

The Ramayana: An Epic of Indian Ideals and Dharma

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ABSTRACT

The Ramayana is the holiest epic of Hindus. It was written by seer Valmiki. The story of The Ramayana is of two men, Lord Rama and Ravana, the king of Lanka. One is the apostle of good and the other of bad. Lord Rama is considered the greatest ideal human in Hindu mythology and the other, Ravana is known for his villainous attitude in the history of mankind. The characters in The Ramayana fulfil both sides of the coin whether the good or bad characters. The virtuous characters show the path of righteousness and the evil characters lead life to the doom. The character of Rama shows us the duty of Dharma and his wife Sita is the symbol of ideal woman in Hindu mythology. The Ramayana is not merely an epic of Hindu religion, but it is the symbol of the entire world which teaches us how to live a pious life amidst the adverse circumstances.

Keywords: *Apostle, considered, villainous, virtuous, righteousness, pious, adverse, circumstances.*

The *Ramayana* is an admired creation of Rishi Valmiki who was a great seer of India. It is the most splendid work and the main source of inspiration, ideals and fascination for all kinds of people all over the world. Valmiki made it sublime work with his stupendous learning. If anyone has a desire to know India, he should have to study Indian history especially considering the life of Lord Rama. It describes the magnificent culture and civilization of India. As we know that there are two great epics of India, named the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Both epics are the testimony of Indian civilization during their past. The *Ramayana* tells us the duty of Dharma and the *Mahabharata* tells us the duty of Karma. If we thoroughly observe these great epics, all the characters of Indian civilization including their magnificent virtues as well as their shortcomings, will be disclosed one by one. The story of duty of Dharma (Ram) and the ideal woman (Sita) is liked by all kinds of people with great rejoicing whether they are the people of palace or the people of the ground. The *Ramayana* is an epic that leads us to the

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path of virtue in the form of Dharma and teaches us never to forget your duty towards parents, a wife, a brother, a son and the people of your society. Prof. C. Blucke comments that

"the popularity of Valmiki's Ramayana and the voluminous Rama, literature of many countries in a monument to the idea of India, its high esteemed of moral values and its belief in the ultimate triumph of good over evil. In the same way, the enthusiastic response of the millions of Indians to the message of Ramcharitmanas testifies to the deep seated religious belief and spontaneous piety of the soul of India."¹

There are many scholars who have tried their hand to trace the origin of the *Ramayana* and the great devotees of the Ramayana in Hindu religion who are living in India or also living in abroad, believe Rama, the ideal hero of the epic *the Ramayana* and they have a staunch faith that Rama is the incarnation of lord Vishnu. Rama has been drawn as an ideal man who fulfils all his duties faithfully and sincerely with great devotion and respect that shows him all noble qualities and he is the ideal model for all the coming generations. There are several characters, especially female characters who play dominant roles in the epic and enrich Ram's greatness at a high level. Sita, Kaushalya, Kaikai, Sumitra, Mandodari, Trijata, Tara, Urmila and Manthra are the marvellous characters who play a vital role in the epic, *the Ramayana*.

In Ramayana, Lord Rama is portrayed as the dutiful son, loving brother, caring husband and a great ruler. He did not tell lies and performed his duties earnestly and honestly. His only concern is to follow the path of virtue and never disobey the will of his father. When Dushratha, the king of Ayodhya, ordered him to go into exile, he thought only to fulfil his father's wish and followed his order with great respect. On the other hand, Lord Dushratha wanted Ram to be the king of Ayodhya, the next day but he didn't break the promise of Kaikeyi and was compelled to send Rama into exile. This was the greatness of Lord Rama that he did not speak against his stepmother and went away to exile for fourteen years silently. That is why he is known as 'Maryada Purushottama'.

It is clear that the influence of *the Ramayana* is too much on human beings. But there is no denying its impact on literature also. That is why most of the paintings, sculptures and other forms of art performing can be seen on the basis of the stories and episodes of the Ramayana. *The Ramayana* no doubt can be judged on different levels. It is the story of a single person that ought to be studied. The whole life of Lord Rama is the emblem of ideal living and teaches us how to restore Dharma on this earth. The character of Lord Rama is the paragon of love,

peace and inspiration in Indian mythology. He possessed all qualities of moral condition and virtue.

The story of the *Ramayana* manifests the conquest of good over evil. No other work of literature has a great influence on the human mind and soul as the Raman has. It shows the religious austerity and the moral virtues of a human being among the society. We cannot ignore this view that religion is the backbone of human society and has a great value in the life of human beings. Religion plays a vital role in the development of cultural society. The speeches

of Lord Rama present the noble and sublime ideals that make him singular among the other characters of Indian mythology.

It is said that the gods were very angry with the tyranny of Ravana who was the ruler of demons and rakshasas. He was not a common demon. He had possessed valuable powers by his austerity and services offering to God. He had 10 heads and 20 hands, but he used his power in offensive deeds. Through his power he often mocked the rishis and saints by creating disturbance in their ritual rites. All the saints became so scared at the arrival of Ravana. They had no power to do against Ravana. This was an insulting behaviour of Ravana towards the rishis and saints. When Lord Vishnu learnt about his evil designs, he decided to do something against him. Lord Vishnu was taken aback about what to do and how to control the activities of Ravana because Ravana had got a boon. Lord Vishnu decided to be born on this earth as a human being. It is known to all that Lord Rama is the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. In this way Lord Vishnu would be able to kill Ravana. Narad Muni Das son of Brahma who knew all about human beings' future explained that Rama is only a human being assisted with several aspiring goodness that seldom seemed like the character of God even.

Not only Rama but also all the characters are bound to be ideal characters. If Sita is an ideal wife, Lakshmana is also an ideal brother. The role of Hanuman is the epitome of devotion and worship. As Rama is the incarnation of God Vishnu Sita is known as the mythical incarnation of goddess Lakshmi, she is virtuous, sensible and never forgets her duty towards her husband Lord Rama. Sita has all great qualities. When Ravana tried to captivate Sita, she did not stagger from the path of virtue and patiently waited for husband. On the other hand, when she is deserted by her husband during the pregnancy, she fulfilled her duties with great devotion. In fact, she is a part of natural beauty and remains alive in harmony and peace in nature. She is

the embodiment of Dharma. When she heard, Rama was going to exile, she did not care about her imperial pleasure and implored to accompany him to spend forest life. Both Rama and Sita spent life in the forest peacefully without any grudge and complaint.

The main crucial character of Bharta, cannot be ignored. His devotion and sacrifice can't be overlooked. He is an ideal brother and a man of high virtue. When his mother plotted against the coronation of Lord Rama and reserved the throne for her son, he became very upset. He did not accept this crown ship and without any delay and went to the forest and implored Rama to rule. When he found himself helpless in returning Rama, he took Rama's sandal and said to

Rama, " I will put these on the throne and every day I shall place the fruit of any work at the feet on my Lord." Such is the ideal character of Bharta that becomes the ideal of every person in all ages.

The first Prime Minister of India Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru commenting on his views on the great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata says:

They deal with early days of the Indo-Aryans, their conquests and civil wars when they were expanding and consolidating themselves but they were composed and compiled later, I do not know of any books anywhere which have exercised such a continuous and pervasive influence on the mass mind as these two. Dating back to a remote antiquity they are still a living force in the life of the Indian people... They represent that typical Indian method of catering altogether for various degrees of cultural development, or the highest intellectual to the simple unread and untaught villager.... Deliberately they tried to build up a unity of outlook among the people which was to survive and overshadow all diversity".²

Many succeeding poets were influenced by the *Ramayana* in India. Alamkaras descriptions of nature, subject matter and plot construction were copied by the great poets of succeeding generation. There are several great authors of India borrowed the theme of *Ramayana* in their dramas. The great and eminent poet of Sanskrit, Kalidas who is considered as Shakespeare of India, wrote his play 'Raghuvansham' on the theme of *Ramayana*. Bhabvabhuti, an imminent poet wrote the Play, 'Mahavira Charita And the 'Uttaramacharita' are on the subject matter of Valmiki's *Ramayana*. The great scholar poet Bhutt has also taken the plot of *Ramayana* for his work. Murari the 'Anargharaghava' is based on the theme of the *Ramayana*. The Play 'Bala Ramayana' of Rajasekhara is also on the theme of the Ramayana. In this way it is clear that the Ramayana influences literature in many ways.

The popularity of the *Ramayana* is considered due to the ideology of Rama. On the other hand, in Hindu community, Lord Rama is known as the embodiment of the inner self or atma that is

why his mind and behaviour are without any impurities. He is the Paragon of God. All the ideals of Rama and the concept of Dharma impress all the people of India and teaches how to live a life of Dharma and virtue. On the other hand, Sita is the ideal woman of wisdom, spirituality, intellect and devotion. As a devoted wife Sita always busied in her affairs without any saying. Sita knows very well the innermost feelings of Lord Rama as well as his strength. When Rama reached Panchvati to fulfil his duty and dissuaded her mind by praising asuras and said, " Since they are the most powerful in all the world. What could be wiser than to live in harmony with them? Sita threatened him and told, " These days are numbered. My lord's

mission in life is to rid this world of them and establish peace on earth". Her husband's dented faith in her husband's valour is clearly seen here.

Indeed, the Ramayana is the ideal manifestation of Hindu culture. No doubt faithfulness, patience, devotion, sincerity, and rituals were also found in Indian culture long ago. The predominant activities of ritual rites and life of high ideals became the vital part of the people. Rishi Valmiki portrayed each detail in every character of the epic whether they are Lord Ram, Sita, Lakshman and Hanuman etc. Therefore, the Ramayana is the panorama of Indian culture and civilization. Sri Aurobindo says:

"The work of Valmiki has been an agent of almost incalculable power in the moulding of the cultural mind of India. It has been presented to be loved and initiated in figures like Rama and Sita made so divinely and with such a revelation of reality as to become objects of enduring cult and worship or like Hanuman, Lakshman, Bharat, the living human in ages of its ethical ideals. it has fashioned much of what is best and sweetest in the national character and it has evoked and fixed in those finer and exquisite yet firm soul-tones and that more delicate humanity of temperament which are a more valuable thing than the formal outsider of virtue and conduct..."³

The importance of Karma and Dharma in Lord Rama is also found in Kalidas' famous play, 'Raghuvansham'. The ideal royal Rama had the capacity to control his senses. The portrait of Lord Rama as Raghu is the undauntable figure between the conflicts of Karma and Dharma. As Barbera Stoler Miller comments:

"The high qualities of kinship that Kalidas' heroes possessed, qualified them to be called 'royal sages'. The epithet 'royal sage' (Rajarsi) signifies that the king's spiritual power is equal to his material strength and superiority. He is a sage (Rishi) by virtue of his discipline (Yoga), austerity (Tapas) and knowledge of sacred law (Dharma). It is his religious duty to keep order in the Cosmos by guarding his Kingdom; in this he is like a sage, guarding the realm of holy sacrifice. His responsibility to guide and protect those

beneath him, involves him in acts of penance that place him in the highest position of the temporal and spiritual hierarchy."⁴

On the other hand, Sita's character is the embodiment of ideal womanhood but in modern culture the role of Sita in a feminist outlook, is considered in two ways. First people think that the character of Sita is an instance of enslavement of women in Hindu culture and secondly, they feel that moulding Sita as a typical Hindu wife shows the initial male hegemony and female slavishness. It is also supposed that Sita's character emerges from the domestic violence in India.

One incident of the Ramayana has been presented in Ayodhya Kanda, indicates the ideal image of Sita. The scene is taken when Rama goes to Sita and informs her, " I am now going to the forest for 14 years as the behest of my father"(II.26.19). She hurriedly says without any doubt,"

I am going too". Rama is taken aback at her answer and tries to convince her by elaborating the horrors of the forest because he is not sure that a delicate lady like Sita will face the trials of forest life. Rama again tries to convince her about the terrible insecure life of the forest. Being an ideal wife, she does not delay in saying that she has no desire what matters to her and turns towards him and asks:

"Wherefore do you tender me this advice which makes me indeed look so small. O Rama,... In the case of women neither father nor son nor their own body nor mother nor female companions serve as an Asylum here or here. the husband alone is their refuge at all times."

The character of Sita in Ramayana depicts manifold traits of Indian Hindu woman who is always ready to fulfil her duty of Dharma. In Ayodyanagar Sita shows her indomitable courage as a Kshatriya woman and boldly speaks to Rama, "What are you afraid of? What are the things which you dread that you should reject me who have no other person to rally on earth? I am your wife entirely utterly and yet you discard me. Where has your moral courage gone?"

Sita doesn't stop here and adamantly argues:

"O Rama, that a wife who stands disunited from her husband would not be able to survive...Following my husband to the forest with devotion, I shall surely be absolved from all guilt... For the husband is the supremacy deity for a wife.... If you do not feel inclined at all to take me I shall resolve to poison fire or water to hasten my end," (II.30. 19).

No doubt such a woman like Sita cannot be traced in modern society where the women don't know the austerity of life and the ideal virtues of womanhood.

Sita, an ideal paragon of Dharma never forgets her duties towards the kingdom as well as her husband. Sita's intellectual outlook to analyse the situation, never distracts her from the path of virtue and dharma. For example, when Rama and Lakshmana are ready to leave her alone in the forest early in the morning for killing the rakshasas, Sita immediately comes forward and protects against her husband Rama, killing Rakshasas according to the degree of Rishi which is a transgression of a Muni or seer or saint the way in which Rama is compiled to fulfil duty himself in the forest.

The understanding of conjugal life of Rama and Sita, makes their life full of pleasure and happiness despite several contradictions in the forthcoming situations. Sita's bold and courageous nature makes Rama a great satisfaction and he says to her:

"You have said this to me because you have a right to do so. It was done in good faith, out of an honest desire to put me on the right path. I am not offended.... Nobody will chide one whom he does not care

for. You chide me because you are interested in me because you love me because you think I should do no wrong, commit no sin".(III.10.20.21)

The influence of Ramayana is very much on human society. We know that faithfulness, sincerity, obedience, and truthfulness and earnestness are the main qualities of an established society. The ideals of life are depicted in every episode of Ramayana. Every detail of the epic impacts on the human mind and helps to mould the characters in young age. The education system of that time was structured in the shape of Gurukul where Karma and Dharma were the main source of education. All kinds of students were educated there. There was no means of racism, casteism and religion, even the scheduled tribes were also a part of this Gurukul. Rama's friendship with Nishad King Guha tells us that untouchability was not seen at that time. Rama's submissive nature made a spell bound to everyone. Rama's sensibility is traced in his behaviour. Sabris profound faith in the darshan of Rama as well as Nishad king Guha's soul attachment for Rama is nonparallel in the tales of Indian history.

R K Narayan, the great Indian English writer also gives his views on Dharma in his novel, 'Ramayana'. He gives graphic details of Rama's ideal life of Dharma. He points out that Rama being a good son he obeys his father's order and becomes ready to go on traveling with Rishi Vishwamitra. He presents all the obstacles and hurdles of Rama's life in fulfilling his duty of Dharma in chapter 1st of the book. His father Dashratha loved Rama too much and he did not want to send Rama exile, but Kaikeyi's promise compels him to do so. Dasaratha implored

Rama not to leave. But Kaikeyi asked Rama, "It is your duty to help your father fulfil his promise otherwise he will be damning himself in this and other world. You owe him a duty as his son".⁵

Rama kept his promise and Dashrath could not bear this terrible shock and died. It is said in Hindu religion, 'Pran Jaye par Vachan Na Jaye'. Narayan explains many adverse situations that were faced by Rama during the period of exile. Rama never felt annoyed and did not show any trace of anger on his face. He fulfilled his duties of Dharma to the best of his ability.

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It is the story of love and exile. Rama the incarnation of Lord Vishnu was sent to earth to set free the world from the tyranny of Ravana because Ravana was kept in promise by God Brahma that he would not be defeated by any God, so Vishnu took Avatar in the form of a man, Rama on earth. In this way Valmiki's Ramayana is the vital source of inspiration for every generation and century. The character of Rama is the true embodiment of established norms to make society prosperous and happy. In fact, if we want to make life splendid we should follow the path of virtue and honesty like Rama.

Therefore, the Ramayana is the story of ancient times, but it is highly relevant in Indian religion. It manifests social and religious prospects of life in Indian culture; the entire epic is based on the path of Dharma as it is the essential concept in the Indian religions. It is replete

with heroism and virtue. No doubt Rama, the embodiment of Dharma, follows the path of righteousness for the welfare of the people. Both the characters, Rama and Sita are matchless. Rama was brave and virtuous while Sita was beautiful and kind. Sita's life is bound to the duty of Dharma and honour. On the other hand, Lakshmana fulfils his duty towards his brother and sister-in-law, Sita. He stands behind Rama as a strong warrior and performs his duties with great courage and respect. He only thinks about his brother's safety. All the characters give an impression on the mind of the readers. Indeed, the Ramayana is the source of learning virtues for each and every person of all ages. Therefore, it has gained immense popularity all over the world for its poetic qualities. It would be right to say that the Ramayana is like a casket in which different kinds of gems like characters are kept endowing knowledge in the field of world literature with several perspectives.

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