking after his old parents and not risk her own comforts by accompanying him to the forests, he presents several arguments. But the noble lady stronger than *Rāma* in her determination to stay where *Rāma* is- come what may, prepares herself for the forest-life leading the path of *Rāma*. She promises that she will not be a burden to him nor will she pose any problem to him. Ultimately *Rāma* fails in his attempts and *Sītā* succeeds in getting his whole hearted consent. This again confirms our thesis that *Rāmāyaṇa* is a coordinated march of *Rāma* and *Sītā*. It is not merely *Rāmāyaṇa*, but *Sītāyana* as well and *Vālmīki* known for his economy of words has combined the two in one by his skillful coinage of the word '*Rāmāyaṇa*' as title to his wonderful work-highly suggestive though very simple.

The way how *Rāma* takes things in a sportive manner trying to mitigate the negative aspect of all that happens can be seen in almost all the events that follow his major decision to start a new life with new challenges. The whole *Ayodhyā* wants him to stay back. *Vasiṣṭha* too tells *Kāikeyī* in categorical terms that no nation is worth its name if it is not governed by *Rāma* and even the forest becomes a nation if it is manned by *Rāma*.

न हि तद् भविता राष्ट्रं यत्र रामो न भूपतिः । तद्वनं भविता राष्ट्रं यत्र रामो निवत्स्यति ॥ [वा०रा० २.३७.२६]

*na hi tad bhavitā rāṣṭraṁ yatra rāmo na bhūpatiḥ ।*

*tad-vanaṁ bhavitā rāṣṭraṁ yatra rāmo nivatsyati ॥* [vā. rā. 2.37.29]

The helpless King *Daśaratha* suggests that he should be discarded as insane and taken into custody and *Rāma* should succeed him by general consent. *Sumantra* tells *Rāma* that his horses refuse to go back without *Rāma* in the chariot. Finally, even after *Rāma* settles down at *Citrakūṭa*, *Bharata* approaches him with all the citizens of *Ayodhyā* at his back and persuades him again and again to return to *Ayodhyā* and accept the position which rightly belongs to him.



But *Rāma* who moves in this mundane world making Truth (*satya*) and Righteousness (*dharma*) his two feet stands firm on his decision to spend the stipulated period of 14 years in the forests as desired by *Kaikeyī*. He presents his view-point in a refined and sophisticated language without offending any one. It takes some time for him to convince his brother *Bharata* that the ends of justice will be met by acting according to the wishes of his father. Finally he succeeds in evolving a formula which satisfies the requirements of truth and justice in letter and in spirit. According to the solution he offered, neither *Rāma* nor *Bharata* will be designated as ruler but *Bharata* will look after the welfare of the people in *Ayodhyā* by acting as a trustee and *Rāma* will have a wider jurisdiction beyond the boundaries of *Ayodhyā* and ensure proper administration of justice where injustice dominates. All the sages attending the summit meet in *Citrakūṭa* unanimously agree to this and *Bharata* too accepts it on the condition that he will carry out the orders of his brother *Rāma* exactly for 14 years and then hand over the Kingdom to him. He takes the sandals sanctified by *Rāma* and installs them on the throne. Virtually the governance is in the hands of the sandals and *Bharata* operates on their behalf. All that happens in *Citrakūṭa* speaks volumes about the cultural ethos of the two princes and presents an ideal for all the practitioners of public administration for all time to come.

The real problems and adventures start after the *Citrakūṭa* event. Just before entering into *Daṇḍaka*, the trinity- *Sītā*, *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa* meet the sage *Atri* and his noble wife *Anasūyā*. This meeting is also highly significant as it fortifies the party against all adversities that they may have to face in their forest life. Profusely blessed by the old lady *Anasūyā* whose spiritual powers get transmitted to *Sītā* through the gifts presented by her. The events upto this point only prepare the necessary back-ground for the virtual march of *Rāma* which starts from the moment they set foot in the *Daṇḍaka* forest. What we mean by saying that *Rāmāyaṇa*, the March of *Rāma* is a song of life finds ample illustration as *Rāma* advances in the forest area. A



mysterious chain of events seems to have been planned by some divine hand in such a way that the real purpose of *Rāma* 's exile gets served. *Rāma* rises to the occasion at every step and acts according to the sound advice of his inner voice without caring or even thinking of the consequence. He does this with immense faith in the providence which *Vālmīki* calls *yadṛcchā* (यदृच्छा). He has firm conviction that nothing can go wrong as long as we do not go wrong in our thoughts, words and deeds. It is this inbuilt rhythm of all his actions that makes his march a song of life.

What is strange about the March of *Rāma* is that even the demons who attack later become his admirers and help him in his further course of action. For instance, *Virādha*, the first demon to attack him as soon as he enters the forest realises in no time that his encounter with *Rāma* has resulted in his redemption from an old curse and he is now back to his original form. He then tells *Rāma* that sage *Śarabhaṅga* has been waiting for him. When *Rāma* meets *Śarabhaṅga*, he finds *Indra* there. But *Indra* disappears on seeing *Rāma*. *Śarabhaṅga*, in his turn, tells *Rāma* that another sage *Sutīkṣṇa* has been waiting for him. Again at the instance of *Sutīkṣṇa*, *Rāma* meets *Agastya* who directs him to make *Pañcavaṭī* his residence for the time being. All the time *Rāma* has been searching for a suitable place for him to stay. Every sage offers him his own hermitage. But *Rāma* wants a place which can serve his purpose. Only those who know his purpose can direct him in this matter. Ultimately *Agastya* does it. But he also tells *Rāma* that it shall be his moral responsibility to keep *Sītā* happy by fulfilling all her desires. Surprisingly, this is the constraint which compelled *Rāma* to run after *Mārīca* and this resulted in the abduction of *Sītā*.

If we carefully observe the various factors which contributed to this tragic event of *Sītā* 's abduction, we find that every body went wrong except *Rāvaṇa*. Even *Mārīca* could not gather courage to refuse to cooperate with *Rāvaṇa*. In spite of a word of caution from *Lakṣmaṇa*, *Rāma* wanted to take a chance and finish the deer once for all. No doubt, he did it, but at



what cost? Even *Lakṣmaṇa* lost his patience and deserted *Sītā* against the orders of *Rāma*. And *Sītā* too took fancy in the golden deer which she wanted to present to *Bharata* and the old ladies on return to *Ayodhyā*. *Jaṭāyu* who voluntarily took the responsibility of guarding the cottage in the absence of *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa* could not save her though he made the highest sacrifice for her. Thus the whole thing went against the bright side of things and what was to happen did happen inspite of all precautions and resources. This is where *Rāma* feels convinced that there is divine hand behind certain events which ultimately result in the general good though some people have to suffer for some time. This is how he reacts to the adversities in life. The real song of life, according to him, comes out of stresses and strains when they become unavoidable.

*Rāma* 's alliance with *Sugrīva* is another mystery in the March of *Rāma*. It was *Kabandha* who suggested this to *Rāma* after his hands were cut off by the two princes. Like *Virādha*, he too regains his original form and predicts that *Rāma* will certainly get *Sītā* back with the help of *Sugrīva*. However it was *Hanumān* who played a significant role in locating *Sītā* and uniting her with *Rāma*. More than half the battle was fought by *Hanumān*. The way *Hanumān* conducts himself in his relations with *Rāma* is superb and *Rāma* appreciates it.

The matchless magnanimity of *Rāma* is the most important factor which contributes to the epic grandeur of his personality. When he hears *Hanumān* for the first time, he recognises his great potentiality through his introductory words. He tells *Lakṣmaṇa* that here is an individual who has cultivated humility from *Ṛgveda*, sincerity from *Yajurveda* and substantial learning from *Sāmaveda*. With immense confidence in him, he gives his ring to *Hanumān* to be handed over to *Sītā* as a token of identification. When he comes back with solid evidence of having seen *Sītā*, he embraces him. This cordiality continues till the end when *Sītā* presents a golden chain to *Hanumān* at the time of the coronation ceremony in *Ayodhyā*.



*Rāma* maintains remarkable balance while dealing with intricate problems. He entertains *Vibhīṣaṇa* without any hesitation inspite of adverse opinion expressed by most of his counsellors including *Sugrīva*. He declares that it is his policy to provide shelter to any body who approaches him with a sense of insecurity. He even goes to the extent of saying that he is prepared to entertain and pardon even *Rāvaṇa*. In fact he does it in the battle-field when he sees *Rāvaṇa* for the first time confronting him. At the first sight, he admires his august personality and the radiance in his face. But the next moment, he pities him for having downgraded himself by committing a heinous crime. Then he makes up his mind to teach him a lesson. *Hanumān* carries *Rāma* on his shoulders while *Rāvaṇa* drives in his chariot. When *Rāvaṇa* hits *Hanumān* with a terrible arrow, *Rāma* destroys *Rāvaṇa* 's chariot and the charioteer completely and then attacks *Rāvaṇa* himself with a piercing arrow which makes *Rāvaṇa* faint on the spot and the bow in his hand suddenly drops down. *Rāvaṇa* nearly collapses and is almost finished. Then *Rāma* tells him not to strain further and asks him to go home, take rest and come back with new equipment later. This was worse than death for *Rāvaṇa*. But the magnanimity of *Rāma* lies in letting his enemy go. It requires a large heart to pardon an avowed and unpitiable enemy like *Rāvaṇa* having caught him utterly helpless. The reason is that *Rama* 's real intention was not to kill *Rāvaṇa* but to make him realise what a cowardly act he has done. He would have even pardoned *Rāvaṇa* on the battle-field itself if only *Rāvaṇa* had chosen to ask for it. This single instance is enough to appreciate the mental harmony *Rāma* maintained. This is the SONG OF LIFE.

Sometimes some doubts arise in the minds of some people about certain actions of *Rāma* which superficially appear to be unsound and even unjustifiable. For instance, the killing of *Vāli* was condemned by *Vāli* himself. The elaborate explanation was offered by *Rāma* to the complete satisfaction of the victim. *Rāma* did not run away after killing *Vāli*. On the other hand, he promised to carry out the last wishes of *Vāli* and kept his promise with additional benefits.



Similar doubts are still expressed about the fire-ordeal to which *Sītā* was subjected. *Sītā* herself challenges this strange attitude of *Rāma*. *Rāma* keeps quiet and looks down with burning anguish within. *Sītā* understands the heart of *Rāma* and *Rāma* knows how to communicate to her. It is very difficult for any third party to understand the language of their hearts. The whole misunderstanding between them just vanishes when *Rāma* takes *Vaidehī* into his lap while taking their seats in the *Puṣpaka-vimāna*. *Sītā* feels shy to sit so close to *Rāma*. On the way *Rāma* gives a running commentary of all the places they see from above and the various events connected with those places. This relieves *Sītā* of all her tension and she suggests to *Rāma* while over-flying *Kiṣkindhā* that we should take the ladies of *Kiṣkindhā* also with us to the capital city of *Ayodhyā*. Perhaps she was suddenly reminded of her fancy for the golden deer which has created all the story. *Rāma* readily accepts this suggestion and this adds amusement and music to the return journey. This is how *Vālmīki* hints at the light vein that *Rāma* and *Sītā* sometimes indulge in.

Humour and entertainment are ingrained in the two characters - *Rāma* and *Sītā*. If *Rāma* had not thought of talking to *Śūrpaṇakhā* in light vein and making her run from pillar (*Rāma*) to post (*Lakṣmaṇa*), things would not have taken such a serious turn and the *Rāmāyaṇa* would not have assumed the form of the March of *Rāma* singing for itself. *Rāma* indulges in a similar joke with the old brahmin who approaches him for some gifts at the time of his exile. As a preparation for their journey to the forests, they were giving away all their material possessions to the needy and dear ones. In this context when the poor old brahmin approaches *Rāma*, he tells the brahmin to throw a stick as far as he can and he will get as many cows as can fill the area covered by the stick. The old man demonstrates his strength with a nervous mind. Then *Rāma* tells him that whatever is left with him now will be his property. The old man is overwhelmed with joy on this compassion shown to him. This is how *Rāma* sometimes behaves like an average youth.



It is this human and humorous element in *Rāma* and *Sītā* that makes their coordinated March (*Rāmāyaṇam*) an amusing and alluring, yet highly exhilarating SONG OF LIFE.

रामायणं नमस्कृत्य नमस्कृत्य परायणम् ।  
वानरं च नरं नारीं ततः शुभमुदीरयेत् ॥  
शुभकृत् शुभमाप्नोति पापकृत् पापमश्नुते ।  
परं रामपदाभ्याशे सर्वं पापहरं शुभम् ॥

*rāmāyaṇam namaskṛtya namaskṛtya parāyaṇam ।*  
*vānaram ca naram nārīm tataḥ śubhamudīrayet ॥*  
*śubhakṛt śubhamāpnoti pāpakṛt pāpamaśnute ।*  
*param rāmapadābhyāśe sarvaṁ pāpaharam śubham ॥*

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Centre for Cultural Studies, Varanasi.