



National Journal of Hindi & Sanskrit Research

ISSN: 2454-9177

NJHSR 2019; 1(22): 110-113

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www.sanskritarticle.com

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Rāma: A Reappraisal Of The Heritage And Relevance Of The Maryādā Puroṣottama

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Abstract:

Our present century is marked by all availability of goods and apparatuses those are needed to run a contented life. In the world, anywhere there pervades greediness, antagonism and enmity. The pristine traditions, customs, beliefs, thinking pattern are changing gradually. Changes are unavoidable. But such things like moral and ethical values should be remained unharmed to make the world a worthy place to live in. Now, if, with the changing pace of time, a person becomes void of love and care towards his brothers and sisters, husband and wife lacks loyalty to each other, a son does not carry out his duties towards his parents, an administrator does not execute his role properly, a friend deceives, then, it is easily understood what will happen. Family norms will disintegrate and social order will break down into hundreds of pieces. At the present time, the relationships are falling; the ethical and moral orders of life are weakening. So, it is the high time to emphasize and bring to mind our precious values and revitalize ourselves by the medium of our long-cherished assets i.e. the vast knowledge kept in the form of moral and ethical lessons in our epics. The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki has influenced the thinking pattern of the whole nation for thousands of years. The characters of the Rāmāyaṇa stand forth as moral examples. In the eyes of the 'Bhāratīyas', Rāma is an ideal son, an ideal prince, a perfect man and the personification of all conceivable virtues. Thus, the Rāmāyaṇa sermonizes that "rāmadivat pravartitavyam na ravaṇādivat." Therefore, the need of the hour is that one must understand the inherent moral and ethical values of the Rāmāyaṇa and guide one's life through the pathway shown through it.

Key Words: Heritage, relevance, human values, moral & ethical values

Introduction:

As we all know, with the advancement of Science and Technology, the world now becomes a global village. Our present century is marked by all availability of goods and services, needed to run a contented life. However, anywhere, in the world, there spreads greediness, antagonism and conflicts incessantly. The age-old traditions, customs, beliefs, thinking pattern etc. are, as if, changing day by day. People say, gone are the days of Rāma and Yudhiṣṭhira. Some say "xei Rāmo nai Ayodhyā o nāi" Is it true? Can it be so? Changes are inevitable. But such things like moral and ethical values should be remained as it is, to make our planet earth a worthy place to live in. Now, suppose if, with the changing pace of time, a person becomes void of love and care towards his fellow people, brothers and sisters, again, husband and wife lacks mutual loyalty to each other, a son does not act upon his duties towards his parents, an administrator does not carry out his responsibility properly, a friend cheats, then, what will happen? Family norms will collapse and social order will certainly break down into thousands of pieces. It's a matter of worry and disdain that at the present time, the relationships are falling, the ethical and moral orders of life are failing.

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So, it is the high time to underscore and evoke our prized values and invigorate ourselves by the medium of our long-treasured wealth i.e. the vast knowledge kept in the form of moral and ethical lessons in our epics exhibited through the immutable characters like *maryādā puroṣottama* Rāma.

Objectives:

The present paper tries to highlight the inherent moral and ethical values of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and guide one's life through the pathway shown through it. The objective is to establish that the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, through its central character i.e. Rāma, deals with some of the most basic themes of human existence and constitutes a powerful exploration of the concept of *dharma*. There is the objective of preaching people that one should conduct like Rāma, not like Rāvaṇa i.e. *rāmādivat pravartitavyam na rāvaṇādivat*. The heritage and the character of Rāma is relevant in the present times also.

Methodology:

The present work will pursue a few steps of organized studies. The methodology of the research is purely descriptive in nature. Pertinent materials, books and other information are thoroughly studied. The study materials gathered are compared, cross-checked and hence critically examined from the point of view of the objectives of the present work.

Analysis:

The *Rāmāyaṇa* (RM) written by Vālmikī contains the story of prince Rāma and his exploits when banished to the forest. By the manoeuvrings of Mantharā, Kaikeyī all of a sudden demands his exilement; Rāma accepts his father Daśaratha's reluctant verdict with utter compliance and with the composed restraint, which characterizes him constantly. The story thus ranges from accounts of conspiracy at Daśaratha's courtyard in Ayodhyā to wanderings among ascetics in the woods, and culminates in the great battle at Lankā. Rāma, though an incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu lived a life of a mere human being, suffered and got mental anguish all through his life. He cried like a common human being, (Kale 28)¹ when Rāvaṇa, the king of the Rākṣasas, abducted his *Pranaballabhā* Sītā², could not find the whereabouts of Sītā. He searched for her here and there with the help of the giant monkey soldiers of Sugrīva, superheroes like Hanumān, Aṅgada and others. Eventually Rāma rescued Sītā from the clutches of Daśānan and punished him for seizure of Sītā.

The RM has influenced the thinking pattern or philosophy of life of entire inhabitants of Bhāratavarṣa for thousands of years. The RM is considered to be the encyclopedia of moral and ethical lessons. The teachings of the RM are so intense and influential that the general life style, thoughts and actions of the complete humankind can be synchronized by these moral teachings. The character of the Rāma stands forth as moral and ethical example. In the eyes of the Indians, Rāma is an ideal son, an ideal prince, a perfect human being and the personification of all conceivable virtues and qualities. People from different walks of life, are all very much familiar with the high moral character of Rāma. While imparting lessons on human values, morality

and ethical standards, religious preachers and public orators frequently cite examples from the life and works of Rāma. Rāma represents himself as an embodiment of principles before us. Righteous people esteem the character of Rāma and desire to mould their life on the pathway of Rāma. Not only people have love towards Rāma, but also worship him with great reverence for the morality exhibited in his character. As already highlighted, Rāma had to face very difficult and catastrophic circumstances, but he reacted gently with endurance and firmness in such situations. We find him never ever swerving from the principles at least.

We can observe the human values, moral and ethical values in the character of Rāma in the epical monument RM. As for example, all these characteristic traits have been very well reflected in the very first chapter of the Bālakāṇḍa of the RM. The first *kāṇḍa* narrates Rāma's birth, youthful adventures, marriage, and generally to provides a structure for the storyline. At the very beginning of the *prathama sarga* i.e. the chapter I, ascetic Vālmikī put the following questions to Nārada, the celestial sage that who can possibly be full of merits in this world at present, who is possessed of prowess and knows what is correct, aware of services done, truthful of speech and firm of resolve, (Bhattacharyya 39)³, who is possessed of right demeanor and who is friendly to all living beings, who has subdued his self, who has conquered anger, who is above fault-finding etc. As a reply to these questions, Nārada told that there is a human being endowed with multiple and extraordinary virtues, by the name Rāma, successor in the line of Ikṣvāku. He has fully controlled his mind; he is determined and has brought his senses under control. (Bhattacharyya 49).⁴ He is sharp, erudite, well-expressed and wonderful. He knows the secret of virtue and is true to his pledge and intent on the good of the people. He is well-known, full of knowledge, pure in his dealings, a man of self-control and resolute mind (Bhattacharyya 57).⁵ He is a supporter of the creation like Brahmā, affluent and a staunch protector of conviction. He is a vindicator of his own virtue and the guardian of his own people. He knows the truth of the Vedas and the six sciences supplementary to them. He is pious and upright. He is always sought by the virtuous as the ocean is by rivers. He is dignified. He is endowed with all excellences and enhances the delight of his mother Kausalyā. He vies with the ocean in depth and comparable with the Himālaya in point of resolution (Bhattacharyya 63).⁶ With intention to satisfy the people, Daśaratha, the king lovingly sought to endow with the office of Regent his beloved son, Rāma, possessed of unfailing prowess and was adorned with the aforesaid qualities, who was not only the eldest of his four sons in point of age, but was also gifted with the highest virtues and dedicated to the wellbeing of the people. But bound by the tie of duty and due to his ever speaking the truth, Daśaratha deported his beloved son Rāma (Bhattacharyya 68).⁷ Rāma possessed no materialistic inclinations at all. In obedience to his father's command in the form of the boon granted by him in favour of Keikeyī and with a view to pleasing Keikeyī, the daring Rāma retired to the forest in order to

implement the vow of his father (Bhattacharyya 69)⁸. Śrī Rāma, the virtue incarnates, though requested again and again by Bharata to become the ruler of Ayodhyā, after the death of Daśaratha, refused to be enthroned. The moral character of Rāma was so profound that though, he was the strongest among the four sons of Daśaratha, he never coveted for insignificant things of the earth like kingdom, supremacy and position etc. Nobody can refute the importance of this kind of attitude in the present context. In defense to his father's declaration (boon conferring the throne of Ayodhyā on Bharata), Śrī Rāma too, who was extremely generous and enjoyed a very great repute and who always wore a gracious aspect, did not crave for the kingdom (Bhattacharyya 80).⁹ Rāma handed over his wooden sandals as his representative to rule over the kingdom. Befitting of an elder brother, Rāma has never kept any feeling of bitterness for Bharata and others. After Bharata's returning back to Ayodhyā, Rāma had left Nandigrāma (a lonely retreat fourteen miles away from Ayodhyā) and entered Daṇḍaka forest, anticipating the renewed visit of the people of Ayodhyā to that region. Rāma, of unfailing promise and who had conquered all his senses was of the only intent on implementing the oath of his father. Then Rāma, in Daṇḍaka forest solemnly promised before seers, the destruction of the monsters and fulfilled his promise in a battle. Then in the Bālakāṇḍa, there pervades the whole story of the RM in a nutshell. Throughout the story, the high moral character of Rāma has been reflected. As for example, Rāma helped Sugrīva to recover his lost realm and his wife taken away by Vālī. Hearing the predicaments of Sugrīva, Rāma immediately took a vow to kill Vālī, for his crimes. Having killed Vālī, on the field of battle Rāma, at the instance of Sugrīva, installed Sugrīva himself on Vālī's throne. Afterwards in the great battle at Lanka, Rāma killed Rāvaṇa and released Sītā. Then, after installing Vibhīṣaṇa on the throne of Lankā, Rāma felt accomplished of purpose and got rid of anxiety, delighted greatly. (Bhattacharyya 129)¹⁰ Rāma came back to Ayodhyā and regained his kingdom too. The model of welfare state and compassionate ruler becomes quite apparent when we come across the episode of abandonment of Sītā. Here, Rāma abandoned Sītā just to gratify the people of his kingdom. It reminds us similar verse from *Uttararāmacarita* (URC) wherein, Rāma utters- "affection (friendship), mercy, personal happiness, nay, even Jānakī! –giving up (sacrificing) these for the satisfaction of his people, he will feel no pain." (Qtd. from Kale 4).¹¹ Rāma's Karuṇa rasa (the sentiment of pathos) has been suggested by Bhavabhūti in his URC. Rāma considers Sītā as "the very Lakṣmī in his house, and a pencil of nectar to his eyes; her touch as a thick sandal-paste to his body; that her arm twined round his neck is as cooling and smooth as a pearl-string; what about her would not be pleasing (only), but separation from her is exceedingly unbearable." (Kale 11) Thus, it was Rāma, who was most overwhelmed with grief by this untoward incident. (RM, Uttarakāṇḍa, Gītā Press ed.)¹² During Rāma's sovereignty, people were much elated, joyful, contented and

well-fed, exceedingly devout, free from mental sufferings and bodily sickness and rid of the scourge of famine and fear of stealing and robbery, (Bhattacharyya 134)¹³ etc. The highly celebrated Rāma established the royal dynasties a hundred times more affluent than ever before by not only recognizing and confirming their sovereignty but even by liberally supporting financially them. He directed the people belonging to all the four grades of society to follow their particular duties on this earthly plane. Ultimately, after a long and prosperous reign, described in ideal terms, Rāma settles the kingdom on his sons and openly immolates himself in the river Sarayu (thus returning to his form as Viṣṇu). There is benefit of narrating the story of Rāma also. The fruit or result of reading this story has been mentioned in the RM as that who reads the sacred tale of Śrī Rāma, capable of purifying the mind and wiping out sins, is treated on a par with the Vedas, is completely released from all sins. Reading this narrative centering round Śrī Rāma and conducive of prolonged existence, a human being, on departing from this world shall be honoured in heaven along with his sons and grandsons as well as his followers and attendants. (Bhattacharyya 142)¹⁴

The moral and ethical intensity of the character of Rāma is so strong that its impact is very much noticeable in some rhetorical works like *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, (Kane 1)¹⁵ *Śṛṅgārāprakāśa* (ed. work of Josyer)¹⁶ etc. It may be pointed out here that whereas the *Mahābhārata* has been regarded by several modern scholars as an exploration of the problems involved in establishing the nature of *dharma* and in applying it in particular situations, the RM is a confirmation of the centrality of *dharma* to all right endeavour. The RM, thus deals with some of the most basic themes of human existence and constitutes a powerful exploration of the concept of *dharma*. Rāma is presented as the outstanding martial figure often compared to Indra, the divine warrior, whose adherence to moral and ethical values is equally exceptional as he is frequently called 'the best of upholders of *dharma*', a basically human but commendable figure. As his moral altitude is accentuated, various episodes of the original story receive a didactic gloss, in order to eliminate the possibility of moral lapses on his part; so, for example, his killing from behind the *vānara* chief Vālī while the latter is fighting with his brother Sugrīva, with whom Rāma has made a treaty, is given an elaborate justification, as are his martial activities to protect the hermits while they go about their religious activities (basically in terms of the Sanskrit epics, his duty as a prince to uphold law and order).

Conclusion:

Thus, the RM preaches that one should conduct like Rāma, not as like Rāvaṇa i.e. *rāmādivat pravartitavyam na rāvaṇādivat*. Hence, the character of Rāma is relevant in the present times also. Therefore, the need of the hour is that one must understand the intrinsic moral, ethical as well as human values of the RM presented through Rāma's character and guide one's life through the pathway shown by it.

Endnote:

1. अथेदं रक्षोभिः कनकहरिणच्छद्मविधिना
तथा वृत्तं पापैर्व्यथयति यथा क्षालितमपि ।
जनस्थाने शून्ये विकलकरणैरार्यचरितै-
रपि ग्रावा रोदित्यपि दलति वज्रस्य हृदयम् ॥
अयं ते बाष्पौघस्रुटित इव मुक्तामणिसरो
विसर्पन्धाराभिर्लुठति धरणीं जर्जरकणः ।
निरुद्धोऽप्यावेगः स्फुरदधरनासापुटतया
परेषामुन्नेयो भवति च भराधमातहृदयः ॥ उत्तररामचरिते, १. २८-२९
2. इयं गेहे लक्ष्मीरियममृतवर्तिनयनयो-
रसावस्याः स्पर्शो वपुषि बहुलश्चन्दनरसः ।
अयं बाहुः कण्ठे शिशिरमसृणो मौक्तिकसरः
किमस्या न प्रेयो यदि परमसह्यस्तु विरहः ॥ पूर्वोक्ते, १. ३८
3. को न्वस्मिन् साम्प्रतम् लोके गुणवान् कश्च वीर्यवान् ।
धर्मज्ञश्च कृतज्ञश्च सत्यवाक्यो दृढव्रतः ॥ रामायणे, बालकाण्डे, १. २
4. इक्ष्वाकुवंशप्रभवो रामो नाम जनैः श्रुतः ॥
नियतात्मा महावीर्यो द्युतिमान् धृतिमान् वशी ॥ पूर्वोक्ते, १. ८
5. धर्मज्ञः सत्यसन्धश्च प्रजानां च हिते रतः ।
यशस्वी ज्ञानसम्पन्नः शुचिर्वश्यः समाधिमान् ॥ पूर्वोक्ते, १. १२
6. स च सर्वगुणोपेतः कौसल्यानन्दवर्धनः ।
समुद्र इव गाम्भीर्यं धैर्येण हिमवानिव ॥ पूर्वोक्ते, १. १७
7. स सत्यवचनाद्राजा धर्मपाशेन संयतः ।
विवासयामास सुतं रामं दशरथः प्रियम् ॥ पूर्वोक्ते, १. २३
8. स जगाम वनं वीरः प्रतिज्ञामनुपालयन् ।
पितुर्वचननिर्देशात् कैकेय्याः प्रियकारणात् ॥ पूर्वोक्ते, १. २४
9. रामोऽपि परमोदारः सुमुखः सुमहायशः ।
न चैच्छत् पितुरादेशाद् राज्यं रामो महाबलः ॥ पूर्वोक्ते, १. ३६-३७
10. अभिषिच्य च लङ्कायां राक्षसेन्द्रं विभीषणम् ।
कृतकृत्यस्तदा रामो विज्वरः प्रमुमोद ह ॥ पूर्वोक्ते, १. ८५
11. स्नेहं दयां च सौख्यं च यदि वा जानकीमपि ।
आराधनाय लोकानां मुञ्चतो नास्ति मे व्यथा ॥ उत्तररामचरिते, १. १२
12. अपश्यमानो वैदेहीं मेने शून्यमिदं जगत् ।
शोकेन परमायस्तो न शान्तिं मनसागमत् ॥
रामायणे, उत्तरकाण्डे, १. ४, गीता प्रेस
13. प्रहृष्टमुदितो लोकस्तुष्टः पुष्टः सुधार्मिकः ।
निरामयो ह्यरोगश्च दुर्भिक्षभयवर्जितः ॥ रामायणे, बालकाण्डे, १. ९०
14. एतदाख्यानमायुष्यं पठन् रामायणं नरः ।
सपुत्रपौत्रः सगणः प्रेत्य स्वर्गे महीयते ॥ पूर्वोक्ते, १. ९९
15. चतुर्वर्गप्राप्तिर्हि काव्यतो रामादिवत् प्रवर्तितव्यं न रावणादिवदित्यादि-
कृत्याकृत्यप्रवृत्तिनिवृत्त्युपदेशद्वारेण सुप्रतीतैव ॥
साहित्यदर्पणे, प्रथमे परिच्छेदे
16. सर्वं हि वाक्यं विधिनिषेधयोरेव पर्यवस्यति...किञ्च महावाक्यैरपि
रामायणादिभिरिदमेव व्युत्पाद्यत्। रामस्य पितुराज्ञां पालयतः वनवा-
सिनोऽपि तथाविधोऽभ्युदयः संवृत्तः, रावणस्य परदारान् अभिलष्यतः
त्रैलोक्यविजयिनोऽपि तथाविधः उच्छेदः। तस्मात् पितुराज्ञां पालयेत्
परदारान् नाभिलष्येत्, रामवत् वर्तेत् न रावणवत् इति ॥ शृङ्गारप्रकाशे,
पष्ठे परिच्छेदे

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