

On Rama Navami

(from Bhavan's journal)

It is an old saying that time mocks life. It is equally true to say that Ramayana mocks time. Ramayana has withstood the ravages of time for over hundred of millennia. It is recorded that Brahma himself said,

*“ As long as in this firm set land
The Rivers shall flow and mountains stand
So long throughout the world be sure
The great Ramayana shall endure.”*

The fact that Ramayana is known in other countries like Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia, reinforces Brahma's ascertain “that Ramayana endures throughout the world”.

The story of Rama is very simple and yet it is fascinating every time one reads or hears it. The epic portrays a perfect father Dasaratha; a perfect son Rama; a perfect wife Sita; a perfect brother Bharata; a perfect devotee Hanuman; a perfect comrade Sugriva. In fact, every one of them is an ideal example of following Swa Dharma in their life.

Mythologically, Rama is an avatar of Vishnu and, therefore, divinity itself. He takes a human form in order to protect the innocent and destroy the evil doers and restore the Dharmic way of life to the present and future generations of mankind. Valmiki, the Adikavi presents him as a human person and not as divine being. Rama says,

Atmanam manushamanye
Ramam Dasaratatmajam.

*I am a human being
Son of Dasarata.*

If a divine person observes and acts according to Dharma, there is nothing unique about it. He is following his Swa Dharma. It is only when a human being follows Dharma in his every word and deed, he becomes an exemplar.

Later day authors of Ramayana like Kalidasa, (*Raghuvamsa*), Kamban (Tamil Ramayana) and Tulasidas (Hindi *Ramacharitmanas*) wrote centuries later when Rama has been worshipped as God and if they had treated him as human being, they would have offended contemporary sentiments.

There is another reason why Rama was born as a human being. When Devas beseeched Brahma to save them from the atrocities of the Rakshasa Ravana, Brahma told them that when he conceded boons to Ravana, Brahma had said that Ravana shall be indestructible by any Deva, Rakshasa, Gandharva or Yaksha. He had overlooked man and therefore Ravana has to meet his end at the hands of a Man.

Further more, the story runs that once Valmiki asked Narada, “who among the heroes of this world is the highest in virtue and wisdom” and Narada narrated the life of Rama, descendant of the Solar dynasty and ruler of Ayodhya. It is pertinent to note that Valmiki wanted a hero in this world and Narada could not have given a hero from the Heaven.

Valmiki projected Rama as a Karma Yogi, one who performed his duties as a son, a prince, a Grahastha, a warrior and followed unerringly the path of Dharma.

In the *Adyatma Ramayana*, Vyasa brings out Rama as divine Avatar. In the Aranyakanda, Rama explains to Lakshmana that the Jiva is devoid of disease and decay, that it is eternal, indestructible and unchangeable, that the Atman has no attachment nor release (Moksha) and that it is Bliss.

Again in Kishkinta Canto, when Vali's wife wails over the death of her husband and asks Rama to kill her with the same arrow which killed her beloved, Rama explains as follows: "If you think the body is your husband, the body is still here. It is a compound of flesh, bones, skin and blood. If you think that the "Jiva" is your husband, then there is no need to grieve because the Jiva is neither born nor dies. There is no reason for you to grieve."

Here Rama is presented as the proponent of the philosophy of Knowledge - the Jnana marga.

But when Vali accused Rama saying, " the world calls you a Dharmatma but is it Just (Dharma) for you to kill me hiding yourself like a hunter, Rama replied as follows : "Only for the purpose of protecting "Dharma", I am moving around with a bow and arrow; I will punish those who commit unjust (Adharma) deeds. This is my objective. Is it not a sin that you immorally appropriated? Your brother's wife, while sister, daughter, wife, son's wife and brother's wife are all equal? It is the duty of the king to punish the sinful acts. Therefore, I punished you, the sinner."

This passage in *Adyatma Ramayana* again reinforces Valmiki's presentation of Rama as a Karma Yogi.

I have been emphasizing the aspect that Rama was born a *nara* (mortal) experiencing human joys and sorrows, trials and tribulations of life and yet scrupulously adhering to the path of Dharma, setting an example to generations of mankind for eternity.

Dr. S Radhakrishnan, the scholar Statesman once said that if the primordial man who was no better than a beast, could develop into a civilized man, living in peace and harmony, there is no reason why man cannot rise to divinity by observing all the virtues encased by Gandhiji in two words, Satya and Ahimsa.

For Gandhiji, *Satya* does not mean only repeating the truth. It includes virtues like non-exaggeration, not bearing tales against others, and not hurting the feelings of others. Likewise, *Ahimsa* does not mean only non-killing but a number of virtues like kindness, compassion to all beings, (birds, beasts and men) gentleness to subordinates and poorer sections, absence of ego, hatred etc. Therefore while celebrating Rama's Birth Day, we should not be content with wishing many happy returns but strive to live up to the ideals set by Rama, the hero among heroes. Bhagavat Gita emphasizes repeatedly that the performance of Duty without attachment to the fruits thereof, is the path to Salvation.

*"Thasmat asaktah satatam
karyam karma samachara,
Asaktohi acharan karma
param apnoti purushah."*

Therefore always perform your obligatory duties; by performing action without attachments, one attains the Supreme.

On the happy occasion of Rama Navami, I wish our readers, peace, prosperity and joy.