

## Ramayana and Mahabharata

(Welcome address by Shri R Venkataraman, President Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan on the occasion of the Release of the millionth copy of "Ramayana and Mahabharata" by the Hon`ble Prime Minister of India Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee at 530 pm on 19<sup>th</sup> December, 2001 at the Vigyan Bhavan Auditorium, New Delhi)

I deem it an honour and privilege as President of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan to extend to all of you a very warm and cordial welcome to this unique function namely the release of the millionth copy of each of Rajaji`s Ramayana and Mahabharata.

The Bhavan family is very proud and happy that the Hon`ble Prime Minister has been good enough to spare the time for this function.

The Ramayana and Mahabharata written by Rajaji are not summaries of Valmiki and Vyasa but stories retold by a saintly statesman with his own vast experience and perception of life and times. It is most appropriate the millionth copy of these volumes should be released by a person no less than Rajaji

Guides at the Pyramids proudly tell the tourists: "Time mocks life; but Pyramids mock time." I would like to add that the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata mock both Pyramids and Time. While the Pyramids are only around 4000 years old, Ramayana and Mahabharata are stated to have been in existence from time immemorial even before Valmiki and Vyasa versified them.

But the two epics have captured the imagination of the people of not only India but great parts of the world. Ramayana is part of their tradition in Thailand and Laos while Ramayana and Mahabharata are so in Indonesia. These epics are universal in character. They deal with human nature regardless of region, religion, creed, colour or clime

As Brahma the Creator told Valmiki

*Yavath Sthasyanti Girayh  
Saribascha Malitab  
Thavat Ramayan Katha Lokeshu  
Pracharisyathi*

As Long Mountains stand  
And Rivers flow  
So long shall Ramayana Katha  
Shall in this world endure.

Rajaji once said:

"I repeat my confession that in the evening of my busy life during a great and eventful period of Indian history, the writing of these books, wherein I have retold the Mahabharata and Ramayana, is in my opinion, the best service I have rendered to my people."

India`s freedom struggle kindled a fervour for our ancient culture, our scriptures, our indigenous medicines and our Arts and Crafts. The Swadeshi Movement gathered momentum and our people took pride in our hoary heritage. It was in this climate the far-sighted patriot and eminent statesman Dr. K M Munshi launched the Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan in 1938 for the revival of our ancient legacy and integrate it with modern development in science and technology.

Today the Bhavan runs 85 schools including High schools, Primary and Pre-primary schools and another 80 Technical colleges and Job-oriented institutions in Management, Public

Relations, Journalism, Mass Communication, Foreign Languages etc. Its computer training centre affords free training to weaker sections of the Society. Besides, courses in Heritage, Vedic studies, Sanskrit and Arts are provided in several branches.

The Bhavan has 112 Kendras (branches) in India and six units abroad in London, New York, Lisbon, Dubai, Toronto and more are in the pipe line.

Dr. Munshi also started a publication division and wisely called it “Book University”. Over 1600 titles ranging from Vedas and Upanishads to computer science and information technology have been published so far.

Ramayana delineates its characters as perfect beings. Rama is a *Karma Yogi* who performs his duties as a son, a prince, a householder and a warrior following the path of Dharma unerringly. Dasharatha is an ideal king who keep his word even at the greatest cost. Bharata, a noble selfless brother, refuses to accept kingdom which legitimately belongs to his brother. Sita, is an exemplary wife and Hanuman, a perfect devotee.

Rajaji describes that among the characters in Ramayana, Bharata is the perfect embodiment of virtue. He continues that “Jnana and Bhakti will automatically grow by contemplation of the personality of Bharata”.

According to Kamban

Guha after realising the true purpose of Bharata’s visit to the forest praised Bharata saying:

When at the behest of your mother  
Your father gave you the kingdom  
You declined it as evil and went  
With a sorrowful face  
Will a thousand Ramas be equal to you?

Thus these epics are not mere stories but treatises on Dharma or Virtue which must inform every one’s actions and behaviour.

Likewise Vyasa’s Mahabharata is one of our noblest heritages. It strengthens the soul and emphasizes on the importance performance of one’s duties without craving for the fruits there from. It contains a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations. At the core of Mahabharata is the Bhagwat Gita, the treasure house of Dharma (virtue) not only for the Hindus but for the whole mankind. Rajaji says “Mahabharata is an ancient story but human nature remains the same. Even at the present day, anger and hatred afflict and threaten with ruin the poor human being without regard to age sex or condition”.

If at the time of Mahabharata one cheated with dice, now Bulls and Bears cheat us in the Stock Exchange. It is the change in human nature that is sought by our scriptures and epics.

A scholar in Sanskrit and Tamil, Rajaji has drawn from the best of Valmiki’s and Kamban’s versions. He has also compared these versions with that of Tulsidasa’s Ramacharitra Manas. In this sense, his presentation of Ramayana and Mahabharata is better than each of the Originals.

In his preface to Ramayana, Rajaji says “I appeal particularly to the young men in schools and colleges to read these books (Ramayana and Mahabharata). There is not a page in them but after reading you will emerge with greater courage, stronger will, and purer mind.”

Moreover, these two epics serve as a link between the people of our nation. Rajaji emphasized this aspect in the following words:

“Let us keep ever in our minds the fact that it is Ramayana and Mahabharata that bind our vast members together as one people despite caste space and language that seemingly divide them.”

The first edition of Ramayana and Mahabharata was published in 1951. Since then Ramayana has run 34 editions and Mahabharata 40 editions both crossing the million mark of copies.

Apart from the English edition, Ramayana and Mahabharata have been translated into Gujarati and Marathi. Translations into other national languages are being undertaken. Further more, Bhavan's Mahabharata has been translated into Japanese, Italian and Dutch and Ramayana into Japanese.

I thank once again the Prime Minister and his Cabinet Colleagues and the elite audience for their gracious presence at this function.