

Ramayana: A Divine Drama

**Actors in the Divine Play as scripted by
Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba**

Volume III

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VOLUME III

Na Karmana Na Prajaya Dhanena Thyagenaikena Amrutatthwamanasu (immortality is not attained through action, progeny or wealth. It is attained only by sacrifice). The bliss that you get out of sacrifice is eternal. That alone is the true wealth, and it can never diminish. In order to acquire such everlasting wealth, spend your time in the contemplation of God. Divinity pervades all that you see, hear and feel. Being in the constant company of such an all-pervasive Divinity, why should you worry and fear? Why fear when I am here? Never be afraid of anything; because God is in you, with you, above you, below you, around you. He follows you like shadow. Never forget Him. If you have faith, God will protect you wherever you are: in a forest or in the sky; in a city or a village; on a hill or in the middle of deep sea.

All belong to Me and I belong to you all. Do not entertain any doubt or weakness. I am ready to give whatever you require. Be courageous. Why fear when I am here? Why should one fear when God has given such an assurance? If you follow Him, He will certainly bestow on you pure and unsullied bliss.

- *Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba*



Why fear, When I Am Here

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7. RAMA'S BROTHERS

We must train ourselves in such a way that we can do our own work and after that we must be ready to serve our parents. We should then plunge into the society and be prepared to serve the society. This service must come from within you in a free and voluntary manner.

We should not prepare ourselves to do work for the sake of showing it to others. It is for the sake of *prema* and love that we should do work. We should be prepared to do work as a consequence of our realising the oneness of all mankind. If there is an individual who is suffering in a hospital without anyone to look after him and is without any friends, if any of you go to the hospital in those circumstances and talk to him sweetly, you will establish a close bond of affection between you both. This will make you a closer friend of his than even his own relatives. He will take your address and will want to write to you. This is the kind of heart to heart relationship which selfless service can establish. This comes spontaneously from the heart. Nobody can create this kind of attachment by other methods.

- ***Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba***

7.1 LAKSHMANA

Man comes in to the world burdened with maya and its instrument, the mind. The mind expresses itself through attraction and repulsion, raga and dwesha (affection and hatred), towards the external world. Raga is rajasic (passionate) in its effect; it can be used for one's uplift, as Narada used it to fix attention on the Lord. Dwesha is Tamasic (negativistic), as Durvasa expressed it in his dealings with Ambarisha and others.

Without raga and dwesha, the mind cannot function at all. If these two are removed, there can be no mind and no maya, and you get fixed in jnana. Let raga and dwesha go and let Rama enter; then there will be no manas or maya (mind or illusion).

- *Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba*

LAKSHMANA

Lakshmana was the brother and close companion of Rama and himself a hero in the famous epic Ramayana. In some Hindu traditions he is worshiped as an avatar of Shesha. The name may also be written as Lakshmana or Laxman. Lakshmana is the twin brother of Satrughna, born in Ayodhya to Sumitra, the second wife of Dasaratha, king of Kosala. Thus, Rama is the eldest, Bharatha is the second, Lakshmana is the third, and Satrughna is the youngest of the four brothers. Despite being the twin of Satrughna, Lakshmana is specially attached to Rama, and the duos are inseparable. When Rama marries Sita, Lakshmana married the younger sister of Sita named Urmila.

- *From Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia*

LAKSHMANA: Brother of Rama and son of Sumitra; represents intellect (*Glossary of the Vahinis*)

BIRTH

Dasaratha performed *Puthrakameshti Yajna* to get four sons. Lord Narayana Himself took birth as his son. Adishesha was born as Lakshmana. (*SSS Vol.31 p.202*)

The third day after the birth of Rama, were born the twins- Chaitra, bright half eleventh day, Aslesha Star, Vriddhiyoga. (*RKRV Part I p.42-43*)

Out of the part of the pudding given by Kausalya, Lakshmana was born to Sumitra. (*SSB 1996 p.14*)

THE GURU AND THE PUPILS

Name

Vashishta gazed upon the twin children of Sumitra. the elder one, he felt, would be a hero, a stalwart fighter, and endowed with vast wealth. He knew that he would take delight in the service of God and His Consort, Lakshmi; that service would be for him like the very breath of life. So, he chose the name Lakshmana for him. (*RKRV Part I p.46*)

Lakshmana would not be physically separate from Rama:

Lakshmana is one who had good qualities by birth; and he so controlled his senses that he had acquired further good qualities. He was a person of good conduct and good thoughts and was

always ready to obey Rama's orders. He was Sumitra's¹ son. From his very birth, during his childhood, he never knew separation from Rama. Lakshmana was such that during the first two days after his birth, he was not taking food and was crying for the sake of Rama. Sumitra, the mother and Dasaratha, the father, wanted to know what the reason for this incessant crying of Lakshmana was. Dasaratha and Sumitra were trying to give him various kinds of medical attention. They tried many *tantras*, *mantras* and *yantras*; but in spite of all that, Lakshmana's crying did not diminish at all.

When this news was conveyed to Vashishta², the *Guru*, he thought for a moment and tried to understand the situation by his divine vision. He saw that the cause for this situation was the physical separation of Rama and Lakshmana, and he advised that they both be made to sleep in the same cradle. Thus, when Sumitra took Lakshmana to the mansion of Kausalya and put him in the same cradle where Rama was sleeping, Lakshmana

¹ See Chapter, *Sumitra - Curious thing – Sumitra not destined to mother her twins*

² Lakshmana as a child raised such a long and loud wailing, one night, that Sumitra feared that an evil spirit had possessed him. She hurried to Sage Vashishta and asked him to apply some *vibhoothi* (sacred ash) to the fore head of the child so that the spirit might leave. Vashishta knew why Lakshmana was weeping so pathetically. He said, "Take the child and put him next to Rama; he will stop wailing." Lakshmana could not bear even as a child a moment's separation from Rama. For each one, the place he needs most is the natural habitat. That is the reason why Lakshmana accompanied Rama, when Viswamitra led him into his hermitage. (*SSS Vol.8 p.145*)

not only stopped crying, but also began to take food and began to enjoy the bliss of the company of Rama.

To Lakshmana, separation from Rama was as distressing and troublesome as the joining with Rama was blissful. From that day, Lakshmana was following Rama as if he was Rama's shadow. Lakshmana could not sleep for a moment when Rama was not present. Lakshmana would not eat if Rama was not present. Wherever he went, he was always following Rama, as if he was Rama's shadow. Devotion to Rama was so intense in Lakshmana that he filled his heart with a feeling that everything that was present belonged in reality to Rama. (*SSB 1977 p.40-41*)

Pined the company and comradeship of Rama

Lakshmana, Bharatha and Satrugna too learnt their lessons admirably well, but they pined for the company and comradeship of Rama so much that, as soon as Rama was out of sight, they lost interest in study and in their duties towards their teacher. As a result, they could not catch up with Rama. They were following him a session or two behind.

Lakshmana dared tell his teacher once or twice that they had no need for any lessons or learning. They would be happy if they could but get the company of Rama! Rama was the very life of Lakshmana. The teacher observed this strange relationship between the two and drew much inspiration contemplating on it. He reminded himself of the statement of the sage Vashishta that they were no other than Nara and Narayana, the inseparable Divine Forces. (*RKR Part I p.57*)

THE CALL AND THE FIRST VICTORY

Lakshmana followed Rama as he was Rama's amsa

Dasaratha became frightened on hearing the words of Sage Viswamitra. At that instant, Vashishta arrived. Assessing what had happened, the Sage said to Dasaratha, "Oh King, it is not proper on the part of the scions of the Ikshvaku lineage to go back on their word. You need not fear about the safety of Rama. He is the auspicious One and the incarnation of Narayana. You should send Rama along with Viswamitra for the protection of the *yajna*." Dasaratha agreed to send Rama along with Viswamitra. Lakshmana wanted to follow Rama since he was the very reflection of Rama. He was Rama's shadow. (*SSB 1996 p.22*)

Rama did not ask Lakshmana to accompany him; Neither Viswamitra nor Dasaratha asked him to follow Rama. Lakshmana followed Rama of his own accord because he was an *amsa* of Rama. Just as shadow follows the object, Lakshmana followed Rama. Seeing this Viswamitra thought to himself, "Everything happens according to the Divine Will."

Viswamitra taught Bala and Athibala mantras – to Rama and Lakshmana – Though Rama was called Lakshmana followed:

When they reached the bank of Sarayu river, Viswamitra said, "Rama come here," He called only Rama and not Lakshmana. Though he was not called, Lakshmana also went and sat by the side of Rama. Viswamitra said, 'My dear ones. I am taking you to *Siddhashram* where *yajna* is going to take place. You have

come here to protect the *yajna* from demons. I don't know how many days you have to stay in the forest. You are used to royal comforts and delicious food. But there is no one to prepare food for you in the *ashram*. You may have to stay awake day and night forgoing food and water in order to protect the *yajna*. So, I will teach you two mantras; *Bala* and *Athibala*. With power of these mantras, you can remain without food, water and sleep for many number of days. (*SSS Vol.35 p.115-116*)

THE WEDDING:

Rama lifts the bow and Lakshmana balances the Shift:

Sage Viswamitra signed to Rama to lift the bow. Rama went up to the box in which the bow was kept and lifted the bow. The moment he did that a severe turbulence struck and shook everybody. Lakshmana then got up and with one foot pressed down the earth firmly. Even Viswamitra did not know what Lakshmana was up to. He asked, "Lakshmana, what is happening? What are you doing? Lakshmana humbly bowed the head and said, "This is the help I must render my elder brother." What Lakshmana meant was that, when Rama raised the bow there was a sudden tilt in earth's balance leading to turbulence. By pressing down the earth Lakshmana was balancing the shift. (*SSB 2002 p. 54*)

Lakshmana understands the sign and falls down:

It was then the time for the bride and the groom to garland each other. Rama stood much taller than Sita, and it was difficult for Sita to reach Rama's height and garland Him; so she stood

silently, holding the garland in her hand. Rama then made a sign to Lakshmana. Lakshmana alone knew the meaning of this sign, as he was extremely intelligent. Understanding the sign made by Rama, Lakshmana replied via another sign signifying that what Rama wanted was not possible. Rama had conveyed through His sign that since Lakshmana was Adishesha (the serpent upon whose coils Lord Narayana reclined) he should raise the ground where Sita was standing. Lakshmana, by his sign, indicated that if he were to raise the ground on which Sita stood, the entire ground around them would be raised. Rama was unwilling to bend down His head, for He had vowed that He would not bend His head to a lady, though He was ready to bend down His head for His devotees. Lakshmana, who was very resourceful, immediately fell at the feet of Rama. Rama now had to bend down to raise Lakshmana to his feet. Sita immediately took advantage of the situation and garlanded Rama! The four bridegrooms, accompanied by the four brides, then circumambulated the sacred fire. (*SSB 1996 p.32-33*)

Lakshmana marries Urmila:

Then (*Janaka*) came near where Lakshmana was. He said, “Lakshmana! I am giving you this bride, Urmila, accept her,” and with the prescribed Manthras, he completed the ceremony of gifting her to the bridegroom. (*RKR V Part I p.189*)

Confrontation with Parasurama

As they were returning to Ayodhya, they heard a loud and frightening sound. Rama instructed Lakshmana to be ready for

the battle. Parasurama³ appeared on the scene and challenged Rama saying, “Oh Rama! I have heard that you have broken the bow of Siva. It is of no consequence and is not at all difficult to lift. If you really have strength, you should break this weapon of mine. So saying, Parasurama hurled his weapon at the feet of Rama. Rama calmly picked it up and broke the weapon. Parasurama at once fell at the feet of Rama. (*SSS Vol.38 p.116*)

RAMA TO BE CORONATED BUT SENT TO THE FOREST:

Rama teases Lakshmana and asks to be ready to take half share of his burdens – in happiness, fame and fortune:

Rama chuckled at Lakshmana and teased him in innocent fun, “Brother! Can you tell me which Rajyalakshmi will be delighted at this lovely taunt?” He retorted, “Brother! I need no Rajyalakshmi to wed me. In your kingdom itself, if you assign any responsibility, I shall fulfil it. That is enough fortune for me.” With this he prostrated at Rama’s feet! Rama said, Lakshmana! You are my breath,. So, half the responsibility in government is yours. So, you too should get ready, with me, wearing jewels and regal robes. You have half share in my burdens, and in my happiness, my fame and fortune. You have a half a share in all that I am and will.” (*RKRV Part I p.225-226*)

³ See Chapter, *Parasurama*

Lakshmana furious at Kaikeyi and angry with his father – Rama faced honour and dishonour with equal serenity – Sumantra was confirmed in his worst fears:

Lakshmana was standing at the door and listening to the words inside the room. He was in tears. He was furious against Kaikeyi and angry against his father. He found it impossible to give expression to his feelings. So, he followed the footsteps of Rama with arms folded, eyes on the ground, head bent low. Though he had lost a kingdom, and had to exile himself into the forest, Rama's face shone like the moon behind a thick dark clouds, unaffected by the black veil. The splendour of his countenance was unaffected; for, he faced honour and dishonour with equal serenity, He behaved like a veteran Yogi, with no trace of agitation in thought, word and deed. He walked as if nothing had happened to cause him worry. However, Sumantra guessed that some transformation had happened inside the palace. The guess soon grew into certainty. When his eyes fell on Lakshmana, his heart suffered a shock. To add to his fears, Rama brushed aside the White Umbrella that was held over him by the attendant. He ordered that the ceremonial whisks be not used for him. He declared that he did not deserve any more the silver chariot. On hearing this, Sumantra lost strength of body and will. He was confirmed in his worst fears. (*RKRV Part I p.278-279*)

Lakshmana wants to kill Manthara

See Chapter, *Manthara* - **Manthara was born to fulfil a Vow – Poisoned Kaikeyi's mind – Jealousy root cause of all Evils:-** (*SSS Vol. 34 p.82-83*)

Rama breaks the news of his banishment to Kausalya:

Observing Kausalya’s love and ananda, the eyes of Lakshmana were spontaneously filled with tears⁴. Kausalya noted it. She turned to him, and enquired, “Lakshmana! Why are you sad?” She hurried towards him and tried to caress him, but Lakshmana could not suppress his grief any longer. He wept aloud and sobbed. The queen stood aghast. She did not know why he sobbed. Rama’s words and Lakshmana’s grief confused her much.

Meanwhile Rama interceded: “Mother! If you promise not to grieve, I shall tell you one thing,” and he held her hands in his, very firmly. Does it not give you great joy that I obey father’s command? He has resolved to crown my brother, Bharatha! He has resolved to send me, in the habiliments of a hermit into the Dandaka forest for a period of fourteen years. I have bowed to his command and come here to take leave of you.” At this, Kausalya shrieked, “Rama” and fell on the floor. (*RKRV Part I p.282-283*)

Lakshmana’s Anguish on seeing Kausalya’s plight:

Lakshmana was watching the anguish of Kausalya and listening to her words. He could not control his emotions. He was bursting with anger. He held his hands tight over his chest, and said, “Oh! Revered Mother! I shall never accept this. Is Rama to leave the kingdom and betake himself to the forest, yielding to the prattle of a woman? I cannot tolerate it. Father has become too old. His

⁴ See Chapter, *Kausalya* - A mother’s Ananda and Rama unwillingness to break the news of his banishment:

mind is very unsteady as a result. And he is entangled in sensual pursuits, and he has become a slave to the enticements of Kaikeyi.

He is pitifully uxorious⁵. He has no sense of discrimination about the consequences of his actions. He is liable to issue any kind of order in his infatuation. Orders of such type should not be obeyed. The king is in a state of feeble-mindedness, unable to distinguish the real from the unreal, the momentary from the momentous. When such rulers give orders out of infatuation they can well be disobeyed. What crime did Rama commit that he should be sent into the forest? Even the cruellest enemy of Rama (if he has any), or even the most hard-hearted barbarian suffering punishment for his crimes, cannot point his finger at the slightest slur on his behaviour or action. No king on earth has the authority to drive into the forest, as an exile, a person of such unquestioned innocence, purity of intentions and holy sanctity. Rama is steady in his straightforward path. He is the master of his senses. He honours and treats with respect enemies of every type. Will any father drive such a son into the jungle? Moreover, the king is most attached to Dharma. He is a hero full of sacred ideals. He is an adherent of the best in all faiths. Can such a king issue this command? Judging from this, it is certain that Dasaratha is either insane or enslaved by passion. Any command from a person who is either of these, is unworthy of consideration.

⁵ **uxorious** - foolishly fond of or submissive to your wife (Based on WordNet 3.0, Farlex clipart collection. © 2003-2011 Princeton University, Farlex Inc.)

The words of a king who behaves like a lunatic or an infant need not be honoured at all. Forgetting the dictates of political morality, giving up the path of worldly wisdom, throwing to the winds the demands of paternal affection, he has become mad, giving free vent to his whims and fancies. Need his command be treated as valid? I won't agree that it should be respected.”
(RKRV Part I p.287-288)

Lakshmana vows to finish off the opposition to Rama's Coronation:

Lakshmana turned towards Rama, and clasping his hands in reverence, he said, “Rama! Pardon me! Assume the ruler-ship of the realm before news of this spreads and becomes known to all. I shall be by your side, with my bow. Whoever in Ayodhya stands up against you will have to meet the arrows from this bow. Of course, there is no such, either in Ayodhya or any other place. But if any opposition develops, this great City will become a desert, with no human inhabitant. My sharp arrows will see to that. Why repeat a thousand things? If Bharatha opposes, or anyone on his behalf, I shall destroy him, root and branch. I will not care. Even Dasaratha, if he stands forth as a supporter of Kaikeyi in this struggle, I shall capture him and shut him up in prison.” **(RKRV Part I p.288-289)**

Rama Chides Lakshmana for crossing the boundaries:

While Lakshmana was holding forth in this strain, Rama looked at him sternly, intercepting the flow of his feelings and admonished him thus: “Lakshmana! Your words are crossing the bounds. No one can deny me what I wish for. None can change the march of my will. My exile in the forest cannot be avoided.

Be quiet, give up your fears and hatreds. We shall await what happens next.” Rama advised him⁶. (*RKR V Part I p.289*)

Lakshmana questions the authority of any son

At this, Lakshmana fell at the feet of Rama and said, “Rama! On what basis, under what authority is Bharatha to be given the Crown that ought to be yours? Which other son has the right which the eldest has not? You are obeying this absurd, unjust order because of father; but I will not approve of it, whatever you may say in justification.”

LAKSHMANA TOO WANTS TO ACCOMPANY RAMA

Lakshmana tells Kausalya that he is the shadow of Rama and will follow him:

Turning to Kausalya, Lakshmana continued: “Revered Mother! To tell you the truth, I am devoted to Rama. I speak this on oath. I cannot exist even a single moment apart from Rama. If Rama has no desire for the Kingdom and if he moves into the forest, I will follow him. I will walk in his footsteps, I will be the shadow for him. If he but orders so, I shall jump most joyously into the blazing fire. I shall heed only his orders, not of anyone else. Mother! I cannot bear the sight of your sorrow. He is your son. He is my Ramachandra. How can anyone be away from his own life breath?”

⁶ Under Section, *Rama*, See Section, *Two Boons - Abduction Of Sita And Search For Sita - Rama Chides Lakshmana for crossing the boundaries:*

Listening to Lakshmana, Kausalya was a little comforted. She stroked the head of Lakshmana saying, “Your love gives me much consolation. Your words give me great strength. Brothers of your kind are rare indeed! The world considers the mother who has borne such children as venerable and holy; but, we are afflicted now with the feeling that we are great sinners. Rama will not desist from his resolve. Exile is inevitable for him. I want only this now: Take me also with you,” she wailed. (*RKRV Part I p.290-291*)

Rama explains the true facts – No one dedicated to the good life shall break the word plighted to the mother, the father or the esteemed Preceptor⁷:

Rama looked at Lakshmana and said, “Brother! I know the extent of the love you bear towards me. I am not unaware of your heroism, your ability and glory. Mother is suffering great grief, since she is unable to understand the true facts and the value of self-control. Besides, since I am the child born of her loins, grief is natural. But consider; for all values of life, righteous conduct, Dharma, is the very root. And Dharma is secure only on the foundation of Truth.

“Do not allow your reason to slide into this terror-creating Kshatriya mentality. Give up violence and cruelty and adopt my stand.” Rama stroked the back of Lakshmana, who was weighed down by anger and sorrow and spoke soft loving words to assuage his grief. Then, turning to his mother, Kausalya, he said,

⁷ Under Section, *Rama*, See Chapter, - *Two Boons - Abduction Of Sita And Search For Sita* - **Rama explains the true facts**

“Do not obstruct my resolve and cause breach of my vow. Whatever may happen to anyone, my exile to the forest cannot be averted. Send me with your Love. Bless my vow, my resolution.” Then he fell at her feet and prayed for permission to leave. (*RKRV Part I p.291-292*)

Lakshmana asks Rama to follow the Scripture ‘*Matru devo bhava, Pitru devo bhava,*’

Meanwhile, Lakshmana intervened and said, “Brother! Mother’s words are the highest Truth. The mother deserves even more reverence than the father. The scripture has laid down ‘*Matru devo bhava, Pitru devo bhava,*’ thus placing the mother first, and the father in the second position. It says, ‘Let the mother be your God,’ and thereafter ‘Let the father be your God.’ It is not proper for you to stick so firmly to your resolution and cause so much grief to mother.⁸” (*RKRV Part I p.295*)

Rama asks Lakshmana to Stay and serve their Father:

Lakshmana was greatly moved. His eyes turned red. He lost all awareness of where he was and amidst whom. His lips became dry. His tongue was tied. He had a fixed stare. He bowed his head and looked on the ground, tears flowed without let or hindrance. Rama watched him, and felt that it would not be proper to leave him in that state. Besides, Lakshmana might do something with himself. If left alone, he might even do injury to others. And those acts would be deemed to have happened on

⁸ Under Section, *Rama*, See chapter, *Two Boons - Abduction Of Sita And Search For Sita - Rama expounds the rights and duties of a son:*

account of me, he thought. So, Rama decided to question Lakshmana. “Brother! The fumes of anger are as incense to the horde of sins. Suppress them. You might be distressed at the thought that Rama has been so grossly insulted and dishonoured. But Sathya and Dharma, the path of Truth and Righteousness, heed no honour and dishonour. It does not crave for one and shy away from the other. Be brave. Fill your heart with courage. Remain here and serve Father. Use your days thus for the fulfilment of the highest purpose of life.” (*RKRV Part I p.297-298*)

Lakshmana says he has no desire to serve anyone except Rama and wants to don the hermit’s clothes:

When his elder brother blessed him thus, Lakshmana was startled into speech. “Brother!” he cried, “When Rama, my very breath, is proceeding to the forest, whom am I to serve here, with this inert material physical object called body? This Lakshmana has no desire to serve anyone except Rama⁹. You value your Dharma, your sense of duty. I too have my sense of duty, and I value it equally. Therefore, I shall come behind you. I have no need to await anyone’s order. I am not included in the persons bound to the boons claimed by Kaikeyi. Even if I am involved with them, I shall not pay heed to her commands or to the directives of her henchmen. No one other than Rama has the authority to command me or issue directives about my movements or conduct. So, here and now, I too shall don the

⁹ “He who is born with you, more worthy of affection, than she who joined you later” that was the view of Lakshmana, when he joined his brother, Rama, leaving his wife, Urmila, in Ayodhya. (*Bhagavata Vahini p. 179*)

hermit's habiliment of bark, tie up my hair into matted locks, and prepare myself to follow you.¹⁰”

With these words, Lakshmana divested himself of the jewels and regal paraphernalia he had burdened himself with, while proceeding to the Coronation Hall; he threw the jewels and silken robes in disgust. The ear ornaments and the necklaces fell in the far corners of the room. He was fretting to accompany his brother. Rama's heart softened at the sight of the spontaneous devotion and dedicated loyalty of Lakshmana. He went close to him, and placing his hand upon his shoulder, spoke softly, “Brother! My joy has no bounds, since I have such a brother as you! This is my great good fortune. By your coming with me, mother Kausalya too will gain some peace of mind. She is very much agitated by fear and doubt about how I shall spend my fourteen years in the forest, and whether I will return after the period of exile is over. So, tell mother to be free from fear. Go and soothe her. While we spend the hours like this, Father must be suffering more and more anxiety.

Kaikeyi will suffer from the welling doubt that I may not leave at all! Therefore, I shall now go to Sita and inform her; and thence, I shall go to the Palace of Kaikeyi, to take leave of father.

¹⁰ As Rama was leaving for the forest Lakshmana joined Him, for it was impossible for him to live without Rama. Separation between Rama and Lakshmana is unthinkable, because Lakshmana was the incarnation of Aadhishesha, on whom Lord Narayana reclines. Lakshmana accompanied Rama without speaking a word to anybody. He simply told Rama, “Oh Rama, I came to this world to serve You. I cannot live without You even for a moment.” Since Rama knew the heart of Lakshmana, He allowed him to accompany Him. (*SSB 1996 p.38*)

Meanwhile, you will go to your mother Sumitra and receive her consent to join me.” (*RKRV Part I p.298-299*)

Sumitra counsels Lakshmana:

Sumitra counselled Lakshmana thus: “Never be under the impression that you are going to the forest. Wherever Rama and Sita are present, that itself is Ayodhya. This Ayodhya without Sita and Rama is a veritable forest. Consider Sita and Rama as your mother and father and serve them to the best of your ability with all love, sincerity, faith and devotion.” (*SS May '99 p.120*)

Lakshmana joined them (*Rama and Sita*). After taking leave of his mother the three then moved on. (*RKRV Part I p.319*)

ENTERING INTO EXILE

Lakshmana too wore the same sylvan garments as Rama had on. Rama decided that there should be no more delay. The three prostrated reverently before Dasaratha, who fainted away at the sight of his sons in their ascetic attire. They prostrated also before Kaikeyi who was standing nearby. They fell at the feet of sage Vashishta and of his Consort. And they started towards the forest.

Citizens of Ayodhya who had gathered at the Palace gates saw them walking as hermits. They broke into bitter sobs. Many were so shocked that they fell unconscious. Many beat their heads in sheer despair. (*RKRV Part I p.328*)

Lakshmana watched the upsurge of devotion rising from the common people of the realm. His eyes turned red with anger, his tongue was tied with emotion, when he thought of Kaikeyi, the stepmother, who did not have even an iota of this sentiment towards Rama. He sat on the ground, his head heavy with sad thoughts. (*RKRV Part I p.338*)

INTO THE FOREST

Service

Rama directed Lakshmana to find someplace where Sita could get down from the bank to where she could safely take bath. The banks of the river were soft and slushy in the jungle area. So, Lakshmana chose a spot, which he reinforced by placing stones and rocks so that she could descend safely and ascend in comfort after her ablutions. He prayed to Sita, the Mother, to use that temporary ghat for her bath. She took great care while stepping down; and before she entered the river, she too prostrated to the Goddess Ganga. Lakshmana went into the jungle to gather some edible fruits so that Rama and Sita could recoup, with some food, after bath. He offered them, reverentially, and they partook of them. (*RKRV Part I p.342*)

Sita slept on the soft bed of grass. Lakshmana sat at the Feet of Rama, in order to massage them tenderly, to relieve the tension of exertion. Rama realised that Lakshmana would continue the service, so long as he appeared to be awake. He desired to induce him to take rest; so, he pretended as if he had gone into deep sleep. At this Lakshmana feared that any further pressing of the

feet might disturb the sleep, and he quietly slipped into the distance. There, he sat in the “hero” posture so that he could gaze intently at the four directions, and recognise at once any wild animal approaching the spot, or any demon or demonic person bent upon disturbing the sleep of Rama. He was all attention and vigilant. (*RKRV Part I p.346*)

Rama directed Lakshmana to bring a quantity of the milky juice of the ficus tree. Lakshmana moved off without murmur into the forest nearby, and without much delay, he brought with him a leaf bowl full of the juice. Rama applied the juice to the locks of hair on his head, and they turned into a thick matted lump, the like of which is generally worn by hermits. (*RKRV Part I p.350*)

Conversation with Guha:

Lakshmana gathered some courage and said, “Oh! Chieftain of the Nishadas! One does not get happiness through another, nor does he become miserable through another. He cannot get good fortune or bad fortune through another. There is no possibility for such indirect means to succeed. Nor can one really be either happy or miserable. Each one comes for some purpose, urged by the potentiality of his acts in the previous birth or by some Sovereign Will and Resolution. And in the course of fulfilling that purpose, they appear to be happy or miserable, that is all. A beggar dreams that he is a king. A king dreams that he is a beggar when they are awake; they find that the happiness and the misery were unreal and short-lived. So too, the world is a dream, unreal, illusory. It is *Mithya*. You feel sorrow because Rama is in this plight, but Rama is above and beyond grief and joy. For those who watch him, according to the good fortune or

misfortune as decided by the merit or demerit acquired and accumulated, he may appear to be happy or miserable. What you see as joy or grief in Rama is only the reflection of your own mental state.” At this Guha calmed himself, and gave up the rage he had directed against Kaikeyi, a little while ago. He understood that it was not proper to find fault with another and assign blame. “People are all laid up in the sleep of delusion¹¹. And they are engaged in witnessing a variety of dreams. This is the way men spend the night called ‘life.’ The Yogis, self-mastered people, they alone keep awake in the night, without being caught up in, or enchanted by, dreams. They have no use for the world and its contents. They have turned away from all sensual pleasures and entanglements. Until this stage is reached, people cannot refer to themselves as ‘awake.’ When *Jnana* (wisdom) is attained and the Reality is realised, then the bonds of delusion fall off, and Love is fixed on the Lotus Feet of Sai Rama.” Guha’s thoughts ran on in this strain. He was comforted and strengthened by them. The rest of the night was spent by Guha and Lakshmana, narrating to each other the superhuman attributes of Rama and the fullness of the Glory that was latent in Him. (*RKRV Part I p.348-349*)

Lakshmana could not bear the anguish. He uttered a few words of anger and bitterness against those who had caused this tragedy, but Rama realised his temper and stopped him forthwith. Then, he turned to Minister Sumantra and said, “Sumantra! Lakshmana is a stripling; do not attach importance to his words. Do not communicate them to father. Lakshmana’s mind is undergoing such suffering since he has great affection

¹¹ See *Endnote – No.5 - Maya*

for me, and since he is affected by the troubles that afflict Sita. He gave vent to such expressions, for he has a mistaken notion about those who sent me to the forest in exile. By nature, Lakshmana is endowed with very good qualities.” Then, Rama began to describe the virtues of his brother. (*RKRV Part I p.352*)

Sita describes Lakshmana

Sita¹² turned towards the women and spoke to them thus: “Sisters! This simple, sincere person with the golden complexion is Lakshmana. He is my Lord’s brother, a younger brother. (*RKRV Part I p.368*)

Lakshmana upset:

Within a short time, they saw the Mandakini, and were happy to bathe in its sacred waters, and perform the prescribed ceremonial rites. They rested awhile under a shady tree, and ate some fruits, before walking over the grass for some distance, admiring the verdure and the scenery.

Then, Rama spoke to Lakshmana thus: “Lakshmana! I am at a loss to decide on the exact spot where we can erect a cottage of leaf-thatch and bamboo for our stay in this place. I do not find it easy to say which place is good and which is not. So, select and fix upon a spot.”

No sooner did these words fall on his ears than Lakshmana crumpled on the ground right at the feet of Rama. He was in evident anguish. “What wrong have I sentence for any sin? Or,

¹² See Chapter, *Sita - Sita in the city of Nagas*

are you testing me, and my nature? Or, are you joking and making fun of me?” he asked. He was in great sorrow and he stood with his head bent with fear and anxiety.

Rama was surprised at his behaviour. He went near him and clasped him to his bosom. “Brother! What happened now to make you so sad? I cannot guess why you are so heartbroken,” he said. “Tell me,” he pleaded, “tell me the reason, and do not prolong my astonishment and sorrow.”

Lakshmana replied immediately. He said, “Brother, I have surrendered everything to you. I have no likes and dislikes. What is pleasing to you is, on that account, pleasing to me. You know that this is the fact. But yet, you now ask me to *select* a place which I like and erect a cottage for you thereon! My heart received a shock when you directed *me* to exercise *my* will. Order me where it is to be raised. I shall do so. Be merciful, do not speak to me in this strain, bless me in accepting the surrender I am offering at thy feet of all of me, the will, the intelligence, the mind, the senses, the body, all with no exception and no reservation. I am your servant, following you in the hope of having the chance to serve you. Use me. Command me, and have the command obeyed and the action accomplished.”

When Lakshmana prayed and supplicated so sincerely, Rama consoled him and pacified his feelings. “Lakshmana,” he said, “Why are you worried so much on this little matter? Do not take it so much to heart. I gave you that direction in just a casual way. I am not unaware of the loyalty that fills your heart. Well. Come along with me. Right, I shall select the spot myself.” And with

Sita by his side, he took the forest track, along with Lakshmana, and shortly, they sighted the northern bank of the Mandakini river. That length of bank was curved like a bow. It appeared as if the bow was held by the Chitrakoota peak standing behind it like a hero. One felt that the arrows it was ready to let loose were Sense-control, Mind-control, Charity, Renunciation, etc., and the target they were intended to destroy was the Gang of Sin. Rama described the spot thus and added: “This hero will not withdraw from the fight!” He directed that the cottage be built on that captivating spot.

Lakshmana requested Rama and Sita to rest awhile under a tree, and set about collecting poles, leaves, creepers and fibre from tree barks to spin ropes from. In order to raise a hut spacious enough for three, he dug pits, planted poles, and laboured quickly to complete the construction. When Sita and Rama rose from the shade after some rest, they found the cottage rising before their eyes, a thing of beauty, certain to be a lovely home by all counts. Rama felt that he too should give Lakshmana some help in his work; and so, seeing his brother on the roof, giving the finishing touches, he handed him from the ground bits of string to tie the bundles of dry grass to the cross poles in order to thicken the thatch. Sita too desired to give a helping hand. She plucked long leaves from the tree branches Lakshmana had brought, and gave sheaves of them into Rama’s hands to be passed on to Lakshmana.

The house was ready for occupation, even before sunset. Rama looked often and long at the neat little cottage, and he praised the devotion and skill of his brother to Sita, in high terms. Sita too

appreciated the house and said that she had for a long time yearned to live in just such a habitation. She told Rama that her long-cherished desire was fulfilled that day.

Meanwhile, Lakshmana came down from the roof; he went round the cottage to examine whether anything was wanting. Then, he asked permission from Rama to proceed to the Mandakini for a bath. A short while after, Sita and Rama both went to the river and had their bath; they returned to the cottage and partook of the fruits that Lakshmana had gathered in the morning, and slept soundly on the floor of their new home. (*RKRV Part I p.374-377*)

Lakshmana had the unique chance of feasting his eyes upon the Lotus Feet of Sita and Rama, and imbibing the affection they bestowed on Him. So he forgot everything else, and immersed himself in supreme spiritual ecstasy, *Sat-chit-ananda* (Being-awareness-bliss). His mother, Sumitra Devi, or his wife Urmila, or his other kinsmen did not appear before his vision, even in dreams. So austere was his refusal to remember them. (*RKRV Part I p.379*)

Sthala Prabhava

Once while Rama and Lakshmana were walking in the forest suddenly Lakshmana told Rama in a dejected mood, "Dear elder brother! Why this exile in the forest for us! It is very difficult for us to protect Sita from the demons in this forest. Why should we undergo so many ordeals here? Why should Mother Sita, who was never exposed to the sun and rain so far, encounter so many difficulties in this forest? Come! Let us go back to Ayodhya and

lead a comfortable life." Rama then realised that, what Lakshmana was talking was due to the effect of *sthala* (place). He took the hand of Lakshmana into His smilingly and brought him out of that place by walking some distance. Then He asked Lakshmana, "Lakshmana! Now you tell Me. Shall we go back to Ayodhya?" Lakshmana then realised his mistake and felt sorry. He pleaded with Rama, "Dear brother! We need not go back to Ayodhya now. We have to live here in the forest for fourteen years as per the command of our father. I never went against Your wishes nor disobeyed Your command. I do not know why I spoke like that then. I am just not able to understand why my mind had changed like that." Rama explained, "Lakshmana! I know this is not your nature. This is the effect of the place through which we passed just now. There are several demons moving about in this place. Since you entered a place inhabited by the demons, the demonic qualities entered into you." So saying, Rama helped him regain his poise. Hence, we have to take into consideration the time and place as also the *sthala prabhava* (effect of the place) and conduct ourselves accordingly. (DD 24th August 2006 p 6-7)

BROTHERS MEET

Once, while moving about in the forest, Rama and Lakshmana sat under a tree. At that time, they heard the neighing of horses and the cries of elephants at a distance. Rama asked Lakshmana to find out how horses and elephants happened to appear in the forest. (Dasara Discourses 2004 p72)

Lakshmana was curious to find out the source of all this commotion. Climbing to the top of a tree, he found that Bharatha was coming with an army and the people of Ayodhya. Since he was the incarnation of Adishesha (the thousand-hooded serpent), he was immediately smitten by anger and burst out, "Oh Rama! Bharatha is coming here to drive us deeper into the forest. He has come with his army to fight us." *He exclaimed: "Brother! Get ready for battle. Take up your bow and arrows¹³."*

Rama smiled at Lakshmana and said, "Lakshmana! Though you have moved with Bharatha you have not understood him. He is the embodiment of peace, and he loves Me deeply. Do not harbour any ill-feeling toward him. Wait and see." (*SSB 1996 p.40*)

Lakshmana replied, "Bharatha is coming with an army to kill us." Rama said: "Lakshmana! What a serious mistake you are making! It is impossible for any action of the Ikshvaku clan to think of such a preposterous idea even in dream. Because we two were not present in Ayodhya when Bharatha and Shatrughna returned to the capital, they are now coming to see us." Rama sought to pacify Lakshmana.

Lakshmana replied: "What is this forbearance and sympathy on your part? If they merely wanted to see us, will they come with a huge army? No. they are coming only to slay us. Rama said: "Lakshmana! You are too much dominated by Rajasic tendencies. You seem to be attached to kingship. Why worry?"

¹³ *SSS Vol.28 p.90*

Bharatha is coming. I shall ask him to crown you as king¹⁴. You may go with him."

Even as Rama was speaking thus, Bharatha came rushing towards Rama, fell at his feet crying: "Rama! Rama! Rama! And said: "I am not competent to rule over Ayodhya. To reign over a kingdom Ramachandra alone is worthy as the eldest son of Dasaratha. You alone are fit to rule over the kingdom properly and establish Rama Raja. Please return to Ayodhya," thus pleaded Bharatha. As Bharatha was entreating in this manner, Rama looked smilingly at Lakshmana. "Compare your feelings with the expressions of Bharatha" he said. (*SSS Vol. 28 p.90-91*)

Rama's words of advice to Bharatha made an indelible impression on the mind of Lakshmana. He fell at the feet of Rama and repented for his outburst. He said, "Brother, when I saw Bharatha and his army from a distance, I was seething with anger. Now my mind rests in peace having known the truth and listening to your soothing words." Rama advised him not to be carried away by the outward scenario but to turn inward and strive for experiencing bliss. (*Dasara Discourses 2004 p.73*) Lakshmana regretted his misjudgement of Bharatha and sought Rama's forgiveness. (*SSS Vol.27 p.274*)

¹⁴ Reacting to Lakshmana's outburst, Rama said, "Lakshmana you have developed a desire for the throne of Ayodhya. Better, you go to Ayodhya and rule the kingdom. I will keep Bharatha with me in the forest. Bharatha is one of sacrifice and character. His spirit of sacrifice is matchless. You have misunderstood his noble intentions. (*Dasara Discourses 2004 p72*)

Lakshmana saw the anguish Bharatha experienced at the separation from them. He realised that his estimate of intentions was very wrong! He suffered terrible contrition within himself. His head was bent by the weight of sorrow. He shed profuse tears along with Bharatha and Satrughna. (*RKRV Part I p. 444*)

Rama comes to know about Dasaratha's passing away:

Rama became aware of the calamity that had befallen, but he soon consoled and comforted himself. He drew Lakshmana near him and told him the fact. Feeling that it would be better that Lakshmana be informed more fully, he requested Sumantra, the loyal Minister of the Line, to relate to him the details and also the facts regarding administration of Ayodhya. At this, Sumantra fell down unable to bear the burden of grief. Struggling to rise he said amidst sobs, "Lakshmana! Where can we have Dasaratha hereafter? He was reduced to ashes by the flames of sorrow at being separated from Rama, Sita and you. Ayodhya has become a jungle. Wherever you look, you see only sorrow. Whatever you hear, you hear only wailing. Not merely men, even birds and animals cast off their lives when you left. Those who survive are keeping alive in the hope of your return." Hearing this, Lakshmana shed streams of tears. He stood like a stump, unable to reply.

Without a word, Lakshmana approached Rama, and told him in a faltering voice, "I could not imagine, even in my dreams, that such a terrible calamity would happen. We could not see our father in his last moments." Rama consoled him, saying that there was no profit in grieving over what has already come to pass. "Physical bodies are as transient as bubbles in water. They

are bound to burst and disappear, if not today, at least the day after,” he said. He gave expression to many a moral maxim, until both the brothers went to the river to finish the bath ritually laid down when one hears of the death of those who are near of kin. (*RKRV Part I p. 445*)

PANCHAVATI

Rama wished to stay at Panchavati on the Godavari for some length of time. So, reclining under the cool shades of a spreading tree Rama called his brother near and said, “Lakshmana, brother, fix upon a beautiful and comfortable spot in this area and build thereon a nice little cottage, as charming as you wish. ¹⁵”

Lakshmana received this order as a dagger-thrust! He could not bear the agony. He fell at the feet of Rama, crying out in anguish: “Tell me what crime I committed to deserve this cruel command.” Sita and Rama were struck with amazement at this behaviour. Rama said, “Lakshmana, I cannot understand what makes you so sad. Have you heard any day a single cruel word from my tongue? Have I become so insane as to utter harsh, unpleasant words to you or anyone else? You attend to my needs

¹⁵ Lakshmana was so shocked with pain at this that he fell on the ground; he lamented that he had fallen from grace. Rama said that he had 'risen' instead, for, he was asking him to select the site himself. That was the very reason why Lakshmana felt he had fallen: "Have I a will apart from yours? How could you ever imagine that I could exercise my judgement independently and select a site myself? Tell me, where and how; it will be done. But, I have no judgement of my own; I have surrendered it long ago." That was the reply of Lakshmana. Lakshmana too was a mighty hero, for, he drew strength from the Divine itself. And, he had no other strength. (*SSS Vol.12 p.165*)

and wishes and serve me as the very breath of life. How then can I speak in cruel terms to you? Your grief is meaningless, mistaken. After all, what did I tell you now? I told you only this: Choose any spot you like and build thereon a hut for us to live in. Isn't it so?"

At this, Lakshmana closed his ears with the palms and protested sadly, "Rama! Rama! I cannot bear to hear these words." Rama was surprised at this gesture of grief. But Lakshmana stood before him with folded hands, supplicating with the words: "Lord! There is no one in me to say "I." My only treasure, my only possession is Sita and Rama. I have no wish of my own. I have no will of my own. My wish, my will, is Rama's wish, Rama's will, Rama's command. Obeying it is my wish, my will. I am the slave who cares for none else, nothing else. How then can I bear to listen to words which indicate that I have to choose according to my wishes a spot for the cottage? As if I have the capacity and inclination to choose! Had I preferences of my own, how can I be a fit servant of Rama? How can I deserve this privilege and pleasure? It would mean I am unfit to be alive on earth, and my life is but a burden and a shame." Lakshmana stood, sobbing aloud, unable to stifle his grief.

Rama saw his plight. He consoled him with kind words. "Brother! Your heart is highly sanctified. I used those words in the ordinary worldly sense, but do not be under the impression that your brother is unaware of your innermost quality of dedication. Do not grieve." Rama showered His smiles on Lakshmana and continued, "Brother, I am delighted at the purity of your devotion and the genuineness of your service. Your

intentions are innocent and elevating. I will not pain you by such words hereafter. I spoke to you the language of common usage that is all. Do not take them so much to heart. Come! Let us go and choose!” Saying thus, He took Sita and Lakshmana with him. After traversing some distance, Rama stopped and said, “Well! Erect the *Parnasala* (cottage) here!”

When he heard those words, Lakshmana exclaimed in great joy. “Ah, I am blessed indeed. My duty is to carry out such commands not exercising my wish or will, to do anything on my own.” He fell at the feet of his elder brother. Rising happy and content, he entered on the task of collecting branches and twigs for the hut that was to be their home. Sita and Rama realised that Lakshmana had a highly sensitive mind, a delicately subtle intellect. They derived great joy within themselves at the recollection of the depth of his faith and devotion. Sita confessed to Rama on many occasions that life for her in the forest was even more delightful than life at Ayodhya, for the reason that a brother like Lakshmana was accompanying and serving Rama.

When Sita and Rama saw the hermitage constructed by Lakshmana, they were charmed by its beauty, its captivating simplicity and comfort, and the inspiring setting in which it shone. Sita entered the cottage, and was immediately struck by the skill and artistic taste of her brother-in-law. She praised him for finishing it so quickly and with useful adjuncts and parts. The three of them spent their days happily in that cottage. (*RKR* *Part II p.19-22*)

Encounter with Surpanakha:

One day, Lakshmana was ruminating on these deep Truths and precious directives while he was keeping watch around the cottage. His eyes fell on a tiny sapling of lime, struggling upwards under the shade of a huge tree. He desired to plant it nearer the cottage and help it grow vigorously under his care. So, he was digging it up by the roots with intense love and attention, when the wicked and vicious sister of Ravana, Surpanakha¹⁶ by name, rushed into the scene!

As soon as her eyes fell on Lakshmana, she was allured by the halo of goodness and the splendour that illumined his body. She was struck dumb at the unexpected vision. She suddenly transformed herself into a charmingly pretty damsel and approached Lakshmana with amorous gestures. But Lakshmana paid no heed. He continued his task, unaffected by the apparition. Surpanakha could not bear inattention any longer. She came close to him and with a pathetic voice, she appealed, “Lord! Why are you plunging me into despair? Cool my unbearable ardour. Cast on me your loving happiness-conferring eye.” Lakshmana did not react to her call. He heard her words, but he only smiled within himself at her audacity. He continued with his attempt to pluck the plant safely from the shade. Surpanakha lost patience. She prepared to draw him to herself. But Lakshmana drew back, saying, “Mother! I am the bond-slave of Sri Rama. I am not a free man. Whatever I do, however small a job it may be, is done only as He commands,” as a prelude to the advice he planned to give her. Hearing his words and curious

¹⁶ See Chapter, *Surpanakha*

to know with whom he was talking, Sita and Rama came out of the cottage into the garden. Rama noticed Surpanakha and recognised that she had changed into the damsel before him. He prepared himself for all eventualities. Meanwhile, Surpanakha pelted harsh abusive words at Lakshmana like, ‘coward,’ and ‘villain’ and laughed loudly in scorn at his irresponsible behaviour. She had not noticed Rama, all her attention and anger were fixed on Lakshmana alone. She pleaded before him, “Oh Most Charming! Wed me and be happy. I can delight you and serve you most loyally.” Lakshmana tried to ward her off by saying, “Pretty woman! I am a slave. If I wed you, you will have to live as a slave,” and continuing the jocular retort, he said in fun. “Well, there is my master, Rama. If you wed him, I will be your slave.” Surpanakha took him at his word. She believed that it was good strategy. She turned to the cottage which Lakshmana had pointed to her; and there, standing near the door, laughing together at her, she found a very beautiful woman and beside her, the embodiment of masculine charm! (*RKR V Part II p.28-29*)

Surpanakha was smitten with passionate love. She ran forward to Rama and weeping out her distress, she prayed, “God of Love! God of Beauty! Accept me as yours.” Rama too decided to treat her to a homily and derive some fun out of the ludicrous situation before him. He said with a chuckle. “Oh Beauteous Woman! I cannot wed you, for I am under the vow of monogamy. I have my wife here. My brother, Lakshmana there, has a wife, but she is not here. So, wed him and derive fulfilment. He is the proper person for you, approach him.” At this, the woman hastened to where Lakshmana was and started her appeals once again. She said, “Your brother has agreed to the wedding. So, do not delay,

accept me.” Her attitude now was very humble and gentle. Lakshmana grasped the absurdity of her plight and wanted to heighten the fun. He sent her to Rama and Rama sent her back to Lakshmana several times, until she grew so desperate, and blinded by passion, she relapsed into her demonic nature! Her crooked intelligence told her that it was Sita that stood in the way of her success in this adventure of lust. Rama could not wed her, since Sita was by His side. If she were removed, Rama would certainly yield to her solicitations. So, she fell upon Sita in order to kill her and swallow her; for, she was a demon to the core. At this, Lakshmana stood ready, watching the face of Rama for orders. Rama realised that the woman was far gone and she had to be stopped. Feeling that an axe need not be used when the nails are enough. He raised his hand up, and counted four on his fingers, looking at Lakshmana. (*RKR V Part II p.29-30*)

Lakshmana reads the signs made by Rama:

Lakshmana immediately grasped the meaning of that command! By counting four, Rama indicated the Four Vedas, which are collectively called Sruthi, that is to say, “The Heard,” which means the Ear. Lakshmana had a sharp vigilant intellect and so, he could rightly interpret the slightest gesture of Rama. Rama had held his hand up, towards the sky. The sky or *Akasa* is the fifth elemental force, characterised by Sound. Sound is the symbol for Brahman, known as *Sabda Brahman*, or God. God resides in heaven, and heaven is also indicated by the raised pointing hand. Heaven is known as ‘*naaka*’ in Sanskrit. It has also another meaning, ‘Nose!’ No sooner did Rama make those two gestures, Lakshmana rushed towards the demonic woman with his sword drawn. He dragged her down to the ground; and

shouting that her effrontery must be punished, he slashed off her ears and nose! Surpanakha raised such a loud wail that the forest quaked and quivered. She assumed her real shape as an ogress and yelled, “Is this just? How can you deform, so cruelly, a woman who has come to you? I shall bring my brother Ravana here and inflict retribution for this cruel act.” With this, she disappeared quickly into the forest. (*RKRV Part II p 30-31*)

Encounter With the Rakshasa Hordes

In the forest, Lakshmana cut off the nose and ears of Surpanakha. She went and complained to Ravana. Then Ravana invaded the forest with a huge army. At that time, Rama called Lakshmana and said, “You have to support Me as per My instructions. I shall go and face this army of Rakshasas¹⁷ alone. You take Sita to a secluded place and keep her concealed in a safe haven.” But Lakshmana refused to accept this. He said, “Is it proper to face this huge horde of *Rakshasas* alone? My duty is not to protect Sita alone. My prime purpose is to serve You. Being Your brother, can I stand by and safely preserve my life while You are in grave danger? So, I shall not go leaving You alone”. Rama replied, “In the multiple duties of man, many such situations arise. You have to act according to circumstances without transgressing *dharma*. Are you not aware that I can face alone any number of opponents singly? Therefore, you only take up the job of protecting Sita.” In such soft words, He mollified Lakshmana and made him agree to stay back and look after Sita. He whispered the secret of the appropriate *dharma* in Lakshmana’s ears. Lakshmana agreed and conducted Sita to a

¹⁷ See Chapter, *Khara And Dushana*

safe place. From their safe haven, Lakshmana and Sita could hear the loud clamour and bright flashes of the fierce battle. It was difficult for Lakshmana to keep his mind tranquil. Sita also, in her anxiety, urged Lakshmana with even abuses to go in help for Rama. “Lakshmana, why are you abandoning your brother? Go to His support,” she insisted. Lakshmana said, “Mother, my prime duty is strict obedience of Rama’s instructions. Rama is capable of winning over all the enemies by Himself. He is omnipotent and omniscient. What is my strength compared to His! I won’t leave you.” He was pacifying her in this way, and waiting. Rama released a thousand-headed weapon against the enemy, and the Rakshasas were all destroyed. When Rama returned, He was happy to see that Sita and Lakshmana were safe and sound. (*SSS Vol.34 p.74-75*)

ABDUCTION OF SITA

While they were in exile living in the forest, one day Sita noticed a golden deer. She was fascinated by it and she prayed to Rama to go after it, catch it and bring it for her. The golden deer (*Maricha*, the demon) was the decoy employed by Ravana to draw Rama away from the hermitage, so that he might kidnap her. (*SSS Vol.15 p.302*)

Rama tells Lakshmana to Guard Sita while he goes to catch the Golden Deer:

Moreover, since the subsequent scenes of the drama were known to both Sita and Rama, Rama kept it to himself, while he said: “Lakshmana, this forest is the dwelling place of Rakshasas. Remember what happened two days ago, when their leaders,

Khara and Dushana fell upon us. Their kinsmen and comrades might come in force and attack us. So, it is necessary to have arrow on bow always and watch all the four quarters with utmost alertness. Guard Sita with great care. Do not leave Sita alone, under any circumstance. This deer might escape me and flee into the distance. I have to catch it alive; so, it may take some time for me to accomplish this task. Or use your intelligence and physical prowess as suits the occasion, and save Sita from any danger that might threaten her while I am away.” (*RKR Part II p. 52*)

Dialogue between Sita and Lakshmana:

When the fatal arrow struck him, Maricha exclaimed in agony, “Ha! Sita! Ha! Lakshmana!” and collapsed on the ground. The cry fell on the ears of Sita and Lakshmana. Even before the sound reached him, Sita said, “Lakshmana, did you hear? That is the voice of your brother. He is calling you for help. Go, go immediately. Do not delay. These Rakshasas are experts in magical transformations and tricks. They cause profuse calamities, changing their shapes and natures.” She wanted Lakshmana to proceed in haste to the spot from which the cry had come.

Lakshmana was an intelligent person, used to discriminating and arriving at right conclusions. He was also a loyal adherent of the directions of his brother; he revered those orders, precious as his own breath. So, he said, “Mother! No calamity can ever happen

to Rama¹⁸. No Rakshasa, however crafty, can harm Rama. You have seen, haven't you, how he destroyed in a trice thousands of these very Rakshasas? Do not be anxious. Muster courage and be calm. Rama will soon come back hale and hearty into this hermitage.”

Sita said, “Lakshmana! Why is it that you are behaving so heartlessly? I do not understand your intentions. Go soon. Go and put an end to the danger into which your brother has fallen. Help him, go.” She demonstrated her fear and anxiety in many ways and tried her best to persuade Lakshmana to leave her.

Of course, Sita knew quite well that Rama can never be touched by trouble. But things have to happen as foundations for future events. She acted like an ignorant person affected by the cries. Lakshmana spoke assuringly in various ways. He pleaded piteously that he would not disobey his brother. Seeing that she cast aside all his arguments and appeals, Lakshmana said at last, “Mother, The Command of Rama is my very Life. I consider it as precious as my breath. Did you not hear Rama ordering me never to leave you unguarded, but always to protect you? Therefore, I shall not move one step away from here whatever might happen.”

¹⁸ Lakshmana said to Sita, “Mother, the voice you have heard is not the voice of Rama. It is but the trick of the demon, who wants to deceive us. Nothing dangerous can ever happen to Rama, as He is the incarnation of Lord Narayana. Do not worry in the least.” Sita, who knew the master plan of Rama, was determined to send Lakshmana on one pretext or the other. (*SSB 1996 p.45-46*)

Sita desired that Lakshmana be sent afar, for Ravana had to approach the hermitage. It was the plan that Rama had designed to effect the destruction of Ravana and the Rakshasas. She had to fulfil the will of Rama. So she too held on to her words and made them sharper and more hurting, so that Lakshmana could yield.

Lakshmana closed his ears with his palms. He could not bear the imputations and the charges. He prayed, “Mother! I shall suffer all the anger you pour on me.” Sita became harsher (*RKRV Part II p.53-54*)

She knew that soft and gentle words would not make Lakshmana leave the place. Hence, she used stern words and said, “Oh Lakshmana! Perhaps, you wish to have me as your wife, when Rama dies.” (*SSB 1996 p.61*)

She threatened to go herself to the rescue of Rama if he would not proceed. Lakshmana had no alternative. He could bear it no longer. He could not allow her to roam about in the forest in order to discover Rama and help him. So, with a heavy heart, he moved away from the hermitage in search of Rama.

When Lakshmana left the hermitage, he pleaded with Sita to enter the place and be within closed doors, and never to move out. He exhorted her to be careful and vigilant. He moved out of the hermitage with no willingness and with no strength to move! He turned round and addressed the spirits of the forest, praying to them to keep watch over Sita and guard her. He drew four

lines¹⁹ around the hermitage and invoking on them mysterious and mighty mantric power. He asked Sita not to step beyond them on any account, under any pretext or pressure.

Lakshmana was a person endowed with all the virtues. He was caught between loyalties to two divergent commands. He could not disobey either. He was overcome with anguish. He had perforce to act counter to the commands of Rama. He had to leave Sita alone and unprotected. Fear shook his heart. He walked off, in spite of his legs failing him. He turned back towards the hermitage, at every step he took forward. (*RKR V Part II p.54-55*)

The moment Lakshmana left the place; Ravana came there and begged for food saying he was hungry. Sita felt very sorry on hearing the word ‘hunger’. Sita decided that it was her duty to offer food to a hungry person. She therefore invited him to come in. But, Ravana was very much afraid to cross the *Lakshmana Rekha*. He dared not cross the line, but started shouting ‘hungry, hungry’. Then Sita was constrained to cross the *Lakshmana Rekha* and come out to offer food to Ravana. Immediately Ravana abducted Sita and took her away in his chariot. (*SSS Vol.40 p.191-192*)

Rama’s Lamentation on seeing that Sita is missing:

Rama returned to Panchavati from the depths of the jungle, after killing the “impersonation” called the Golden Deer. He thought within himself that the plot of his story would have by now

¹⁹ Lakshmana Rekha. (*SSS Vol. 40 p.191-192*)

worked out, at the hermitage, as directed by His Will. He said within himself, “Though that is but the blossoming of my plan, people should not understand so soon that it is Divine Design. I have to behave hereafter as an ordinary human being.” When he was halfway back, he saw Lakshmana coming and he decided that he too must be kept unaware of the secret purpose behind the seeming tragedy. So he asked, as if he was perturbed in mind, “Lakshmana! Brother! You have disobeyed me and brushed my word aside. You have come away, leaving Sita alone in the hermitage. How could you do so? You have come so far leaving her helpless! Alas, you have been witnessing the demonic wickedness of the Rakshasa brood every day. How could you desert Sita so? Alas, what has happened to her? I am afraid some calamity has befallen! I feel that Sita is not there, in the hermitage. Alas, what shall we do now? What is to be our future?”

Lakshmana tries to explain why he left Sita Alone:

Hearing this lamentation, Lakshmana fell at his brother’s feet and said, “Brother! You know me, as the workings of your mind. Whatever the occasion I am ever ready to offer myself, my very breath, at your feet. Will I ever go counter to your command? However this time it happened. The force that compelled me to disobey is the prompting of my Destiny. What can I do? The outburst, ‘Ha, Sita, Ha, Lakshmana’ that arose from the throat of that false Deer reached the Hermitage. As soon as she heard it, she urged me in various ways to run to your side. I am conversant with the tricks of these Rakshasas and so, I fell at her feet and prayed for pardon. I told her, ‘Rama cannot be harmed in the least. No danger can approach him. The cries we heard are

only the false stratagems of the Rakshasas.’ A second time, those cries struck our ears. Then she lost all courage. They were exact reproductions of your voice. At this, she ignored her own Reality. She ignored the mores of kinship and family. She used words that should not be spoken or taken by the ear. I could not suffer any more. So I directed her to take every precaution. I did all I could to keep her safe, and then came away from the hermitage. I shall gladly accept whatever punishment you award me, whatever measure you take to expiate for the wrong I have done.”

With these words, Lakshmana fell flat at the feet of Rama. At this, Rama said, “Lakshmana, you ought not to have left her all alone, whatever the reason! I feel that Sita will not be at the hermitage when we reach there. How can we pride ourselves as heroic men, when having come into this forest, we are not able to guard Sita from being carried away by the Rakshasas? Can you tolerate when people say tomorrow that Rama was unable to save his wife from the calamity of being kidnapped? Can you remain calm in mind, listening to such talk? Alas, how am I to bear this tragedy?” Rama moaned and groaned in great mental pain, just like an ignorant man, and ran forward to the hermitage, to find whether his fears were true. (*RKRV Part II p.60-62*)

THE SEARCH

Meeting Jatayu:

Rama and Lakshmana started searching for Sita -- Brothers walked near the place where a combat had taken place where

there were evidences like broken arrows and patches of blood - They found an eagle gasping for breath repeating Rama, Rama-- When Rama stroked his head and body lovingly – He recovered some little strength overpowered by joy and sorrow – He crawled and placed his head on the Feet of Rama-- Rama placed his head on his lap and gently fondled- Jatayu²⁰ narrated how he tried to save Sita but as his wings were slashed into shambles by Ravana he could not save Sita and stop Ravana's further journey. (*RKRV Part II p. 66-68*)

Ajamukhi

A demoness called Ajamukhi²¹ espied them and was entranced by their personal beauty. Lakshmana inferred that she too was stricken with the malady of Surpanakha, and he treated her with the same contempt. He cut off her limbs and taught her a severe lesson. (*RKRV Part II p. 69*)

Encounter with Kabhanda

Rama the all-knowing One, knew the whereabouts of Sita but pretended as though He did not. While searching for Sita, Rama and Lakshmana entered a forest. They saw a strange monster, with its head in the place of its stomach. They could not help laughing at the sight of the monster. Becoming curious, they began to observe him.

²⁰ See Chapter, *Jatayu and Sampathi*

²¹ See Chapter, *Ajamukhi And Kabanda*

Suddenly, Kabandha²², the strange monster, caught both of them in his hands. Both the brothers struggled to free themselves from the iron grip of Kabandha but they failed. Lakshmana, who thought that death was inevitable at the hands of Kabandha, said to Rama that he would become the food of Kabandha so that Kabandha would release Rama. He said: “Rama! Allow me this favour of helping You in this way.” Rama refused to listen to the words of Lakshmana. He said: “O Lakshmana! You are the most virtuous one in this world. One can never get a brother like you. Let Me become the food for Kabandha. You go and find Sita and protect her.” In this way, each brother vied with the other to sacrifice himself for the sake of the other. One can never find such ideal love between anywhere in the world. While there was hatred between brothers like Vali and Sugriva, Vibhishana and Ravana, there was only pure love between Rama and Lakshmana. In the end, the brothers decided to destroy Kabandha and axed both his hands.

An angel immediately emerged from the body of Kabandha and said, “Rama²³! Today I am freed from my curse by the touch of Your Divine Body. Once upon a time, I was the son of a Sage, But I was turned into a monster by a curse which I earned due to my evil deeds. You have freed me from my curse, and I am eternally grateful to You, Not far from this place is the hermitage of Sage Matanga. There, an old devoted lady is eagerly awaiting Your arrival.” (*SSB1996 p.52-53*)

²² ibid

²³ Kabandha who swore at Rama and wanted to eat Him up alive; but, Rama liberated him from curse and restored him to previous glory. (*SSS Vol.4 p.20*)

Sabari’s devotion:

Lakshmana appreciated the devotion of Sabari²⁴ collecting fruits and offering to the Lord and her divine joy that had filled herself as a result of long years of spiritual study and practice -- (*RKR V Part II p.74*)

Befriending Sugriva:

Lakshmana sought to deepen faith and tighten the bond by relating to Sugriva²⁵ the Truth of Rama and the mission on which he had come. Lakshmana told him also of Sita and her Divinity. She was the daughter of King of Mithila, he said, and so she can be won and her blessings secured, only by uniting *Methane*, or churning or Sadhana. (*RKR V Part II p.83-84*)

Rama asks Lakshmana to identify the Jewels of Sita:

When Sita was being carried away by Ravana over the Chitrakoota Mountain, she dropped several of her jewels so that people could find them and convey the news to Rama. When Rama and Lakshmana became friendly with Sugriva, he brought the jewels, which his followers had gathered and showed them to Rama. (*SSB 1977 p.43*)

The cloth in which the jewels were bundled was a part of the fibre cloth which his step-mother had thrown towards Sita, so that she might wear it while in exile as a recluse in the forest. Recognising it as such, Lakshmana shed tears. Rama loosened the knots and undid the bundle. He showed the contents to

²⁴ See Chapter, *Sabari*

²⁵ See Chapter, *Sugriva - Sugriva meets Rama and Lakshmana:*

Lakshmana in order to confirm whether the jewels were those of Sita herself. Lakshmana declared that he could not identify them all, for, he had never raised his eyes and looked at Sita²⁶. (*RKR V Part II p.84*)

Lakshmana said:

*“Naham janami keyure
Naham janami kundale
Nupurethyabhi janami
Nithyam padabhivandanath.*

‘I do not know whether these bangles belonged to Sita. I do not know whether these ear studs belonged to Sita. (*Beacons of Divine Wisdom Part I p.46*)

Nor can I recognise the head ornaments in this bunch. (*SSS Vol.23 p.81*) I have seen only the toe-rings that sister-in-law wore, for I used to prostrate at her Feet every day. Yes, these are the toe-rings she wore. I can vouchsafe for that. While moving through the jungles, I used to follow her and walk on her footsteps. You know that you always walked in front and I followed behind Sita. I was walking, watching her feet and so, I know these rings quite well.” Sugriva and Hanuman looked on wistfully at the brothers, when they acted their roles and were

²⁶ During all the years of his service to Sita and Rama, he was sitting at their feet and did not even look closely at Sita’s face. Lakshmana said that while he cannot recognise the other jewels, he can certainly recognise those which Sita wore on her feet. When Rama asked how he could recognise these, he said that every morning he used to go and touch her feet; hence he was quite familiar with them. (*SSB 1977 p. 43*)

deeply moved at the sight of the jewels dropped by Sita. (*RKR V Part II p. 84-85*)

Lakshmana was looking at the wife of his brother as his own mother and was looking only at her feet. He never looked at her face. Lakshmana would always bend his head low if he found some other woman coming in front of him. Lakshmana was a person of exemplary character. The vision and the eyes of the young people today do not bend even if we bend them by force. If they use their vision for unsacred purposes, the disturbance of the mind will surely follow. The first important *sadhana* is to control our vision. Lakshmana had such sacred thought and mind. If only he is taken as an ideal example and we follow him, there will be no doubt of our own elevation. (*SSB 1977 p. 44*)

There is another example. On one night, when matters of state were being discussed, there was delay; and Lakshmana was returning home rather late. At the mansion of Rama, Lakshmana, Bharatha and Satrugna were all alone and by mistake Lakshmana walked into Rama's palace. When he saw Sita sleeping, he realised his mistake and quickly rushed out and fell at *Guru Vashishta's* feet and prayed to him so that he could tell him how this mistake can be corrected and atoned for. Lakshmana had a pure heart by which he could consider entering a room where his brother's wife was sleeping as the greatest sin which one could commit. Such ideals, at the present time, would not be seen even as rare examples. If the brother goes out on camp, the younger brother will be taking out his sister-in-law to the cinema. Lakshmana was a great individual who followed a code of conduct which would set an example to others. Although

Lakshmana had a spark of divinity in him, this could come out and be seen only in the divine presence of Rama. At all other times, when he was alone, he was like an ordinary person, in fact weaker than an ordinary person. *(SSB 1977 p.44)*

THE SEIGE

Battle with Meghanada:

When Meghanada and Lakshmana were fighting; Lakshmana fell into a swoon. Meghanada tried his best to carry away Lakshmana to Lanka. Although Meghanada had all the strength, he could not move Lakshmana even a little. *(SSB 1977 p.45)*

Though his strength was equal to Lakshmana's, Meghanada²⁷ could not raise the body. Countless warriors came forward to help him; but, numbers were of no avail. Lakshmana was the Primeval Serpent, that bears the Cosmos on its Thousand Hoods, Adishesha, come again. How could anyone however strong or any number of such ones succeed in lifting him? Only those who have won the Grace of Sri Rama could move Lakshmana! *(RKR Part II p.211)*

Hanuman entered the scene and was uttering the name of Rama. By hearing the name of Rama, Lakshmana became so alive that Lakshmana could be carried on the shoulders of Hanuman to the camp of Rama. Lakshmana was one who had such an attachment to the name of Rama that if Rama's name was mentioned, Lakshmana's strength would reappear. Lakshmana used to

²⁷ See Chapter, *Meghanada* - **Meghanada's combat with Lakshmana:**

display his strength only in the presence of human beings or *rakshasas*, but would never display even a fraction of his strength in the presence of Rama. Lakshmana had such noble and good qualities. (*SSB 1977 p.45*)

When Lakshmana fainted in the battlefield, Rama lamented, “Oh Lakshmana! In this wide world, I may be able to obtain a wife like Sita or a mother like Kausalya. But I will never be able to get a brother like you.” Such was the supreme love of Rama for Lakshmana. (*SSB 1996 p.14-15*)

Rama then started lamenting, “Oh Lakshmana, I considered you as my sixth vital breath. Today, my sixth vital breath is gone.” Rama pretended as though He wept. Vibhishana came to the spot and directed Hanuman to bring the herbs of the Sanjivini plant from the Himalayas. Since Hanuman could not identify the plant, he lifted a big chunk of the mountain and brought it to the battlefield. As soon as the herbal medicine was given, Lakshmana regained consciousness. (*SSB 1996 p.65*)

During the battle against Ravana, the fight between Lakshmana and Meghanada lasted for three full days. (*SSB 1977 p.43*)

Meghanada went Nikumbala Part to do Yajna... Vibhishana warned if he completed the Yajna it would be hard to defeat him.. Angada, Hanuman went there to disturb the Yajna... Vanaras held Meghanada by hair and ragged him out.. Hanuman and others were injured by his trident weapon... Lakshmana fixed sacred arrows on his bow; and invoking on it the might and majesty of Rama, aimed it at Meghanada, wherever he might be.

That arrow entered the heart of Meghanada and ended his life.
(*RKRV Part II p.231-232*)

Rama came and embraced Lakshmana and said that he was as happy as he would be when he found Sita. In the entire battle, the most difficult thing was to defeat Meghanada. In fact, it was easier to kill Ravana. When Rama saw that Lakshmana was victorious, he was overjoyed. (*SSB 1977 p.43*) Rama embraced him with unbounded joy, and exclaimed, "Ah, dear brother! What a great victory you have achieved today. Now I feel as if I have already got Sita back." (*SSS Vol. XIII p.216*)

TEN HEADS ROLL – The End of Ravana

Lakshmana's encounter with Ravana:

Earth and sky were darkened by the showers of arrows sent by Ravana. The Vanaras ran to the far corners of the land. Chaos prevailed in the camp. Lakshmana noticed the situation. He girded up his loins and armed himself with his bow and sheaf of arrows. Prostrating before Sri Rama, he rose with his blessings and proceeded to the field of battle. Lakshmana accosted Ravana, and scoffed at him thus: "You villain! What benefit can you gain by slaughtering monkeys and bears? Gaze at me, standing before you like Death itself, the Spirit of Time come to finish your earthly career." Ravana replied, "O! Don't I know you? You are the destroyer of my son. I was looking out for you for many days. My heart will find solace only on my killing you this day." Ravana yelled in anger and let loose sharp arrows at Lakshmana. But Lakshmana cleverly cut them into a thousand

splinters. In addition Lakshmana shot fiery shafts at Ravana and they succeeded in cutting to pieces the chariot of Ravana as well as his charioteer. Lakshmana rained arrows in deadly groups of a hundred and more. They found their mark on the face of Ravana and on his chest, so that he was felled to the ground, having lost consciousness with the blow and the pain. Yet, he recovered very quickly and rose up in ferocious anger, and directed against Lakshmana the terrible mighty missile that was conferred on him by the First of the Trinity, Brahma Himself. When the missile hit him, Lakshmana rolled to the ground. Hanuman saw the fall, and he hastened to the side of Lakshmana, shouting imprecations against Ravana. Ravana administered a heavy blow on Hanuman with his clenched fist. It made Hanuman reel in pain, but he steadied himself. He returned the blow even more power-filled than the one he had received from Ravana. Ravana was stunned by the impact. He said within himself, “May this fellow’s fist be burnt to ashes. I never dreamt that a monkey’s fist could discharge such a thunderbolt.”

Meanwhile, Lakshmana recovered from the swoon and rose ready for the fray. Ravana had to be helped into another chariot having become unconscious again. His charioteer cleverly drove the chariot in the direction of Lanka itself. He got back his awareness as soon as he reached Lanka. (*RKRV Part II p. 249-251*)

News of Rama’s Victory conveyed to Sita:

“O my dear Lakshmana! How much I had derided you, virtuous one! How deep must have those words hurt you, my son that you

had to leave me.” These thoughts made her feel very sad. (*SSB 1996 p.91*)

Sita’s Agnipareeksha:

Rama gathered Angada and Vibhishana and others and told them to proceed to the place where Sita was and directed them to bring her respectfully to his presence. They went to Ashokavana where Sita was so long interned. Vibhishana directed that Sita may take bath, wear silk clothes and bedecked in jewels, when she moved out of the Ashokavana. But Sita cast aside the suggestion. She said, “Rama is the most precious jewel I have. That jewels enough for me. Seeing him is the bath I shall be satisfied with. The prostration I do for him is the silk cloth for me. I do not like to wear anything that was once Ravana’s property.” Vibhishana was moved by the depth of her yearning. He asked the maids to respect her wishes.. They also said that Sita was desperately wishing for the darsan of her Lord, Soon a palanquin was brought and Sita was seated in it. The Vanaras bore the palanquin on their shoulders- She bent her head and was sunk in one single thought—Rama. When a little distance had yet to be covered, Sita came down from the palanquin, for, she felt that she should go to her Lord in humility, walking the distance. She walked slowly towards Rama – When she came within a short range, Rama declared that she should not be brought to him immediately, but that she had to go through the Ordeal of Fire! (*RKR Part II p.263-264*)

Meanwhile, Rama sent word through Lakshmana to light a fire into which Sita²⁸ was to jump. She was to be affirmed by the God of fire himself as a precondition for Him to take Sita back to Ayodhya. At these words, Lakshmana flared up. He had never spoken against Rama before. Now he said, “Rama! Have You gone mad? Has Your intelligence dwindled? What are You saying? You might have been affected by some fault, but there is none in that great lady Sita. She is a highly chaste lady. She is an ideal for all women, and You are talking so degradingly about her! If this is what You had in your mind, why did she suffer for ten months? Have You considered that?” Rama knew Lakshmana’s heart and Lakshmana knew Rama’s heart. Upon hearing Lakshmana’s outburst, Rama replied, “Lakshmana, we are now living as ideal men. We have to set standards for men to follow. I know her greatness. But her goodness must be brought out. People say that so and so is a great man. But being good is far more important than being great. Hence I must prove to the world that she is a great lady, but more than that, she is a good lady.” Sita meanwhile heard Rama’s command. (*SSB 1996 p.92-93*)

With tears flowing down her eyes, she went around the fire and prayed, “If I am indeed the embodiment of Truth, if at any time there has been no evil feelings in me, may this fire cool down. Except for Rama’s name, at every point of time, I had no other thought or name in my mind. But then, when Ravana was taking me away from Chitrakoota, he had caught hold of me and put me on the chariot. What could I do to prevent him from touching

²⁸ See Chapter, *Sita - Fire Ordeal*:

me? Even then, I thought of only Rama. If You have decided to test me after all that, I shall obey Your command.” So saying, she jumped into the pyre. All the gods and goddesses appeared there. They were critical of Rama’s action. They remonstrated with Him for knowing everything and yet doing such a foolish deed. But the fact was that Rama was totally satisfied with Sita’s innocence. Otherwise, why would He subject himself to so many difficulties, give up food and drink, come to Lanka and be injured by the Rakshasas? Why would the two face so many obstacles together? Why would they have built the bridge across the ocean? Was it not for Sita? Rama knew Sita’s purity. He said, “I may know your nature. But people are like crows that keep cawing about imaginary things.” (*SSB 1996 p.93*)

She prostrated before Rama and moved into the Fire. The God of Fire, Agni, appeared in the form of a Brahmin bringing with him the real Sita, and offered her at the feet of Rama, just as the Lord of the Ocean of Milk offered Lakshmi at the feet of Lord Vishnu. She shone on the left of Rama, like a golden lily by the side of a full-blossomed blue lotus. The gathering of gods expressed their joy by sounding heavenly drums and trumpets. (*RKRV Part II p.266*)

Lakshmana asks Rama to rule Lanka:

In the *Tretha Yuga*, after the destruction of Ravana, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita were getting ready to leave Lanka for Ayodhya. At that time, Lakshmana spoke to Rama, "If we return to Ayodhya, I doubt, we will get back our kingdom. Kaikeyi might have installed Bharatha on the throne. We left Ayodhya for the forest in response to the command of our father. Ayodhya

may not be in a prosperous condition now. You know that Lanka is more prosperous than heaven itself. Would it not be better for you to be the ruler of Lanka and enjoy all that this country can offer?" (*SSS Vol.14 p.371-372*)

Rama smiled at this suggestion. He replied, "Does any son give up his mother because her features are ugly? My motherland may be poor but it is my mother. Can I adopt a woman as mother, if she is more charming than my own? However rich and prosperous this Lanka is, I do not wish to be here." Rama held up the ideal of a patriot eager to serve his native land. (*SSS Vol.15 p.245*) Rama replied: "Lakshmana, however ugly one's mother may be, I am not so insensible as to look upon some other beautiful woman and regard her as my mother. My motherland is the land of my birth. However attractive and prosperous Lanka may appear, with all the treasures of the earth, I have no use for its attractions and wealth."²⁹ (*SSS Vol.14 p.372*)

²⁹ We, who are born in the sacred land of Bharat, should be prepared to face whatever difficulties and hardships there may be in our country and use all our talents, knowledge and abilities to serve our country to the utmost and thereby uphold the good name of our country. (*SSS Vol.14 p.372*)

RETURNING TO AYODHYA

Rama shows Sita and Lakshmana all the places visited by them during the 14 years:

Vibhishana hurried into the City and brought clothes and jewels fit for Divinity in the aerial chariot named Pushpaka. The Pushpaka took off and turned north. When it rose, there was great commotion on the ground. Vanara hordes raised thunderous shouts of “Jai”—“Victory to Rama, Victory to Sita, Rama and Lakshmana.” Inside the Pushpaka, there was a high throne charmingly carved and designed. Sita and Rama took their seats on it. They then appeared to all as cloud with a lightning flash resting on the Sumeru Peak. Rama drew the attention of Sita to the battlefield below, and said, “Here is where Lakshmana overpowered and killed Meghanada.” He also showed her other spots associated with similar exploits and victories. He showed her the bridge that the Vanaras constructed across the sea, and described to her the heroism, devotion and faith of the Vanaras. Very soon, the aerial chariot reached the Dandaka Forest. Rama had the vehicle land before the hermitages of Agasthya and other sages. With Sita and Lakshmana, and other members of his entourage Rama visited the holy sages, paid reverential homage to them, and after taking leave of them, he ascended the Pushpaka again, and reached the Chitrakoota Hill. There too, he offered prostrations to the sages, and soaring to the sky again, he showed Sita the City of Kishkindha from the chariot itself. Even while the Pushpaka was speeding fast, Rama indicated to her the sacred rivers, Yamuna and Ganga. Sita offered worship to the holy streams in her mind. Soon, they could see the thrice-holy Prayag, where the Yamuna flows into the Ganga. They could get

a far glimpse from that position of the splendourous City of Ayodhya itself.

The Pushpaka landed just then at the (City of Kishkindha). Guha ran forward and fell at the feet of Rama. Tears streamed from his eyes. He could not contain his delight. He rose and embraced Rama in the ecstasy of his heart. Sita, Rama and Lakshmana conferred their blessings on the tribal chieftain. They took their bath in the sacred river and ordered Guha to bring the ferryboat for them to cross the Ganga. The Pushpaka, which belonged to Kubera, before Ravana appropriated it, was sent back to its original owner. (*RKRV Part II p.269-270*)

Bharatha thinks that Lakshmana is fortunate to be serving Rama:

One more day remained to be spent, outside Cities, in exile. Therefore, Rama commissioned Hanuman to change himself into a Brahmin and proceed to Ayodhya. He was to inform Bharatha the news about Rama and others, and bring back from Ayodhya news of Bharatha. Bharatha³⁰ was grieving that one more day was still to pass before the period of exile would end. He was worried that Rama had not sent anyone to communicate to him which place he had reached. He told himself how fortunate Lakshmana was, since he was all the time in the presence and serving the Lotus Feet of Rama. (*RKRV Part II p. 270*)

³⁰ See Chapter, *Bharatha* - **Bharatha and Satrughna praise Lakshmana's luck – no one in the world is as fortunate as him:**

EXILE FOR SITA

Rama found words to express his wish. Between sighs, he said, “Brothers! Don’t say no. Take Sita into the forest, leave her there and return.” On hearing this, they were stunned.

But Rama addressed Lakshmana himself directly, “Lakshmana!” he began, “Grasp the implications of what the people are saying. Give up the foolish pose of sadness. If you disobey my command and begin arguing with me, you will have to rue it until death. Take Janaki in a chariot and leave her to herself in a deserted place with no human habitation on the bank of the Ganga and then return.”

Lakshmana heard the command of the Lord. He prepared himself even for death if it encounters him while carrying out that command. He got ready for the journey. Stocking the chariot with provisions and clothing, he made Janaki sit in it and then, drove off. Rama’s faithful consort was elated at the prospect of spending some time in hermitages. She was full of delight and gratitude. But seeing the crestfallen face of Lakshmana, she was saddened. She became mute and dispirited. Like the cobra that had lost its crest gem, she suffered unseen, in her depths.

They reached the bank of the Ganga. The forest was frightful indeed. They got terror in their hearts. Seeing Lakshmana fear, Sita was frightened more. Of course, she knew that she was only acting the part and that her real Self was not there. Still, to make her role successful before the world, she acted her part well. She wailed, “Oh Lakshmana! Where have you brought me? There is no hermitage visible here. Do not wild beasts and poisonous

snakes roam about in this forest? No sign of human habitation can be seen here, Lakshmana! I am getting afraid.” When Sita lamented thus, Lakshmana was overcome with sympathy. He remembered Rama and said within himself, “Rama! What is this you have done!” Gathering some courage, he looked at Sita, but a fatal thirst overcame him at that time and he suffered much. Sita was torn with anxiety at his condition and his struggles. Realising that he was determined to leave Sita there and return, the deities of the forest spoke from the sky, “Lakshmana! Leave Janaki here and go back. Sita, the Embodiment of Fortune shall live.” These words from the Unseen planted courage in the heart of Lakshmana. He folded his palms in reverence and said, “Mother! What can I do? I cannot but carry out brother’s command. I have no courage to overstep it even to the slightest. I am the vilest villain. Brother has ordered me to leave you in this thick jungle and return.” Saying so, he turned the chariot back. His looks were fixed on the track he was leaving behind. He could hear the lament of Sita in the distance. “Lakshmana! Are you abandoning me in the forest and leaving me alone? Who will protect me here?” She was wailing like any common woman. Her cries pierced the ears of Lakshmana; but remembering his duty to follow the commands of Rama, he made his heart as hard as rock and drove fast until he reached the City. (*RKRV Part II p.305-311*)

Lakshmana reached the City, with his eyes swollen with sorrow, and heart heavy with grief. He related the sad tale to the three mothers. They broke into inconsolable sorrow and sobbed at the calamity that had overtaken Sita. They praised the virtues of Sita and lamented that a lady of such sterling character should be

subjected to this disaster. They blamed Rama for harshness. The capital and the palace were sunk in sorrow. There was no one free from grief. Wailing was the only sound that could be heard. There was no one who did not ask in sorrow, “Could such a mother be ever punished thus?”

Rama heard the wailing and weeping. He retreated into the shrine with Lakshmana as his sole companion and spent the day away from the sight of others. (*RKRV Part II p.312-313*)

ASWAMEDHA YAGA

Rama announces his desire to celebrate the Aswamedha Yaga:

Rama announced that he desired to celebrate the Aswamedha Yaga, (the Horse-Sacrifice) mentioned in the Vedas since the Yaga would ensure the destruction of all varieties of grief. The Yaga began on the second day of the bright half of the Magha month, after Rama had initiated himself with the necessary rites. Vashishta directed that the Horse, chosen for the Yaga, be brought so that it might be examined by experts, whether it had the auspicious marks prescribed. Lakshmana prostrated before the Guru and hurried to the stables of the Palace to seek out the Horse and decorate it before leading it into the Hall. A gem-set saddle was placed on its back. It was a horse immaculately white in complexion. The horses of the Sun would have felt ashamed to stand before it! When it was fully caparisoned, it became so charming that people thought the God of Love and Beauty had a hand in adorning it. It was an impossible task to describe its

splendour. It could be said that the horse gave the impression that the Sun-god (*Suryanarayanamurthi*) had turned into a horse, and was prancing proudly. On its forehead was placed a peacock feather with emerald gems shining in it. Like the stars shining in the sky, that feather shone brilliantly with its scintillating gems. Silk cords that shone like lightning flashes were placed round its neck and held by attendants. It was accompanied by 5,000 great warriors—heroes of many a battle—fighters of invincible mettle, led by Lakshmana, all on horseback.

The Horse let loose to wander:

While proceeding thus, venturing in the four directions along different routes and encountering different places, *Shatrughna* happened to reach the hermitage of Valmiki. There, Janaki was living with her twin sons³¹, each redoubtable in splendour like the Sun. Those two boys saw the Horse, read the golden plate tied around its brow and led it away, to be bound and kept at the hermitage. Then, they came forward eager to fight back the guardians of the horse, with an arrow-case tied around their waists and bows and arrows in their hands. They took up the bow and arrow, remembering their Guru, the sage, Valmiki. Their arrows shattered the chariot of Satrughna³² to pieces. They also entered his body in many places and made it a patchwork of holes.

Soon, Rama was informed of the exploits of the two boys from the hermitage. At last, he said, “Fighting cannot be avoided.

³¹ See Chapter, *Lava and Kusha* - **LINEAGE**

³² See Chapter, *Lava and Kusha* - **Lava and Kush capture the sacred sacrificial Horse**

Take Lakshmana with you and proceed.” Those who had fled to Rama had to return perforce to the same place. Rama also commanded, “Bring those two boys hither. Since they are from the hermitage, they do not deserve death in any case.”

Lakshmana’s encounter with Lava and Kusa

Lakshmana marched forward at the head of a fully equipped army. He reached the place where the engagement had already taken place. He saw the heroic warriors who had fainted and fallen. He was surprised at the audacity of the ascetic boys. He addressed them thus: “Boys, I warn you, save yourselves. Flee from this place back to your homes. You are Brahmin boys and it would be harmful for us if we fight against you. It is against the injunctions of scripture. Get away from before my eyes.” Kusa and Lava greeted these words with a peal of laughter. “Oh Brave Commander! See how your brother has fared. Take refuge in your own home soon.”

Lakshmana³³ grew in anger and fell on them with enormous violence. He placed his chariot before them and began attacking them with no dread of the consequences. The brothers broke his arrows into pieces. They fought most admirably, with many new stratagems. Kusa fixed on his bow the Brahma arrow that Valmiki had taught him to use. At the very prospect of its release, the three worlds shook in fear. He aimed it straight at the heart of Lakshmana and let it go. Lakshmana was hit and he lost consciousness.

³³ See Chapter, *Lava and Kusa* – **Lava and Kusa fight Lakshmana**

Messengers carried the news to Rama. Rama came into the battle area, red with anger, at the head of a large army. He saw the two boys and without letting arrows against them, he got them near him and asked, “Boys! Who are your parents? Where are they living? Which is your native land? What are your names³⁴?”

“King. Our mother is a daughter of Emperor Janaka. Janaki is being fostered by the sage Valmiki. We do not know the name of our father nor do we know the lineage to which we belong. Our names are Kusa and Lava. We reside in the forest,” they said. Rama pretended to have discovered just then that they were his children, and told them, “Boys! Give fight to the army which is coming behind me.” Saying this, he raised up Angada, Jambavantha, Hanuman and others from the fainting fit into which they had fallen. He also raised Lakshmana, Bharatha and Satrughna so that they might see the happenings of the future. The army could not do anything-- Just then Kusa fell upon Rama. The impact forced Rama to faint and fall. Kusa pulled down the decorative ropes and chains on the chariot and the horses of Rama, and both brothers bound Hanuman with them. They led Hanuman at the end of the rope and took him home-- The sacrificial Horse was among the possessions they paraded. With these, they approached the mother, Janaki. They prostrated before her and offered the booty acquired as homage to her--
(RKR Part II p.327-330)

³⁴ See Chapter, *Lava and Kusa* - **Rama’s interaction with Lava and Kusa**

ENDING THE PLAY³⁵

Janaki was amazed at the sight of the Vanaras and others, as well as the way in which they were decorated and dressed up. Just then, Valmiki the Sage reached the place, evidently overcome with anxiety. He described all that had happened before Sita. He loosened the bonds on Hanuman, Jambavan and others. Then he went with Kusa and Lava to the battlefield. he described how Lakshmana had left Sita alone in the forest, and how Sita lived in his hermitage, where Kusa and Lava were born. He said, “Lord, Kusa and Lava are your sons. Hearing these words, Rama embraced the boys and stroked their heads. Lakshmana hurried to where Sita was, for Rama directed him to find out from her what she proposed to do about her “vow.” Nearing her, Lakshmana fell at her feet. Sita was desirous of fulfilling the “vow” if that was the wish of Rama. So she accompanied Lakshmana to the presence of Rama. – She made the pronouncement as the Truth Oh Mother! Goddess Earth! Take me into yourself.” Immediately, the Earth sundered where she stood-a trench was formed- there arose a Divine Lion-Throne, with the Goddess Earth seated therein- She held out Her Hand, and lifting Janaki from the ground, She blessed her ---she said , Come! In My Home, be happy.” The next second, they were both out of sight.- “Janaki has gone in consonance with the inclinations of my mind. She was always moving in accordance with the plans I had in mind. Now, we should also proceed to our Vaikuntha residence.” (*RKRV Part II p.332-333*)

³⁵ Under Section, *Rama* See Chapter, *Rama's Reign- The Reign Of Righteousness - Rama Rajyam - ENDING THE PLAY*

LAKSHMANA’S WIFE URMILA:

(Lakshmana) informed (Urmila³⁶) that he was accompanying Rama and Sita to the forest to serve them. She was very happy with his decision. She entreated him to serve Sita and Rama with utmost devotion³⁷. (*SSS Vol.35 p.123-124*)

Urmila did not have any objection for Lakshmana to go with Rama to the forest for 14 years and said, “Protect Rama and Sita just as eyelids protect the eyes. They are everything for you. Consider them as your father and mother. Never be slack in serving them. Never think of me even for a moment in the forest for these fourteen years. Only Sita and Rama should be uppermost in your mind.” Saying this, she offered her salutations to him. (*SSS Vol. 41 p 61*)

It was fourteen years since Lakshmana and Urmila³⁸ had seen each other. (*SSB 2002 p.129*)

LAKSHMANA’S SONS:

Chitrakethu (Chithrakethu): One of Lakshmana's two sons.

Chitrangada (Chithraangadha): One of Lakshmana's two sons.
(*Glossary of the Vahinis*)

³⁶ See Chapter, *Urmila - Urmila asks Lakshmana a promise before going to the forest:*

³⁷ See Chapter, *Urmila - Urmila happy that her husband was lucky to serve Sita and Rama:*

³⁸ See also Chapter, *Urmila- Urmila meets Lakshmana after fourteen years:*

The sons of Lakshmana, Chitrakethu and Chitrangada, were mighty warriors, heroic fighters, veterans of wars. They were deputed to the Western Region and destroying the Rakshasas there, they ruled over that area. Rama³⁹ invested those two with regal authority over Cities with different names which became their capital cities. He also gave all the sons valuable advice on political and administrative matters. (*RKRV Part II p.334*)

INNER PERCEPTIONS AND QUALITIES OF LAKSHMANA:

Lakshmana, an embodiment of purity:

Lakshmana was the embodiment of purity and virtue. He is a worthy ideal to be emulated by students. Though he lived for thirteen years in the company of Rama and Sita, he had never looked at the face of Sita.

Rama would always praise Lakshmana for his great virtues, but Lakshmana would modestly say "Rama! I am Your servant. You are Lord Narayana Himself. This is the effect of Your company." Virtuous people are always modest and humble. (*SSB 1996 p.54*)

Every notable character in *Ramayana* stands out as an ideal for the world. All of them are embodiments of *Dharma*. Consider the example of Lakshmana. Valmiki has described Lakshmana in many ways. He has called him "Rama's other self." In the *Kamba Ramayana*, Lakshmana is described as the "second virtue of Rama." Tulsidas characterises Lakshmana as "Rama's right hand." Rama and Lakshmana were associated inseparably as "Bimba and Pratimba"--one was just the reflection of the other. In his great quality, his immaculate purity and spirit of sacrifice, Lakshmana is his own example.

³⁹ Under Section, *Rama*, See Chapter, *Rama's Reign- The Reign Of Righteousness - Rama Rajyam* – Rama advises his sons on methods of administration

In accordance with his father's commandment, Rama had to go to the forest. Lakshmana was under no such compulsion. Making the supreme sacrifice of his own accord, he elected to accompany Rama. *Ayanam* (Rama's path) was the apple of his *nayanam* (eye). Hence Lakshmana had a key role in *Ramayana*. Leaving his mother, forsaking his wife and rejecting royal pleasures, Lakshmana chose to follow Rama as the be-all and the end-all of his life. By his sterling quality and exemplary character, Lakshmana stands out as an ideal to the world. (*SSS Vol.21 p.80-81*)

Humility of Lakshmana:

Look at the self-control and humility of Lakshmana. When the ornaments (thrown over by Sita while being carried through the sky by Ravana) were placed before him by Rama and he was asked to identify those whom he could recognise as Sita's own, Lakshmana could recognise only the 'toe-rings' of his sister-in-law! He said he used to see them when he fell at her feet in reverence, as the first duty of the day. As regards the other personal ornaments and jewels of Sita, he could not say anything, for he had never lifted his head and looked at her. How many brothers can claim today that depth of reverence towards their sisters-in-law? Now, young men behave rudely, they peer at girls insultingly, they follow them along the roads and make life miserable for the girls. (*SSS Vol.4 p.245*)

Humility, heroism and noble character of Lakshmana

Between Rama and Lakshmana there was never any trace of envy or suspicion. Lakshmana was supremely indifferent to what was happening around him, if it did not affect Rama. His greatness is immeasurable.

When Lakshmana fainted during the battle with Meghanada, the latter wanted to lift his unconscious body and carry him into Lanka as a hostage. But since Lakshmana was the incarnation of the cosmic serpent, Sesha, he was tremendously heavy and could not be moved. So Meghanada gave up the idea and went away. Meanwhile Hanuman arrived there, and on his uttering the name of Rama, Lakshmana's weight was reduced to that of a feather, so responsive was he to *Ramanama* even in his unconsciousness. This is a

measure of the humility and the heroism of this great-brother of Rama. (SSS Vol.13 p.217)

Dangers of disobedience of divine command - Lakshmana Disobeys Rama on two occasions:

Aajna is a great injunction. If it is disobeyed, there will be no joy. Transgression of *Aajna* leads to many hardships and difficulties. (There are episodes in the *Ramayana* which point out the serious consequences of disobeying the *Aajna*). (SSS Vol.21 p.85)

In this story of *Ramayana*, while the Lord in human form was playing the role of Rama, Lakshmana had also a very important role to play. The entire life of Lakshmana was devoted to obeying the orders of Rama. However, on two occasions, knowing that what he was doing was wrong, Lakshmana had to disobey the orders of Rama. The first occasion relates to the incident when Maricha appeared as a deer and when Maricha was being pursued by Rama, they heard the voices of Maricha asking for Lakshmana's help and calling to Sita. What were the orders Rama gave on this occasion? Lakshmana was to remain and protect Sita. On that occasion, Sita spoke very harsh words and she even threatened by saying that if Lakshmana would not go, she would commit suicide by burning herself. On that occasion, listening to the harsh words of Sita, Lakshmana felt that if he would not leave Sita and go, some harm may come to her. In order that Sita may not harm herself, he disobeyed Rama's orders for the first time. (SSB 1977 p. 41-42)

The subsequent tragic developments---the carrying away of Sita by Ravana and all the troubles that had to be gone through to find and recover Sita--all these caused deep anguish to Lakshmana. He lamented⁴⁰: "Is it not because I transgressed Rama's orders that these troubles overtook Sita and us?" All his life Lakshmana was distraught by these thoughts. He often felt: "This was the only occasion in my life that I had acted against Rama's orders."

⁴⁰ Rama is *Atma-Rama*, the Voice of God within. Do not disobey it or circumvent its directives. Pray that the Voice alerts you ever, pray with humility and surrender to the advice. Then Rama will guide you right with compassion. (SSS Vol. 16 p.58)

But, there came another occasion when he was faced with a cruel dilemma: whether to adhere to or act against Rama's orders. (*SSS Vol.21 p.85-86*)

Lakshmana's second transgression:

The second occasion: when he had to disobey the orders of Rama was towards the end of Rama's mortal life. Rudra, the God of Time, came to meet Rama. Before he started conversation, he said that no one else should enter the room while they were conversing. So Rama called Lakshmana and asked him to stand at the entrance and see that no one disturbed them. Rama realised that this was a difficult task, and that only Lakshmana could do it effectively⁴¹. At this time, when Lakshmana was standing guard, Durvasa came and wanted to enter the room. Lakshmana, who was under orders to keep out visitors, told Durvasa in great humility that as Rama was in conversation with someone else, he should wait for a while. (*SSB 1977 p.42*)

He (Durvasa) told Lakshmana: "I have to go in urgently for a talk with Rama." Lakshmana firmly refused to let him in. Enraged at Lakshmana's stand, Durvasa angrily declared: "I will utter a curse on Ayodhya. I will destroy your entire dynasty by my curse. Beware, Oh! Lakshmana!" Lakshmana was shaken by the irate sage's threat. He was caught in a profound moral dilemma. "If I let the sage in, my head will be cut off. If I do not let him in, not only the city of Ayodhya but my whole race will be ruined by the sage's curses." Lakshmana could not reconcile himself to the destruction of *Raghuvamsa* (his dynasty). Nor could he suffer the prospect of the people of Ayodhya being destroyed. He resolved the dilemma in this way. "By disobeying Rama's orders I shall be losing only my head. But, thereby I shall be saving my dynasty and the people of Ayodhya." Coming to this decision, he allowed Durvasa to go in. Lakshmana felt: "It will be a supreme good fortune to have my head cut off at Rama's hands. I will be the only sufferer. If I do not yield to this sage, my entire race will be wiped out." Lakshmana thus

⁴¹ Rama said if he allowed anyone, he (*Lakshmana*) would lose his head. (*SSS Vol.21 p.86*)

deeply considered the pros and cons of his decision and chose to sacrifice himself rather than allow others to suffer⁴². (*SSS Vol.21 p.86-87*)

In this manner, Lakshmana spent all his life in the service of Rama and rarely disobeyed the orders of Rama; and even when he did disobey, it was only for the sake of others. All the work that he did was for the good of others. (*SSB 1977 p. 42-43*)

Lakshmana's unalloyed devotion to his brother

Turning to the harmonious relations that existed between the brothers' Complying with his stepmother's words, Rama might don the bark of trees, wear the mantle of an ascetic and leave for the forest. There was no such obligation on Lakshmana's part. But as a younger brother he felt that it was not proper for him to stay and enjoy life in Ayodhya when his brother was leaving for the forest. He was ready to renounce his mother and wife and accompany Rama, whom he considered as his life-breath.

Thus he followed Rama as an ascetic, treating Ayodhya without Rama as a jungle and a forest with Rama as Ayodhya. Indefatigably he served Rama and Sita night and day. The behaviour of brothers today in similar situations would be entirely different. They are likely to indulge in litigation over the sharing of property and lose them all in carrying the dispute upto the Supreme Court. They will not agree to enjoy the property in common and will ruin themselves through litigation. To such brothers, Rama should serve as an example.

It was because of the unalloyed devotion of Lakshmana that Rama considered him greater than Sita or anyone else. He declared: "It is impossible for me to find a brother like Lakshmana." This was a tribute to the way Lakshmana served Rama and Sita for thirteen years in the forest. (*SSS Vol.24 p.60*)

⁴² **Departure to His Divine Abode:**

Since, he was the incarnation of Adishesha, he shed his mortal coil and reached his divine abode even before Sri Rama. (*Beacons of Divine Wisdom, Part I, page 49*)

Hanuman said to Sita, Lakshmana is spending his days watching over Rama as the lids guard the eye; he is the breath of Rama; he is overcome by the agony of separation from you and of witnessing the anguish of his brother; he has become a rock, unaffected by any feeling other than concern of Rama. He is the source of courage and sustenance that is unyielding and full. He has not slept these ten months, nor has he taken food. (*RKR Part II p.140*)

Relationship of Brothers:

Lakshmana, the brother of Rama, who followed his footsteps throughout his earthly career, is the symbol of the Mind; walking on the footprints of *Dharma*, it never lost its way; it triumphed in the lap of Victory. The Ramayana is a text-book for *Dharma* to be lived out in every home, by the father, the mother, the son, the brother, the members of a joint family---both men and women. (*SSS Vol.7 p.215-216*)

To others like Vibhishana, Rama frequently stated that it is very difficult to find a brother like Lakshmana. He has been telling Sugriva and others, that the task which he has completed could be so handled only because of the presence of Lakshmana, and that he, by himself, could not have done it. If today, we want to understand the kind of relationship that should exist between brothers, we should take the example of Lakshmana from *Ramayana*. However, these days, the inimical attitude between brothers is indeed very bad. One brother cannot bear the prosperity of the other brother; they become jealous of each other and go to the extent of even killing each other. The sacred and good qualities of Lakshmana are beyond description. (*SSB 1977 p.43*)

Rama said to Vashishta, Master! You are my witness; my father's feet are my witness. Let me assert this: No one is as dear to me as my brother, Lakshmana. No one has a brother in the world as dear as Bharatha is to me." (*RKR Part I p. 449*)

Here is a small example. There is a stone from which you can produce fire. Even if such a stone is kept under water for a long time, it can produce fire when it comes into contact with another such stone. In the same manner, divine strength which is present in Lakshmana and Hanuman blossomed forth

only when they came together or when they were in the company of Rama. (SSB 1977 p.45)

Once, after a battle with Meghanada, Rama's body was covered with blood. Lakshmana fainted unable to bear the sight. Such was the love that bound the two. (SSB 1996 p.93)

Lakshmana – the steadfast support of Rama:

When Rama was banished to the forest, Kaikeyi asked for two boons. The first one was, Bharatha her son should become the king, and the second was that Rama should go to the forest and live there as a *sanyasi* for fourteen years. There was no place for Lakshmana in these two desires of Kaikeyi. But when Rama was preparing for the journey, Lakshmana also accompanied Rama. He also wore clothes of bark in the same manner. Looking at the kind of clothes Rama was wearing to go to the forest and the kind of appearance that Rama had, Lakshmana also decided that he should wear similar clothes and have a similar appearance.

For all the fourteen years in the forest, Lakshmana conducted himself, as if he was one with Rama⁴³. He was spending all his energy and time in taking care of and serving Rama and Sita. Truly, if Lakshmana was not present, how would Rama and Sita have spent their lives? This important role of Lakshmana was beautifully described by Tulsi Das in his narration of the *Ramayana*. Tulsi Das described that when Rama was returning victoriously to Ayodhya with his flag flying high, the people of Ayodhya were reverentially saluting the flag and the pole on which the flag was flying⁴⁴. This description

⁴³ When Rama started out into exile in the forest wearing garments of bark, Lakshmana too did the same. For fourteen years he watched over his brother and his wife, guarding them day and night, without any regard for his own comfort or even for sleep or food. (SSS Vol.10 p.115)

⁴⁴ But they did not know, he says, that the pole which carried the flag of Rama's triumph was Lakshmana, the devoted brother. How could the flag fly so splendidly without the dedicated service, the undaunted courage and the steadfast loyalty of the brother who gladly shared the travails of exile with Rama? (SSS Vol.10 p.115)

of Tulsidas has a significant inner meaning. The pole here signifies Lakshmana. The pole is as important as the flag. In fact, if the pole did not exist, the flag cannot fly at all. Thus Lakshmana became the steadfast support for Sita and Rama. (*SSB 1977 p.41*)

Always Obeyed Rama:

A difficult situation arose when Sita was in the family-way in an advanced stage. It became necessary for him to take Sita into the forest. He did not like to do this and yet he took her into the forest. This he did just for obeying Rama's orders. Again, on the occasion when Sita returned from Lanka and when she was preparing to jump into the fire to prove her innocence, Lakshmana was asked to prepare the fire. Although Lakshmana did not like to do this, he did prepare the firewood for the test, just for obeying the orders of Rama. Whatever difficult situation it may be, he always followed the orders of Rama. (*SSB 1977 p. 42*)

The brother among brothers

The ideal of brotherhood as depicted in the Ramayana is without parallel in any other epic anywhere in world literature. When, during the battle with the *rakshasas* (demon) hordes in Lanka, Lakshmana fell unconscious and could not be revived, Rama lamented the calamity, saying, "Alas! Lakshmana is the source of my breath; there is no brother like him on the whole earth." Lakshmana's life and relationship with his brother Rama are shining examples for mankind. (*SSS Vol.13*) How can God lament! It was only a divine play enacted by Rama to show to the world the nobility and greatness of Lakshmana. Such sacred love is like a powerful magnet. Such selfless, unattached love transcends action, space, time, cause and effect. (*SSS Vol.32 Part II p.47*)

It can be said that Lakshmana is the A in the sacred syllable *AUM*; Bharatha, the second brother, is the U; Shatrughna, the third, is the M and Rama, the eldest, is the full *AUM*. Rama is the concretisation of the *Brahman* (Universal Absolute) that first emanated as the Primeval Sound, *AUM*. When Rama and Lakshmana were wading through the Jungle after the loss of Sita, the sages who saw them described them as the 'Sun and Moon,' so majestic and magnificent was their mien. They shone with the splendour of courage and

determination. When strength of body and steadfastness of mind reinforce each other, one's mein becomes attractive. Youth today has neither physical strength nor mental steadfastness, so young people appear old very early in life. When the body is weak, the mind, too, gets weak. You must try to develop physical well-being and health, for a gem has to be treasured in a safe, strong box. The gem of Divinity that is your reality also has to be kept in a strong box, namely, the body.

Lakshmana followed Rama as a shadow:

Lakshmana had a pure heart from his very birth. As he grew up he was able to overcome the urges of his senses and establish himself as their master. His character was above reproach. He eagerly welcomed any order from Rama and enjoyed fulfilling it to the best of his ability. He could not tolerate separation from Rama. His greatest desire was to be in Rama's presence. He followed Rama like his shadow, never residing in a place where Rama was not present. Rama was all that he wanted, all that he cared for. (*SSS Vol.13 211-214*)

Because of Lakshmana's intense devotion to Rama, he has also followed Him like a shadow. He brought fruits, flowers and tubers from forest to serve Rama and Sita, and himself fasted. Every moment of his life, he spent in the service of Rama. He put his both his body and mind in the service and worship of Rama as a Sagunopasaka. (*SSS Vol.32 Part II p.43*)

Steadfast loyalty of Lakshmana to Rama

When Rama started out into exile in the forest wearing garments of bark, Lakshmana, too, did the same. For fourteen years he watched over his brother and his wife, guarding them day and night without any regard for his own comfort or even for sleep or food. Tulsi Das pays great tribute to Lakshmana for this devoted service. According to him, when Rama returned to Ayodhya after his period of exile, the citizens in lakhs cheered at the distant sight of the flag on top of the chariot which was bringing him. But they did not know, he says, that the pole which carried the flag of Rama's triumph was Lakshmana, the devoted brother. How could the flag fly so splendidly without the dedicated service, the undaunted courage and the steadfast loyalty of the brother who gladly shared the travails of exile with Rama?

In the course of Narayana's enactment as a *nara* (man) named Rama on earth, He had a crucial role to play. Lakshmana laid down his life for the purpose of realising the Mission of the *Avatar* (divine incarnation). He never transgressed by as much as a step, the boundary laid down by Rama. When Rama ordered him to raise a fire into which Sita was advised to step as part of the fire-ordeal to prove her chastity to the world, Lakshmana obeyed with a bleeding heart. When Rama ordered him to take Sita out into the forest and leave her alone and unguarded there, Lakshmana obeyed, though his heart was wrung with pain. (*SSS Vol.13 p.214-215*)

Lakshmana gave up everything to serve Rama

Lakshmana decided every act of his on the touch-stone of either Rama's wish or the general good. He gave up everything---his wife Urmila, his mother Sumitra and the princely life at Ayodhya---for the chance of serving Rama and furthering His mission. (*SSS Vol.13 p.216*) In the forest, Lakshmana protected Rama and Sita with great care and engaged himself in their service. (*SSS Vol. 40 p.112*)

Lakshmana was a courageous and resolute person. (*SSS Vol.21 p.86*)

Grand examples of renunciation

When Lakshmana went to his mother, Sumitra, to take her blessings before accompanying Rama into exile, she did not argue, "Why should you go? Your father has not asked you to leave. Stay on and be happy in the palace and make me and your newly wedded bride happy." She said, "Son! Do not imagine that you are leaving for the forest and that we are remaining in the city of Ayodhya. Without Rama, this city is the jungle; with Him the jungle is Ayodhya." What did Urmila, the young wife, tell her Lord Lakshmana? She did not plead for permission to accompany her husband as Sita did and for very good reason. She said, "If I come, you will not be able to pay undivided attention to the service of Rama and Sita. I shall remain here awaiting your arrival after 14 years!" What a grand example of renunciation, this! If, in each family, we have such sons, mothers, brothers and wives, the land will have no anxiety or sorrow. It will be resplendent with joy and peace. (*SSS Vol.7 p.461-462*)

Lakshmana used to follow Rama like a shadow. He never tolerated injustice. He treated Sri Rama as more important than his father, mother and even his wife. He was a *Saguna bhata* (one who devoted to the form and attributes of god) and a great rununciant. He developed absolute faith and devotion in Sri Rama and sacrificed everything to be in His presence at all times. (*Beacons of Divine Wisdom Part I p.41*)

Lakshmana revered Sita as a mother

Rama lived in Ayodhya for twelve years after his marriage. After that, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita spent 13 years in the forest. During all the 25 years he had been with Rama, Lakshmana had not looked at Sita's face even once. Nowhere in history can you find an example of one with the character of Lakshmana. He revered every woman as a mother. (*SSS Vol.21 p.81*)

When Sugriva brought the bundle of jewels that Sita had thrown down to the earth from the sky, when being carried away by Ravana, Rama excitedly showed them to Lakshmana, saying, "See, Lakshmana! These are jewels of your sister- in- law, aren't they?" Lakshmana touched the jewels with great reverence and said, "Brother, I do know the anklets. They are hers! The rest I do not know, for I have never seen her face!" Rama pretended to be surprised, wanting to test Lakshmana, He asked, "Have you really never seen her face?" Then Lakshmana said. "Brother, the great Dasaratha is my father ant the noble Sumitra is my mother, who had blameless characters. The blood flowing in my body is theirs. They never could do anything contrary to dharma in their word or deed. How can I being their son, do it?" As is the seed, so is the tree. As is the food taken, so is the belch. What parents are, that embodies itself in their children too. (*Heart to Heart Part I p.13*)

Since they had such noble character, they were blessed with what has been described as "*Lavanya*". '*Lavanya*' in Sanskrit means beauty of character. It is used as a mere name today. It actually means purity derived from strict discipline and character. (*SSB 2002 p.65*)

Rama directed Lakshmana to leave Sita in a forest near some sage's *ashram*. Sita was pregnant at that time. When Lakshmana was about to leave, Sita said to him: "Lakshmana! It may be fitting for Rama to send me to the forest to

appease public opinion. The duty of a king is to protect his subjects and be an ideal ruler to them. Eschewing completely all ideas of "mine" and "thine," the ruler should be concerned solely for the well-being of the people. Sri Rama's reputation is the source of my joy. I do not grieve because he has sent me away. Rama's glory and fame should be everlasting. But, you, who are my brother-in-law, how can you agree to abandon me in this forest? Pregnant as I am, how can you have the heart to leave me alone in this wilderness? Please stay with me at least for some time and then you may go."

Lakshmana replied: "Revered mother! All these years I have not even seen your face. In spite of the complete innocence and purity of your character, you have been the victim of calumny by thoughtless people. If now I were to stay with you, your good name will be subject to reproach. In these circumstances I am prepared even to give up my life for you, but I cannot suffer your reputation being sullied in any way. Moreover, I have to carry out Rama's orders. Rama means everything to me. I cannot live for a moment going against the commands of Rama. Therefore, Oh mother! forgive me and allow me to return." He prostrated at Sita's feet and entreated her to let him go.

In this manner, Lakshmana dedicated his entire life to upholding the glory of Rama and Sita. He thereby demonstrated to the world his own great qualities. (*SSS Vol.21 p.81-83*)

Lesson for today's youth from the life of Rama

Even during their boyhood Rama and Lakshmana were careful about how they dressed. During the period of their early spiritual apprenticeship, they discarded princely robes, even though Dasaratha tempted them to wear costly jewels and clothes. When in the forest as exiles, they wore deerskin and had their hair knotted on top. They argued that a dress must be worn for one's own satisfaction and not in order to imitate someone else. They were never slaves to fashion or convention. They laid down the norms for others and never imitated others just to earn their favour. Heroism was the hall-mark of the brothers. They met every obstacle squarely and exhibited the necessary enterprise and ability to meet and overcome opposition. The youth of today have to learn this lesson. They quaff before the tiniest obstacle and lose heart at the first difficulty they encounter. Like the heroes of the Ramayana they

should march forward bravely, whatever the handicap, in either the secular, the moral or the spiritual fields of activity. When the truth of One Reality in all, the Reality of God, is revealed, then there will be no more room for anger or hatred. They will seek and see only the good in every one. (*SSS Vol.12 p.212-213*)

Surrender to the orders of God:

The *Prapatthi Marga* is like the way of the kitten, the *Marjalakisora*, 'Sarvabhara Samarpatha' attitude. As the kitten simply continues mewling in one place, placing all its burdens in the mother-cat the devotee puts complete trust on the Lord. The mother-cat holds the kitten in its mouth and removes it to more elevated places or transports it safely through even very narrow passages. So too the devotee places all his burden in the Lord and surrenders fully to His will. Lakshmana is the witness of this Path.

The characteristic of Prapatthi is complete self-surrender, in all aspects. To serve Sri Rama, Lakshmana renounced all obstacles in his path, like wealth, wife, mother, home even sleep and food. And, this, He felt that Sri Rama was his all, his happiness and joy, that He would grant him everything that he needed and that his life's purpose was only to follow Him and serve Him, and surrender his will to Him. So, if all burdens are placed on Him, and if He is followed ceaselessly and unforgettingly, He will certainly provide everything. This is the nature of the Prapatthi type of devotion. (*Prema Vahini p.55*)

Until we reach the Railway station, we have to engage a coolie or a horse-driven cart or a cycle -rickshaw or a taxi to carry our luggage. If none of these conveyances is available, we have to carry the luggage on our head. Once we reach the station and sit in the train, the train carries us, along with our luggage. But, it is only an idiot who, even after boarding the train, carries the luggage on his head. In keeping with this analogy, when you have surrendered yourself to God, offer you everything to Him, unreservedly and unconditionally. Then, God will look after everything. When, to do, what to do and how to do, He will decide. You should not have any egoistic feeling of "I and Mine" at that stage. In the *Ramayana*, there is a beautiful example for this. Sri Rama reached the Chitrakoota Mountain, along with his wife Sita and younger brother Lakshmana. God takes a human form as a *leela* (sport). He is

the *suthradhari* (conductor of the cosmic play) He pretends and acts as sorrowful and in difficulties, though in reality He has none of these feelings. He takes the human form to be available to devotees and to maintain proximity to them. Thus, he becomes near and dear to them. (*Bhagavad Gita Part I p.57/58*)

Lakshmana is a superb example of the attitude of surrender. When Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana went to the forest and reached Chitrakoot, Rama told Lakshmana, “I am feeling tired and Sita is also tired. It is better we stay here for some time. (*SSS Vol.31 p.152*) It is better we stay here for some days. So I would like you put up a hut, in which we may stay longer, even for a period of 10 years if necessary. You can put up the cottage in any place of your choice (*Sai Echoes From Kodai Hills April 1998 p.87*)

Hearing these words, Lakshmana felt hurt and bent down his head with grief. Noting this, Sita asked Lakshmana, “Why are you perturbed, Lakshmana? Your brother did not speak anything harsh. Why do you feel so?” (*SSS Vol.31 p.143*)

Lakshmana said, “Have I ever had any choice of my own? I left my mother; wife, and all comforts of life and accompanied you both to serve. I have surrendered myself to Rama. (*SS 1/1999 p.25*) There is nothing of my own; I am a total renunciant now. To obey your command is the be-all and end-all of my life. In fact, it is the only goal of my life. You are my father and Sita is my mother. This forest is Ayodhya for me. When I thus came along with you leaving everything, will there be again a decision of my own? Will there be any choice of my own? When you say that I should build a Parnasala (hut) at a place of my choice, it means I have a choice. In such a case it does not amount to total surrender (*sampoorna saranagathi*⁴⁵) on my part. What a

⁴⁵ Worship or Upasana or Bhakti marga is the name given to the path of Saranagathi or surrender to the Lord’s Will, the merging of the individual Will in the Will of the Universal. That is real *Saranagathi*, real *bhakti*. This can be acquired by constant practice of detachment. (*SSS Vol.6 p.3- 4*)

wretched fellow I am!" He continued: "I have no other desire, except to obey your command. Your pleasure is my pleasure. My duty is to obey whatever you say. My only goal in life is to be at your Lotus Feet constantly and obey your commands. Nothing else."

While Lakshmana thus surrendered himself before Rama, Sita entered the scene and pleaded: "Rama! Please do not speak to Lakshmana such words again". (*Bhagavad Gita Part I p.58-59*) Rama realized the sacred feelings of Lakshmana and the true attitude of his surrender and pointed out the site himself. (*SS 1/1999 p.25*)

Shun bad places haunted by bad people

When one surrenders, according to the circumstances, the devotee becomes subject to some doubts and mental agitations. For instance, in the Ramayana, when Rama and Lakshmana were going in search of Sita, suddenly Lakshmana felt tired and told Rama that he was fed up with the search for Sita (*SSS Vol.28 p.53*) and said, "Rama, I am leaving You and returning to Ayodhya. Why should I come with You? Only you were asked to go to forest. I shall go back to Ayodhya to join my wife and mother." Rama was surprised at this unexpected turn in the mind of Lakshmana and asked him to wait for a while. (*SSS Vol.31 p.153*)

How did Lakshmana, who previously had declared that Rama was everything to him and that he would not live without Rama even for a moment, suddenly develop this attitude? How did this concern for bodily comfort arise? (*SSS Vol.28 p.53*) Walking away some distance, he halted under a tree for shelter. Then Lakshmana repented for his lapse and said, "I am sorry, I don't want to leave You and go. I do not know why I got such an unnatural attitude all of a sudden!" Rama said, "You were then in the region of Surpanakha, the demoness. So, your mind wavered⁴⁶. Now we have come out of her territory and you are normal⁴⁷." This is a lesson to show that even a great devotee like

⁴⁶ Rama then replied! "Lakshmana! That place was surcharged with all her evil qualities. Those vibrations aroused in you the bad thoughts. (*SSS Vol.28 p.54*)

⁴⁷ Rama said, "your inherent good nature asserted itself." (*ibid*)

Lakshmana could be upset by traversing the region of a demonic person. Rama saw that Chitrakoot was the seat of *rishis* (sages) and so decided to stay there. That is why you should shun bad company and bad places haunted by bad people. Discriminate between what is good and what is bad, that which gives permanent joy and which is transient. Do good deeds. If you surrender to the *Atma* and be constantly in touch with it, God will be with you, around you, above you and below you. (*SSS Vol.31 p.153-154*)

The lesson of this incident is that people will have to be careful about their association with certain places or persons. Eschew bad company. Be away from places where evil qualities are rampant. The vibrations from a place affect persons who frequent them. (*SSS Vol.28 p.54*)

Lakshmana is Mantradrasta:

Rama symbolised Rig Veda. He was Mantraswarupa (embodiment of Mantras). Lakshmana was *Mantradrasta* (one who contemplated on the *mantras*) and he put the teachings of Rama into practice. He followed Rama faithfully. He considered *Rama Nama* as the *taraka* (liberating) *mantra*. He, in fact, considered Rama as everything - mother, father, *Guru* and God. (*SSS Vol.37 p.98*)

IDEAL CHARACTER OF LAKSHMANA

Embodiments of Love! You do not need to undertake any spiritual practices. Experience the innate divinity in everyone by following the path of love. Spend your life in selfless service. This is the teaching of Rama. - Lakshmana said: "I am Your servant. It is my duty to serve You in the way You want me to."

In order to demonstrate to the world the ideal character of Lakshmana, Rama subjected him to a test. When Sita, Rama and Lakshmana were residing on Chitrakoota Mountain, one day Lakshmana went into the forest to fetch some food. Taking this opportunity, Rama decided to test Lakshmana. He requested Sita to play her role in this divine drama. As Lakshmana was returning with food, Sita pretended to be asleep under a tree, keeping her head on the lap of

Rama. Rama asked Lakshmana to keep Sita's head on his lap without disturbing her sleep as He had some other important work to attend to.

Rama wanted to observe the feelings of Lakshmana. So, He assumed the form of a parrot and perched on the same tree. Considering Sita as his mother, Lakshmana closed his eyes and went into deep contemplation of Lord Rama. Rama in the form of a parrot started singing: "It is easy to wake up someone who is fast asleep, but is it possible for anyone to wake up a person who is pretending to be sleep?" (Telugu Poem) Sita pretended to be fast asleep and even started snoring! In all respects Sita and Rama was a perfect match for each other. After some time, Rama returned as if from somewhere and 'woke up' Sita. Sita opened her eyes as if from deep sleep and expressed her satisfaction to Rama that she had a sound and undisturbed sleep. The Leelas (pranks) of God are mysterious, wonderful and sacred. God tests a devotee in order to shower His grace on him and protect him. Lakshmana fell at Rama's feet and said, "I am Your servant. It is my duty to serve You in the way You want me to". (SS May '99 p.119) (*SSS Vol.32 Part I p.108-109*)

Jaya Jaya Rama Janaki Ram

Shyamala Komala Nayanabhi Ram

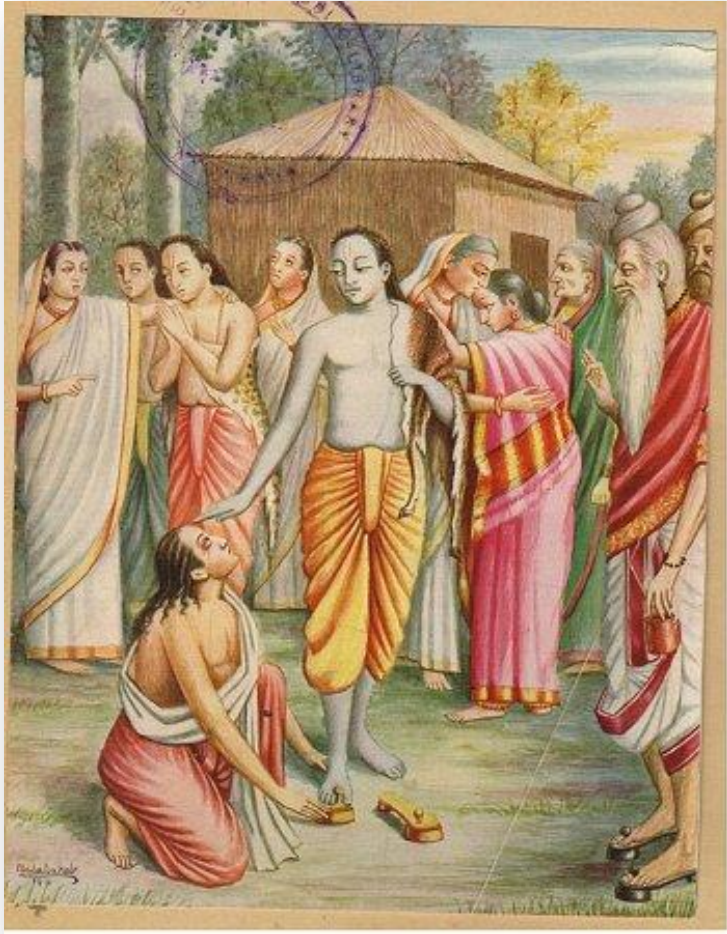
Natavara Shyama Sundara Rama

Pathitodharaka Pattabhi Rama

Bhakthodharaka Prasanthi Rama||

- Inspired composition by Tumuluru

7.2 BHARATHA



Summary of the Photo (from Wikipedia)

Description **English:** Bharatha Asks for Rama's Footwear

Date 1916

Source <http://www.kamat.com/kalranga/mythology/ramayan/30021.htm>

Author Balasaheb Pandit Pant Pratinidhi

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BHARATHA

In the Hindu epic Ramayana, Bharatha was the second brother of the main protagonist Rama, and the son of Dasaratha and Kaikeyi. Dasaratha was the Emperor of Ayodhya and belonged to the Suryavansha or Solar Dynasty. It is said that after Rama, he was the symbol of dharma and idealism. A few commentators, however, deem Bharatha to be even greater than Rama himself in virtue.

He is considered to be born in the aspect of the Sudarshana Chakra, the most famous of Vishnu's Panchayudhas.

- *From Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia*

BHARATHA: Son of Dasaratha and Kaika; brother of Rama. "Bharatha" means "he who rules" (*Glossary for the Vahinis*)

BIRTH

Kaikeyi's son was born the next day (after the child of Kausalya was born) — (Uttarayana, the Divine Half-year, the bright fortnight), Chaitra (Month), tenth day, Tuesday gandhayoga.

(RKRV Part I p. 42-43) The conch manifested as Bharatha (*(SSS Vol.31 p.202)*)

NAMING CEREMONY:

Dasaratha prayed to Vashishta to fix the auspicious time for the naming ceremony of the children. The Family Preceptor sat still for a few seconds lost in meditation: he saw revealed in his yogic vision the future years. He gazed on the child that was the source of Kaikeyi's joy. That child, Vashishta knew, will fill all hearts with love and joy. He will amaze all by his unbelievable adherence to Dharma. He will rule over his subjects with great compassion and affection. So, he gave him the name, Bharatha (he who rules). *(RKRV Part I p.43/46)*

Bharatha's name itself signifies that he is saturated with love of Rama (Bha - means, Bhagawan - the Lord, Rama; ratha - means, pleased by, happy over, attached to). Let the Love for the Lord grow in you, as it did in Bharatha. Let that sense of adoration, which discarded even a throne, flourish in you. Then, you can be of great use to our country, our culture, your society, your religion and your community. *(SSS Vol.7 p.118-119)*

CURIOUS INSEPARABLE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE BROTHERS:

The children grew fast on the fond care of the mothers. But one curious⁴⁸ thing was noticed early. It was observed very soon that

⁴⁸ See Chapter, *Sumitra - Curious thing – Sumitra not destined to mother her twins*

Lakshmana always sought Rama and Satrughna always sought Bharatha! (*RKRV Part I p.47*)

Bharatha would not live without Satrughna even for a moment, a feeling that was well reciprocated. Satrughna would not bear the separation from Bharatha. (*SSB 1996 p.14*)

In the story of Ramayana, just as Lakshmana was closely following Rama, so also Satrughna was closely following Bharatha. Such was the inseparable connection that existed between Bharatha and Satrughna. If Rama was not present, Lakshmana would not be happy at all. In the same manner, if Bharatha was not present for a moment, Satrughna would be in great sorrow. (*SSB 1977 p.59*)

HIS MARRIAGE:

Janaka approached Bharatha and pronouncing the Vedic Manthras traditionally used for the wedding, he gifted Mandavi to him as his bride. (*RKRV Part I p.189*)

BHARATHA GOES TO GIRIVRAJA

Bharatha leaves for his maternal uncle's place, Girivraja:

Meanwhile, the prince from Kekaya, the maternal uncle of Bharatha, approached Dasaratha and represented that a long time had elapsed since he came from his kingdom. "Father is waiting to see me back. He would have been very happy to be present here during these festivities. He does not know about the

wedding of Bharatha. He will be very disappointed when he comes to know that the marriage of his grandson was celebrated in his absence. That disappointment can be assuaged to some extent if Bharatha is sent with me now, so that some festivities might be arranged there for his satisfaction and pleasure.” Dasaratha consulted his wives and called Bharatha to his presence. “Son! Your maternal uncle, Yudhajit, had come to take you with him from Mithila itself, I did not agree. I have come to know that your grandfather is very anxious to see you. So, make yourselves ready to accompany him,” Dasaratha ordered. Then Bharatha said, “Father! It would be very good if Satrughna too comes along with me.” So, he was also ordered to prepare himself to leave. And both of them left for the city of Girivraja, with their wives. (*RKRV Part I p.211-212*)

Moved by his respect towards elders, Bharatha made preparations to leave Ayodhya, with his wife. No objections were raised, or arguments presented against. Bharatha was endowed with the highest intellect; besides, he was master of himself, his senses and desires. Bharatha and Satrughna, with their wives, journeyed quite happily, and reached the city of Girivraja. The grandfather was longing to see him and fondle him, and enquired about the health and happiness of people in Ayodhya. He asserted that they looked exhausted by the long hours of travel and insisted that they should rest. He led them to the residences allotted for them. From that moment, he treated them more affectionately than his own children and paid close attention to their smallest needs. (*RKRV Part I p.212*)

Father and sons pine for each other:

Though the grandfather cared for their comfort and joy, the brothers appeared to suffer from some secret discontent; for, they could not bear separation from their aged father and Rama, who was the very breath of their existence. They conversed among themselves constantly only about Dasaratha and Rama. Off and on, anxiety about the health and welfare of the father tormented them, in spite of themselves, and deprived them of peace of mind. While their feelings in Girivraja were such, in Ayodhya, not a single moment passed without Dasaratha pining for them. He sensed a void without them. Many times, he asked himself the question, “Why did I send them from here? Oh, it would have been good if I had not agreed to send them.” The four sons were as four arms for Dasaratha. Now he had been deprived of two. One day, Rama saw his father plunged in thought, at the separation from Bharatha and Satrughna. He approached his father and sitting near him spoke soft and sweet words, making him happy. (*RKRV Part I p.212-213*)

The Emperor’s Decision

One night, Dasaratha⁴⁹ felt thirsty and wanted to drink water. When he picked up the jug containing water, he found that his hand was trembling. He realized that he was no longer as strong as he once was, and it dawned upon him that having become weak, he was unworthy of ruling the kingdom any longer. The next morning he summoned his Ministers to hold deliberations about the prospective ruler of Ayodhya. It was decided in the

⁴⁹ See Chapter, *Dasaratha - The Emperor’s Decision*

meeting that Rama, the eldest son, was the worthy successor to the throne of Ayodhya.

Manthara, the servant-maid of Queen Kaikeyi, began poisoning the mind of Kaikeyi, though the queen had nurtured deep love for Rama. Manthara ultimately succeeded in changing the mind of Kaikeyi and caused the departure of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita from Ayodhya. (*SSB 1996 p.35-36*)

At last, the hour for the departure of Rama from Ayodhya arrived. Meanwhile, the people came to know of the departure of Rama. They were plunged into inexpressible grief and cried out heartrendingly. (*SSB 1996 p.38*)

Bharatha's dreams:

Ever since Ayodhya was plunged in sorrow, Bharatha was experiencing various premonitions in the form of ominous dreams. He was awakened by the terror and turmoil which the dreams presented before him. Many nights Bharatha had not even a wink of sleep. He sat up in bed, in an eerie state of expectation. He feared that some bad news was coming fast towards him. He moved out even before dawn; and, after an early bath, he engaged himself in various rites and ceremonies in order to propitiate the Gods and avert the expected calamity. He sat long in the shrine, praying for relief. In spite of all this, he was haunted by a mysterious fear. The dreams were persisting for fourteen days and so Bharatha had reached the very bottom of his courage and faith.

Family Preceptor, Vashishta sends word that Bharatha and Shatrughna should be sent back to Ayodhya immediately:

Meanwhile the courier from Ayodhya managed to reach the City of Kekaya, where Bharatha was, on the fifteenth day of his long journey. When Bharatha was informed of his arrival at the main entrance to the Palace, Bharatha ordered that he be brought in immediately, so that he might know what had brought him. The courier prostrated before Bharatha and prayed that he and his brother start without the least delay, according to the command of the Preceptor, to Ayodhya. Bharatha enquired about the welfare of people in Ayodhya, plying the courier with a variety of questions. He replied that there was nothing special to report, except that the Preceptor wanted them to return soon, without delay. This was the task on which he had come and he had nothing more to say. Nor did he know anything more. *He did not inform them that Dasaratha had died*⁵⁰

Bharatha knew that couriers would not speak more than a few words before their royal masters and the royal masters too should not keep on talking to them intimately for long. Etiquette demanded that he should not converse with him for more than a few minutes. The courier too had his code of discipline. So, he rose and left the chamber. (*RKRV Part I p.395-396*)

GLOOM OVER AYODHYA

Bharatha and Satrughna leave for Ayodhya:

That very moment, Bharatha entered the inner apartments, and took leave of his maternal uncle. Along with his brother,

⁵⁰ SSB 1996 p.38-39

Satrughna, he got into the waiting chariot, and hurried it to move forward faster and faster. Like an arrow from an intrepid bow, the chariot flew over mountain paths, hill tracks and jungle roads. Grief was surging from Bharatha's heart, as fast as the chariot itself. He could not explain why or wherefore. Some inexplicable agony afflicted him. Bharatha did not wish to delay on the road for food or even for a gulp of water to assuage his thirst.

Satrughna noticed the sense of alarm and anxiety that had overcome his brother. He suggested a few times that a halt could be made for food and drink; but, Bharatha did not heed. He stayed silent. Moreover, they observed a series of bad omens encountering them as they drove along. Crows cawed raucously from positions and directions foreboding evil. Dogs howled piteously, in an eerie tone. These signs of calamity ruffled the calmness which Satrughna had heroically maintained until then. *(RKRV Part I p.396-397)*

Face of Ayodhya in gloom:

It took fifteen days for Bharatha and Satrughna to reach Ayodhya, though they sped fast in chariots⁵¹. When they arrived at the main gate of the City of Ayodhya, and looked up, the fear was confirmed; for, the festoons of mango leaves had not been renewed for days. Only dried leaves were hanging across the moaning gateway. They were beating against the wind, as if gnashing in anger and sorrow. Why were green leaves not hung across? *(RKRV Part I p.397-398)*

⁵¹ ibid

The mango leaves were all dried up, and this was symbolic of a dreary atmosphere instead of proclaiming prosperity. He started seeing bad omens and began wondering as to what the matter was. He found all the streets littered with dirty pieces of matter and all the houses appeared very unclean. This unusual situation made him think that something was drastically wrong, and that some tragedy had come over Ayodhya. (*SSB 1977 p.67-68*)

The two brothers were shocked to see the lustreless face of Ayodhya⁵². Birds and beasts hung their heads in sorrow, and were crying disconsolately. Dogs were roaming on the roads, whining loudly. (*SSB 1996 p.39*)

They entered the City and drove on. The Royal Stables for horses and elephants were at the very entrance. When Bharatha's eyes fell on them, his heart broke. He lost control over himself. For, he found the animals standing without moving a muscle, heads bent and eyes streaming tears. The mahouts and grooms stood with a heavy load of grief, unable to lift their heads. When they drove further into the City, they found the doors of all the mansions on both sides of the road closed, as if the people inside declined to welcome anyone in. The roads themselves were dusty and unswept. The few citizens who were up and moving suddenly turned their gaze away when they saw the chariot that was coming in. When they recognised Bharatha, they shed tears. The diamond bazaar was closed, so were all shops all over. Bharatha could not find the tongue to enquire from anyone the

⁵² What had happened to the City? Why this neglect, this sign of distress? The brothers guessed that some terrible bolt of sorrow had fallen on the Capital. (*RKR V p.395-396*)

reason for the pall of gloom that hung over the City. He was petrified at the unforeseen signs of distress. (*RKRV Part I p.398*)

Bharatha rushes to Kaikeyi’s Chamber:

The chariot entered the Royal Palace. The guards received them silently, with no acclamation of joy, the traditional shouts of Jai, Jai. They stood mute and bent. They could not raise their eyes, for there were tears overflowing. The brothers were now convinced that some unspeakable calamity had overtaken the city. They alighted from the chariot and ran into the palace. Kaikeyi had noted that her son had come. She went forward with great joy to receive him. The bevy of maids who rose with her and walked behind her were groaning in sorrow. Bharatha looked at their faces and stood stunned where he stood, unable to speak even a single word. But Kaikeyi started to speak. She said, “Son! Is your uncle well?” Bharatha gave some indistinct reply to that question and pressed forward with his own query, “How is father? How is my eldest brother? How is my other brother? How are my aunts, the queens?”

At this, Kaikeyi was rendered mute. Tears gathered in the eyes of the maids who stood around. He realised that some terrible news was being hidden from him. He asked, “Mother, where is father?” At this, the maids burst into sobs and tears. Seeing them, Kaikeyi too sensed that she should not delay any longer. She too shed tears and acted the role of a grief-stricken woman. Bharatha could not unravel the mystery unaided. He prayed to his mother to explain to him what had happened to whom, and why everyone was so overcome with sorrow. At this, Kaikeyi replied, “Son! What shall I say? I was very happy that with the help of

Manthara, I was able to achieve all that I desired. But with the very first step, my success has broken into bits. The Gods cast an unpropitious eye on it. The Emperor, your dearly beloved father, has left for Heaven.” Kaikeyi started sobbing aloud. No sooner did these words fall on his ear, than Bharatha rolled on the ground like a she-elephant at the roar of a lion. (*RKRV Part I p.398-400*)

Bharatha’s agony on hearing about Dasaratha’s death:

He cried out, “Alas, Father!” as he fell. Like a plantain tree cut asunder, Satrugna too fell flat on the floor. Their agony was indescribable, immeasurable. Bharatha sat up pressing his head with both hands and wept aloud. He cried out, “Father! We could not be present round your bed when you drew your last breath. Oh! What great sinners are we? Of the four sons, all the four could not reap the same merit. And this Bharatha and this Satrugna are the worst, the most unfortunate. During the last moments, you would have talked so lovingly to us. You would have given us invaluable blessings and directions for life. Well, we must be grateful that Rama was there with you. You would certainly have told him what you wished to convey to us. Brother! Rise. Come with me. We shall go to Rama and find out what father has left as message for us. Mother! Tell us where Rama is now.” Bharatha stood up, ready to go. He was waiting only for his mother’s reply.

Bharatha’s interaction with his mother, Kaikeyi

Kaikeyi said, “Son! If Rama was here, your father would not have breathed his last, don’t you realise that? Rama is not in the City, don’t you know?” This was like pouring poison into a

wound. Bharatha was shocked by the new blow. Bharatha asked, “Mother, Rama is my very breath. Where has Rama gone?” Bharatha was on the brink of collapse, Kaikeyi replied quick and fast: “Where to? Do you ask where he has gone? Well, to the forest.” “That may be,” Bharatha intervened, “But why has Rama who has gone to the forest not returned yet?” (*RKRK Part I p.399-401*)

Kaikeyi’s answer was delivered calmly and with deliberation. She said, “Son! We have no time to relate and listen to that long story. First, busy yourself in arranging for the last obsequies of your father!” From this, Bharatha learnt that his mother was trying to hide some unpleasant secret from him. So, he asked the whereabouts of Sita and Lakshmana, one after the other. The mother replied, “They both have followed Rama into the forest. They will not be returning to this City until after fourteen years. Thus did your father command.” Kaikeyi delivered this statement, with a firm, hard voice.

Kaikeyi saw that Bharatha was rendered increasingly desperate and distressed by her statements; so, she drew her son near and, stroking his head, she started consoling him saying, “Son! There is no need to lament over your father. He was, while alive, engaging himself continuously in a series of meritorious activities, and so his soul would have attained heaven. Your duty now is to follow the ideal he has set before you, to earn similar fame by meritorious deeds and rule over the Empire happily. Increase his fame and renown by your own wise and merciful rule and maintain the great name of the dynasty.” Kaikeyi

endeavoured to heal the lacerated heart of her son by these and similar words.

But they struck his heart like a dagger thrust. Each word hit him like a hammer stroke. Satrughna developed a burning sensation all over his body, as he listened to her. But he kept quiet. He did not scream. Bharatha, however, rose suddenly, deciding to discover the truth, for, he felt that his mother was deceiving him by her words, keeping some facts away from him and talking in riddles. (*RKRV Part I p.401-403*)

Kausalya comforts Bharatha and laments her plight:

He drew Satrughna along and rushed out of the room towards the apartments of Kausalya, the eldest queen and the mother of Rama. And what did he see there! Kausalya was rolling on the floor, in her dust-ridden clothes, lamenting aloud, “Oh Lord! Lord, Rama, Rama!” Her maids themselves sunk in sorrow were nursing her into some sort of courage. Bharatha could not restrain himself. Crying out “Mother! Mother!” he collapsed on the floor at her feet. Queen Sumitra too was there, with Kausalya. Both of them recognised Bharatha and Satrughna, and they suddenly fainted away. Recovering, they clasped each other in a fit of agony and wept aloud. It was a scene that would have melted the hardest stone. The brothers could not bear the weight of sorrow. They fell on the floor. “Mother! Take me to father. Tell me the reason why he passed away. Why did my dear brothers, Rama and Lakshmana, proceed to the forest, with Sita? It is all a mystery to me. Save me from this agony, tell me why.” Bharatha pleaded pitifully, clasping the feet of Kausalya. Kausalya embraced him tenderly and replied, “With your return,

my son, I am consoled a little. Seeing you, I can forget the pang of separation from dear Rama. You are as much as Rama to me. I make no distinction.” Even while saying so, she interrupted her words, with sobs and groans, and the cry, “Ah! Rama! Can I keep alive for fourteen long years, while you spend them in the forest? Have you resolved that I should be reduced to ashes by the sorrow of separation, just as your father was? Alas how unfortunate am I?” Bharatha suffered even more at these outbursts. His imagination pictured all kinds of tragedies and miseries, for, he was not yet aware of the truth. He prayed: “Mother! Do not keep fact away from me. Trust me. Tell me why Rama went away into the forest, and why father breathed his last. Tell me and save me from this tangle of confusion.”

Kausalya was ever simple and straightforward and very compassionate by nature. She took Bharatha to be Rama himself returned. She drew Bharatha near her, and wiping her tears off, she said, “Son! Bharatha! Be bold. Do not grieve over the past. Such grief is useless. Strange things do happen when times are not propitious and circumstances so conspire. Of what benefit is it to lay the blame on someone? No one should be found fault with. It is my destiny to live on with this load of sorrow. This cannot be avoided. It must be endured by me. But you are young. You are like the sun at the hour of early dawn. Remember that. “My dearly loved darling, Rama, in obedience to father’s order, wore apparels of fibre, tied his matted hair into a topknot, and is now moving about in the jungle. Sita, who cannot live away from him even for a moment, is with him, clothed in a bark garment. Lakshmana attempted to prevent Rama from going into the forest, but his efforts were of no avail. He declared that

Ayodhya without Rama was a jungle for him, he followed Rama. All this happened before my very eyes. Oh! What a sinful soul should I be that I still live!

“I could not go with them, nor would my life depart, when they left. How shall I describe my miserable plight? My heart is really carved out of adamant stone. Oh tender-hearted Rama! you suffer so much now, since you were born of me. Or else, why should you? Alas! Rama! How much suffering you have to endure, living on fruits and roots, and wandering about in the terror striking recesses of the jungles!” She groaned aloud once and fell in a faint on the floor. Bharatha saw all this and listened to what was told him, but the puzzle still remained unsolved. He was struggling in fear and anxiety, unable to delve into the mystery. (*RKRV Part I p.402-404*)

Bharatha tries to learn about the mystery from Sumantra:

Meanwhile, a message was brought by Minister Sumantra that the royal preceptor, Sage Vashishta, had asked that Bharatha should go to him. Sumantra too burst into tears when his eyes fell on the brothers. He clasped Bharatha to his breast. The brothers too could not control their grief. Bharatha hoped that Sumantra at least would throw light on the mystery hanging over the tragic events in the Capital.

He tried various means to draw Sumantra to giving him an account of the happenings. But Sumantra did not like to speak on them. He thought Bharatha and Satrugna had already been told what had happened by those whom they had met before his arrival.

Vashishta directs Bharatha to perform the last rites to his father:

They went to the Preceptor together. Bharatha and Satrughna fell at the feet of Vashishta and wept aloud. He raised them up, with affection and sympathy, and taught them many a moral and philosophical lesson, in the process of consoling them. “Already, there has been much delay. It is not advisable to delay any further,” he said, and directed Bharatha to prepare himself for performing the funeral rites of his father. Bharatha was lost in thought for a long while. Then, he pleaded with the Preceptor Vashishta, “Master! This is a duty that has to be carried out by the eldest son, and Rama is the eldest of us four. Now you are proposing that I should carry it out. Is this just? Is this right? You have preserved the body all these days⁵³; keep it so for two or three days more. We shall proceed to where Rama is, Satrughna and I, and bring him back with us. Please give us permission to do so.” Vashishta replied, “Son! You are a simpleton! Rama would not like to return earlier than the period which has been fixed. He honours the word, when once given. However much you might plead, Rama will not enter Ayodhya until the fourteen years are over. Therefore, give up that plan of yours. Perform the obsequies of your father, and later you can do whatever you desire.” Vashishta spoke in this strain again and again to convince Bharatha of the futility of his idea. Bharatha found that he could not avoid obeying the Preceptor. He agreed.

⁵³ The body had been preserved in oil for fifteen days. (*SSB 1996 p.52*)

Bharatha pleads with the queens not to immolate themselves:

Meanwhile urged by an irrepressible yearning, Bharatha went straight into the apartments of Kausalya and Sumitra, and falling at their feet, he prayed, “Mothers! No. You must desist from immolating yourselves in the funeral pyre of father. If you try to do so, I will not perform the last rites for him.”

He secured from them the promise that they would not. Both of them were much impressed by his love and affection. They could not but comply with this request. They said, “Son! We shall act in accordance with your desire.”

The last rites:

The father’s body was bathed, and the rites laid down in the Vedas preliminary to cremation were duly gone through. The body was taken and placed on the pyre of sandalwood piled on the bank of the Sarayu River. Bharatha performed the last rites with scrupulous correctitude, evincing a faith in the Vedas which was a thousand times more than what Vashishta expected and foresaw. He gave away in charity, in the name of his father, the sixteen prescribed articles, in plenty. He gave cows, lands, gold, houses, clothes, food, horses, elephants, coins, and other valuables. The recipients extolled throughout his generosity and filial piety.

But the feudatory kings, the scholars and priests, and the common people could not reconcile themselves to the absence of Rama. That sorrow gnawed their hearts. That agony of separation caused pangs of pain every moment. They knew they were helpless. There was no way out. Rama would never give up

the plighted word. He would not return whatever the inducement. He would not come back to Ayodhya until the fourteen-year period was over. They had to accept that fact. So they steeled their hearts to bear with the agony and decided to keep alive, awaiting his return, hoping to rejoice when the term of exile ends.

Bharatha is ashamed at learning about the cause of Dasaratha's death from Vashishta:

Bharatha and Satrughna, who were unaware of these tragic developments at the Capital now being described by their Preceptor, were overwhelmed with anger, as well as sorrow and a sense of shame. They bent their heads. Their hearts were filled with contrition. Streams of tears flowed down their cheeks. The persons assembled before them could scarce lift their eyes towards them. Even Vashishta wiped his eyes which were fast filling with tears. The hall was saturated with gloom. A silence fell over the assembly.

All men sat like stone images. Bharatha and Satrughna could not any longer listen to what Vashishta was narrating. They were too full of anger at Kaikeyi for her nefarious conduct. Bharatha cursed himself that he was born of such a mother. He was so ashamed at this consequence of his own evil deeds in past lives that he could not lift his head or look anyone in the face. They were anxious to leave the hall and get away. (*RKRV Part I p.404/408*)

Vashishta's advice to Bharatha to act according to his father's word-

It is the glory of the Ikshvaku royal line that every one belonging to it would sacrifice anything for the sake of keeping the word once given. That is the splendour which you share. You too must act according to your father's word and accept the responsibility of administering the kingdom. May you attain all auspiciousness in the task May success and prosperity attend on all your undertakings. I have ventured to advise you thus, only because of the affection and compassion I have towards you; or else I would not have laid on your shoulder this heavy responsibility. I know you can maintain the fair name of your father. You have the administrative ability, the skill, and the courage and needed for taking up this burden. Do not hesitate or doubt. *Vashishta, the family preceptor, advised him to ascend the throne, for, the empire was suffering an interregnum!*⁵⁴ Accept the charge.”
(*RKRV Part I p.409*)

Bharatha's agony on be asked to the reins of the Kingdom:

Bharatha took his loving advice and when the Preceptor finished, he rose quickly from his seat, and fell prostrate at his feet. He struggled to speak, for he was in inconsolable grief. His lips were quivering. His throat was unclear. Words could hardly shape themselves on his tongue. He said, “Master! Are these words of yours really an indication of your love and compassion? No, in fact, you have no love, no compassion towards me. For, if you had, you would have never agreed to place this entire burden on me. You are sentencing me to this punishment without the least

⁵⁴ *SSS Vol. 7 p.118-119*

compassion. This Empire that drove the holiest and purest person into the jungles, this Empire that plunged the entire population into years of incessant tears, this Empire that has lost its most righteous ruler, this Empire that has brought eternal infamy to its ruling dynasty, the Ikshvaku Line, this Empire that has brought about the pathetic state of widowhood on mothers Kausalya, Sumitra and the rest, this Empire that has degraded itself in so many ways—you are now entrusting to me! “Alas, this is the consequence of the sins I have committed, the consequence of this unfortunate fellow being born from the womb of that embodiment of cruelty and hatred, Kaikeyi. Instead of inflicting this punishment on me, please earn some spiritual merit by sending me to where Rama is. I can make my life worthwhile and save myself, by engaging in the task of sweeping the paths ahead of them, to make them soft for his feet. I cannot remain in this place a moment longer.”

Vashishta Implores Bharatha to take up the reins

Bharatha fell at Vashishta’s feet and prayed for permission to leave for the forest. At this, the Ministers of the State rose with folded hands and said, “Lord! It is not proper to continue this state of affairs long. We have no ruler now. You cannot escape the responsibility which the Preceptor is imposing on you. After Rama returns, you can act in the way you prefer, but now, please accept our prayers. Protect the realm and promote the prosperity of the people. Take up the reins.” (*RKRV Part I p.410-411*)

Bharadwaja tells Bharatha:

The son to whom the father entrusts the kingdom is thereby deemed deserving of the right to govern it. That relentless

adherent of Truth, that High-souled ruler, Emperor Dasaratha, gave the Empire to you, and ordered that you should act according to the Dharma of Monarchs. (*RKRV Part I p.431*)

BHARATHA'S INTERACTION WITH KAUSALYA:

Bharatha did not reply to their importunities. Instead, he wanted leave to go to mother Kausalya and see her for awhile. Vashishta readily agreed. Bharatha and Satrugna moved out of the Assembly, and made their way straight to the palace of Kausalya. They fell at her feet and Bharatha told her, "Mother! Pray pardon this unlucky Bharatha who has been the cause of all this calamity, having been born from the womb of that wicked woman, Kaikeyi. This cursed fellow is the source of miseries of the realm. Give me permission to leave for the forest. I cannot walk or move about even a moment in this city of Ayodhya with head erect, after my master and lord; Rama has left it on account of me. This Empire belongs as of right to the eldest son.

This insignificant fellow has no right over it. I do not need this burden. I shall not bear it. Bless me, so that I can leave immediately." Bharatha stood waiting, filled with grief.

Kausalya comforted Bharatha and advised – No word of condemnation for his mother:

Kausalya⁵⁵ mustered courage and started to comfort Bharatha. She said, "Bharatha! Consider the circumstances and give up your grief. This is no time for wavering. Rama is out there in the

⁵⁵ **Kausalya laments her grief to Bharatha**

midst of the forest region. Your father is in Heaven. Your mothers, kith and kin, your friends and well-wishers, and the subjects are sunk in deep sorrow. All are now looking forward to you as their sole refuge and resort. Realise that all this has happened because the times were not propitious and so deeds of men became crooked and shocking; take courage and decide. Obey the directions of your father. Bow your head to the command of the Guru, Vashishta. Honour the petitions of the people. Act as the ministers are praying you should.” Kausalya was holding his hands fondly in hers, while she was trying to persuade him to accept the authority of the monarch of the realm. Her words touched him with a strange softness, as if they were cool sandal paste over a burning heart. They were sweet to the ear, and very appealing to hear. For, Kausalya had no word of condemnation for his mother who had caused this string of disasters. She entertained not even the least doubt regarding his loyalty. Bharatha felt immensely happy and relieved when he listened to her words. He was delighted beyond measure when he noted how broad her heart was and how sincere her affection towards him. He had not calculated even in his wildest dream that Kausalya would treat him like this, when her own son was an exile for fourteen years in the forest, and also pour out such plentiful affection on him, who was the son of another wife of her husband! What a difference, he wondered, between his own mother, Kaikeyi, and Kausalya. He could not gauge it by any unit of measurement. He found in Kausalya the completion and fulfilment of the love that should fill the heart. (*RKRK Part I p.411-413*)

Bharatha deploras his plight and pleads with Mother Kausalya that he is not a fit to rule:

He folded his palms and importuned, “Mother! Your words filled with tenderness and love are like a shower of cool rosewater on my lacerated heart. Perhaps you mistook me for Rama! But alas, I am not that pure-hearted Rama. Bharatha, born of Kaikeyi, I have a crooked nature, inherited from her. I am mean, with no sense of shame. I am the enemy of Rama. You have taken me to be Rama and spoken so kindly, so affectionately. Your heart is so set upon Rama that you address everyone as you address Rama himself. I am speaking the truth, mother! Listen to me, and pay heed to my prayer. “Mother! Only those who are established in righteousness deserve to rule. When persons of devious intelligence and shady skills like me rule the realm, the earth will degenerate into an image of the nether regions. Selfish pushers, narrow-minded adventurers, greedy vultures, pomp-loving personalities, self-centred individuals, persons suffering from chronic envy, these do not deserve the right to rule. They harm the interests of the people whom they rule over. They undermine the foundations of righteousness. The kingdom will be ruined by them. Only those who tread the path of virtue and righteous conduct deserve to rule over others. I can discover only one such, and he is Rama. I do not know of any other. Therefore, I shall leave this very instant, and clasping the feet of Rama, pray to him. I shall bring him back with me to Ayodhya. Grant me the permission. Bless me without further delay.” Bharatha prostrated before Kausalya and waited for the answer.

Kausalya gives Bharatha permission to go to the forest:

Bharatha’s words soothed the heart of Kausalya to a large extent. She said, “Son! In you I find surging forth the selfsame feelings my Rama has. Looking upon you, I can bear a little the agony of separation from him. So, if you too proceed to the forest, what is to happen to us? If you declare that your going is inevitable, then, take me too. For whom have I to spend my days with in this Ayodhya? Having lost the husband, and having become distant from the son, the wife has not yet dissolved herself in the agony of the loss. Go, secure the permission of the Guru, Vashishta.

We shall enter the forest, and spend at least some time with Sita, Rama and Lakshmana. I can then end this life of mine.” When she spoke thus, Bharatha derived some consolation and peace of mind. Thereupon, Bharatha fell at the feet of Kausalya and Sumitra, and rose to proceed towards the palace of Kaikeyi.

Bharatha berates Kaikeyi and himself for being born from her womb:

Bharatha walked first and Satrughna followed him. They were heavy with grief and resentment that Kaikeyi, putting her trust in Manthara, had brought about such havoc. They tried hard to suppress the anger that rose within them. At last, they entered the palace. They saw at the entrance Manthara herself, elaborately bejewelled, waiting to receive them. Satrughna⁵⁶ could not

⁵⁶ See Chapter, *Satrughna* - **Satrughna was prepared to kill Manthara** - Bharatha and Satrughna were prepared to cause hurt and harm to their own mothers, but they were not prepared to displease Rama by their acts. (*SSB 1977 p.59*)

tolerate that sight. He dragged her down by the hair and rained blows on her. She bawled out, “Ayyo” “Ayyo” and when the sound reached the ears of Kaikeyi, she ran to the spot, and started berating Satrugna for his action. Taking advantage of the opportunity, Bharatha let himself go, with uncontrolled indignation. He shouted at her, “Fie upon you, blackest sinner! You placed faith in this wicked woman’s words and committed despicable sin. How was it that your heart did not break in twain when this woman’s disastrous counsel entered it? How could your tongue pronounce those baneful boons? Did it not turn into ashes, when it uttered those abominable desires? With what face can you dare reside in this palace? Aren’t you ashamed to move within its precincts? Alas! How did the Emperor place his faith in the words of a person so evil as you are? Blinded by lust, he agreed to barter away the son, in order to win the wife. The conspiracy you hatched was mean and fraught with misery. You polluted the pure heart of the Emperor. You set the Kingdom on fire. You have destroyed the dynasty and its glory. You have brought eternal disgrace on the Royal Line of Raghu. Your crooked, poisonous heart has achieved all this ruin. To declare you as my mother is a dire sin. How could you decide that, when you harm another, your son will attain good fortune? Are not the children of others as dear to them as yours are to you? Women who plan ill for other’s children are only accomplishing evil for their own children. How did you miss this great truth? It must be due to the sins you have committed in previous lives. No. All this is due to me. Or else, why should the pure, the steadfast, the undefiled Rama, my beloved brother, and the crown of chastity and goodness, Mother Sita, wander about in the fearsome forest? Oh, what a cruelty! How dreadful! Fie on you. That I have to

Speak to such a foul-hearted sinner is itself the result of sins I must have committed in my past lives. Oh, I wonder what dreadful sin I have committed to deserve this punishment, this disgrace, of being born of your womb. Sinners get only sinners as sharers and companions. How can they be associated with good men, men engaged in meritorious activity? (*RKRV Part I p.413-414*)

This Solar dynasty is as holy, as pure, as the Celestial Swan, with no trace of blemish. But really speaking, you are like your mother; she had her husband killed in order to fulfil her ambition. You too have killed your husband, in order to realise your selfish wish. Can the younger son ever rule over the Empire, overstepping the eldest son contrary to the established practice of the Royal Line? “You did not get this fatal idea now. It was there, latent, as a seed, since the very beginning, or else, it would not have manifested as a giant tree all of a sudden. Endowed with such a wicked nature, you could have smothered me dead as soon as I was born and saved me and this Empire from all this misery. Of what avail is it now to bewail what is past? Alas! Your intelligence directed you to hew down the trunk and water the branches, your reasoning faculty instructed you to promote the lives of fish by bailing out the water from the tank. I am unable to decide whether I have to laugh or weep at your banal stupidity.

“Instead of fouling these minutes conversing with you, I would rather proceed to the presence of Rama, and pray to him to come back to Ayodhya so that I can return with him. In case, he declines to return, I am determined to stay with him as

Lakshmana has done, and be happy serving him. I shall not look on your face again.” Saying this, Bharatha turned his back on her, and started with his brother. Kaikeyi⁵⁷ ruminated on her erroneous action. (*RKRV Part I p.416-417*)

THE BROTHERS MEET

Bharatha prays to the elders that only the sight of Rama would cure his agony:

Bharatha and Satrugna went straight to the place where the Ministers, the Royal Preceptor, and the leading citizens of the Capital had assembled. All of them were awaiting their arrival, anxious to know what they had resolved upon, and silently expectant to listen attentively to what they were about to tell them. Meanwhile, Bharatha fell at the feet of the Preceptor and declared, “Divine Master! I am telling you my honest intention. Please believe my sincerity, for, I am not hiding anything. I am opening my heart without any reservations. The effect is harder than the cause. The metal that is extracted from the soil is harder than the soil, you know. Born in the womb of the hardhearted Kaikeyi, I am indeed even more hard- hearted. Or else, how can you explain that I am still alive, despite the fact that Rama is far away from me? Kaikeyi has transferred Sita and Lakshmana into the forest, she has sent her husband into heaven, plunged the subjects of this vast Empire in sorrow and anxiety, and brought eternal infamy on her son. And you are now demanding that I should rule over the Empire and cover myself with lasting

⁵⁷ See chapter *Kaikeyi* - **Recognition of her own sin**

disgrace. I am not in the least happy over this. I do not deserve this at all. Will not people laugh at me in scorn if I sit on the Lion Throne as Lord Ruler when Rama is moving about in the jungle? (*RKRV Part I p.418-419*)

Bharatha appealed that he be allowed to go to “the God of my Prayers, the Lord who receives the homage of my unceasing adoration”. Vashishta told him that his father's command, and his preceptor's counsel that he sit enthroned as Ruler. Bharatha replied that that the request was proof of the extreme hatred that the parents, people, the preceptor and everyone in Ayodhya had towards him, for, had they loved him, they would not have pressed him to do such a mean sin. Bharatha stood before Vashishta with folded palms; he prayed, "Is it just, is it fair, that you should burden me with the sovereignty over a kingdom, which slew my father, widowed my mothers, exiled my dearest brother whom I value more than my very breath, to the demon-ridden jungle, with his dearly beloved queen and which finally brought disgrace on my mother? My empire is the realm, which Rama rules over, namely, my heart, which is too small to contain His glory?" (*SSS Vol.7 p.118-119*)

“My reign will bring only harm to the people; for, my accession itself will be immoral and unrighteous. And who will deign to honour an usurper and obey his commands? I cannot punish the unrighteous and the immoral! With what face can I correct wrong doers, when I myself have done mountains of wrong in ascending the throne that is not rightfully mine? People would certainly point the accusing finger at me, when opportunity

arises, though they may keep quiet for some time, for fear of the reprisals that I might inflict using my authority.

“The evil design of my mother has now become transformed into an agonising headache for me. I cannot wait even a single moment here without seeing Sita and Rama. I am only communicating to you my terrible anguish. Only the sight of Rama can cool my heart and cure my agony. No words of consolation or explanation can bring me solace in my grievous plight. I have obtained permission from Kausalya and Sumitra. I have decided to proceed at dawn tomorrow to the place where Rama is at present. My sins, however plentiful they might be, will be reduced to ashes the moment the eyes of Rama fall on me. Even if Rama does not speak to me, I shall be happy taking his darsan always, hiding behind some tree, and following him at a distance, delighted at the chance. Elders who have gathered here! Pray for me, bless me that I may progress as a result of the darsan of Rama. Ministers! Give me permission to go to the presence of Rama. I am the slave of the Lord Rama. He is the Lord for all of us.” In that assembly, not one among the Ministers, the Feudatories, and the leaders of the people could raise his voice in reply. They realised the depth of Bharatha’s remorse. They understood that Bharatha had an unsullied heart and that he was refusing to be bound by the coils of the conspiracy his mother wound round him. (*RKRV Part I p.419-420*)

The entire city comes forward to go to the forest:

Bharatha, refusing to accept the kingship that was offered to him, looking upon Rama as the only fit person to rule the kingdom, he

set out for the forest to meet Rama and persuade him to return to Ayodhya. (*SSS Vol.21 p.83*)

The chief of the Elders of the city rose from his seat and said, “Lord! We too shall come with you. We too find separation from Rama an insufferable agony. We do not care what happens to our lives after we get one chance to have his Darsan.” He asked for this permission on behalf of everyone gathered there. Others too responded to the suggestion wholeheartedly and came forward with prayers that they too be taken to Rama. Within minutes, the news spread into every nook and corner of the vast City; and men, women, children, young and old, got ready to start! Who can dissuade whom? There was no one that day among the huge population of Ayodhya so cruel as to prevent others from proceeding to Rama for his Darsan. The mothers, Kausalya and Sumitra, too set out on the journey with their maids. (*RKR Part I p.420-421*)

Meanwhile, Kaikeyi⁵⁸, overcome with repentance pleaded that she might be permitted to pray for pardon, and join the others in their attempts to persuade Rama to return to Ayodhya.

All prepare for the journey to the Forest to meet Rama:

Bharatha was informed that the entire City was on the move. He informed the Ministers that at least a few had to stay behind, in order to guard the City, without leaving it helpless. So, some

⁵⁸ See chapter, *Kaikeyi* - She pleads that she might be allowed to accompany the queens and pray for pardon:

were left behind. Vehicles were made ready before every house during the night itself, so that the inmates might join the trek, during the early hours. Practically everything on wheels was commandeered for the purpose. Food and drink for the entire mass of people were duly arranged. Like Chakravaka birds, the men and women of Ayodhya awaited the heralding of the dawn, so that they might journey towards their dearly beloved Lord. It was a night of ecstatic anticipation for the citizens. They spent it in contemplating on the Darsan that awaited them. The army with the entire force of chariotry, elephantry, cavalry and infantry got ready to march. Vedic scholars were directed by the Minister that they had to keep on reciting the auspicious hymns. They had also to take with them the ceremonial requisites for the ritual worship of Fire. Right on time, according to the calculations of the astrologers, the leading chariot for Bharatha and Satrughna, and next in order the palanquin for Queen Kausalya were brought before the palace.

Bharatha and Satrughna Walk barefoot:

Bharatha ordered that everyone must occupy the chariot or vehicle allotted. And allowing his chariot to move on with no one in it, Bharatha and Satrughna walked on, by its side barefooted.

People thought that they might walk in that manner only for some little time, for some short distance. But they found that Bharatha was in no mood to get into the chariot, however long the distance to be covered. Kausalya could not tolerate this. She said, “Son! I cannot suffer the sight of your walking. Sit in the chariot at least for some time.” At this, Bharatha replied,

“Mother! This is only to make amends for the sins I am burdened with. Do I suffer now while walking on the road at least a fraction of what Rama and Sita are suffering in the forest, while they walk barefoot? When they are walking barefoot, it is highly wrong for me, their servant, to ride in a chariot. Pardon me for disobeying your command. Permit me to walk as I am doing now.”

Meanwhile, the Royal Preceptor, Vashishta, and his consort Arundathi, who were seated in the preceding chariot, stopped their vehicle and witnessing the determination of Bharatha, they prayed to Bharatha at least to sit in their chariot and act as their charioteer. But Bharatha was adamant. He said, “I am the servant of Rama and I am bound only to his chariot. Until I get the precious chance to act as his charioteer, I shall not ride in any chariot nor hold the reins of any other steed. This is my vow.” Vashishta desisted from any further persuasion. He was genuinely delighted at the love and reverence that Bharatha bore towards Rama. (*RKR V Part I p.421-423*)

Bharatha now resolved to bring Rama back to Ayodhya. Accompanied by his mothers, ministers, and the royal entourage, he proceeded to the forest. Even Manthara accompanied him. Saint Thyagaraja has paid tribute to Bharatha by describing him as an “intelligent” one. The Saint sang,

*Would the monkey cross the bridge?
Would goddess Lakshmi adore You
and Lakshmana worship You?
Would the Intelligent Bharatha salute You
If You are not really Divine?*

Bharatha's journey through the forest:

Bharatha followed the trail left by Rama's chariot. Deep in the forest, he found flocks of birds moving about. Looking at them, Bharatha concluded there must be water in the neighbourhood because birds usually flock in large numbers near water sources. He also concluded that Rama would not be far away from the source of water, for He too would require water. The huge procession of men, soldiers, horses and elephants that followed Bharatha created a commotion and kicked up clouds of dust high into the sky. (*SSB 1996 p.40*)

They reached the bank of the River Tamas at the nightfall of the first day. The next day, they reached the bank of Gomati. As soon as it was dark, the vehicles were stopped, shelters were provided for women, children and the aged. The food was distributed to the people. Throughout the journey everyone carried out the work assigned to him with care and enthusiasm. They took good care that no one suffered any hardship.

Resuming their journey, with the dawn of the third day, they reached Sringeriverpuram when darkness fell on the land. The king of the Nishadas⁵⁹ saw the huge concourse and the army on the march.

Knowing that Bharatha was a Prince of Imperial lineage, he secured as offering to be presented to him large quantities of

⁵⁹ See Chapter, *Guha - Guha was perturbed to see Bharatha coming with a big army — Wanted to discover whether Bharatha was a friend or foe:*

flowers, fish, flesh and fruits. He⁶⁰ planned to discover the innate intent of Bharatha by noting his reactions to the various articles that were offered to him. Roots and tubers and fruits are Satwic food. If he preferred them, he must be reckoned a friend. The flesh of slain animals is Rajasic food. Preference for that type of food would mark out the “middle of the road” neutral, who is neither ally nor adversary. Fish, if accepted eagerly, would indicate a foe, for they are Tamasic items of food.

Bharatha’s interaction with Guha - Bharatha follows the trails left by Rama and wants to see all the places that Rama set his foot on:

Taking with him these offerings, Guha, the Chieftain of the Nishadas, proceeded to the presence of Bharatha. The Preceptor recognised him as the companion of Rama. He blessed the Chieftain, and calling Bharatha to his side, he spoke to him of Guha as the “friend” of Rama. As soon as those words fell on his ears, Bharatha embraced Guha warmly, and showered questions on him about his health and welfare. Bharatha prompted Guha to relate to him how he met Rama. When Guha mentioned how Rama spent one whole night with him on the banks of the same river, Bharatha showed great earnestness to listen to his description of that night. His eyes and ears were panting with thirst for the nectar of that narrative.

⁶⁰ When Bharatha left Ayodhya and went to the river Ganges, even Guha had some doubt about the intentions of Bharatha. Guha asked Bharatha if he was taking all the attendants with him to Rama with a view to cause some harm to Rama. Bharatha was not in a position to give any reply. Bharatha accused his mother and said because he was born to this woman Kaikeyi, he was submitting himself to all this humiliation. (*SSB 1977 p.71*)

Guha showed him the thatched hut he had prepared so that Rama, Sita and Lakshmana could rest for a while. He told him of the conversation he had with Lakshmana during the night, On hearing all this, Bharatha and Satrugna could not stop the stream of tears flowing down their cheeks. They could not suppress the surging waves of sorrow. Watching them, Guha was convinced that they had genuine brotherly feelings towards Rama and that there was no trace of hostility in them. He was struck by their devotion and the sincerity of their dedication.

Bharatha had a close look at the huts constructed for the use of Sita, Rama and Lakshmana. He desired that they be tended with due care so that they suffer no damage.

Following the orders of the Preceptor, Bharatha performed the ceremonial bath in the holy river Ganga, along with his mothers. Bharatha asked Guha to take them to the place where Rama spent the night. Pointing his finger to a heap of darbha grass that had been scattered by the wind, Guha said, "Sita and Rama rested here, on this bed of dry grass that night." Bharatha and Satrugna prostrated before that holy spot. Bharatha lamented, "Alas! My Lord accustomed to sleep on a thick soft silken bed, how could he sleep on such hard stuff? Alas! How did that holy mother Sita bear all this hardship?" Overcome with grief, Bharatha could not move from the place for a long while.

Rising, Bharatha requested that he be shown the places which Rama, Sita and Lakshmana had rendered holy by treading on them. Guha took them to an Asoka tree, under whose shade they sat for some time to eat a frugal meal of fruits. There too the

brothers fell on the ground reverentially, knowing it to be holy ground.

While they were moving round the places sanctified by Rama, Sita and Lakshmana, the two brothers suffered indescribable agony. The humility, reverence and devotion they manifested touched the heart of the Nishada chieftain. Bharatha could not contain his anguish when he contemplated the discomforts that Sita—Goddess Mahalakshmi Herself—the dearly beloved daughter of Emperor Janaka, the daughter-in-law of Emperor Dasaratha, and the Consort of Rama the Mighty, was enduring. Bharatha disclosed to Guha that the inhabitants of Ayodhya City could not survive in that City any longer, for the holy couple, Rama and Sita, had left it. They felt that Ayodhya had been transformed into a jungle, for it had no Rama in it. He said that he too could not bear their grief, and he too realised that Ayodhya was wherever Rama was. So, he explained, he had come with his following and with the inhabitants, to the sacred Presence of Rama.

Guha opened his heart to Bharatha and begged to be pardoned for the doubts he had framed in his mind about his intentions. Bharatha said that his fears were natural and that he had committed no wrong. For the truth was, he was indeed a wicked barbarian! “I am the reason for the exile that Rama is going through,” he said. “For that one crime, I deserve to be killed. He who kills me commits no sin,” he groaned. When Bharatha was condemning himself so harshly, Guha poured out his prayers for pardon.

News spread in Sringerapur, the Nishada Capital that Bharatha had come to the bank of the Ganga. At this, the subjects of Guha hurried in groups to honour the brother of Rama. They fed their eyes on the beauty and majesty of the brothers. They praised them to their hearts' content. They prostrated reverentially before them. They also roundly reprimanded Queen Kaikeyi. They blamed the God of Destiny, Brahma, for being so cruel. They shed profuse tears. They extolled Rama through manifold forms of praise.

They prayed to Bharatha and Satrugna (everyone of them, men, women, children, all) to bring Rama, Sita and Lakshmana back with them. Bharatha was struck dumb at this demonstration of extreme agony at separation from Rama! Tears rolled down his face. "Praying is my task. What happens to the prayer is dependent on the Grace of Rama. I am but a slave. Who am I to exert pressure on Rama? Join with me in my prayer. Pray from the depths of your hearts that Rama should return to Ayodhya. His heart will certainly melt at our agony. This is our duty. Let your prayers help my prayers to succeed. Rama has come to save the world, and he will not refuse the prayers of the people." Bharatha consoled and comforted the Nishadas and others in ways best suited to their needs and capacities. Meanwhile, darkness fell on the earth, and Bharatha asked the Chieftain of the Nishadas to direct his people to go home. They ate the fruits brought by Guha and spent the whole night talking about Rama and His glory.

When the eastern sky brightened to usher in the new day, Bharatha instructed the Minister to awaken the populace. He

bathed in the sacred Ganga, with his brother. The Mothers too finished their baths. Everyone got ready to continue the journey. Guha, the Chieftain of the Nishada tribe, collected enough craft to row over the large mass of people, the chariots, the horses, and other sections of the armed forces that had accompanied Bharatha.

The Brahmins, and the Preceptor Vashishta walked on as one group. The people of Ayodhya followed in one vast mass. Units of the army followed behind. Journeying thus, Bharatha reached the confluence of the rivers Ganga and Yamuna, the sacred Prayag, in the afternoon. Bharatha had never walked so much on foot, and so, his soles became sore and they hurt with a burning sensation. Yet, he plodded on, for he felt his pain as recompense for the pain inflicted on Rama. He ignored it, for he was conscious only of the pain Rama was undergoing at that very moment. (*RKRV Part I p. 423-429*)

Bharatha's interaction with Sage Bharadwaja

The inmates of the Bharadwaja Ashram in Prayag learnt of the coming of the brothers with contingents of his armed forces, accompanied by their mothers and ministers. Sage Bharadwaja sent his disciples to Bharatha and invited the party to visit the Ashram. Interpreting the invitation as a command, Bharatha and his entourage entered the Ashram. The brothers prostrated before that Monarch of the Monastic Orders. Bharadwaja⁶¹ raised them by the shoulders and drew them near with great affection. He

⁶¹ See chapter, *Bharadwaja - Bharatha comes to the Ashram of Bharadwaja*:

gave them refreshingly cool drinks. He noticed that Bharatha was sitting with his head bent in shame and fear, lest his share in the exile of Rama be revealed through questions that might be asked.

Bharadwaja discovered the reason for his silence and nervousness. He said, “Bharatha! You need have no apprehensions. I am aware of all that happened. No one can control or direct the path of Destiny.

“You are innocent and blameless. No blemish can attach itself to you now if you rule over the Empire. In fact, Rama will be happy to know that you have taken up the reins of emporium. “I must also say that the mission on which you are now set is very laudable indeed. Your purpose is highly commendable. For, devotion to the Lotus Feet of Rama is the spring and source of all prosperity and progress. Bharatha! I can boldly declare that there is none so virtuous, so fortunate as you. You have proved yourself worthy of being the dearly beloved younger brother of Rama. Rama sanctified this, our Ashram, while on his way to the forest. (*RKRV Part I p.430-432*)

In this manner, Bharadwaja, the great Sage, praised Bharatha for his manifold virtues and excellences. While speaking in this strain, tears of joy rolled down the cheeks of the revered ascetic. Bharatha and Satrugna had their minds set on Rama and his limitless Prema. They felt that they were indeed fortunate to be his brothers, but the joy was immediately extinguished at the thought that they had been themselves exiled from the presence of that Embodiment of love. So, they were plunged in gloom, in unbearable agony and inexpressible grief. In a voice choked by

anguish, Bharatha said, rising up from the prostration he offered to the Sage, “Master! You are aware of the Past, Present and the Future. You have spoken the very Truth. You are master of the Highest Truth. Rama is unbeatable in skill and power. I have resolved to utter in your Presence only the Truth. Rama knows the workings of the people’s mind and what is now agitating them. I have at present no grief over the wrong committed by my mother. I have no fear that the people would blame me for the tragedy that has befallen them. I have no despair even when it is announced that I am ineligible for heaven. “My father has earned high renown. Though dead, his fame has spread over the entire world. When his beloved son, Rama departed from his presence with Lakshmana, he gave up the bubble breath that very instant. He could not survive the bolt of that tragedy. There is no need, therefore, to be anxious any more about him. But Sita, Rama and Lakshmana are moving about barefooted. Donning the robes of ascetics, they sit on mats of kusa grass. They reside in leaf-thatched huts. They are fried by the sun, soaked by rain. They shiver in the cold and bear its pangs. They are undergoing untold hardships in the forest, aren’t they? Now, tell me, am I not the sole cause for all these hardships? It is this sad fact that is eating me throughout all the hours of the day and night. Food refuses to enter my stomach. Sleep refuses to close the lids of my eyes. This crookedness of my mother’s mind has become a dagger sticking in my heart. The stratagem she devised for my installation on the throne has turned into a trap to ruin me. The agony that is gnawing me from within cannot be appeased, whatever is done. Nothing can cure it. It will end only on the day when Rama returns to Ayodhya. No other remedy exists to destroy this agony.” (*RKR V Part I p. 432-434*)

The monks who had gathered were delighted to hear these words from the Prince. Bharadwaja told him, “Son! Do not grieve any more. The moment your eyes fall on the Lotus Feet of Rama the burden of grief which torments you now is certain to disintegrate and disappear.” The ascetics too consoled and comforted him in various ways. (*RKR V Part I p. 434*)

Bharadwaja wanted to test Bharatha. He had a big throne chair prepared and was arranging for a feast. The feast that was arranged by Bharadwaja was not creating any interest in Bharatha. When his brother Ramachandra was living on roots in the forest, he would not participate in this feast. We should recognise the close relationship and affection that existed between the brothers of those days. (*SSB 1977 p.71*)

They refused to eat, for they felt that the Darsan of Rama alone could give them the sense of contentment. That was the nectarine feast they yearned for. The sage had finally to accede to their wish to be left alone. He could not prevail upon them to sit down at the feast.

Everyone got ready to start for the forest, even as early as the first intimations of dawn. They prostrated before the Sage, secured his blessings and his permission before they left the hermitage. (*RKR V Part I p.437*)

The greatness of Rama

They reached the bank of the River Yamuna when evening fell. Throughout the hours of night, boats were seen gathering by the bank in countless numbers. Hence, at daybreak the entire mass of

people could ferry over at the same time! Then, they finished their bath, and proceeded forward, after prostrating before the holy river in reverential gratitude.

Thenceforward, Bharatha and Satrugna moved on in the robes of recluses, into which they had changed. With them walked the Ministers, the Companions of the Princes, and their aides, carrying the pictures of Sita and Rama in their hearts. While on the march, inhabitants of the villages on the way stood in awe at the strange crowds that passed along. Women who were walking towards the river to bring water to their homes placed the pots on the ground and stood stunned, looking at the brothers, without even winking their eyes for one moment. They wondered who they were and concluded that they were the same two brothers, Rama and Lakshmana, passing through that path again, this time without the Sita whom they had with them then, but accompanied by the armed forces, the chariots, elephants, horses and foot soldiers. They wondered where Sita could be at that time? They searched for her amidst the moving mass, with eager curiosity. They shared their disappointment with their friends in sad whispers. “The other day, when we saw Rama and Lakshmana, the brothers were shining with the splendour of physical charm, youth, virtue and intelligence. But there is some sadness clouding the faces of these two; and so these might not be those who passed this way that day,” argued a woman in the group. Their conversation was overheard by one of the spies of the royal entourage, who reported it to Bharatha. (*RKRV Part I p.437-439*)

Meanwhile, the women came to know that they were the brothers of Rama, and that they were proceeding to where Rama was, in order to have darsan. At this, one rough natured woman burst into rage. She exclaimed, “Ruling over the Empire that his father gave him, look at this person, going to have Darsan of his brother Rama, accompanied by the armed forces! Has he no sense of shame?” she asked.

Another woman interrupted her at this point. She said, “Sister, don’t say so. Our Emperor Dasaratha can never have, from his loins, children with hearts so hard. He must be going to Rama with the various units of the armed forces, in order to pray to Rama, and persuade him to return to Ayodhya, and to take him back with Imperial Honours.” A third woman declared her acceptance of this interpretation. She said, “Yes, yes. Who knows which snake rests in which hole on the earth? No one can pronounce on the nature of another. Who can judge the feelings and motives that prompt others to action. They may be of very high order, for aught we know. But Rama is the firm adherent of Truth. He will not return to Ayodhya until the full term of fourteen years is spent in exile, whoever might plead with him and pray to him. This is my belief.” She expressed her noble sentiments in this manner.

The spies duly reported the conversation of these village women to their Master, Bharatha, and to Satrughna. They were delighted to know that those unsophisticated women from the rural regions had grasped the greatness of Rama to such an amazing extent. Thus, they walked along listening to the people’s admiration for the virtues of Rama and for their own humility and fraternal

devotion. They were every moment fixing their minds on Rama only. Many Brahmins, ascetics, monks and other holy men were encountered by them as they walked on. They found that all whom they met were engaged in the pleasant task of extolling Rama and his virtues. On seeing them Bharatha prostrated before them and enquired where they were coming from. When the holy men struggled to master the surging waves of ecstasy and at last succeeded in discovering their voices in order to reply, Bharatha watched them in eager expectancy. When they said they were returning after having Darsan of Sita, Rama and Lakshmana, he and his brother fell flat on the ground before them, and rose with tears of joy streaming down their cheeks. (*RKRV Part I p.439-440*)

They said, “Oh! How fortunate you are! Tell us, tell us how far are they? Where are they?” They enquired about the health and welfare of those holy men also, and learning from them that they had to continue the journey for some distance more, they decided to spend the night at the place where they were. As soon as dawn broke, they discovered that they were quite near to the Chitrakoota Peak. So, urged on by the yearning to meet Rama, Lakshmana and Sita, the Mother, they continued the journey, with redoubled haste. By about noon, they could hear the murmur of the Mandakini River. They could see clearly the Chitrakoota Peak. The moment their eyes discerned the Peak, the citizens of Ayodhya and the two brothers prostrated on the ground, in reverence. Rising, they walked forward, with renewed vigour. Those who were too exhausted and had despaired of further exertion, suddenly found that they had developed elephantine resources of energy. They walked fast, without

paying any attention to their physical condition. Those who bore the palanquins and trudged along on bleeding soles suddenly found reinforcements of strength by cheering Jai, Jai, and reciting the name, Rama, Rama, while they hastened forward. (*RKRV Part I p.440-441*)

Bharatha meets Rama

Bharatha himself sent word through some forest dwellers that he was seeking the Darsan of Rama, along with his brother Satrughna and their attendants and followers. Rama felt glad when this happy news was brought to him. Like lakes in late autumn, his lotus eyes were filled with water. All this happened while Rama, Lakshmana and Sita were returning in haste to the “thatch” after their hurried bath. Bharatha saw them when they reached the cottage of grass. He was torn by agony. He shouted distressingly, “Rama,” in extreme agony. He fell flat on the feet of Rama and sobbed aloud on the ground. Lakshmana saw the anguish Bharatha experienced at the separation from them. He realised that his estimate of intentions was very wrong! He suffered terrible contrition within himself. His head was bent by the weight of sorrow. He shed profuse tears along with Bharatha and Satrughna. (*RKRV Part I p.443-444*)

Rama tells Bharatha not to talk ill of his mother - Tells Kaikeyi to teach him the codes of governance:

Bharatha went to the forest to entreat Rama to come back and ascend the throne. Bharatha fell at the feet of Rama. “My dear, how are parents?” This was the first question that Rama asked Bharatha.

Rama asked Bharatha if the people in the country were happy and if he was performing the religious ceremonies like the agnikaryas regularly. What is the meaning of such questions which were asked by Rama? What is the sanctity of which he attached to such thing in our country? This is something, which you should ask yourself. The human bodies have to drop away some time or the other and they will be cremated. They will then disappear but as long as the body lasts, if you are not able to make it do such sacred things as are enjoined upon that body then what is the purpose of the sacred body? Whether this body remains or not it is an important task for us to lead a life which is ideal one in this world and which will set an example to others. *(SSB 1974 p.237)*

He did not enquire about his own mother Kausalya, but he asked about the well-being of Kaikeyi. On hearing the name of Kaikeyi, Bharatha became furious. “It is because of that wicked woman you are forced to live in forest. The very mention of her name fills me with disgust. Please don’t mention her name.” Rama put hand on his shoulders and pacified him, saying, “Bharatha, Mother Kaikeyi is a noble woman. It is because of her that my name is glorified and spread far and wide. Do not go by the outward behaviour and talk ill of her. Her heart is filled with noble intentions.”

After speaking to Bharatha, Rama went straight to Mother Kaikeyi, fell at her feet and said, “Mother by your blessings, I am fine here. Do not worry about me. Let Bharatha be crowned as the king of Ayodhya. Teach him the codes of governance. After the completion of 14 years, I will come back to Ayodhya

and see all of you. It is my duty to uphold the promise made by my father. It not enough if one listens to the command of one's parents. One should strictly adhere to the rules and regulations laid down by the government and strive for the welfare and happiness of fellowmen. Only can one be called an Ideal citizen. As denizens of the land of Rama's reign, we should lead our lives in accordance with his model.

When Bharatha started pleading with Rama to return to Ayodhya, Rama affectionately drew him close and said, "Bharatha, no doubt your intentions are noble, but you should bear in mind the command of our father. You must follow your mother's advice. That is the only way you can please me. Share your love with not only your friends and relatives but with one and all. Remember that *thyaga* (sacrifice) alone can bestow you true *bhoga* (pleasure). (*Dasara discourses 2004 p.73-74*)

Bharatha prays to Vashishta to persuade Rama to return to Ayodhya:

Bharatha had not a wink of sleep during the night, nor a pang of hunger during the day. While the people were happy, looking on at the face of Rama, Bharatha and Satrugna were filled with misery, while they looked on at that face. They could not bear it any longer; they approached Vashishta and fell at his feet. They prayed to him to persuade Rama to return to Ayodhya, with Sita. They pleaded with him most earnestly expressing their agony in manifold ways. The Preceptor knew only too well the strength of Rama's faith in his ideals, the tenacity with which he stuck to his sense of Truth, and his determination to carry out his father's

wishes. But he was so moved by the sorrow of Bharatha that nothing was left undone to persuade Rama to return.

He called Rama to where he was and said, “Rama! Listen to the prayers of Bharatha. Conduct yourself in accordance with the wishes of good men, the interests of the people, the principles of politics and the directives of the Vedas.” Rama recognised the affection that the Preceptor had towards Bharatha that found expression in these words. He knew that Bharatha would never deviate from the path of righteousness that he would carry out his directions with full heart and in word, deed and thought and that he would always follow his steps and strive for his welfare and prosperity. He felt happy at this. So, he spoke softly and sweetly a few auspicious sentences, in response to the proposal made by the sage: “Master! You are my witness; my father’s feet are my witness. Let me assert this: No one is so dear to me as my brother, Lakshmana. No one has a brother in the world as dear as Bharatha is to me. Those who are attached to the feet of their preceptor are indeed really fortunate. You have such affection and compassion on him that is his great treasure. He is younger than me, and so, I hesitate to praise him in his presence. My opinion now is that Bharatha should speak out his mind.” Saying so, Rama prostrated before Vashishta and took his seat.

Vashishta turned towards Bharatha; for he could not reply directly to Rama. He knew that Bharatha was to be “Ruler.” He said, “Give up all hesitations and doubts. Rama is your elder brother. He has immeasurable compassion. Open your heart to him. Tell him all that you have in mind.” Hearing these words of the sage, he felt that Vashishta had probed the mind of Rama and

that both of them were inclined to favour him and grant his desire. So, he was glad at the turn of events.

Bharatha stood motionless before them. Tears flowed from his eyes, red and bright like lotus petals. “The revered sage has told Rama all that has to be said. What remains for me to add specially to the appeal he has made on my behalf! I know full well the nature of my Rama. He has no anger against even wrongdoers. He has unbounded affection for me. I cannot deny it. A sense of shame has made me silent while I stand before him. But my affection makes me delighted to look upon him. My eyes do not feel content, however long they fix their gaze on him. God could not tolerate my affection towards Rama. He could not bear to see so much love between brother and brother. So, He designed this distress, devising my mother herself as the instrument to bring it about. I know that it does me no credit or bring me any respect if I say this. How can I establish my superiority by placing the blame on my own mother? (*RKRV Part I p.448-450*)

When one proclaims himself innocent, can that statement make him truly so? I am myself hesitating to declare, because of my doubts that my mother is feeble-minded or that I am good and intelligent. I am diffident to state so. Can pearls grow in the shells of snails that infest tanks? Why should I blame others for my sorrows? My misfortune is as vast as the ocean. I know that all this tragedy has happened as a consequence of sins. I have been seeking a way of escaping from my grief, through some means, along any of the four quarters. I see now that there is one way out and only one. My Preceptor is the great sage Vashishta.

Sita and Rama are my sovereign rulers. Hence I am certain all will be well with me. Lord! I do not wish for anything else: Rama! Grant but this one wish of your servant. Rama, Lakshmana, Bharatha and Satrughna are all four the physical progeny of Emperor Dasaratha. So, all four are equally bound to obey the commands of their father. The father has equal affection for all the sons. And there is no limitation or regulation that the commands of the father must be obeyed by this one son or that other son. You have borne the responsibility of obeying his commands, thus far. Now, it is our turn to bear the burden of exile. Sita, Rama and Lakshmana must return to Ayodhya and we two shall be in the forest as exiles until the sentence lapses. Confer on us this boon and bless us.” Thus saying, Bharatha fell at the Feet of Rama.

Listening to this prayer of Bharatha, Vashishta shed tears of joy. Rama was not taken in by this argument. He said, “Bharatha! I feel that your line of thought is not as valid as you seem to think. It is not correct so to act. Ask me for anything except this.” Bharatha replied, “In that case, brother, allow me and my brother to be with you here and serve you, as Lakshmana has been doing. This will then be a wholly satisfying holy life for us.” Rama did not accept even this prayer. He said, “Bharatha! For me as well as you, the commands of the father are unbreakable. We have to bow our heads in reverence before them and carry them out without the least murmur. The most appropriate action for us all is that I should follow the orders issued to me and that you should follow the orders issued to you. Let us not spend precious days in such purposeless talk and cause distress to the people who have come such long distances hoping against hope. Return

to Ayodhya that has been allotted to you, with them, and rule them righteously. I shall carry out the task allotted to me and act righteously guarding and fostering the forest realm assigned to me.” Neither Bharatha nor anyone else could meet this decisive statement of Rama with any counterproposal or argument. They had to accept it as the right path to take. (*RKRV Part I p.450-452*)

Bharatha’s lamentation-Self- torture and depression:

Bharatha was overcome with grief. He lamented, “On whom else can God heap such unbearable agony than on me, who happens to be the son of a mother who felt that Rama, Sita and Lakshmana are her enemies? Yes, Brother! I heard that you walked into the forest on bare feet with nothing to protect you from thorns and pebbles. The news wounded my mind like sharp spears, but yet I lived on! I am the cause of all this calamity; but as a sinner, I am alive; or else, I would have cast off my body long ago. My breath persisted in this body even when Guha suspected me of treachery against my brother and got ready to confront me in battle at the head of his forces! Alas! My heart is harder than diamond. That is the reason why it has not broken, in spite of those blows.

“I am looking on calmly at the very tragedy of which I am the cause. Yet my life is so unfortunate that I am able to stand the thrust of so much sorrow. My mother has such dreadful poison in her that scorpions and serpents discard their proud possessions in sheer shame. Being the son of such a mother, how can God allow me to escape the consequences of my destiny?” Bharatha was indulging in such self-torture that the citizens, the queens, the

sages and others who watched his grief, his penitence, his humility, his reverence and his fraternal affection were all stricken like lotus blooms fallen on ice. They reminded Bharatha of many incidents from the Puranas so that he might recover from his depression. (*RKRV Part I p.451-453*)

Then Rama addressed Bharatha. He said, “Brother! Why do you give yourself up to despair? Your sorrow is in vain. Destiny cannot be countermanded. At all times, everywhere, you will be honoured by good and virtuous people. Those who ascribe crookedness to you will be miserable here and hereafter. And condemning one’s mother? This crime will be committed only by those unfortunates who have not been trained either in the society of the virtuous or at the feet of preceptors. Bharatha! Your name will be remembered long and those who bring it to their memory will be able, by its unseen influence, to discard their vices. You will be earning renown in this world and bliss in the next. The world will be sustained by your ideals and your rule. Bharatha! Both hatred and love cannot be suppressed and hidden in the heart. They needs must find expression despite all attempts to keep them imprisoned in the heart. I know your nature very well. In order to uphold Truth, the Emperor let me go; and unable to bear the separation from me whom he loved so much, he lost his very life. It is not right for a son like me or like you to dishonour the word of such a loving father. Therefore, do not hesitate further. Tell me what you have to say, ask about things that you desire to know and decide to shoulder the responsibilities imposed on you. That is the best course for you.” Rama spoke these words with great emphasis.

Bharatha had no chance to speak any more about his fond desires. But he resolved to press one demand of his, the final one. “Rama! The Kingdom that you have given up, that has brought on this disgrace of being the cause for your exile; I do not like to rule over. I have no love towards it either. I can never go against your will, command. I will not do so at any time. If you but cast your loving eye on me with no trace of anger, I shall consider myself blessed. Lakshmana has served you now so long. Send him back with Satrughna to Ayodhya and allow me to take his place at your Feet. (*RKRV Part I p.453-454*)

“This will bring both fair renown. Lakshmana is an expert in administration. He can rule over the Empire wisely and well in all fields of administration and bring solace to the soul of the departed father. Grant this prayer of mine. Keep me with you. Do not refuse my request. Do not kick me from the presence.” Imploring piteously in this way, Bharatha clasped the feet of Rama.

“Or else,” continued Bharatha, “kindly return to Ayodhya with Sita and stay there. We three brothers will stay on in the forest. We shall carry on our lives here in any manner that you prescribe. If on the other hand, you pile upon me this royal burden, I cannot bear the weight and live. Keep me at your feet and pile on me a weight thousand times heavier than the Empire. I shall bear it gladly and with enthusiastic delight. I have no knowledge of the science of government, or the texts on morality. You are aware that one who is sunk in grief can have no wisdom in him. Even shame will be ashamed when one’s servant answers back and points to one’s want of knowledge. Do

not put me in that position. Rama! I am opening my heart to your gaze and revealing my inmost feelings. I desire only to promote the welfare of the world. Kindly decide on the best course for each of us. Do not doubt our intentions. Shower your Grace on us and confer on us your commands. We shall bow our heads in loyal reverence and carry them out without hesitation.”

These words of Bharatha gave the vast gathering who listened to them, great joy. Their hearts melted with compassion and gratitude. They extolled in manifold ways the affection and faith that Bharatha had placed in his brother Rama. They were affected by the expression of his deep devotion. All of them with one voice prayed, “Rama! Lord! Accept the prayer of Bharatha. With the passing away of Emperor Dasaratha, the long-established glory and happiness of the people too have passed away! The world has been pitifully orphaned. Ayodhya is wailing like a despairing waif. Like a chaste woman who has been deserted by her lord, she is lamenting her lot.” (*RKR V Part I p.454-455*)

Bharatha’s desire to see the hermitages— Bhatathakupa or Bharatha’s Well

Bharatha fell at the feet of Rama when He came near him. He said, “Lord! A desire has arisen in my heart. I am unable to express it before you on account of fear and shame.” Rama stroked the head of his dear brother, saying as he did so, “Why do you hesitate to tell me? Come. Tell me what it is.” At this, Bharatha said, “Brother! I have a great desire to see the hermitages, the sanctifying bathing Ghats on the banks of the river, the glens of these thick forests, the wild animals that roam

therein, the lakes and streams, the waterfalls around this Chitrakoota peak. They have all been rendered holy by the imprint of your Lotus Feet. The residents of Ayodhya are overpowered by the urge to see those meritorious spots.”

Rama replied, “Bharatha! Your desire is highly commendable. You can gladly explore this region, with the permission of the Sage Athri.” Hearing this, Bharatha was very happy. He fell at the feet of the sage as well as of Rama, and then proceeded to the interior of the forest, visiting on the way, with Satrughna and the people from Ayodhya, many hermitages and other holy spots.

On the way, he saw a well by the side of the mountain. It had in it holy waters from all the sacred rivers and lakes. Bharatha sprinkled its waters reverentially on his head. He prostrated before that sacred seat of sacredness. He cleaned the water by removing with his own hand some dry leaves and dirt that had fallen on the water. It is this well that is honoured even today as Bharathakupa or Bharatha’s Well, all over the world. (*RKRV Part I p.467- 468*)

SANDALS ENTHRONED

Bharatha, as Celestial Swan (Hamsa) separated the milk from water, had separated truth from untruth and given expression to Truth alone- hailed the gathering:

On the sixth day of their stay, Bharatha called together, after the morning rites, bath and devotional ceremonies such as the worship of the Dawn, his brother Satrughna and his own aides and followers. He watched for a favourable moment to accost Rama and when he found one, he rose suddenly from his seat

and mustered sufficient courage to lay himself prostrate at his feet. Standing in front of him with his palms folded, Bharatha prayed thus: “Oh Mark of Auspiciousness on the brow of the Royal Ikshvaku line! You have fulfilled my desires in every way. On my account you have determined to suffer miseries of all kinds. You are undergoing all types of troubles for my sake. Lord! I am awaiting your commands. For fourteen years, I shall be awaiting your return and serving you in the kingdom. Show me the path by which I can feast my eyes on your Lotus Feet when the period of exile ends. Teach me the courage I need to survive these fourteen years of separation. Rama! Your subjects, their families, the people residing in the vast Empire, the Brahmins, and the Pundits— all are spiritually earnest. They are bound to you by feelings of reverential devotion. They are bearing the pangs of misery buoyed up by the love you bear unto them. I care not even for the attainment of Self-realisation if, to attain it, I am separated from you. You are aware of the inner feelings of your servants. You know their deepest desires. You can guide me and lead me to the goal, here and hereafter. This conviction is the sustenance and strength on which I exist. On account of this conviction, I treat all this agony as just shrivelled blades of grass. Till now I elaborated before you my sorrows as if they were burdening my head. That was a failing on my part. Do not hesitate to reprimand me for this fault.”

Hearing this, the gathering hailed his statements and expressed their appreciation. As the *Hamsa*, Celestial Swan, is able to separate the milk from the water which is mixed with it and drink just the milk, so, they said, Bharatha had separated the Truth from untruth and given expression to the Truth alone. Rama,

compassionate towards the distressed, listened to those words poured from the pure heart of his brother. (*RKRV Part I p.469-470*)

Bharatha's contentment accepting Rama's sandals—Rama's advice to Satrugna:

Rama was equally determined not to return. Rama did not yield to his request. Quoting the Vedic dictum *Matru Devo Bhava, Pitru Devo Bhava*, He exhorted Bharatha to obey the command of the father and fulfil the desire of his mother by becoming the king of Ayodhya. Rama promised him that He would render all help and support⁶². (*SSS Vol.32 Part I p.101*)

Vashishta noticed the equal determination of the two brothers. The sage told Bharatha: "Rama has come to the forest to carry out the command of his father. It is not right on your part to ask him to change his mind. Let us take his *paadhukas* to Ayodhya. Those *paadhukas*⁶³ will reign over the kingdom." Vashishta gave this timely advice and persuaded Bharatha to take Rama's

⁶² That is why even today people extol Rama as Sathyavakparipalaka (one who adheres to truthful speech).(*SSS Vol. 32 Part I p.101*)

⁶³ These incidents show that the worship of the Lord's feet and of the Lord's sandals has a long antiquity. The sacredness of this worship was propagated to the world by Bharat from ancient times as part of its spiritual message to mankind. Indians today have largely forgotten this ancient practice. In those days it was the practice of the disciples, after the completion of their education at the *guru's ashram*, to take with them *paadhukas* of the *guru* to worship them on their return to their homes. But even the worship of *paadhukas* is an external activity. True devotion calls for the installation of the *paadhukas* in the heart. This means that starting with the external form of worship; we should in due course make it an internal exercise. (*SSS Vol.29 p.350*)

sandals and install them on the throne in Ayodhya. (*SSS Vol.29 p.349-350*)

Bharatha pleaded for taking Rama's sandals and administering the kingdom in Rama's name till he returned to Ayodhya⁶⁴. (*SSS Vol.20 p.46-55*)

Suddenly, Rama in his infinite Graciousness loosened his sandals and gave them to Bharatha. And Bharatha reverentially accepted them in his palms and placed them on his head. Tears streamed from his eyes, like the twin rivers, the Ganga and the Yamuna. Bharatha could not express his joy in words. “These are not the ‘sandals’ worn by the Ocean of Mercy! These are the guardians of the lives and prosperity of all mankind.

These are the chests enclosing the precious treasure of Rama’s brotherly love. They are the protecting doors of the fort which enshrines the royal fame of the Raghu clan. These are two hands that are ever engaged in good deeds. These are the veritable eyes of the Universe. These are the symbols of Sita and Rama who are coming with us as these two.”

⁶⁴ Bharatha was a man of such great sacrifice. He was embodiment of dharma. Sri Rama then taught several moral principles to Bharatha and tried to convince him. He explained to Bharatha that a person who disobeys the command of his father is not worthy of a son. In accordance with the principle, he was unable to fulfil the request of Bharatha. Rama gave His sandals to Bharatha as per his wish. Bharatha kept reverentially on his head and brought them to Ayodhya. (*Beacons of Divine Wisdom Part I p.51*)

Bharatha extolled the “sandals” thus wise and danced around them in sheer joy and thankfulness. All present fell at the feet of Rama and acknowledged the sublimity of Rama’s Grace. Bharatha prostrated before Rama and prayed that he might grant him permission to leave. Rama appreciated the spirit of contentment with which he welcomed the “sandals.” He drew Bharatha near and embraced him fast and firm with great affection and delight. Satrugna also fell at Rama’s feet. Rama embraced him with great affection and he communicated to him also many a directive for ruling the kingdom and carrying out the duties devolving on him. Consider Bharatha as Rama himself, he told him. “Be his support and counsel and help him to establish peace and prosperity in the Empire.” (*RKRV Part I p.471- 472*)

Rama teaches lessons to Bharatha - How to establish Rama Raajya?

Rama replied thus in conformity with the place, the time and the circumstance: “Brother! For you who reside at home, and for us who reside in forest, there is one who fosters all and fends. You have in a worldly practical sense, the Preceptor Vashishta and the Emperor Janaka as guardians and guides. No trouble can bother either you or me⁶⁵, even in our dreams; no, it can never happen. The highest duty for us is to carry out strictly the commands of our father. That alone can enable us to earn lasting renown. The path is one approved by Veda. The Vedas declare that whoever reveres the commands of the preceptor, the father

⁶⁵ Under Section, *Rama*, See chapter, *Pathithapaavana – Teachings and Advice - Rama teaches lessons to Bharatha*

and the mother and walks on the right path, is the noble example for all.

Be aware of this truth. Throw away the shroud of grief. Take up the burden of the Empire; rule over it for fourteen years with justice and rectitude as your ideals. The King is the face of the State. For, the face eats and drinks and thus strengthens and activates all the limbs of the body. The king feeds and sustains every section of his people. The mind encloses with itself all likes and dislikes. So too, the King is the repository of all moves and movements in the political field.” Rama expounded many a useful doctrine of political ethics to Bharatha. But Bharatha was too agitated to earn mental peace as a result of Rama’s advice. The mothers, teachers and ministers stood benumbed, for they too were overcome by imminence of the moment of parting.

Bharatha and Satrughna praise Lakshmana’s luck – no one in the world is as fortunate as him:

Then, Bharatha and Satrughna embraced Lakshmana in fraternal love, saying, “Brother! Your luck is indeed great. Yours is the best of luck. In all worlds there is none so fortunate as you.” They praised Lakshmana to their hearts’ content and took permission to depart. Lakshmana too called them near and told them that the “sandals” of Rama are the springs of all varieties of auspiciousness and so, they, who have won that gift, were indeed more fortunate than any. He advised them to act worthy of the gift and earn the Grace of Rama forever. “This is your duty now,” he reminded them.

Sita's advice to Bharatha and Satrughna not to deviate a little from the guidelines marked by Rama:

Later the brothers proceeded to where Sita was and fell at her feet. On seeing her, they could not contain their grief. They burst into sobs. She consoled them softly and sweetly in various ways. "Is there aught else than the armour of Rama that can protect anyone in the world? You are indeed blessed. The fourteen years will roll by as swift as fourteen seconds, and the Empire will smile in plenty and peace with the return of Rama. Carry on the administration with patience and devotion. Don't deviate a little from the guidelines he has marked out. By this rigorous obedience you will be able to secure the fruits of your desires."

Bharatha and Satrughna meet Janaka and his advice to them:

Then the brothers, Bharatha and Satrughna, went straight to Emperor Janaka and fell at his feet in exemplary reverence and said, "Lord! You have such compassion on us that you came to Ayodhya when you heard about the death of our father and of the exile of Rama into the forest. You observed our plight with your own eyes and comforted us during those critical days. You gave us appropriate advice to resuscitate ourselves. In order to fulfil your inner desire, you subjected yourself to all this strain and trouble, coming over here into this jungle. You have shared with us our grief and contributed your valuable part in the pleading we made to Rama to persuade him to return. When those pleadings failed, you consoled us and taught us to bear the disappointment and distress, and enriched us with your blessings. We offer our reverential gratitude. What more can we say or do? Your blessings are the most effective reinforcements we

require.” Janaka listened to these words uttered so sincerely and so thankfully by the two brothers.

He appreciated their reactions and feelings, their character and conduct. He drew them near himself and he lovingly caressed them and stroked their heads. He said, “Sons! May you walk along the path laid down by Rama and may you thereby win his Grace. I am proceeding to Mithila straight from here.” The ministers, feudatory rulers, Brahmins, sages, ascetics, and others who had come with the brothers, went one after another towards Rama, Lakshmana and Sita, and falling at their feet, they took leave of them and turned their faces homeward, their hearts heavy with a sense of gloom. Sita, Rama and Lakshmana went to where the mothers were and prostrated before them. They consoled them, saying, “Do not worry in the least. Be engaged in the correct performance of your duties and responsibilities. Have before you ever the wishes and ideals that father has laid before us.” As for themselves, they said they would be spending happily and peacefully the period of fourteen years as a quick span of fourteen seconds, and returning joyfully to Ayodhya. These words restored the spirits of the queens. (*RKR V Part I p.473-474*)

The stream of people emerging from the edge of the forest towards the populated areas near Ayodhya—the ascetics, the sages, the Brahmins, the brothers Bharatha and Satrugna, the queens Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra, the ministers and the vast mass of citizens—could not contain the burden of sorrow, which became heavier the farther they went, and the nearer they approached the City. They spent the time describing to each

other the events of the five days they had spent in Rama's presence, and admiring the ideals that Rama had embodied and exemplified and his love, compassion and affection. They did not halt anywhere for food or even for sleep, since they felt neither hunger nor the prompting of sleep. Sorrow at the separation had overwhelmed and put to flight all minor insufficiencies.

The second day, they encountered the mighty Ganga River. The Chieftain of the Nishadas arranged boats to row them across and also prepared plentiful repast for the tired populace and for the distinguished persons from the Court.

But no one partook of the hospitality he provided, for their grief at having come away from Sita, Rama and Lakshmana lay too heavy on their hearts. Unable to displease Guha and unwilling to wound him, they just sat before the plates, fingered the items and getting up soon, threw the contents away. Why? Even the horses had no wish to feed. They just refused. Vashishta, the Royal Preceptor noticed this, and he said, "See! Rama is the Inner Resident, the Atma that is in all. He is the Intelligence, the Awareness that marks out each Being."

They had no inclination to turn aside in order to snatch a few hours of rest. Bharatha had resolved to travel straight to Ayodhya and not delay on the way. He was anxious to present before the citizens pining in Ayodhya the holy sandals of Rama, and bring them some little comfort and courage. So the party forded the Gomati and the Sarayu rivers and reached the outskirts of Ayodhya, on the fourth day of their journey.

The aged, the children and the women of Ayodhya who could not join the vast assembly that marched to the place where Rama had fixed his camp, were watching for the signs of their happy return, after accomplishing their mission, namely, persuading Rama to take up the reins of rulership. Their eyes had well-nigh gone blind, with exhaustion and extreme anxiety. When they heard the distant whirr of chariot wheels, they ran out into the streets and peered into the passing vehicles, asking “Where is our Lord?” But since dusk soon thickened into darkness, they went back into their homes, and spent the night in joyous hope that they could see their beloved Prince with the first rays of the rising sun. Vast disappointment not unmixed with a little satisfaction awaited them next morning, for, they learnt that Rama did not return to the Capital from the forest, but had sent instead, the Sandals he wore, as his representative.

Meanwhile, Bharatha called together the Royal Preceptor and the Ministers of the Court and assigned to them the various duties of administration. He entrusted them with the authority to perform their duties. He then called Satrughna near and allotted to him the task of fostering and consoling the queen mothers. He arranged a gathering of Brahmins and Pundits, and standing before them with folded palms, he told them that he would fulfil their wishes, whether great or small, for he knew they would only promote the best interests of himself and the people. He wanted that they should place their demands before him without hesitation.

He also called for a gathering of the citizens of Ayodhya and the leaders of the people from all parts of the Empire and he

described before them all that had happened in the Capital and at the place where Rama was living in exile. He gave them a summary of the conversations he had with Rama, and appealed to them to adore and revere the Sandals of Rama for the period of fourteen years that Rama would be away, as the authentic Presence of Rama himself. “They will guard us all, they are our refuge and resource,” he said. “In the full confidence that the sandals are ruling over us, let us,” he said, “live with Rama installed in our hearts. After his return, Rama will rule over us directly, granting us the joy of his physical presence and direction. Our duty from this moment is to wait for that happy day, with prayer in our hearts.” (*RKRV Part I p.479-482*)

Vashishta’s advice to take Rama’s sandals and perform coronation and rule the country- The suggestion was accepted immediately--Bharatha decides to stay in Nandigram:

Bharatha was not in a position to overrule Rama’s orders. Bharatha did not like to become the king and rule the kingdom. In this conflict, Rama tried to console Bharatha. Vashishta then gave a small advice which would give satisfaction to Bharatha. Vashishta said, “You can take the sandals of Rama, and regarding those sandals as symbolic of Rama, perform the coronation for the sandals and carry on the rule of Ayodhya.” He could not throw away the orders and suggestions given by the *Guru*. He could not also contradict the orders of Rama. So, with a very heavy heart, he agreed to receive the sandals. (*SSB 1977 p.72*)

Then, Bharatha decided on an auspicious hour, when the Sacred Sandals could be installed on the throne, for, he had the joy of all classes of the population in view, the Royal Preceptor, the Pundits, the ascetics, the priests, the ministers and others of the Court, the leaders of the people and the common ranks of citizens. He saw to it that arrangements were made on a grand scale to celebrate the event.

That day, he prostrated before the mothers, Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi and then proceeded to the throne with the Sandals borne on his head. Praying for the blessings of Vashishta and permission from him and all those assembled, he placed them on the throne, offering them reverential loyalty. He placed all his responsibilities safely in their custody.

Later, that steadfast adherent of Dharma, that incomparable hero, Bharatha walked towards the village of Nandigram, where he had a thatched hut made ready for his residence. He wore his hair braided into a knot, as Rama and Lakshmana had done. His apparel was made of the bark of trees, as theirs was. He lived in a cave specially dug into the earth. His food and dress were the same as those of the ascetics of the forest. His acts, thoughts and words too were austere and spiritually oriented.

Bharatha renounced the luxurious life of Ayodhya which Indra, the Ruler of Heaven praised, as unattainable by Him. He gave up the rich life of the Royal Palace, which even Kubera, the God of Riches envied. He was happy in that tiny village unseen by others, inside the “grass-thatched” hut. He vowed that he would not look at the face of anyone until Rama returned from exile.

His mind was fixed on Rama and on the day of his return from the forest into which He had gone. His body became weaker with every passing day. But the spiritual splendour on his face brightened more and more with the passage of time. His devotion to Rama grew to vaster and vaster proportions. He was transformed into a pure soul that has achieved fulfilment. In the firmament of his heart, the stars shone in glorious galaxies. Below them, his feelings and emotions shone like the Ocean of Milk, calm, deep and pure. (*RKR V Part I p.482-483*)

The people of those days were also such that they will obey good orders immediately. So, they recognised the sacred heart of Bharatha and they accepted these suggestions. He took Rama's sandals, put them on the throne, and with a heavy heart, went to the village Nandigram. In that village, he announced that he would stay without food and without rest till Rama returns to Ayodhya. He decided and began to live a life of austerity in the village Nandigram in the same manner in which Rama was living in the forest. In this context, the *rishis* and elders have been telling us that the attributes and aspects of Rama and Bharatha became one and the same. This exemplary conduct of Bharatha, by which he had accepted fully the orders of his brother, and was carrying on the rule of the country, demonstrates his greatness. (*SSB 1977 p.72-73*)

You must recognise the inner significance of this episode. People generally regard the sandals as objects to be despised. But Rama taught a different lesson about them. Rama treated the kingdom and the sandals on par. "I don't want a crown. Enthroned my sandals."

Acting on Rama's injunctions, Bharatha performed the coronation of Rama's sandals and spent his time peacefully, contemplating on Rama. (*SSS Vol.28 p.91*)

Bharatha's anxiety about the welfare of Rama

In those days, Kings used to appoint special messengers to keep them informed about the happenings in and around the kingdom. Once a message was conveyed to Bharatha relating the enormous trouble that the demons were causing to Rama. A particular mention was made of the terrible duo Khara and Dushana. They were close associates of the demon king Ravana. They attempted to secretly harm Rama, Lakshmana and Sita. It was Surpanakha who poisoned the ears of Khara and Dushana and goaded them to attack the brothers. Bharatha was hence anxiously awaiting further news about Rama from his messengers. He was hesitant to approach the elders with this news; such news was generally conveyed only to Sumitra. She was a great lady. She would always use soft words and advise aptly. Therefore, she was relied upon. Bharatha conveyed this news to Sumitra and sought her advice. He did not mention this to his own mother Kaikeyi. At this moment of Bharatha's anxiety, Sumitra consoled Bharatha and said, "Rama will not come to any harm. He is Divinity incarnate. Therefore, do not give scope for any worries," She advised Bharatha thus. (*SSB 2002 p.93-94*)

Bharatha mistakes Hanuman for Rakshasa --Nobility of Sumitra and Urmila and their faith that Lakshmana was under Divine care and protection.

One day, during the battle, Lakshmana fell unconscious. Hanuman then went on his mission to bring the Sanjivi herb, so

that the life-restoring herb could not locate the particular herb on mountain and therefore he lifted the entire mountain and started returning to the battlefield. He had to pass over the city of Ayodhya on his way as Lanka. The residents of that city wondered who could be that monkey carrying the whole mountain? Bharatha was at that time alone, worried about his brother Rama and his life in the forest. He saw Hanuman⁶⁶ moving with mountain in his palm in the sky and inferred that it must be a Rakshasa proceeding on a wicked mission. Seizing his bow, he shot an arrow aimed at Hanuman. Immediately, Hanuman fell down with a shrill cry ‘Rama’! Bharatha ran towards him and learnt about the story of Hanuman’s mission and its urgency. He informed Bharatha, “Oh noble one! Rama is engaged in a battle against Ravana, to release Sita from captivity. Lakshmana fell unconscious in that battlefield. In order he may be revived I am carrying this Sanjivi mountain to that place, as per that command of Rama. Since I could not locate the particular life – saving herb, I am carrying the mountain itself” Bharatha repented for his hasty act and Hanuman set on his mission once again.

Sumitra, the mother of Lakshmana came to know about the incident. Though it saddened her for a while, she quickly regained her composure. Sumitra was a noble lady. No one has attempted to describe her qualities so far in the Ramayana. Not only she comforted herself, but she also counselled Kausalya saying, “Oh elder sister, You need not feel sorry that Rama is

⁶⁶ See chapter, *Hanuman- Hanuman meets Bharatha on his way back:*

engaged in a battle against Ravana. Sri Rama is not an ordinary person. He is a great warrior, who can conquer the entire world and rule over it. Hence, Rama Himself will protect Lakshmana.”
(*SSS Vol.40 p.193-195*)

She told herself, “The son born of my loins is offering his very life, in the service of Rama! That is enough consolation for me. It gives me a great sense of satisfaction. My life has attained fulfilment. But I am concerned, because Rama must be afflicted at the fate of Lakshmana. This ‘loss of consciousness’ must be affecting him. Separation from his brother might cause him grief. Son, Satrughna, go to where Rama is and be by his side!” At this Satrughna stood up in readiness saying, “What greater good fortune can fall to my lot?” But Bharatha stopped him and said, “Without specific orders from Rama, I am unable to agree to your joining him.” Bharatha comforted Satrughna, and told him that Rama might dislike this act, and that it was always beneficial to bow to his will. (*RKRV Part II p.217-218*)

Meanwhile, Lakshmana’s wife Urmila also came to know about the incident and she was happy that her husband was under the divine care and protection of Rama. Urmila too was a noble and courageous woman.

Sumitra the mother and Urmila the wife of Lakshmana were all great and noble women. It is because of such noble women, the four brothers Rama, Lakshmana, Bharatha and Shatrughna were happy and safe. (*SSS Vol.40 p.193-195*)

CORONATION OF RAMA

Rama returns to Ayodhya:

Following the promise he gave to Rama on the mountain of Chitrakoota, Bharatha was spending all his time in the village of Nandigrama. None of the citizens of Ayodhya could see Bharatha who was leading a secluded life in Nandigrama. The reason for this is that Bharatha took a vow to lead the same type of life which was being led by Ramachandra, wear the same kind of clothes which Ramachandra was wearing and eat the same kind of roots and fruits which Ramachandra was eating. After living for fourteen years in the forest and after the death of Ravana, Rama was returning to Ayodhya along with Lakshmana, Sugriva and various other attendants. On the way, He reached the *ashram* of Bharadwaja. Rama knew very well the agony in the mind of Bharatha⁶⁷. Rama knew that if He delayed even a little beyond fourteen years, Bharatha would probably enter fire and destroy himself. So, Rama sent Hanuman in advance to Bharatha to tell him about his impending arrival. (*SSB 1977 p.52*)

Bharatha has the premonition of Rama's return:

Bharatha had some welcome premonitions of the happy event. His right eye twitched and his right arm too. He anticipated the receipt of the good news of Rama's entry into Ayodhya. He was

⁶⁷ The period of 14 years of exile of Rama was over. As the end of fourteen years drew near and Bharatha could not see any signs of Rama's return to Ayodhya, he got ready to give up his life by immolating himself on a pyre. As Rama had anticipated the situation, he sent Hanuman in advance to inform Bharatha that he was on His way back to Ayodhya (*SSS Vol.42 p.89*)

grieving that one more day was still to pass before the period of exile would end. He was worried that Rama had not sent anyone to communicate to him which place he had reached. He told himself how fortunate Lakshmana was, since he was all the time in the presence and serving the Lotus Feet of Rama. “The Lord cast me into this City, for I am a hypocrite. My Lord is all softness and sweetness. He is the kind kinsman of the downtrodden and the fallen. He is Compassion Itself. He will certainly arrive tomorrow,” he consoled himself.

Just then, Hanuman was within his sight as a Brahmin, come with tiding. Hanuman was thrilled at the condition of Bharatha. His body had been very much reduced; he was worn down by anxiety. His hair had become matted. His eyes had become perennial streams of tears. He was repeating the name of Rama without intermission. Hanuman was full of joy at the sight of such a dedicated soul. The hairs of his body stood on end because of the ecstasy. His thoughts ran in several directions. But he remembered his mission and poured the nectarine news he had brought into the thirsty ears of Bharatha. “Bharatha! The person from whom you have been separated and for whom you have been pining without sleep or food all these nights and days, whose virtues and powers you have been extolling and reciting every moment of your life all these years, who has guaranteed safety to the gods and security to the sages, who fosters truth and righteousness in all the worlds—He, Rama, has achieved victory over all enemies, and the gods are singing his glory.”

Just as a man suffering from acute thirst is rendered happy at the sight of water, Bharatha was filled with joy when he listened to

Hanuman. He wondered whether he was actually listening to someone actually speaking to him. But he assured himself that it was true. “How can this be an illusion? Who is this person who has brought the good news? Where did you come from?” he asked the visitor, embracing him out of sheer gratitude. Hanuman replied, “Oh Bharatha I am Hanuman, the son of Vayu, the Wind- God. You seem to have forgotten. I am the Vanara who fell on the ground, before you, while I was carrying the Sanjivi Hill. I am a servant of the Lotus Feet of Rama.”

Hearing this reply, Bharatha rose most respectfully and was overwhelmed with joy. He bowed his head in reverence. “Oh Leader of Monkeys! You have demolished my sorrow. Your very sight has ushered calm in my mind. Ah! How fortunate am I! I could see a Messenger come from Rama today!” He continued to repeat the same sentiments for a long time. “Is my Rama hale and happy? My mother Sita, how is she? Hanuman how am I to express my gratitude to you? What shall I do for you in return? I cannot find anything of equal preciousness which I can offer you in gratitude. So I will ever remain indebted. I do not know how to repay the debt, or with what. Where is Rama now? At which place is he staying? Relate to me the exploits he fought unto victory,” he said, with unbearable eagerness.

Hanuman was struck by the devotion and dedication that Bharatha evinced and he fell at his feet to demonstrate his admiration. He said, “Bharatha! Rama is very near the City of Ayodhya itself. You can see him within a short time. His achievements are indescribably wonderful. You know this. He too constantly remembers you. The Lord of the Worlds, Rama,

has said out of his own mouth that in the whole world there is no brother equal to you in purity of heart, sharpness of intellect, and equipped so fully with all the virtues. How can those words be negated?”

Bharatha was overcome with delight when he heard these words. “Has Rama spoken of me thus? O! How fortunate am I!” he cried and embraced Hanuman fondly. Hanuman declared that he could not delay any longer. He took leave of Bharatha and reached the Presence of Rama. He informed Rama about all that he had seen and heard.

Now, Bharatha started preparations. He seldom put both his feet down at the same time on the ground! He was ever on the move, most busy. He arrived at Ayodhya from Nandigram and offering prostrations to the Preceptor, Vashishta, communicated to him the news of Rama entering Ayodhya soon. He rushed into the Queens’ Apartments and announced to the three mothers that Rama, Sita and Lakshmana were arriving. The mothers rose quickly and were filled with joy. Bharatha ordered that the entire City be informed of the good news through all media. The news reached all ears with lightning speed. Children, the aged, men and women ran helter-skelter shouting the news at the top of their voices.

Bharatha collected the sages, the scholars, the preceptors, the leading citizens and the four Sections of the Armed Forces, and with the three Queens and Ministers led by Sumantra, he walked forward with Satrughna by his side to meet Rama. Rama, while nearing Ayodhya, was describing to the Vanaras and others

around him the beauty of the City: “Oh Sugriva, Angada, Vibhishana! Ayodhya is a holy City. It is a beautiful City.” In the midst of Rama’s enthusiastic description of the City’s charms, Bharatha appeared at the head of the Armed Forces and with his brother and the Queens. As the ocean heaves up in joy at the sight of the autumn moon the vast populace heaved a breath of joy at the sight of Ramachandra, Rama the Moon. Rama drew Bharatha near him, and pained at his weakened frame, he consoled and counselled him lovingly.

He praised aloud his brother for his steadfast devotion and affection towards the people. Sita, Rama and Lakshmana prostrated before Vashishta, Jabali, Vamadeva and other sages, as soon as they were sighted. Even the most ascetic among the sages could not restrain his tears at the happy reunion with Rama.

The Vedic scholars raised their voices to the sky and showered their blessing in traditional formulae: “Live victoriously for hundreds of years,” “Live prosperously for hundreds of years.” Bharatha and Satrughna fell flat on the ground before Rama in reverential homage. (*RKR V Part II p.271-275*)

At the same time, Bharatha was eagerly awaiting Rama’s arrival. The dead line Rama had given him for his reaching Ayodhya was over that day. He was distraught with anxiety as to whether Rama would return or not. He had a chariot kept ready to receive Rama and take him to Ayodhya. Shortly, to his great joy he saw *Pushpaka Vimana* approaching in the sky. The citizens of Ayodhya were overjoyed. Their hearts were dry without seeing

Rama for fourteen long years. The state of the women was beyond description. They had spent fourteen years in great despair. They were unable to relish their food. They had all become almost skeletons in appearance. They had spent their time chanting Rama's name and consoling themselves.

Meanwhile, Shatrughna arrived from Ayodhya with garlands for his brothers and sister-in-law. The *Pushpaka Vimana* landed and everyone alighted from it. And then a wonder occurred. Everyone was astonished to see that Bharatha and Rama looked identical! This wonder was witnessed by one and all.

Since Bharatha had spent every moment of the fourteen years in constant contemplation of Rama, he had acquired Rama's features and attributes. Shatrughna wanted to garland Rama, but could not identify who was Rama among the two. As everyone was wondering, Lakshmana came to Shatrughna's rescue. Rama was garlanded and one garland was presented to Sita. The entire group moved in a procession towards Ayodhya. (*SSB 2002 p.127-128*)

Coronation of Rama- Bharatha Proclaimed as Yuvaraja:

They all reached Ayodhya. The citizens of Ayodhya were extremely happy. In that happiness, they cleaned up all the streets, made all preparations for the coronation of Rama. (*SSB 1977 p.54*) The next day Rama was proclaimed King and Bharatha was proclaimed the Yuvaraja. After the ceremonies were gone through, Rama and Lakshmana stated that all that they had done was for the prosperity and happiness of the people. (*SSB 1977 p.54*)



Yudhakandam

Summary of the Photo

Painting by Sri K V Bhima Rao exclusively for this book

Challenged King Gandharva

A king by the name Gandharva was causing a lot of trouble to the people in the two cities, Takshasila and Pushkalavati, of his kingdom. The people came to Rama and Lakshmana and described their difficulties to them and begged that somehow or other their difficulties should be removed. Bharatha, who recognised that the people's prosperity and the people's happiness is also the ruler's prosperity and the ruler's happiness, went along with them in order to remove their difficulties.

Bharatha challenged this King Gandharva and fought with him very hard for seven days and with the help of the name of Rama, he defeated Gandharva. After defeating Gandharva, Bharatha made one of Gandharva's sons Takshaka, the king of Takshasila. The second son of Gandharva, by name Pushkala, was made the king of Pushkalavati. He returned to Rama and said that he does not want anything more, and that he has no more ambition. He said that he only wanted to spend the rest of his life at Rama's feet. Lakshmana and Bharatha were such that they regarded their entire lives as belonging to Rama and their ambition was to be nearest to Rama. All their life was surrendered for the service of Rama. (*SSB 1977 p.54*)

ASWAMEDHA YAGA

Rama announced that he desired to celebrate the Aswamedha Yaga. ... *The Horse let loose to wander*⁶⁸....*Lava and Kusa*

⁶⁸ See Chapter, *Lakshmana* - **ASWAMEDHA YAGA**
See chapter, *Satrugghna* - **EXILE FOR SITA**

capture the horse..... Satrughna and Lakshmana lose consciousness. Messengers carried the news to Rama. Bharatha folded his hands and stood before Rama. Rama reached the spot where the fighting was going on. At that very moment, Kusa and Lava came to the place.....*Bharatha* shouted to his men, “Well! Use your weapons!” When he said so, the Vanaras cast upon them trees, rocks and mountain peaks. Lava pulverised all of them by means of a single arrow. In a short time the forces of Rama were in complete rout. The field was one full flood of blood. All the valiant soldiers lost their lives. At last, even Bharatha fell fainting.

ENDING THE PLAY⁶⁹

Rama proceeded to the bank of the Sarayu River. Bharatha walked on the right side of Rama and Satrughna on his left. As they entered the waters, Bharatha merged in the Lord.

BHARATHA’S SONS

Thaksha: Bharatha's son. (*Glossary of the Vahinis*)

Pushkara. Bharatha's second son. (*Glossary of the Vahinis*)

Rama placed the son of Bharatha, Thaksha, over the Southern Kingdom. His second son, Pushkara, was given the Pushkara Kingdom. They destroyed the remnants of Rakshasas that were there and established themselves in those kingdoms. (*RKR Part II p.334*)

⁶⁹ Under Section, *Rama* See Chapter, *Rama’s Reign- The Reign Of Righteousness - Rama Rajyam - ENDING THE PLAY*

CHARACTER OF BHARATHA:

Ideal brothers:

When Bharatha returned from Kekaya kingdom, he came to know from sage Vashishta that Rama had gone into exile and would not return for fourteen long years. He was disconsolate. He went to the Sage, offered his respects and said, “Oh venerable preceptor, I do not want this kingdom which has caused the exile of my brother Rama. Being the eldest son, only Rama has the right to rule over the kingdom. Hence, at this very moment I shall go the forest, fall at the feet of Rama and plead with him to come and take over the reins of Ayodhya.” In this manner, each of the four brothers was ready to make any sacrifice for the sake of the other⁷⁰. (*SSS Vol.36 Part I p.103-104*)

Bharadwaja also exhibited some suspicions about Bharatha’s motives. Here it became clear how much Bharatha was devoted to Rama. Bharadwaja wanted to test Bharatha. He had a big throne chair prepared and was arranging for a feast. The feast that was arranged by Bharadwaja was not creating any interest in Bharatha. When his brother Ramachandra was living on roots in the forest, he would not participate in this feast. We should recognise the close relationship and affection that existed between the brothers in those days. (*SSB 1977 p.71*)

Kausalya’s concern for Bharatha:

Kausalya said amidst her sobs, in a grief-stricken voice, “If Sita, Rama and Lakshmana reside in the forest, many calamities will happen. I know that Bharatha cannot survive separation from Rama. My agony is heightened when I see Bharatha, more than when I see Sita, Rama and Lakshmana. Fear overpowers me when I think of Bharatha.” (*RKR Part I p.462*)

Kausalya mustered some little courage and addressed Sunayana thus: “Queen of Mithila! You are the consort of the Ocean of Wisdom, Emperor Janka.

⁷⁰ Under Section, *Rama* See Chapter, *Characteristic Of Rama - Standards Set For Everyone - An Ideal Brother*

Who dare convey counsel to you! We prattle away in our ignorance. Yet, I pray you might tell the Emperor Janaka at the earliest, when he is in a mood to listen, these words of mine, namely, ‘Persuade Rama and make him agree to have Bharatha for some time with him. Since Lakshmana has already spent some time in his presence, let Lakshmana be sent to Ayodhya to oversee the activities and administration there, and Satrugna be directed to assist Lakshmana in his duties at Ayodhya. ‘If only Rama agrees, the rest of the problems would set themselves right quickly. It is only the condition of Bharatha that gives me anxiety. His attachment and love for Rama are deep-rooted and delicate. The Emperor has passed away. Rama will not return from the forest. If Bharatha finds separation from Rama unbearable, it might lead to his death. Then, the entire empire would be reduced to a living corpse! My heart is torn by fear and anxiety when I picture the future, and the calamities that are in store.’” Kausalya held fast in her hand the two hands of Queen Sunayana and appealed to her to fulfil this mission, achieve this end, and confer Ananda on them all. (*RKRV Part I p.463-464*)

One must be prepared to sacrifice everything for God:

There is nothing wrong in repudiating one's mother, father, husband or preceptor if they come between the devotee and God. When Kaikeyi came between him and his devotion to Rama, Bharatha utterly denounced her. One must be prepared to sacrifice everything for God. (*SSS Vol. 31 p.77*)

Sumitra says Bharatha is the effulgent Lamp of Royal Line:

Sumitra spoke next. She said, “Mother! (Queen Sunayana) Through your blessings and good wishes, our sons and daughters-in-law are as pure as the Ganga itself. Bharatha had never so far asserted that he was the brother of Rama and claimed something from him. But now he is demanding that he should fulfil his wishes, in a satwic, highly righteous manner. Even Goddess of speech, Saraswati, will hesitate to accept the assignment of describing the virtues, the humility, the large-heartedness, the fraternal attachment, the steadfastness of that faith, the courage and inflexibility of that courage, that mark Bharatha as a great person. Can the ocean be measured by means of a snail shell? Bharatha is at all times, under all conditions, the effulgent Lamp of Royal Line; only/ people did not realise this until now. A gem has to be examined before its value can be determined. Gold has to be tested on the

touchstone, before its genuineness and fineness can be known. Let us not talk despairingly about him at this time. Our reason is now affected by sorrow and deluded by filial attachment.” Sumitra wiped her tears, as she concluded her words of consolation. (*RKRV Part I p.462-463*)

Bharatha identifies himself with Rama:

When the padukas are worshipped, the thoughts should be concentrated on the Feet of the Lord. Bharatha is the supreme example of one who worshipped Rama’s padukas with such devotion. Setting himself in a hermitage outside Ayodhya, he worshipped Rama’s padukas with such concentration for 14 years that his mind merged in the Lotus Feet of Rama. He identified himself totally with Rama and dedicated every moment to Rama. (*SSS Oct.98 p.263*)

Bharatha was equal to Rama⁷¹ - But if we look at the type of faith each one had with care, we find that Bharatha comes second in the series. (*SSB 1977 p.67*)

No Selfishness:

Both Lakshmana and Bharatha dedicated all that was theirs to the Divine. They had no trace of selfishness or self-interest in them. They adhered to Rama’s Path – the path of Dharma (Rama – ayana). As all the brothers followed the path laid by Rama, the Ramayana vindicates its title. (*SSS Vol.21 p.83*)

Greater tragedy makes one forget lesser tragedy—Rama Chinthana is remedy:

Unable to bear separation from his beloved brother Rama, Bharatha developed hatred against his own mother kaikeyi. His anger and frustration clouded his love for his mother. It is evident that a greater tragedy makes one forget a lesser tragedy. Hence, if one desires to forget worldly sorrows, one has to be drawn itself in the divine love. In fact, moving away from god is in itself a great tragedy. If one loses himself in contemplation on God, the worldly sorrows will be swept away as if by air. It is only because Bharatha delved

⁷¹ Under Section, *Rama*, See Chapter, *Comparisons – BHARATHA AND LAKSHMANA*

deep into *Rama chintana* (contemplation on Rama) that he could forget worldly sorrows and difficulties. (*Beacons of Divine Wisdom Part I p.53*)

Bharatha's mind was totally centred on Rama, because of such intense concentration, both became one. (SSS Vol.32 Part II p. 47)

The residents of Ayodhya stared in astonishment: “Who was Rama and who was Bharatha?” Both looked to be Rama! Both were dressed in the garbs of an ascetic, their hair was matted and both were similarly complexioned! The citizens, who had come to give a grand welcome to Rama, stood gaping!! Everybody came forward to garland Bharatha, thinking he was Rama. Bharatha realised their predicament and pointing to Rama, directed them to garland Him. Only then did the citizens realise who was Rama and who was Bharatha and the other two brothers, were all aspects of the Divine incarnation. (*SSB 1996 p.96*)

Rama's form and Rama's brilliance entered Bharatha's body. As he was continually thinking of Rama, he was transformed into Rama. (*SSB 1977 p.53*)

Bharatha gave up his mother, his throne, and all his wealth and power; he revelled in travail and poverty, he dwelt only in the thought of Rama in the forest, and denied himself everything that his brother could not get. By constant contemplation on Rama, even his complexion changed into Rama's. (*SSS Vol.5 p.208*)

Bhagawan says:

It is very necessary for you to recognise the affection that was shown between the brothers in the *Ramayana* and the sacredness of such affection. At no time and on no occasion did the brothers of Rama exhibit any selfishness. With a selfless attitude, they were regarding that service to the people was the main concern of their life. All these good qualities were acquired by them from their *Guru* Vashishta, even while they were young; and they shaped themselves so as to be ideals for others in the world. It is only when we can recognise and understand the true nature of *sathya* and *dharma*, even while we are young, that we can get the most beneficial results out of such an understanding when we grow older. This age of yours is a very sacred age. In

this sacred age, you must make an attempt to get such good notions implanted in your mind. It is only when the young plant is straight that the tree will also be straight. But if the plant becomes crooked when it is young, the tree will also become crooked. If the plant is crooked, how can it change into a straight tree when it grows big?

You are like tender young plants. If, at this stage, you can get rid of all crookedness, you can grow into a straightforward useful citizen of the country. It is to give you this chance that this opportunity has come your way. Truly, your body is like the temple of God. You should make an attempt to keep this temple sacred and clean and use it in a good manner. You are going to make your body the living place for the *Sanathana*, the age-old God. Along with your mind, you must keep your body sacred. Along with your body, you must keep your mind sacred. (*SSB 1977 p.54-55*)

Nirgunopasaka

Bharatha requested Rama to return to Ayodhya, but his efforts did not succeed as Rama refused to return. So, Bharatha reconciled himself to returning, but stayed outside Ayodhya in Nandigrama. His body was in Nandigrama, but his mind was with Rama. Bharatha's worship was purely mental as his mind was united with Rama. As Bharatha's worship was purely mental, he was *Nirgunopasaka*. (*SSS Vol. 32 Part II p.43*).

Bharatha was embodiment of Sama Veda and chanted Rama Nama incessantly with bhava, raga and tala (feeling, melody and rhythm) Bharatha was engaged in nirguna worship (worship of formless God). (*SSS Vol.37 p.98*)

His Ideal was to serve Rama – Ideal brothers an example to the mankind – Draw a lesson-

Recognising the connection between Rama and Lakshmana, Bharatha felt very sorry that Lakshmana alone deserved to be close to Rama and he did not get that opportunity of being close to Rama. In this way Bharatha's ideal was to serve Rama all the time and thereby derive the grace of the Lord. We can describe in this manner Bharatha's devotion and faith were even more than those of Lakshmana. Brothers between whom such devotion, faith and affection exist are very rare in this world. These brothers were serving Rama

at all time and in that service they were setting an example, an example to the mankind. In each family, how should brothers conduct themselves? How should they treat each other? Answers to these questions were being furnished by these brothers⁷². (*SSB 1977 p.71-72*)

IDEAL HOME – *Brahmavid Brahmaiva Bhavati –Yad Bhavam Tad Bhavati*

Bharatha lived in Nandigram devoting himself entirely in the contemplation of Rama. He was immersed in the contemplation of Rama, foregoing even food and sleep. His wife **Mandavi was also a great devotee of Rama**. She also lived in Nandigram for fourteen years serving her husband. Since Bharatha was immersed in the contemplation of Rama, He too shone like Rama. When he entered Ayodhya with Rama, people could not distinguish between Rama and Bharatha. "*Yad Bhavam Tad Bhavati*" (As you think so you become). Mandavi was a virtuous lady, who was devoted to her husband by paying due obedience to the mothers-in-law and her husband. She shone as an ideal to others. She too became an ascetic with her hair in a single plait. When Rama was entering Ayodhya followed by the three brothers and their wives, people could not distinguish between Sita and Mandavi. Sita shone like an ascetic due to fourteen years of contemplation on Rama. Mandavi also shone like her since she was always immersed in the contemplation of the Lord. *Brahmavid Brahmaiva Bhavati* (The one who realizes the Brahman becomes Brahman himself). As all the brothers had oneness of thought and feeling, their four consorts also had the same. All of them constituted an ideal home. (*SSB 2002 p. 82/83*)

No brother is equal to Bharatha

Hanuman said to Bharatha. "He too was remembering you. The Lord of the worlds, Rama has said out of his own mouth that in the whole world, there is

⁷² Students! It is necessary for you to recognise the kind of close affection that existed between the brothers. In the family of Rama, You should draw a lesson from this and put this ideal into practice. We should understand the kind of ideals that should bind a family together. We should make an attempt to some extent, to remove our selfishness and practice self – sacrifice. (*SSB 1977 p.72*)

no brother equal to you in purity of heart, sharpness of intellect, and equipped so fully with all the virtues. How can these words be negated?"

Bharatha did not go into Ayodhya with Rama's sandals. He instead built a small ashram at Nandigram and remained there, worshipping Rama's sandals, *in constant contemplation of Rama*⁷³. His wife Mandavi too spent her time contemplating on Rama's name and thus gave support to her husband. Rama and Sita spent time roving in the forest. Lakshmana was totally dedicated to their service. (*SSB 2002 p.86*)

Bharatha as interpreted by Bhagawan Sri Satya Sai Baba in His Divine Discourse:

Bharatha, in the *Ramayana*, for the sake of bliss, was searching for the path of truth. He was in no way inferior to Rama. For the protection of truth, or for the following of the right kind of *dharma*, or for making sacrifices when they were necessary, Bharatha was equal to Rama.

In the ordinary sequel, we regard Bharatha as the third stage. We first take the part of Rama, then Lakshmana, then Bharatha and then Satrugna. But if we look with care at the type of faith each one had, we find that Bharatha comes second in the series. In all these four brothers, we do find some apparent changes at the time of birth. It is not possible for us to determine and say, this one is greater and that one is smaller. It is just for man's satisfaction that these minor differences are created. We are not able to recognise the divinity that is present in three brothers: Bharatha, Lakshmana and Satrugna.

When Bharatha was at his grandfather's place, *Guru* Vashishta sent him a letter asking him to come back to Ayodhya. As soon as Bharatha saw the letter, he felt very happy that he was being asked to return for Rama's coronation. But quickly he began wondering, because if Rama's coronation were to take place, his grandfather would also have been invited. He began worrying as to why he alone was called back. In this agitated frame of mind, he and Satrugna started for Ayodhya. They reached the entrance of Ayodhya. Bharatha was a very smart person, and he had a keen sense of observation. He

⁷³ *RKRV Part II p.1*

noticed that at the main gate there were no fresh welcoming arches. The mango leaves were all dried up, and this was symbolic of a dreary atmosphere instead of proclaiming prosperity. He started seeing bad omens and began wondering as to what the matter was. He found all the streets littered with dirty pieces of matter and all the houses appeared very unclean. This unusual situation made him think that something was drastically wrong, and that some tragedy had come over Ayodhya.

His chariot was taken straight to the mansion of Kaikeyi. As soon as he saw Kaikeyi, he could not understand the meaning of the perplexed look which Kaikeyi had. After a few minutes, he realised that the death of his father had taken place, and Rama had been banished to the forest. Without being able to bear the sorrow as a result of the two events, he ran to his *Guru* Vashishta. Vashishta described to him, in detail, all that had happened.

As soon as he got the details of what had happened, Bharatha became very upset. His eyes became very red. He became so excited that he used very harsh words to his mother. He could not stay there even for a moment. He went straight to Kausalya. Unable to bear the death of her husband and the separation from her own son, Kausalya was in deep sorrow. Bharatha ran to Kausalya, fell at her feet and asked her to pardon him, and said that he was innocent, and that he was not responsible for what had happened. In many ways, he asked for her pardon. Both Kausalya and Vashishta told Bharatha that he should first perform the last rites of his dead father. It was already fourteen days after the death of his father. The body was carefully preserved. The kind of preservatives and methods by which the body was preserved in those days were not such as we have in these days. Bharatha came to the conclusion that he does not deserve to perform the last rites of his father. The first son, Rama, alone should perform the last rites. Bharatha said that in Ayodhya where Rama does not live, he cannot stay for a single moment. Here, we should see that Bharatha even forgot the grief caused by the death of his father. Grief caused by the separation from Rama was much more to him than the death of his father. But somehow, he adjusted himself to the orders of Kausalya and Vashishta and performed the last rites of his father. The very next day, all the necessary ingredients were collected in order to perform the coronation of Bharatha. But Bharatha would not agree for his coronation.

Bharatha said that whatever arrangements had been made for the coronation should be taken along with him to the forest. He proclaimed that, in the Ikshvaku Dynasty, it is only the eldest son that had the right to the throne. He being younger had no right at all.

He recognised that this was the *dharmic* way of doing things, and he requested Vashishta and others to let him go to the forest. He thought that Rama's coronation could be performed even in the forest. He always looked to the ideas of people and wanted to follow the ideas of people. So he took some of the people of Ayodhya with him. In this manner, along with the people of Ayodhya, he undertook the journey to the forest. From some distance, Bharatha saw that Rama was having his hermitage on the Chitrakoota Mountain. His heart melted at the sight. The sorrow that came from his heart was something which he could not bear. He noticed that Ramachandra was having unkempt hair. He was shocked to see that Ramachandra, who was used to sleeping on a bed of silk, was lying on a bed of leaves, bark and the ground. Rama, looked at the sorrow of Bharatha and in many ways tried to console him. But all the attempts made by Rama to console Bharatha did not give him any satisfaction. Bharatha fell at the feet of Rama and said that he would not leave his feet until Rama agreed to return to Ayodhya and accept to become the king.

Even in that sorrowful situation, Rama was asking questions in a very peaceful manner. Is every-one well at home? Is the kingdom going on well? Are the people of the kingdom well? He was asking questions with an unparalleled peace of mind. During that conversation, Bharatha told Rama that their father was dead. Although Rama was the in-carnation of Narayana, because he was in human form and in order to proclaim how one in human form should conduct himself in that situation, Rama also appeared as if he suffered very much at the news of the death of their father. Rama and Bharatha consoled each other. A potter cannot make a pot with hard clay. The clay must be wet and used as soft paste. In the same manner, after creating a body, God has to put life into it. For putting life into the body, the parents are made responsible. For the birth of a human being, the father and mother are responsible. God functions only as a witness to that. To such parents, to such father and mother, one should repay one's debt of gratitude. This is the reason

why we are taught that mother should be regarded as God, father should be regarded as God, teacher should be regarded as God and the guest should be regarded as God.

Immediately thereafter, Rama and Bharatha went to the river and performed the traditional rites which they do at the death of the father. They returned home and were talking about various things. The very next day Bharatha arranged a big congregation. All the people were requested to pray. The prayers were that either Rama should return to Ayodhya taking charge of the kingdom, or, since all the sons were on the same footing, Bharatha should also be permitted to stay in the forest along with Rama. Preparing himself for such a task, Bharatha was determined that by some means or the other, he should take Rama back to Ayodhya. He was repeatedly saying that for the sins committed by his mother, he was in no way responsible. Rama told Bharatha that even his mother Kaikeyi was not responsible for this situation. In fact, they proposed to install Rama on the throne the very next day. Overnight, due to pressure, this decision had been changed. The change in such a decision overnight must be because of divine will. It was not a human decision. In this manner Rama was giving some explanation or other to Bharatha. In spite of all explanations, Bharatha did not give up his determination. When Bharatha left Ayodhya and went to the river Ganges, even Guha had some doubt about the intentions of Bharatha. Guha asked Bharatha if he was taking all the attendants with him to Rama with a view to cause some harm to Rama. Bharatha was not in a position to give any reply. Bharatha accused his mother and said because he was born to this woman Kaikeyi, he was submitting himself to all this humiliation. From there, he went to the *ashram* of Bharadwaja. He also exhibited some suspicions about Bharatha's motives. Here it became very clear how much Bharatha was devoted to Rama. Bharadwaja wanted to test Bharatha. He had a big throne chair prepared and was arranging for a feast. The feast that was arranged by Bharadwaja was not creating any interest in Bharatha. When his brother Ramachandra was living on roots in the forest, he would not participate in this feast. We should recognise the close relationship and affection that existed between the brothers of those days. Recognising the connection between Rama and Lakshmana, Bharatha felt very sorry that Lakshmana alone deserved to be close to Rama and that he did not get that opportunity of being close to Rama.

In this way Bharatha's ideal was to serve Rama all the time and thereby derive the grace of the Lord. We can describe in this manner Bharatha's devotion and faith, and we can come to the conclusion that Bharatha's devotion and faith were even more than those of Lakshmana. Brothers, between whom such devotion, faith and affection exist, are very rare in this world. These brothers were serving Rama all the time, and in that service they were setting an example to mankind. In each family, how should brothers conduct themselves? How should they treat each other? Answers to these questions were being furnished by these brothers.

Students:

It is necessary for you to recognise the kind of close affection that existed between the brothers in the family of Rama. You should draw a lesson from this and put this ideal into practice. We should understand the kind of ideals that should bind a family together. We should make an attempt, to some extent, to remove our selfishness and practice self- sacrifice. The main teaching of *Ramayana* is to ask you to throw away your selfishness and promote selfless sacrifice and good qualities in you. Every individual character in *Ramayana* has been preaching this kind of ideal life. Such an ideal example of life is very necessary today. In such an ideal example of life, we should give some respect to disciplinary measures. Without discipline, whatever ideal examples you may give to your life, there is no value for them. Bharatha was not in a position to overrule Rama's orders. Bharatha did not like to become the king and rule the kingdom. In this conflict, Rama tried to console Bharatha. Vashishta then gave a small advice which would give satisfaction to Bharatha. Vashishta said, "You can take the sandals of Rama, and regarding those sandals as symbolic of Rama, perform the coronation for the sandals and carry on the rule of Ayodhya." He could not throw away the orders and suggestions given by the *Guru*. He could not also contradict the orders of Rama. So, with a very heavy heart, he agreed to receive the sandals.

The people of those days were also such that they will obey good orders immediately. So, they recognised the sacred heart of Bharatha and they accepted these suggestions. He took Rama's sandals, put them on the throne, and with a heavy heart, went to the village Nandigram. In that village, he announced that he would stay without food and without rest till Rama returns

to Ayodhya. He decided and began to live a life of austerity in the village Nandigram in the same manner in which Rama was living in the forest. In this context, the *rishis* and elders have been telling us that the attributes and aspects of Rama and Bharatha became one and the same. This exemplary conduct of Bharatha, by which he had accepted fully the orders of his brother, and was carrying on the rule of the country, demonstrates his greatness. If we carefully look at the main characters in the story of *Ramayana*, we will come to the conclusion that God has put all this together as a drama on the stage of the world. People can learn from the numerous examples which God has given through *Ramayana*. God will also bend Himself to help His devotees. For the sake of happiness to devotees, God will be prepared to undertake any kind of trouble. Even if we blame God, He does not feel so unhappy as when His devotees are blamed. God is above *gunas*. He is not affected by *gunas*. So He does not attach importance to blemish. God is omnipresent. Because He assumes some form, we believe that God is of a particular form. That God is omnipresent is the Truth. How can we demonstrate this Truth? Here is a small example for this. We know that earth, water, fire, air and space are the five elements. For these elements, there are attributes. Amongst these five, the most important one is earth. Earth has got all the five attributes, the qualities of sound, form, touch, taste and smell. Because of these five qualities, the earth becomes immobile, becomes stationary and heavy. When we go to the second element, water, it gets some mobility. In water, one of the qualities, namely smell, has disappeared. Only four attributes remain. Because one of the attributes has disappeared, it has acquired some mobility. When we go to the third element of fire, it has got the attributes of sound, touch and form only. Since two qualities have disappeared, fire has become even lighter and fire is able to move faster than earth or water. When we go to air, it has lost three of the attributes. It has got only two of them, namely sound and touch. It has no form. Since three of the attributes have disappeared, air has become much lighter and moves faster and freely occupies the whole space.

The last one, the fifth element is space, or *akasa*. This space has lost all the qualities. Neither form nor touch, nor smell nor taste are present in *akasa*. So it has become omnipresent. It is so light that it is present everywhere. God has no attributes or *gunas* at all, and therefore, is able to be present everywhere. If space or *akasa*, which has only one quality, namely sound, is present

everywhere, then God, who has no quality or no attribute at all, can be present everywhere. One may at this point get a doubt that if God is omni-present and is above *gunas*, how is it that the *gunas* are not in Him but He is in the *gunas*? The moment we say that He is everywhere, it follows that He is present in the *gunas* also. He is in the *gunas*, but the *gunas* are not in Him. How is this possible? For example the mud is present in the pot, but the pot is not present in the mud. The pot is created. The pot has a form. The form has been given in an artificial way. However, if God is in His formless aspect, it is not possible for people to easily recognise the formless aspect. So, He takes a human form, and comes to the world. In this way, He wants to demonstrate to the people the ideal path they should follow.

Students:

I am hoping that you will take at least one or two of the great ideals that are contained in the story of *Ramayana* and imbibe them and put them into practice in your daily life (*SSB 1977 p.72 74*)

7.3 SATRUGHNA



Satrugna. *Durga*

Summary of the Photo (from Wikipedia):

Description **English:** Watercolour painting on paper of Satrugna, the youngest brother of Rama. The painting shows Satrugna as a young male, walking along a path, with a tree on his left. In the distance on his right is shown trees and foliage. He wears a pink dhoti with a matching shawl draped over his shoulder. He is barefoot and wears anklets. He holds an arrow in his right hand and a bow over his left shoulder. At his waist hangs a sword. He is shown crowned and wearing necklaces, earrings and bracelets. The painting is surrounded by a black border.

Date 19thC(early)

Source http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_details.aspx?objectid=182860&partid=1&searchText=ramayana&fromADBC=ad&toADBC=ad&numpages=10&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx¤tPage=17

Author Company School

SATRUGHNA

Satrughna was the youngest brother of Lord Rama in the Hindu epic Ramayana . He is the twin brother of Lakshmana.

Satrughna was born to the virtuous king of Ayodhya, Dasaratha, and his third wife, Queen Sumitra. Shatrughna also had a blood-brother called Lakshmana. Satrughna's name means "destroyer of enemies". Shatrughna was married to Sruthakeerthi, the daughter of King Kusadhbojan and his wife. Sruthakeerthi was the cousin of Sita, daughter of King Janaka and his wife. He is supposed to be the reincarnation of Vishnu's sacred conch.

- *From Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia*

SATRUGHNA⁷⁴: Sumitra's son, twin of Lakshmana and brother of Rama. The name means "slayer of enemies". (*Glossary of the Vahinis*)

⁷⁴ Also spelt as Shathrughna

BIRTH

The third day after the birth of Rama, were born the twins - Chaitra, bright half, eleventh day, Aslesha Star, Vriddhiyoga. (*RKR V Part I p.43*)

Out of the part of the pudding given by Kausalya, Lakshmana was born to Sumitra, whereas Satrughna was born out of the share of the pudding given by Kaikeyi. (*SSB 1996 p.14*)

The conch and mace manifested as Bharatha and Satrughna. (*SSS Vol.31 p.201-202*)

NAME

Vashishta knew, the younger brother of Lakshmana, would be a formidable destroyer of enemies, and would be a contented follower in the footsteps of his elder brothers. (*RKR V Part I p.46*) He named her second son as Satrughna, saying he would destroy all *satrus* (enemies). (*SSS Vol.38 p.107*)

PINED FOR THE COMPANY OF BHARATHA:

Satrughna was melancholic, averse to food and play. He appeared very weak and tired. Sumitra⁷⁵ was worried at this development. So she invited the Preceptor to the palace and enquired from him the reason. Vashishta smiled again. He said, “Mother! your children are not of the common stamp. They are born to enact a Divine Drama! Place Satrughna on the same bed

⁷⁵ See Chapter, *Sumitra - Curious thing* – Sumitra not destined to mother her twins

as Bharatha! Then his daily routine will be joyful. He will be extremely happy. You need not worry anymore.” Vashishta blessed her and left. Sumitra followed his instructions immediately. Since then, Satrughna spent time in the company of Bharatha. The children were in unbounded bliss together; their progress was beyond measure! Like the splendour of the Sun, they grew in intelligence and glory from hour to hour. (*RKRV Part I p.48*)

Vashishta⁷⁶ laid bare the real reason: “Mother, Lakshmana is a ‘part’ of Rama; Satrughna is a ‘part’ of Bharatha.” (*RKRV Part I p.49*)

Satrughna would follow Bharatha, since he was the very reflection of Bharatha. (*SSB 1996 p.22*)

Serving the elder Brother:

Shatrughna would always serve Bharatha, Lakshmana engaged himself in service to Lord Rama. The twins hence spent their lives in serving their elder brothers. Bharatha always relied on Satrughna’s wisdom and sane counsel. True to his name, Shatrughna was one of tremendous strength and valour – one who destroyed his enemies. There was none to surpass him when it came to routing the enemies. It was his presence that enabled Rama, Lakshmana and Bharatha to remain safe and secure. Shatrughna was one who never talked. Even Lakshmana would

⁷⁶ See Chapter, *Sumitra - Sumitra realises the Truth Mamaivamsho jeevaloke jeevabhuta sanathana:*

talk and sometimes argue, but not Shatrughna. (*SSB 2002 p.65-66*)

Satrughna served Bharatha to the last. Bharatha would not live without Satrughna even for a moment, a feeling that was well reciprocated. (*SSB 1996 p.14*)

Satrughna was closely following Bharatha. Such was the inseparable connection that existed between Bharatha and Satrughna. If Bharatha was not present for a moment, Satrughna would be in great sorrow. Like Lakshmana, Satrughna was also easily excited. (*SSB 1977 p.59*)

Sumitra advised her second son Satrughna to serve Bharatha. (*SSS Vol.33 p.127*)

THE WEDDING:

*Emperor Janaka*⁷⁷ said, “I have another representation to make now for your consideration. Maharaja Dasaratha! You have four sons all born of the same heavenly gift of Grace. Why allow two to remain single? It will contribute to our happiness fully if they too are wedded. It is the asterism of Magha today. This is a good day to commence the rites and have the preliminary ceremonials. The day after, under the asterism Uttaraphalgun, I seek your assent to gift the two daughters of my brother, Mandavi to

⁷⁷ See Chapter, *Janaka - Proposals for Lakshmana, Bharatha and Satrughna:*

Bharatha and Sruthakeerthi to Satrughna in marriage.” (*RKRV Part I p.182*)

The sages Vashishta, Vamadeva, Viswamitra and others deliberated among themselves... and informed Janaka thus: “Oh King! “This is highly appropriate, laudable and holy. In addition, we are glad that the brides and grooms are fit in every way for each other. Janaka! Your brother, Kusadhwaaja is one who knows and practises Dharma. It is really good that he too should become related to Dasaratha through the marital bond of his daughters. It is a source of immense joy. Hence, we are ready to bless the marriages of his daughters, Mandavi and Sruthakeerthi with Bharatha and Satrughna. Our wish is that these Royal dynasties should be bound close by these marriages.” (*RKRV Part I p. 183*)

Sruthakeerthi⁷⁸ was gifted by *Janaka* with the pouring of holy water and Vedic recitation to Satrughna. (*RKRV Part I p. 189*) It looked as though they were perfect divine couples. (*SSS Vol.35 p.120*)

BHARATHA WANTS TO TAKE SATRUGHNA TO HIS MATERNAL UNCLE’S PLACE, GIRIVRAJA⁷⁹:

Dasaratha⁸⁰... called Bharatha to his presence. “Son! Your maternal uncle, Yudhajit, had come to take you with him from

⁷⁸ See Chapter, *Sruthakeerthi*

⁷⁹ See Chapter, *Bharatha* - **Bharatha leaves for his maternal uncle’s place, Girivraja:**

⁸⁰ See also Chapter, *Bharatha* - **Father and sons pine for each other:**

Mithila itself, I did not agree. I have come to know that your grandfather is very anxious to see you. So, make yourselves ready to accompany him,” Dasaratha ordered. Then Bharatha said, “Father! It would be very good if Satrughna too comes along with me.” So, he was also ordered to prepare himself to leave. And both of them left for the city of Girivraja, with their wives. (*RKRV Part I p. 211-212*)

When Bharatha was proceeding to his uncle’s kingdom of Kekaya, Satrughna had no information whether to stay back or follow. Yet, Satrughna got ready to accompany Bharatha as he knew it was his duty to serve him. (*SSS Vol.35 p.97*)

PREPARATION FOR THE CORONATION OF RAMA AND THE TWO BOONS

Family Preceptor, Vashishta sends word that Bharatha and Satrughna should be sent back to Ayodhya immediately⁸¹. That very moment, Bharatha entered the inner apartments, and took leave of his maternal uncle. Along with his brother, Satrughna, he got into the waiting chariot, and hurried it to move forward faster and faster. Satrughna noticed the sense of alarm and anxiety that had overcome his brother. He suggested a few times that a halt could be made for food and drink; but, Bharatha did not heed. He stayed silent.

⁸¹ See Chapter, *Bharatha - Family Preceptor, Vashishta sends word that Bharatha and Satrughna should be sent back to Ayodhya immediately:*

It took fifteen days for Bharatha and Satrugna to reach Ayodhya, though they sped fast in chariots. The chariot entered the Royal Palace. The guards received them silently, with no acclamation of joy, the traditional shouts of Jai, Jai. They stood mute and bent. They could not raise their eyes, for there were tears overflowing. The brothers were now convinced that some unspeakable calamity had overtaken the city⁸². They alighted from the chariot and ran into the palace. Kaikeyi had noted that her son had come.

Bharatha prayed to his mother to explain to him what had happened to whom, and why everyone was so overcome with sorrow. Kaikeyi⁸³ replied, “The Emperor, your dearly beloved father, has left for Heaven.”

Kaikeyi started consoling him saying, “Son! There is no need to lament over your father. He was, while alive, engaging himself continuously in a series of meritorious activities, and so his soul would have attained heaven. Your duty now is to follow the ideal he has set before you, to earn similar fame by meritorious deeds and rule over the Empire happily. Increase his fame and renown by your own wise and merciful rule and maintain the great name of the dynasty.” Kaikeyi endeavoured to heal the lacerated heart of her son by these and similar words.

But they struck his heart like a dagger thrust. Each word hit him like a hammer stroke. Satrugna developed a burning sensation

⁸² See Chapter, *Bharatha - Face of Ayodhya in gloom:*

⁸³ See Chapter, *Bharatha - Bharatha's interaction with his mother, Kaikeyi*

all over his body, as he listened to her. But he kept quiet. He did not scream. Bharatha, however, rose suddenly, deciding to discover the truth, for, he felt that his mother was deceiving him by her words, keeping some facts away from him and talking in riddles.

He drew Satrughna along and rushed out of the room towards the apartments of Kausalya, the eldest queen and the mother of Rama⁸⁴.

Satrughna was prepared to kill Manthara

They saw at the entrance Manthara herself, elaborately bejewelled, waiting to receive them. Satrughna could not tolerate that sight. He dragged her down by the hair and rained blows on her. She bawled out, “Ayyo” “Ayyo” and when the sound reached the ears of Kaikeyi, she ran to the spot, and started berating Satrughna for his action. (*RKR Part I p.395-415*)

Shatrughna was prepared to kill Manthara. On that occasion, Bharatha advised Shatrughna that if he wants to get the grace of Rama, he should refrain from doing such harsh things. Bharatha said: “Could I have not punished my mother for her guilt? But if Rama comes to know that we have been cruel to our own mothers, he would send us away and would not show grace to us.”⁸⁵ (*SSB 1977 p.59*)

⁸⁴ See Chapter, *Bharatha -- Kausalya comforted Bharatha and advised – No word of condemnation for his mother*

⁸⁵ We would see here that Bharatha and Shatrughna were prepared to cause hurt and harm to their own mothers, but they were not prepared to displease Rama by their acts. (*SSB 1977 p.59/60*)

THE BROTHERS MEET

Bharatha prays to the elders that only the sight of Rama would cure his agony... All prepare for the journey to the Forest to meet Rama: Bharatha and Satrughna Walk barefoot: (*RKRV Part I p. 421-423*)

They reached the bank of the River Yamuna when evening fell. Then, they finished their bath, and proceeded forward, after prostrating before the holy river in reverential gratitude.

Thenceforward, Bharatha and Satrughna moved on in the robes of recluses, into which they had changed.... Bharatha himself sent word through some forest dwellers that he was seeking the Darsan of Rama, along with his brother Satrughna and their attendants and followers. Rama felt glad when this happy news was brought to him. Bharatha fell flat on the feet of Rama and sobbed aloud on the ground. Lakshmana saw the anguish Bharatha experienced at the separation from them. He shed profuse tears along with Bharatha and Satrughna. (*RKRV Part I p.443-444*)

While the people were happy, looking on at the face of Rama, Bharatha and Satrughna were filled with misery, while they looked on at that face. They could not bear it any longer; they approached Vashishta and fell at his feet. They prayed to him to persuade Rama to return to Ayodhya, with Sita. Bharatha! For me as well as you, the commands of the father are unbreakable. We have to bow our heads in reverence before them and carry them out without the least murmur. The most appropriate action

for us all is that I should follow the orders issued to me and that you should follow the orders issued to you. (*RKRV Part I p.448-451*)

SANDALS ENTHRONED⁸⁶

Rama was equally determined not to return. Rama did not yield to his request. Quoting the Vedic dictum *Matru Devo Bhava, Pitru Devo Bhava*, He exhorted Bharatha to obey the command of the father and fulfil the desire of his mother by becoming the king of Ayodhya. Rama promised him that He would render all help and support⁸⁷. (*SSS Vol. 32 Part I p.101*)

Vashishta noticed the equal determination of the two brothers. The sage told Bharatha: "Rama has come to the forest to carry out the command of his father. It is not right on your part to ask him to change his mind. Let us take his *paadhukas* to Ayodhya. Those *paadhukas* will reign over the kingdom." Vashishta gave this timely advice and persuaded Bharatha to take Rama's sandals and install them on the throne in Ayodhya. (*SSS Vol.29 p.349-350*)

Bharatha prostrated before Rama and prayed that he might grant him permission to leave. Rama appreciated the spirit of contentment with which he welcomed the "sandals." He drew Bharatha near and embraced him fast and firm with great affection and delight. Satrugna also fell at Rama's feet. Rama

⁸⁶ See Chapter, *Bharatha - SANDALS ENTHRONED*

⁸⁷ That is why even today people extol Rama as Sathyavakparipalaka (one who adheres to truthful speech. (*SSS Vol. 32 Part I p.101*))

embraced him with great affection and he communicated to him also many a directive for ruling the kingdom and carrying out the duties devolving on him. Consider Bharatha as Rama himself, he told him. “Be his support and counsel and help him to establish peace and prosperity in the Empire.” (*RKRV Part I p.472*)

Bharatha called together the Royal Preceptor and the Ministers of the Court and assigned to them the various duties of administration. He entrusted them with the authority to perform their duties. He then called Satrugna near and allotted to him the task of fostering and consoling the queen mothers. (*RKRV Part I p.481*)

Ruling Ayodhya during the period of fourteen years while Rama was in Exile:

From the times of Dasaratha, Sumantra remained the chief minister of the kingdom. He was very loyal to Dasaratha and implicitly obeyed him. In such a situation, the legal heir, Rama was in the forest. His representative Bharatha was on a self-imposed exile at Nandigrama. So, who was handling the day-to-day administration of Ayodhya? It is here that we must probe deeply. From dawn to dusk it was Shatrughna who stayed in Ayodhya, enquired into the problems of the citizens and governed the kingdom. By night he would faithfully report everything to Bharatha. Shatrughna carried out every aspect of administration of the kingdom without causing the least trouble to Bharatha. Though he did so much, his name appears scarcely in literature.

Both the sons of Sumitra always engaged themselves in serving their elder brothers and fostering unity among themselves. They never went after name and fame. Shatrughna dedicated himself totally to Bharatha and executed all his commands. He was highly intelligent, able and powerful. Sadly, such a noble character has not been deeply enquired into. For the fourteen long years, it was Shatrughna who held the reins of the kingdom in his able hands. However, he would never disturb Bharatha even if he had any doubts. The reason was that he felt he would be responsible for disturbing Bharatha's concentration as he was in constant meditation of Rama.

Sumitra had already made a promise to the other queens, "Kausalya! Your son may become the king. My son Lakshmana will become his personal aide. Kaikeyi! Bharatha also may become king. I shall then send Shatrughna to serve him. Both my sons were born to serve and not to earn name, fame or kingdoms." How noble were the two brothers Lakshmana and Shatrughna! Without them, both Rama and Bharatha would not have achieved their fame and glory. They always stood by their elder brothers giving them solid support. This cooperation caused the brothers to remain very dear to each other. (*SSB 2002 p.86- 88*)

Ayodhya saw peace, prosperity and security aplenty. Truth was spoken and righteousness was adhered to, in every corner of the country. Shatrughna's able rule assured this. He would not sleep or rest at all, anticipating some problem or other. He used to worry that any lapse in his administration would bring a bad name for Bharatha. Shatrughna was extremely cautious to see

that Bharatha's name was not tainted due to any mistakes of his. He looked after the kingdom with care and concern. He always followed Rama's command.

Shatrughna ruled Ayodhya with such noble feelings. Bharatha did not play an active role in the administration of the kingdom. He would merely nod and accede to anything that Shatrughna proposed. What was the reason for this implicit trust? Bharatha knew Satrugna's selfless love. He also knew that Shatrughna was very capable and would never allow any enemy to venture into the territory of Ayodhya. True to his name, Shatrughna could destroy any such enemy. This led to lasting peace in Ayodhya. The principles followed by the ancient Indians were, speak the Truth, Follow Righteousness (*Sathyam Vada; Dharmam Chara*) and pray for the safety of the world. They also laid emphasis on unity amongst the brothers. None must face disrepute. Everyone must live his life with virtue and good name.

Though Shatrughna ruled the kingdom on behalf of Bharatha, he could never summon courage to advise his elder brother. He never talked back to his elders. When you are replying to elders, you must think carefully and answer. It is a grave mistake to talk to them as you like. Such actions may even lead to some unpleasant situations. Truth must be spoken. Righteousness must be adhered to. Brothers and sisters must live as a closely-knit unit, with understanding among themselves. In this way, Bharatha and Shatrughna spent their time in Ayodhya and Nandigrama, waiting for the return of Rama. (*SSB 2002 p.90-91*)

There are several such incidents and descriptions in the epic *Ramayana*. Today, we have seen what an important role Shatrughna played in ably administrating Ayodhya for fourteen long years. Bharatha was the ruler representative only in name. The groundwork was carried out entirely by Shatrughna. He alone was responsible for keeping the boundaries of Ayodhya safe. During the fourteen years, not even a single enemy dared to march on Ayodhya. There was no unrest amongst the civilians. Initially, there were fears about an Ayodhya without a king. Rama advised Bharatha regarding the duties of a ruler. He said, “Bharatha, you are now the king. Our father was a mighty emperor who ruled his kingdom well. After his death, it is your responsibility now. Do not answer back to anyone. Never use harsh words to hurt anyone. Always carry out pleasant conversations⁸⁸. There must be no agitation in our kingdom.” Both Bharatha and Shatrughna received the advice and followed it faithfully. (*SSB 2002 p 96-97*)

SATRUGHNA’S WIFE-SRUTHAKEERTHI:

Sruthakeerthi⁸⁹ is another character in the *Ramayana* who is extremely noble. She always tried to lighten the burden of her husband Shatrughna by giving him suitable advice. She would never utter words that could harm others. ‘Shruta+Keerti’, as the name suggests, would always listen to good only. In turn, she would always speak what was good and conveyed that which was pleasant and pleasing to the ear. She would encourage only

⁸⁸ Under Section, *Rama*, See Chapter, *Pathithapaavana -Teachings and Advice - Always carry out pleasant conversation*

⁸⁹ See Chapter, *Sruthakeerthi*

what was good and beneficial to others. Dasaratha's daughters-in-law were real gems. (*SSB 2002 p.92*)

Hanuman passes over Ayodhya and Sumitra's directive:

He saw Hanuman⁹⁰ moving with mountain in his palm in the sky and inferred that it must be a Rakshasa proceeding on a wicked mission. Seizing his bow, he shot an arrow aimed at Hanuman. Immediately, hanuman fell down with a shrill cry 'Rama'! Bharatha ran towards him and learnt about the story of Hanuman's mission and its urgency

Sumitra, the mother of Lakshmana came to know about the incident. Though it saddened her for a while, she quickly regained her composure, (*SSS Vol. 40 p.193-195*) reminding herself that Rama was present by the side of her son. She told herself, "The son born of my loins is offering his very life, in the service of Rama! That is enough consolation for me. It gives me a great sense of satisfaction. My life has attained fulfilment. But I am concerned, because Rama must be afflicted at the fate of Lakshmana. This 'loss of consciousness' must be affecting him. Separation from his brother might cause him grief. Son, Satrughna, go to where Rama is and be by his side!" At this Satrughna stood up in readiness saying, "What greater good fortune can fall to my lot?" But Bharatha stopped him and said, "Without specific orders from Rama, I am unable to agree to your joining him." Bharatha comforted Satrughna, and told him that Rama might dislike this act, and that it was always beneficial to bow to his will. (*RKR Part II p.217-218*)

⁹⁰ See chapter, *Hanuman- Hanuman meets Bharatha on his way back:*

EXILE FOR SITA

At last, Rama found words to express his wish. Between sighs, he said, “Brothers! Don’t say no. Take Sita into the forest, leave her there and return.” On hearing this, they were stunned. They were caught in the flames of despair. Their hearts were scorched. They doubted whether Rama was serious or was only joking. Satrughna sobbed aloud. Lakshmana and Bharatha stood motionless, tears streaming from their eyes. They were speechless. Their lips were quivering. Their hands were shivering. At last, with folded hands, Satrughna prayed thus: “Your words have pierced our hearts. Janaki is *Lokamata*, the Mother of all beings. You live in the hearts of all living beings. You are the Embodiment of Sat-chit-ananda. For what reason has Sita to be discarded now? She is eternally pure, in thought, word and deed, isn’t she? Oh, Destroyer of the Rakshasa Race! She is now pregnant and, at this time, in this condition, is it right to forsake her?” Satrughna could not say more. The sorrow surging within him flowed in tears and loud wails. (*RKRV Part II p.307*)

The slaying of Lavanasura:

Bharatha and Satrughna were following Rama and Lakshmana and were demonstrating their ideals in life to the people. In this manner, when Rama became the King and when Bharatha was the Prince and while the kingdom was being happily ruled and after all the *rakshasas* in Lanka were destroyed, a very powerful son of Ravana by name Lavanasura⁹¹ was still alive.

⁹¹ Also known as Lavana

Lavanasura⁹² was the eldest son of Ravana. He had the grace of Shiva. He had acquired the *Trisula* from Shiva. Depending upon the power of his *Trisula*, Lavanasura was giving a lot of trouble to the *rishis* and other good people. The *rishis* could no longer bear the atrocities committed by Lavanasura, and they came running to Rama and begged Him to protect them and kill Lavanasura. Rama knew that this kind of prayer from *rishis* would come. He looked at Satrughna who willingly accepted to go and destroy the enemies. Satrughna was a very strong person and had many good qualities. Devotion and faith were his strong points, but unfortunately, in *Ramayana*, Satrughna's qualities were not described to the people in a prominent manner. (***SSB 1977 p.60***)

⁹² Then, he wanted Vibhishana to come to him. He fell at Rama's feet. Rama asked him, "Tell me all about this Lavana." At this, Vibhishana described everything about his power and nature just as he knew. Vibhishana had a step-mother and she had a daughter named Kumbhinasa. She was given in marriage by Ravana to a Danava (member of a demonic clan) named Madhu. Madhu accepted her and in course of time, she gave birth to the demon, Lavana. He underwent severe asceticism and prayed to Lord Siva to bless him with boons. Siva was pleased at his austerities. He gave him a trident, describing its prowess thus: "Lavana! Whoever wields this trident shall not be easily overcome in battle by anyone." With the help of that trident, he has been terrorising gods and men, demons and serpents and parading his powers over the entire land. He was pursuing all living beings and ill-treating them. No living being was left unconquered by him. Hearing this from Vibhishana, Rama gave vent to a peal of laughter. Of course, there was nothing he did not know. But since he was wearing a human vesture, he had to act as if he did not. He had given him the trident in the form of Siva and he laughed at the stupidity of the recipient and the evil use to which he was putting it. (***RKRV Part II p.321-322***)

Rama gave him an arrow case full of most powerful weapons. Then he told him, “Use these weapons with appropriate Mantras on the enemy, Go, achieve victory and return triumphant.”

He blessed Satrughna with a portion of his Divine Power and sent him on the mission of destroying Lavana, the Demon. Then he told him, “Use these weapons with the appropriate Mantras on the enemy. Go, achieve victory and return triumphant.”

(RKRV Part II p.321-322)

As soon as this was known to Satrughna, he went and touched the feet of Rama. He told Rama that by His grace, he could undertake the task and destroy the enemies. Rama knew very well that Satrughna was a powerful person and so he smilingly blessed Satrughna. Not only this, Rama explained to Satrughna the secret of the weapon, *Trisula*. He told Satrughna that the *Trisula* was present in the house of this *rakshasa*. Every morning this *rakshasa* goes to the forest to gather food which primarily consisted of meat. Rama advised that the *rakshasa* must be killed before he returns home and begins to eat his meal. In this manner, having obeyed Rama’s orders and having secured the blessings of Rama, Satrughna started. Overnight he rested in Valmiki’s *Ashram*. It may be regarded as his special fortune that in Valmiki’s *Ashram*, Sita had just at that time given birth to Lava and Kusha. Satrughna saw Sita and the two children. But in his mind, he thought that this news should not be conveyed to Rama as he felt that it was not proper and kept it a secret. As soon as he left, he thought of Sita and Rama in his own mind and went to face Lavanasura, the *rakshasa*. **(SSB 1977 p.61)**

Under Rama's orders, 3,000 war drums beat in unison, and the dhandhan shook the earth. Horses and elephants cried out in joy, the soldiers blew conches and marched on the capital city of Lavana. Lavana heard their war cries. He emerged from the fort with 64,000 soldiers. He roared like a lion, eager for the kill. He played several magic tricks to evade defeat and to confound the enemy. But his army was shattered to pieces. The sons of Lavana who entered the battle were killed by the son of Satrughna, named Subahu. They reached the heaven reserved for heroes who die fighting. At last, Satrughna shot an arrow invoking the name of Rama and that arrow dealt a mortal wound on Lavana. He drew his last breath as a result and ended his vicious career. The gods acclaimed the victory with a chorus of Jais and they showered blessings on Satrughna. (*RKRV Part II p.321*)

After destroying Lavanasura, he returned to Rama, touched his feet, and expressed his desire to spend the rest of his life at the feet of Rama. Rama did not agree to that. Rama said that he should become the king of the area that Lavanasura was ruling earlier.

Satrughna meets Rama's Sons:

For twelve years he ruled over the kingdom of Lavanasura in a manner that was giving great happiness to the people, the *rishis* and other inhabitants. Satrughna was unable to bear the separation from Rama for a longer period, and he was returning to Ayodhya. Thus, while returning to Ayodhya, he again spent one night in the *ashram* of Valmiki. By this time, Lava and Kusha were twelve years old and Valmiki made these two boys, Lava and Kusha, sing the *Ramayana* in a most attractive manner.

When Satrughna was listening to the songs recited by the two children, he forgot himself in that happiness. He was in such an ecstasy that he looked at Lava and Kusha with great pleasure. He could not believe that he was Satrughna. He behaved as if he was not connected with them and returned to Ayodhya. After returning to Ayodhya he described to Rama the great peace that he experienced in Valmiki's *Ashram*. In spite of the fact that Rama was in a human form, He was all-knowing. He knew everything. He also enjoyed and experienced the narration of Satrughna. But he told Satrughna that he should not speak about this secret in Ayodhya just at that moment. (*SSB 1977 p.61-62*)

Satrughna's encounter with Lava and Kusha during Aswamedha Yajna

Satrughna moved on with his army and came to the banks of the Yamuna. He prostrated before the holy river, and led his army further. While proceeding thus, venturing in the four directions along different routes and encountering different places, he happened to reach the hermitage of Valmiki. There, Janaki was living with her twin sons, each redoubtable in splendour like the Sun. Those two boys saw the Horse, read the golden plate tied around its brow and led it away, to be bound and kept at the hermitage.

When the boys, Kusa and Lava, spoke⁹³ sharply and sarcastically to the soldiers, they were provoked to fall upon them in spite of the fact that they were but tender boys. Lava shot a succession of

⁹³ See Chapter, *Lava and Kusha* - **Lava and Kush capture the sacred sacrificial Horse**

arrows at them, quite in a sportive manner, humming tunes within himself and rather carelessly as if engaged in a play. The bodies of the warriors were shot through in so many places that they were rendered meshy. They fell fainting on the ground. Some of them ran into the camp of Satrugghna. They cried, “Maharaja! Two boys, evidently children of the hermits, have captured our Horse and in the fight that ensued, they have killed a large number of our soldiers.” Satrugghna was enraged at this effrontery. He gathered the four sections of his army and marched towards Kusa and Lava. When he confronted them, and saw their handiwork, on the field, proving their overwhelming prowess, he was shocked into shame. “How can I enter into battle with these two boys?” he hesitated. Satrugghna addressed them thus: “Oh ye children of hermits: Let loose the Horse and go home. You are worthy of worship. It is not right to wage battle with you.”

The boys would not yield. They said, “King! What is your name? From which City are you coming? Why are you moving through this forest at the head of an army? What is the reason for your letting this Horse wander about as it likes? Why have you tied this gold plate round its brow? Well if you have the strength and the courage, remove the plate from its brow, loosen the Horse and take it home.” When Lava and Kusa spoke straight and sharp like this Satrugghna bowed his head in shame and ordered his men to take up arms and march forward. At this, the boys laughed among themselves. “Aha! This King is pretty powerful! But listen. Can a lion be frightened when you clap your hands?” They took up the bow and arrow, remembering their Guru, the sage, Valmiki. Their arrows shattered the chariot of Satrugghna to

pieces. They also entered his body in many places and made it a patchwork of holes. His veteran warriors fainted and fell. They called each veteran forward and shot arrows at them with fatal effect. Soon, Rama was informed of the exploits of the two boys from the hermitage.

SATRUGHNA’S SON

Subahu (Subaahu): son of Satrughna who killed the demon Lavana's sons (*Glossary of the Vahinis*)

ENDING THE PLAY

Rama proceeded to the bank of the Sarayu River. Bharatha walked on the right side of Rama and Satrughna on his left. Satrughna touched the water and shone in the Lotus and merged in the Lord. (*RKRV Part II p.335*)

INNER-PERCEPTION AND QUALITIES OF SATRUGHNA

Nobility:

Kausalya! Your son may become the king. My son Lakshmana will become his personal aide. Kaikeyi! Bharatha also may become king. I shall then send Shatrughna to serve him. Both my sons were born to serve and not earn name and fame or kingdoms,” How noble were the two brothers Lakshmana and Shatrughna. Without them, both Rama and Bharatha would not have achieved fame and glory. They always stood by their elder brothers giving them solid support. This cooperation caused the brothers to remain very dear to each other. (*SSB 2002 p.87-88*)

Master of Science:

Shatrughna was one who had mastered all the sciences and used his powers for protecting his brothers. He was skilled in the use of all kinds of weapons. (SSS Vol.20 p.49-50)

Represents the Atharvana Veda

Satrughna was the one who annihilated the satrus (enemies) and protected the pious. He was obedient to his brothers *and was ever devoted to serving the other three brothers*⁹⁴. He stands for Atharvana Veda. The essence of Atharvana Veda lies in destroying wickedness and fostering sacred feelings and activities. (SSS Vol.36 p.57)

Satrughna, had conquered the internal and external foes (SSS Vol. 23 p.41)

Satrughna followed the advice of three brothers Rama, Lakshmana, and Bharatha and attempted to destroy all the enemies. Satrughna can, therefore, be compared to the *Atharva Veda*. (SSB 1977 p.95) Satrughna safeguarded the places of sacred rituals like Yajnas and Yagas from the invasion of evil spirits and demons. (SSS Vol.34 p.70)

Embodiment of Shakti and Prema:

Rama is the embodiment of Dharma (righteousness), Lakshmana is the embodiment of Sraddha (dedication). Bharatha embodies *Bhakti* (devotion), Shatrughna personifies Sakti (valour). Dharma is associated with Sraddha. The protecting cover for Bhakti is Shakti. Hence Rama and Lakshmana were always together as a pair, and Bharatha and Satrughna as another. (SSS Vol.20 p.46)

Bharatha and Shatrughna were always following Rama because Rama was the embodiment of Dharma and they were always ready to please Him and earn His grace. Rama, Lakshmana, Bharatha and Shatrughna were embodiments of the four qualities of Satya, Dharma, Shanti and Prema. (SSB 1977 p 60)

⁹⁴ SSS Vol. 23 p.41

The world *Sthree*, is a manifestation of the three *gunas*, (*Satwa*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*). The Divine is worshipped as "Devi". The term "Devi" refers to the feminine aspect. The term *Sthree* is used to denote a woman. There are three syllables in this term' *Sa*, *Tha* and *Ra*. "*Sa*" symbolises the *Satwic* aspect of a person. The *Satwic* quality is the very first quality that manifests in man. The feeling of love develops from the mother. It is impossible to describe the nature of maternal love. The mother converts her own blood into love and gives it as milk to feed the child. Therefore, the first quality represented by "*Sa*", is the *Satwic* quality.

The second syllable is "*Tha*". In the term *Sthree*, the syllable "*tha*" represents bashfulness, modesty, self-esteem and such traits which are characteristics of women. Shyness is a predominant trait in women. They attach great value to their honour and reputation. It is because of these sacred qualities that their *Tamasic* aspect is significant. The common view regarding the *Tamasic* quality does not apply to them.

The third quality, symbolised by the syllable "*Ra*", is *Rajas*. Such qualities as sacrifice and high-mindedness in women reflect the *Rajasic* aspect of their nature. When necessary, women will be prepared even to sacrifice their lives to safeguard their honour. When the *Tamasic* elements attempt to subvert the *Satwic* qualities, they are ready to combat and vanquish them.

-Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

8. CONSORTS OF THE **BROTHERS**

Sita too kept up the *Dharma* of women. She declined to return to Rama on the shoulders of Hanuman for she said, she would not of her own will contact another male; nor would she deny Rama the chance of proving his prowess by destroying the wicked person who stealthily carried away His Consort. That is the *dharma* of a *pathivratha* (chaste woman).

-Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

8.1 SITA, THE EMBODIMENT OF PURITY



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SITA

Sita (meaning "furrow") is the wife of Rama, the seventh Avatar of Vishnu in the Hindu tradition. Sita is one of the principal characters in the Ramayana, a Hindu epic named after her husband Rama. She is esteemed as a standard-setter for wifely and womanly virtues for all Hindu women. Understood theologically in Hinduism, Sita is an Avatar of Lakshmi.

Sita was a foundling, discovered in a furrow in a ploughed field, and for that reason is regarded as a daughter of Bhumi Devi (the goddess earth). She was discovered and adopted by Janaka, king of Mithila, and his wife Sunayana. Upon her coming of age, a Swayamvara was held to select a suitable husband for her. She wed Rama, prince of Ayodhya, an Avatara of Vishnu on Vivaha Panchami.

- From Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia

SITA⁹⁵: Wife of Rama; brought up by King Janaka who found her in a box in the earth. Also, a tributary of the Ganga flowing westward. (*Glossary for the Vahinis*)

⁹⁵ Also spelt as Sitaa, Seethe, Seeta

Sita is the daughter of Goddess Earth – Bhoodevi. She is therefore also called Bhoojatha⁹⁶. (*SSB 2002 p.112*)

Sita had another name Vaidehi, meaning one who has no body attachment. King Janaka was her foster father. He lovingly brought her up and gave her in marriage to Rama. (*SSS Vol.41 p.115*)

HER BIRTH

Story of Sita's previous birth

Here you must understand the past life story of Sita. In her earlier life, the name of Sita was Vedavathi. She was performing *Tapas* (penance) with the desire to marry *Vishnumurthi* (Lord Vishnu). One day Ravana had seen her, wanted her to accompany him to Lanka. She rejected this. He caught hold of her plaited hair and tried to drag her. Instantly she created a yogic fire (*pyre*). “In my next birth, shall marry Vishnumurthi, come to Lanka and destroy your family. Whatever portion of the hair is left in your hand, that many rakshasas will be destroyed,” so saying she immolated herself in the fire. Her hair remained in the hands of Ravana. That very Vedavathi born as Sita went to

⁹⁶ The name of Sita should not be taken to mean Sri Rama's wife only, in a limited sense. Sita was in fact, Bhoojatha (daughter of Mother Earth). The same Mother Earth who was responsible for the birth of Sita is responsible for the birth of all the human beings. In a way, all are sons and daughters of Mother Earth. The nature of Prakriti is dwaitha (duality). It is also called 'Maya', who comes between Jiva and Deva (God) and prevents him from realising God. Sita represents Prakriti or Maya stands in between the Jivatma and Paramatma, that is Sri Rama, who was an incarnation of Vishnu. That is the reason why all human beings are not able to realise Him as Paramatma. (*Beacons of Divine wisdom Part 1 p.109*)

Lanka. The other name of Sita was Vaidehi, meaning one without body attachment. There are many such subtle secrets in the story of Ramayana. (*Sri Sathya Sai Vachanamrutham 2008 Telugu p.96-97, DD 28/6/2008*)

In this Avatar

Sita was born out of the womb of the earth. When King Janaka was ploughing a field in the process of the performance of a *Yajna*, he found a box in it. When the box was opened, a small baby was found in it. Considering this as the boon of God, he took the baby home and brought it up with great care and affection. This baby was given the name Sita. Since she was the daughter of the King of Videha⁹⁷, she was also called Vaidehi. This name had great significance since it meant one who transcended the illusion caused by body attachment. (*SSS Vol.40 p.104-105*)

HER BEAUTY

Surpanakha⁹⁸ said to Ravana "Rama has a woman with him, who is endowed with superlative beauty. She is even more charming than they. She is the very Goddess of Love, in human form. In fact, I have never so far set eyes on such perfect feminine beauty; the like of her does not exist on heaven or earth." (*RKRV Part II p.42*)

⁹⁷ See Chapter, *Janaka- Rama wants to know how the bow came into the possession of Janaka:*

⁹⁸ See Chapter, *Surpanakha*

WINNING SITA

Sita's Strength and Janaka's decision regarding her marriage:

Once, Sita was playing a game of ball with her companions in her house. There was a big box in the house of Janaka, which contained a huge bow. As her playmates were playing with the ball, the ball went under the box. It was not possible for anyone to move this box. Sita went there and put it aside with her left hand⁹⁹. Seeing that act of Sita, King Janaka decided that very day that Sita's power should be made known to the world. Thereafter he organised a *Yajna* and made a declaration: "Whoever strings

⁹⁹ For a long period of time, scientists were under the mistaken notion that magnetic power is the same as atomic power. Only of late have they recognised the difference between the two. This magnetic power is present in the human body from top to toe. There are innumerable unseen powers present in man. They are known as transcendental powers (*Atheeta Shakti*).

Scientists know that energy, which is infinite and unfathomable, can be neither created nor destroyed. Since time immemorial, man has been investigating the nature of this energy. They have come to the conclusion that the whole world is based on psychotronic power, which is also termed bioplasmic power. This is present in every cell and every vein of the human body. Human mind cannot comprehend the nature of this power.

This power is also called *Ajnatha Shakti*, that which is not known. All these powers are not visible to the naked eye. It was this power that enabled mother Sita to lift the mighty Siva Dhanush (bow of Siva) with her little finger. It was then that king Janaka decided to give his daughter in marriage to one who was equally powerful. Sage Viswamitra, who had understood the intimate relationship that exists between Divinity and transcendental power, took Lord Rama to Mithilapura and solemnised the marriage. (*SSS Vol.32 Part 2 p 86*)

the bow of Lord Siva, I will give my daughter Sita in marriage to him¹⁰⁰.” (SSS Vol.40 p.105)

Swayamvara¹⁰¹

Kings of many countries came there. All of them thought it was a great good fortune to marry Sita and to become the son-in-law of King Janaka. They came one after the other and tried to lift the bow but all of them failed in their attempt. In that assembly, Rama and Lakshmana were also present, accompanied by Sage Viswamitra. As per the direction of the sage, Rama went forward. Rama walked with great humility to the delight of one and all. His speech, His actions and His demeanour were full of sweetness. He went near the bow, lifted it with His left hand and bent it. It broke with a thundering sound. Everybody expressed their happiness with a loud applause. People thought it would be very difficult to lift the bow; but what is difficult for Rama? His mere *sankalpa* (Will) could do any stupendous task. Viswamitra went near Rama and said, “Rama, today You have demonstrated Your divine power. Certainly it is not a human power. It is indeed divine.”

Everyone praised Rama and started garlanding Him. Then King Janaka brought his daughter Sita. As she came, Rama did not even look in the direction from where she was coming. Why? He did not want to look at her without the command of His parents. King Janaka conveyed the good news to King Dasaratha at

¹⁰⁰ See Chapter, *Janaka- Janaka proposes that he would give Sita in marriage to whosoever lifted the bow and strung it:*

¹⁰¹ Under Section, *Rama*, See Chapter, *Swayamvara – Winning Sita - Prakruthi Marries Paramatma - SWAYAMVARA*

Ayodhya. He requested all of them to come after deciding the *muhurtham* (auspicious time) of the marriage. He said, “Your son has achieved success in the competition organised by me. Therefore, all of you are requested to come prepared to celebrate the marriage of Sita with Rama.” (*SSS Vol.40 p.105-106*)

The Wedding:

Dasaratha along with his queens and his sons Bharatha and Satrughna and his ministers arrived in Mithila with great enthusiasm. It appeared as though the entire Ayodhya had come to Mithila. King Janaka extended a royal welcome to them with great honour.

The name of the second daughter of King Janaka was Urmila¹⁰². His younger brother had two daughters, namely, Mandavi¹⁰³ and Sruthakeerthi¹⁰⁴. It was decided to give Urmila to Lakshmana, Mandavi to Bharatha and Sruthakeerthi to Satrughna in marriage. Everyone was happy that all the four pairs were going to be married at the same time.

When everyone was seated in their respective places, the marriage ceremony started. Sita, Urmila, Mandavi and Sruthakeerthi stood in front of Rama, Lakshmana, Bharatha and Satrughna respectively. First Sita put the garland around the neck of Rama¹⁰⁵. Thereafter, the other three brides garlanded their

¹⁰² See Chapter, *Urmila*

¹⁰³ See Chapter, *Mandavi*

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter, *Sruthakeerthi*

¹⁰⁵ Under Section, *Rama*, See Chapter, *Swayamvara – Winning Sita - Pravruthi Marries Paramatma - Garlanding Ceremony:*

respective bridegrooms. All the people joyfully hailed the occasion. (*SSS Vol.40 p.107*)

Revelation of Divinity - Her hesitation to wash Rama's feet

A servant maid then brought a vessel filled with the water of the Sarayu river for Sita to wash the feet of Rama. Sita was hesitant to do so, for she thought that the golden wristlets that she wore might turn into women, as did the petrified Ahalya rise as a full-blooded woman, on contacting the feet of Rama! Lakshmana who read the thoughts of Sita, wiped the feet of Rama with a towel. He then asked Sita to wash the feet of Rama with the waters of the Sarayu River. Sita did so and sprinkled the water on her head. (*SSB 1996 p.33*)

Her mind was not in peace at the time of Rama Lifting Siva's bow

Moon is the presiding deity of the mind. Before Rama lifted the bow of Shiva in the court of King Janaka, Sita's mind was not at peace¹⁰⁶. (*SSB 2002 p.8*)

¹⁰⁶ When Sita went to Ayodhya after her marriage with Rama, one day she confided to Him how the moon of her mind was clouded before Rama lifted the Siva bow. Rama then told Sita that at the time of His birth, thick clouds covered the moon; so, it could not have His Darshan at the time of His birth. Rama then promised to the moon that He would add Chandra (moon) to His name to make it happy. Rama further told that in His next incarnation in Dwapara Yuga, the moon would be the first to have the Darshan of the Lord and to pay salutations to Him. True to the words spoken by Lord Ramachandra, the moon had the good fortune of having the first Darshan of Sri Krishna when His father Vasudeva was carrying Him across the river Yamuna. Thus, the moon was the first to do *Namaskar* to the Lord in His incarnation as Krishna. (*SSB 2002 p.8-9*)

Her Joy

When Lord Rama lifted Siva's bow, Sita's joy knew no bounds. Her prayers were answered. Rama, being the embodiment of love and righteousness, had the power to lift, not just one bow of Lord Siva, but ten such bows. (*Dasara Discourses 2004 p.77*)

PREPARATION FOR CORONATION AND BANISHMENT¹⁰⁷

Manthara became very angry when King Dasaratha decided to crown Rama instead of the son of Kaikeyi; she started poisoning the mind of Kaikeyi by fabricating many false stories against Rama. Hearing this evil talk of Manthara, the mind of Kaikeyi changed. Though a queen, she was influenced by the words of her servant and became responsible for the exile of Rama. Manthara pleaded with Kaikeyi: “Mother, I am your servant. From your very birth, I have nursed you and brought you up. Kindly fulfil a desire of mine. King Dasaratha has decided to crown Rama. But as per the promise given to you earlier, he should crown Bharatha. Rama should be sent on exile for fourteen years.” Both Sita and Rama were ready for the coronation wearing yellow coloured silk clothes. All were waiting in the royal court to extend welcome to them. Meanwhile, Rama went to mother, Kausalya and said, “Oh mother! I am going to forest. Kindly permit Me.” Then Kausalya asked, “Why my dear one, why do you want to go to the forest now, as this is the time of Your coronation.” Rama said,

¹⁰⁷ Under Section, *Rama*, See Chapter, *Two Boons - Abduction Of Sita And Search For Sita*

“Mother! It is the command of My father that I should stay in exile in the forest for fourteen years; I have to uphold the promise made by My father.” Saying so, he saluted His mother. *(SSS Vol.40 p.108-109)*

SITA INSISTS ON FOLLOWING RAMA AND WINS

Sita enquiries about Rama’s bowed head and bare feet:

Rama stepped on the royal road, and started walking along, barefooted, through the concourse of citizens who had filled it. He proceeded to the apartments of Sita. *(RKR Part I p.302)*

Sita was watching the entrance door, for she was anxious to learn what had happened at the palace of Kaikeyi, and why Rama had not come as yet, though the auspicious hour fixed for the Coronation was fast approaching. She had finished her own rites of Vigil and Fast, and held in readiness a plate of sandal paste, flowers, grain and other prescribed articles so that there would be no delay caused by her tardiness, to accompany her Lord to the Coronation Hall. Her heart was beating fast in expectancy of Rama’s arrival. All the maids and attendants around her were overcome with the ecstasy of the coming hour of triumph. Lovely maidens were ready with sparkling lamps for the ceremony of waving them before Rama as he entered. Into the decorated hall shining in unprecedented charm, suddenly Rama stepped in, unheralded, with bowed head, and on bare feet. *(RKR Part I p.303)*

Everyone was shocked. Sita moved forward towards her Lord. She could scarce believe her eyes. Her body shivered like a leaf in the wind. She bit her lips; and swallowed her surprise. “Lord! What is the meaning of all this? Why are you thus? You said this day is the day dedicated to Brihaspati, the Preceptor of the Gods. You said, it is a very auspicious day, the star is Pushya, and you are to be crowned this day as the Yuvaraja, the Crown prince, of this Empire. How is it that they do not hold over your divinely beautiful self the White Umbrella of Imperium with the brilliance of sunlit Pearls, with its hundred ribs of gemset gold? Where are the resplendent whisks with their feather-pure sheen that appear like Moons? Why are they not accompanying you today? Why are the minstrels of the court silent, without singing your praise, as you proceed to the Durbar Hall? Oh, Lord! How is it that the Masters of Vedic Lore, the Brahmins, have not anointed you with consecrated honey and curds? And the Ministers, the Vassal Kings and the Leaders of the various communities in the State are not walking behind you, as usage requires! The majestic royal elephant, a mountain peak on the move, Sathrunjaya, trampling the ground, making people mistake it for a dark blue cloud flowing over the road, he should come first, announcing your arrival, shouldn’t he?” (*RKRV Part I p.304*)

Rama breaks the news of his banishment

While Sita was raining questions like these, Rama could not decide how to answer them. It was not a matter that could be explained quickly in few words. So Rama entered an inner Hall, and drawing Sita nearer, he said, “Sita! Revered Father has willed and resolved at this very auspicious hour to send me to the

forest. Therefore, it has become urgent to honour his command.” Sita heard the words, but she could not believe that they could be true. She asked, “Lord! What crime did you commit to deserve this punishment, this exile into the forest? Dasaratha is the embodiment of justice, a *dharmaatma* (embodiment of justice). He will never issue an order of this nature without legitimate reasons! What is the real purpose, the inner significance, of this order to live in the forest?”

Rama smiled at her question, and replied, “Sita! Long ago, father had promised to grant mother Kaikeyi two boons; but, that promise had not been fulfilled so far. She too had not demanded them, until now. This day, she asked for them both. They were, first: Bharatha must be crowned as Yuvaraja, and second: I should move into the forest, and live there with matted hair and vestments of bark for fourteen years. Father is supremely righteous. He never acts against the plighted word. Therefore, he bowed his head to Dharma and acceded. I felt I should see you before leaving! (*RKR V Part I p.304-305*)

Rama instructs Sita on her duties, do’s and don’ts and the directives to follow:

You have taken birth in a greatly revered family. You know and value all the moral codes and goals. Janaka Maharaja, Master of the inner Mysteries of the highest morality, is your father. You too walk steadily on the path of Dharma. I have to leave for the forest this very day. Dasaratha has given this empire, inherited by him through many generations, to Bharatha. From now on, he is the Lord over this realm. Immediately after being crowned, he will come to you for your blessing. Do not extol me before my

brother. Nor should you exhibit any trace of sorrow or displeasure at my being sent to the forest. Don't slight him or look down upon him. Kings appreciate only those who adore them and serve them. So, do not praise me or decry him. He is my brother and your brother-in-law; but that is only with reference to physical kinship. With reference to kinship, Bharatha is your monarch and mine. Give him due honour. Do not cause any displeasure or distress to him by word or deed. Fair one! Follow the directives of not only Bharatha, but also of old father, Dasaratha. Serve also mother Kausalya who is suffering unspeakable agony because I am leaving her. Take all appropriate measures to keep grief away from her. The other two mothers, Kaikeyi and Sumitra, them too you must obey and please. Sita! Bharatha and Satrughna are to me as dear and close as my very breath. Treat them as your own brothers; or foster them lovingly as your sons. Oh, charming damsel! Do not leave this place and go to Mithila City, for the reason I am not here. Remain in Ayodhya itself and comfort mother and father, serving them in suitable ways to remove the sorrow from their hearts. With love and care, confer comfort, courage and contentment on them.” (*RKRV Part I p.305-306*)

Sita intervenes and says that only if she stays back she needs to be told how and in what ways she has to serve the In-laws - She was taught by her father before her wedding all duties that guide and bind her - As a wife her place is with Rama:

When Rama was instructing Sita on her duties, she could not contain her laughter! She also felt a sense of shame at the turn the arguments took. She could not remain silent for long. “Rama,” she interrupted, “Rama! you are the son of Dasaratha. I

have not heard at any time words unworthy of that lineage fall from your lips. Mother, father, brother, sister, son, daughter-in-law, everyone has to experience a quantum of happiness and misery, in proportion to the good and bad done by each. But the wife has a special source of fortune, good or bad. That is to say, she has a share in the good and bad for which her husband is responsible. She is endowed with a part of his joy or grief. So, if the Emperor Dasaratha has ordered you to go into the forest, he has given me too the order to go. A woman may be fed and fostered by her mother and father. She may be revered by her son, she may be served by her maids, but they can never be her shield and support. The trinkets and toys with which you try to convince me serve only to arouse amusement in me. During the years preceding my wedding, father taught me all the duties that shall guide and bind me. I am neither an ignoramus nor a seeker of power. And more than these let me tell you, I do not cling fanatically to any opinion because it is mine. There is no need for you to point out my special duties to me, for, I know them all. It is only when I decide to remain here, isn't it, that you have to tell me how and in what ways I have to serve the parents-in-law, the sisters-in-law, and the ruler of the land? But when I am with you, what chance is there, what need is there, for me to take on the service of others. I am coming with you in full joy! Since a long time, I have had an unfulfilled desire to spend some years in forests. It is my good fortune that I have now the chance to satisfy that desire, in the company of my Lord! I will not give ear if you insist that I should not express my point of view in this great matter. Don't be angry with me that I disobey you. It is not just and proper for you to throw me aside here, as one throws out water from the cup after quaffing a mouthful. Believe my word! I

shall not continue in Ayodhya even for a moment; take me with you.” (*RKR V Part I p.306-308*)

Sita pleads to follow Rama saying that wherever Rama is, that is the Empire for her:

With these words, Sita fell at Rama’s feet and held them tight. “I have not the slightest sorrow that you were not crowned. I hold you dear, crowned or uncrowned. Wherever you are, that is the Empire for me. There is my Treasure. That is my Glory,” she pleaded and prayed. Rama told her that forest life was fraught with fears and dangers. The forest was infested with wild animals¹⁰⁸ and wilder men, demonic predators and dacoits. One has to encounter floods in rivers, wade through thick thorny undergrowth. He said that she was not used to traverse places on foot and therefore, she will have to undergo great exhaustion. He described various other forms of fear and anxiety that will confront her. But Sita was unmoved. She replied, “Lord! However wild the animals may be, however thick and terror striking the forest may be, what harm can they cause, what injury can they inflict on me, when you are by my side? I can walk through forest tracks. It will be no trouble for me. I will be happier if you ask me to walk first, preparing the path smooth for you to tread. I shall pick and cast away stones, pebbles and thorns to lessen pain, making your journey easy. Allow me to be with you, so that I may render this service and be happy. Here, in

¹⁰⁸ Sita replied, “Where is the scope for any fear of animals when Rama, a lion in the human form is there with me? Rama is Lord Narayana Himself. Therefore, I have nothing to fear.” In this manner, Sita, Rama and Lakshmana put at rest the fears of everyone and proceeded to the forest. (*SSS Vol.40 p.112*)

the palace of Ayodhya, and in the zenana, I could not get the chance to serve you. I felt worried and miserable that all services for you were undertaken by attendants and aides. There will be no attendant, no aide in the forest! So, I can be happy, doing all the services myself. That is my great good fortune! Make my life worthwhile, Lord. Give me that glorious chance!” Sita prayed in a variety of ways, pleading for mercy and justice. Rama was moved to compassion, He said, “Sita! Living in the forest, you cannot be happy, you have to suffer greatly in the coming days.” Rama expatiated on the horrors of jungles and the sufferings that one has inevitably to meet there. But Sita stood firm, “Rama, I shall not interpose any obstacle in the observance of your vows. From your words, I infer that you are hiding something from me, some objection which you do not like to raise before me. I shall observe along with you the vows of personal austerity incumbent on a person on the Brahmachari path. I too shall live on tubers and fruits. I too shall discard the use of scents. We shall only inhale the fragrance of forest flowers. You are a scion of the Ikshvaku line, which has saved millions from danger and disaster! Can you not guard me against them? Are you so weak of hand? I won’t give you trouble. Through me, you will not have the slightest worry. Lord! I cannot but follow you. I will lay myself down and sleep at your feet. That will give me the fullest bliss. Rama! I know and recognise none except you. I cannot exist alive for a moment apart from you. Well. If you hold fast to your resolution and proceed, leaving me in Ayodhya, Sita would have drawn her last breath before you reach the forest. Take this as Truth.” (*RKRV Part I p.308-309*)

Rama tries to Pacify Sita:

Sita's eyes shed streams of tears as she spoke these words. Rama tried to pacify her. He said, "Oh Sita, you are a very staunch adherent of Dharma. It is best for you to stick to your righteous qualities maintaining them at this place. You cannot act as your will dictates. You have no freedom to behave as you desire. Your Dharma is to act in accordance with my words. Therefore, give up this idea of yours. I am saying this for your own good. Guarding you will be a burden for me certainly. Streams rolling down from mountain peaks, wild beasts that dwell in the caves, lions and tigers roaming without let or hindrance amidst the hills and valleys—these have to be overcome. Rivers in spate will have to be forded. We may have to leap down from huge boulders and rocks. Considering these difficulties I have to tell you in such emphatic terms to stay. You have to wear matted hair and clothes of the bark of trees. We men have to go to some river or lake for the evening rites of worship. At that time, who will watch over you against any calamity that might happen? Whatever may be the crisis, we cannot give up those rites. You know how strict that rule is. So, you may have to be alone for sometime daily. We cannot say what will happen when." (*RKRK Part I p.310*)

Sita says being Rama's Ardhangi, she would never agree to a life without Rama:

Rama tried to picture before Sita fearful scenes of forest life, but Sita was not affected in the least. She said, "Rama! Why tell me these things, as if I am a simpleton of some backward village, or an ignorant stupid woman, unaware of the teachings of the Sastras? I am well aware of your skill and prowess. Nothing is

impossible for you on earth, nay, in all the fourteen worlds! And when you are with me, what fear can disturb me? Well, if a wild beast attacks me and I fall a prey to it, I will be happy that I die in your presence, rather than anywhere far! I shall die happily then. I shall never agree to a life, if I have to spend it without you. You said that I have no freedom to do as I wish. Did you say so, with the full consciousness of its meaning? Or, was it just a remark to test me? I am not able to reason out.

I am half of you. It is my right to name myself as your half. You too have the same right. And that is the truth. You are not fully free, nor am I. I have as much right over you, as you have over me. But I do not now plead for my rights or claims. I am yearning for being near you, being ever in your presence. My words arise from that craving.” (*RKRV Part I p.310-311*)

Rama says Sita’s duty to serve his parents:

Listening to Sita revealing her hard determination, Rama continued. “Sita! You are entangling yourself in the complexities of rights and claims! When I proceed to the forest, the aged parents will be wailing and weeping for me. At that time, you can console and comfort them, with gentle assurances. That is your duty. You must conduct yourself according to the needs of each occasion. Be with them; serve them; that is the way to please me, and give me Ananda.” Rama spoke as if his decision was final, and in a tone of command. (*RKRV Part I p.311*)

Sita says for the wife, the husband is God – Moral rules same for Mother Kausalya and her:

But Sita responded only with a smile. “When the son born of these very parents plunges them in deep grief and goes away, clinging with a bear’s grasp to his adamant resolution, and when the very son whom they love so much gives everything up and goes into the forest, what responsibility has the daughter-in-law, who has entered this household from her own, a stranger in the family, what responsibility has she to console and comfort those deserted by the son? Ponder over this for a while!” she said. “I am told you insisted on your mother remaining here, serving her husband, though she wept out her eyes in bitter tears, and prayed that she be allowed to follow you to the forest! You told her that her duty of serving her husband is predominant. You declared that it will bring untold disgrace on the Ikshvaku dynasty if she abandons the lord she is wedded to, out of affection for the son she has borne and brought forth into the world! Such moral rules of inestimable value, you dilated upon, before her. But as soon as you come near me, you have reversed that advice and started telling me that my predominant duty is service to the parents-in-law and not service to the husband! Think it over! Which is the correct advice? For the wife, the husband is God—this was not laid down for Kausalya alone. It is the guide and goal for women, all over the world, without exception. You have, evidently, forgotten this truth, for it does not suit your present wish. You are unable to explain how the moral rule you quoted before Kausalya does not apply to me. *(RKR Part I p.311-312)*

Sita says that it was predicted that she would spend years in the forest with her husband:

“However long you argue, whatever you may assert; I shall not leave off treading along the prints your feet make. You may kill me for transgressing your order, but I assert I can never be without you, Ramachandra! No sooner did you speak of the exile in the forest you are entering upon than I had such an upsurge of joy, remembering an incident that took place in my childhood! You cannot understand the extent of that joy! My mother, with me seated on her lap, was immersed in anxiety about the husband destiny had in store for me, whether he would be morally upright and endowed with excellent attributes. She was stroking my hair, and lost in thought. The maid put in her appearance just then and announced that a certain woman ascetic desired audience with her. She lifted me and gently placed me on the floor, and went forward to meet her. Mother fell at her feet and directed me to do likewise. I did as she directed. The woman eyed me closely from head to foot, and said, “Mother! Your child will spend years with her husband in the forest.” At this, my mother replied, with a laugh. ‘Not married yet! And you talk of her spending life in the forest!’ She did not keep quiet, however. She explained, ‘After marriage! She will have to live in the forest with her husband, for some time!’ And then, she went her way! Ever since that day, I am looking forward excitedly to the time when I can go and live in the forest with my Lord! Make me happy, take me with you.” Sita fell at his feet and sobbed out her prayer. (*RKRV Part I p.312-313*)

Rama puts forth that as is in the apparel of ascetics, it would be improper to enter into fights with kings and Princes whose eyes might fall on her:

Rama was moved to pity. He raised her gently and said, “Sita! To whom else am I to confide the secret spring of my decision? Listen! You are young. In the forest there are many hermitages full of ascetics, hermits and sages. I will have to go to them in order to be of service to them and to offer my reverence to them. Kings and Princes too may be present there (since they come to hunt) and honour them and be blessed by them. Their eye may fall on you, and consequential complications and conflicts may arise. And since I will be wearing the apparel of an ascetic, it may not be proper to enter into fights with them. At least for this reason you will have to remain in Ayodhya.” (*RKRV Part I p.313-314*)

Sita’s resolution to follow Rama:

Sita had her own reasons to protest at this. She said, “Rama! It is not just that you should deceive me, spinning such fairy tales, as if you are of common stock! When you are by my side, can even the Ruler of the Gods cast his eye on me? If he does, will he not be reduced to ashes that very moment? No, for this reason, you cannot leave me here. You cannot escape your duty and responsibility on this score! Let me also tell you something: If you are not with me, what will be my fate? I will have to be alone in Ayodhya; the incidents of the nature you just now dilated upon can happen here! Or else, I may suffer inner agony not being able to bear the conjugal happiness of others! So, do not leave me alone, take me with you, and let your renown and mine spread for all time over the entire world. Let me add: You

are dear to all as Ramachandra, Rama the Moon! I am Sita, which means, cool, the cool Moonlight! How can the moon be in the forest and its cool light stay away in Ayodhya? Where the moon is, there its light must be! Hence, this separation can never be. The two shall ever be together, never apart! If the two happen to part, it is but evidence of the approach of some unnatural catastrophe, a world shaking tragedy. Or, it may come about for the sake of an epoch- making endeavour to destroy the wicked and save the good from extinction! Since no such crisis is evident now, our separation is impossible. It cannot happen.” Sita, the Supreme Mother, spoke these words in a resolute voice, as if she would brook no objection. (*RKRV Part I p.314-315*)

Rama paints the terrors and tribulations of forest life-

“Sita! You will have to sleep on hard rocky ground, wear apparel made of fibre or bark, live on tubers and roots. Even this food, it might be difficult to get every day. Their availability depends on the seasons of the year. When they are not procurable, you might have to be hungry for days. The forest¹⁰⁹ is infested with demonic tribes who are masters of a million stratagems, and who eat, with delight, human flesh. Oh! It is impossible to describe fully the travails of life in the forest! You

¹⁰⁹ Kausalya was also worried about Sita since she was accompanying Rama to the forest. Rama had tried to dissuade her from going to the forest, saying, “Sita! The forest is full of thorny bushes and wild animals. You will be put to a lot of difficulties in the forest.” Sita then reasoned with Rama, “Oh! Rama! You are the protector of the entire world. Can You not protect Your own wife from the wild animals? You are omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. I am sure that none of these wild animals can cause any harm to me when You are with me. I have no such fear.” Rama felt very happy to hear these words of Sita. (*SSS Vol.39 p.80*)

cannot bear these terrors and tribulations. If you accompany me into exile, people will condemn me and pour abuse on me. How can the Celestial Swan that lives on the ambrosial waters of the Manasa-Sarovar survive drinking the brackish waters of the sea? How can the Kokil sporting in the garden that is full of tender-leaved mango trees be happy and carefree in a patch of low grass? Reflect on these matters. It is most desirable that you stay at home.” (*RKRV Part I p.315*)

Sita counters the argument and insists on Joining Rama

Sita listened to these words of Rama, spoken so soft and sweet; but all the while she stood with her eyes on the ground, and tears were streaming down her cheeks. She stood like a pillar, unmoved and immovable. Her tears fell continuously on the floor. Rama could not bear the sight of her distress. Sita could find no word to answer the objections Rama raised. Finally, she managed to control her emotions and swallow her grief. She said, “Oh Lord of my life! You are the treasure house of everything good and auspicious. When I am separated from you, even heaven is horrible hell. Parents, brothers, sisters, parents-in-law, sons, preceptors, kinsmen—all these might be resplendent repositories of goodness; but for a woman, her husband is the only source of strength, joy and fortune. He alone can grant her happiness and delight. Except the husband, she has none to guide her and guard her. He is her refuge, her only resort. Lord! When the husband is away from her, the wife will find the body, the home, the city, the kingdom, the wealth heaped around her, everything as sources of grief and sorrow. They cannot confer joy on her stricken mind.

Sweetness will turn bitter when her Lord is away. Delight will be curdled into disease. All the joys I crave for are centred in you. Nothing can equal the ecstasy I derive when I fix my eyes on your face that shines so bright and comforting like the full moon in autumn. When I am with you there the birds and beasts will be my kith and kin. The forest will be the city I love. The apparel made of tree bark will be silken clothes. The hermitage with the thatch of leaves will be as delightful a home for me as a heavenly mansion. The fairies and angels of the forest, the sylvan deities will be parents-in-law. I shall revere them with equal awe. When I am with you, sheaves of grass and heaps of floral petals will give as much softness for the bed. The God of Love cannot aspire for more. And the tubers, roots and fruits that you speak of will be as sweet and sustaining as Divine Nectar itself! The mountain peaks there will gladden me as much as the towers of Ayodhya. I will come down one slope and climb another, as gladly as while coming down one flight of stairs and getting up another here. It will be so easy and delightful.

“Every day, I will derive the thrill of delight at the sight of your Lotus Feet. Besides, this will be a golden chance for me to serve you at all times in every way. How can I survive the agony if I am to lose this precious chance? Oh, Treasure chest of Mercy! Do not leave me here. Take me with you! Really there is no need for me to pour these importunities into your ear; for, you reside in all beings and you are aware of all that they feel and think. It isn't proper that you should inflict such pain on me, when you know how my heart is yearning for the chance to be with you. Lord! I am downcast, miserable. If you leave me and go, it will bring your name down. You have all the noble attributes, why

then deny mercy to me? Can I keep alive for fourteen years, separated from you? I find it impossible to keep alive even for ten winks of separation! Accept my prayer, show me a little kindness. When I am with you, how can anyone dare harm or attack me? Why? No one dare cast a glance at me. Can the jackal or the hare open its eye and dare look at the lion? I am not a tender fragile person. To speak the truth, *you* are tenderness personified! The Earth is my mother. Therefore, I have every right and every strength to traverse the Earth. Really, happiness is your share in life. My lot is to suffer. When such is the case, why do you invent facts and cause disappointment to me. It is not correct. I declare that I can carry out with ease tasks which are beyond you! You know full well that I lifted up and placed aside the Bow of Siva that no king however proud of his prowess could lift. I am surprised that you doubt my capabilities! My valour and skill are not inferior to yours. So, do give me permission, and make arrangements to depart with me in great joy.” (*RKR Part I p.315-18*)

Sita Wins

Sita bowed low, and fell at Rama’s feet with these words. Rama felt that it would be improper to continue resisting her wishes. He resolved to yield. “Sita!,” he said, “Give up your grief. Do not give way to sadness. As you desire, I shall take you with me. Engage yourselves quickly in preparing for the journey to the forest!” Hearing the sweet words with which Ramachandra spoke, Sita was elated. She was filled with boundless joy. She said, “Preparation? What has one to prepare, to live in the forest? I am always ready, with whatever I need, for I need only you. I have no other want. I am following you, this moment. In you I

have all I need. You know I have no desire for anything other than you.” With these words, she held Rama’s hand in hers and stepped forward. Rama said, “Sita! Consider this: You will not be in Ayodhya for fourteen years. Therefore go and release the parrots and birds you have reared as pets with love and care. And the cows you fostered with affection, give them away to Brahmins, so that they might be treated lovingly. Distribute the various articles of dress, the vehicles, and other articles used by you, to the people, or else, they will be ruined by time. It is better far that they be used rather than get disintegrated.” When this suggestion was made, Sita immediately ran towards the cages, and addressing each pet bird in loving accents, told them; “Go! Like us, roam freely in the beautiful forest.” With her own hands, she opened the cages and set them free! Then she went to the cow shed. She fed the cows with various tasty foods and talked to the Brahmins who were to receive them as gifts. Her charming face beamed with joy. Spectators who watched her give the things away felt their hearts melt with sorrow at her impending departure. They shed tears in streams for they were moved by the large-hearted generosity, and more than all, by her exultation at the prospect of accompanying her husband into exile in the forest. Her ecstasy was beyond the pen of any poet. (*RKRV Part I p.318-319*)

Meanwhile, Lakshmana joined them. After taking leave of his mother the three then moved on. (*RKRV Part I p.319*)

ENTERING INTO EXILE

Sita in the city of Nagas

The three resumed their journey. Soon, they saw before them a City, which shone brighter than even the City of the Nagas. As they neared the light, they wondered which City it was. The nearer they came, the more delighted they were at the grandeur and charm of the City and its suburbs. Reaching quite near, they took it to be Amaravathi¹¹⁰, the City of the Gods and they were still more delighted. They felt that the citizens must be gods, not men. They sat under a tree in its cool shade and admired its splendour and magnificence.

The people came around them and questioned among themselves whether they had come down from “heaven” and were the Immortals themselves. They ran into the town and spread the good news that some divine personalities were coming into the City bringing great good luck with them. Everyone who heard them ran towards the visitors and vied with each other in attending to their comforts. Some placed milk before them. Some spread fruits. All looked at them without even a wink! No one could leave them and go back. They stood unwilling to depart. One of them, bolder than the rest, came forward, and spoke; “Sirs! Your charm and imposing personality make us infer that you are princes of royal blood. But you are journeying by foot along these rough jungle paths, with this damsel. You are

¹¹⁰ Amaravathi (Amaraavathee). Residence of Indra. Also, a city through which Rama passed on the way to exile in the forest. (Glossary of the Vahinis)

climbing mountains and crossing rivers. You are hard travellers braving all the dangers of the trek; so, we have to conclude that you are like us, mere citizens. We cannot understand how you manage to travel across this forest where lions abound and herds of wild elephants roam. And you have with you this tender embodiment of loveliness and beauty. Have you no kith and kin, no friends and comrades, no well-wishers? If there were any such, certainly, they would not have allowed you to venture on this journey.” He enquired into the nature and cause of the journey and put a number of other questions to Rama. Meanwhile, a woman advanced from the gathering towards them, and addressed Rama thus: “Oh Prince! I am placing a prayer before you. Woman that I am, I am afraid to express it. Pardon my effrontery. We are common folk, unacquainted with verbal finesse. Your physical charm reflects the lustre of emerald and gold, which seem to be the source of your brightness. One of you has the complexion of the rain cloud, while the other is resplendent white. Both are as enchanting as a billion Gods of Love, moulded into human bodies. Again, we are not aware how this sweet damsel is related to you. She has the exquisite charm of the Goddess of Love, *Rathi Devi*. Watching her modesty and innate humility, as well as her charm, we women are ashamed of ourselves. Kindly tell us who you are, and for what purpose you have come thus wise.” Listening to their prayers and watching their eagerness and joy, Rama and Lakshmana were very much amused.

Just then, Sita turned towards the women and spoke to them thus: “Sisters! This simple, sincere person with the golden complexion is Lakshmana. He is my Lord’s brother, a younger brother. Then

about the dark-blue person; he with the Lotus-petal-eyes that enrapture the worlds, with the long, strong bow arms, (here, she turned towards Rama), this is my Lord, the very breath of my life.” Saying this, she bent her head and looked at the ground. Just then, a young maiden interjected, “Ma! You haven’t told us your name!” Sita immediately said, “My name is Sita. I am known as Janaki, the daughter of Janaka.” The women looked at each other in wonder and appreciation and then, with one voice, they blessed Sita profusely, saying, “May you both be as happy a couple as God Siva and Goddess Parvathi and may you live together, as long as the Sun and Moon, as long as the Earth rests upon the hood of the snake Adisesha, in harmony and unbroken joy.”

Rama too spoke to the men and informed them that they had come to see the grandeur and beauty of the forests and that their journey so far had been quite comfortable and useful, that they were not in the least exhausted or inconvenienced. He asked their permission to leave, and then, they turned to the forests again. Having nothing left to do, the men and women hied homeward. Sita, Rama and Lakshmana wended their way, talking among themselves about the citizens and the questions they asked, and affection they manifested and the joy that glinted in their eyes. Suddenly, Rama noticed signs of exhaustion on the face of Sita, and proposed that they rest awhile under the shady tree. A cool broad stream flowed near by. Lakshmana ventured to the jungle and soon gathered some fruits and tubers, which all three ate with relish. They spent the night there, quite happily. At dawn they awoke, and finishing the morning ablutions, they started off on the next lap of their journey. Soon, they entered the fearsome

recesses of the forest. The towering peaks, dark dreadful tangle of trees, and the deafening roar of flooded streams, produced a queer feeling of awe and mystery. (*RKRV Part I p.366-369*)

Sita at Chitrakoota¹¹¹

Sita too never recalled, even for the fraction of a second, her relatives or parents, or the cities of Mithila and Ayodhya. She was fixing her eyes and attention on the Lotus Feet of Sri Ramachandra. That was the veritable festival for her eyes. She watched the stream of sages and their consorts who came to Rama for instruction and guidance. Time flowed by her without her noticing the passage of night and day. The chakora bird delights to the point of self-forgetfulness when the moon shines in the sky; so too, Sita reaped delight, fixing her eyes intently on the Face of Rama. For Sita, the lovely little grass-thatched bamboo cottage was so attractive that she forgot the palace of Mithila, where she grew up into maidenhood, and the palace of Ayodhya where she spent years as the Princely Daughter-in-law. That cottage was to her more pleasing and palatial than all the mansions she knew.

At Bharadwaja Ashram:

Sita, Rama and Lakshmana went to the *ashram* of Bharadwaja¹¹². In that *ashram*, following the ancient practice, the women, the *rishipatnis*, were sitting on one side; the men, the *rishis*, were sitting on the other side. When Sita, Rama and Lakshmana entered the *ashram*, Sita went and joined the women

¹¹¹ Under Section, *Rama*, See Chapter, *Two Boons - Abduction Of Sita And Search For Sita - Rama in Dandakaranya*

¹¹² See Chapter, *Bharadwaja*

and Rama and Lakshmana went and joined the *rishis*. As Rama and Lakshmana lived in the forest, they were wearing clothes suitable to life in a forest; and their shining faces were similar to those of the *rishis*. The situation was such that they were not able to make out who was Rama and who was Lakshmana. (**SSB 1977 p.64**) However, amongst them both, Rama was showing a certain amount of Divine light¹¹³.

On the other hand, Sita could be recognised easily. Sita was alone and the *rishipatnis* recognised her and began talking to her. They were asking questions about her life in the forest. The men, on the other hand, went on explaining the *Vedas* and the discussions centred round the *Vedas*. On the other hand, the women began asking questions and whispering. They came to Sita and asked her, “Has your husband also come with you?” Sita replied, “Yes, I cannot come alone, I cannot live without Him. He has come along with me and He is sitting along with the *rishis*.” The second question which was asked of Sita was, “Who is your husband? Can you find him out among so many of the *rishis*?” Sita was a very noble and modest woman, and could not stand up in the midst of all those present and point to her husband and say who her husband was. She simply bowed her head down and kept quiet. Even then the women did not keep quiet. (**SSB 1977 p.65**) Knowing what was passing through Sita's mind and recognising her reluctance to get up and point to her husband, one of the women asked Sita by pointing at one of the men, “Is that person your husband?” She then replied in the

¹¹³ **SSB 1972 p.79**

negative by just nodding her head¹¹⁴. Another woman came and asked her, “Is that person whose hair is tied up in knots your husband?” She again nodded her head in the negative. In this way, when many women came and asked Sita, pointing at the wrong person and asking the question, “Is that your husband?” she was nodding her head to indicate a negative reply. When Rama who was sitting there was actually pointed out, Sita said neither “yes” nor “no”. She simply exhibited a significant, happy and pleasant smile.¹¹⁵. (*SSB 1972 p.79-80*)

Off and on, Rama used to relate stories of ancient heroes famed in Puranic lore and describe the varied achievements of persons who had mastered the mysteries of austerity. These were heard by Sita and Lakshmana eagerly and with enthusiasm. In the midst of these narrations, Rama used to remember his parents, and remind them of their grief at being separated from them. On these occasions, Sita had her eyes filled with tears at the thought of her father-in-law and mother-in-law. Drops rolled down her cheeks when she pictured the plight of Queen Kausalya. Suddenly, she pulled herself up, with the thought that she was with Rama, the Lion among men, that it was not proper to give in

¹¹⁴ But whenever a wrong person was shown, she would reply in the negative. Locating *Atma* should proceed in this manner. (*SSB 1977 p.65*)

¹¹⁵ Indian culture and the teachings of Vedanta take you through making the statements 'this is not I', 'this is not I', 'this is not I' and so on until you are able to realise what 'I' is. Our Vedanta teaches us something which is exactly similar to this story. If you point at the wrong thing and if that is not the supreme reality, then you say 'no'. Anything that is shown and is not the right thing should call forth the comment 'this is not that', 'this is not that' and so on.. When you put your finger at the supreme reality, the Brahman, then you are in supreme bliss and happiness. Such is the nature of Vedanta of ours. (*SSB 1972 p.79-80*)

to sadness or anxiety in the forest while she was in his presence and that whatever happens must be welcomed as the leela (cosmic play) of her Lord. Thus, Sita spent her days in undiluted happiness in that cottage, with Rama and Lakshmana. They too were guarding her like the lids of the eye against the slightest disturbance or noise that might affect her equanimity, and raise fears in her mind. No worry affected them. No grief or pain or shade of sadness marred their happiness at Chitrakoota. **RKRV Part I p.380)**

Sita's Dream

Even before the hour of dawn that day, Rama had risen from sleep. He communicated to Sita that his father was coming into his consciousness more often than on other days. At this, Sita said, “Lord! You know that I do not get any dreams, any day. But this night I had a very wonderful dream! I can even say it wasn't really a dream. I dreamt that Bharatha and Satrugna had become frail and weak, as a result of separation from you. I dreamt that, finding it impossible to be in Ayodhya without you for a single moment, they are coming to us, with not only the people of Ayodhya, but also the Queens Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi.” Tears gathered in her eyes while she was describing the experience. Rama called Lakshmana near and told him, “Brother, you heard, didn't you, the account of Sita's dream? This does not indicate good tidings; for Sita saw all the others and I saw in my dream only father, father alone, with no association or relation with the rest of them. This strikes me as a bad omen. Come! It is best we take a bath.” Accordingly, the three of them went to the river for the bath. **(RKRV Part I p.441-442)**

THE BROTHERS MEET¹¹⁶

The Queens, Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi, and the ministers, the Royal Preceptor Vashishta, the Pundits and Citizens, the members of the armed forces came near, and were overcome by both grief and joy when they saw Rama. Their sorrow when they looked on Rama in hermits' robes by the side of the lowly hut could not be wiped out by the joy at setting their eyes on their dearly beloved Prince. They wailed and wept, shedding tears of grief and gratitude. The cry, "Rama! Rama!" that rose from their torn hearts sped over the vast expanse of earth and sky. (*RKRV Part I p.444*)

Sita went towards her mothers-in-law, and touched their feet in great reverence. She also prostrated before the feet of the wife of the Royal Preceptor. She met the women who had come from Ayodhya and with due consideration put them at ease, by her sweet welcome. When their eyes fell upon Sita, the Queens wept aloud. The womenfolk who had come from Ayodhya saw the plight of their charming young Princess and they were so overcome with sorrow that they too could not desist from wailing. Coming to know that Emperor Dasaratha had left the body, Sita prostrated before the Queens again and again, saying: "Alas! What misfortune is ours! The Emperor gave up his life because he could not bear separation from us!" Sita felt that the

¹¹⁶ See Chapter, *Bharatha*
 See also Chapter, *Janaka*
 See also Chapter, *Kaikeyi*
 See also Chapter, *Lakshmana*
 See also Chapter, *Sunayana*

news of Dasaratha's departure was as a thunderbolt on her heart. She and the Queens wept for long at the turn that events had taken. Everyone that day could not take either food or drink. They had no mind for either. The entire day and night were spent in sorrow. (*RKRV Part I p.446*)

Sita was engaged in serving the mothers-in-law, anticipating their needs and overeager to serve. She consoled and comforted them. She told them how she was spending her days happily in the forest, lacking nothing, and she made them wonder at her fortitude and skill. They were rendered happy at the thought that she was able to derive so much joy under such adverse conditions. They bore their own sorrow with greater ease, when they saw how Sita was braving her own. (*RKRV Part I p.448*)

ABDUCTION OF SITA¹¹⁷

During the stay of Rama and Sita in a hermitage built by Lakshmana in the Panchavati region, one day, at the behest of Ravana, Maricha the demon assumed the form of a golden deer and began moving about in the vicinity of the *Ashram*. Sita was fascinated by the charming golden deer and persuaded Rama to catch it and bring it to her so that she could play with it. (*SSS Vol.41 p.112-113*)

¹¹⁷ Under Section, *Rama*, See Chapter, *Two Boons - Abduction Of Sita And Search For Sita - SITA ABDUCTED AND THE PLOT OF RAMAYANA UNFOLDS*

*Hear my prayer, O Lord! I love this golden deer
Fetch it for me. O Rama, and fulfil my desire
thereby.
I will play with golden deer,
In this lovely hut that my brother- in- law has built
for me.*

She had never before asked for the fulfilment of any wish¹¹⁸. So Rama went after the golden deer to capture it for her. (**SSB 1996 p.52**)

Rama decided to oblige her as per the divine plan. However, he instructed Lakshmana to stay behind and guard the *Ashram* and Sita from the wily demons, during his absence. As Rama went in pursuit of the golden deer, it went deep into the forest. Finally, Rama lifted his bow and released a fatal arrow on the deer. Maricha in the guise of the golden deer at last fell dead in his real form. However, before he breathed his last, he cried in agony, in a feigned voice of Rama, “Ha! Sita, Ha! Lakshmana.” The cry fell on the ears of Sita and Lakshmana. (**SSS Vol.41 p.113**)

Sita, on hearing the cry implored Lakshmana to go in search of Rama immediately. Lakshmana counselled Sita that no danger could ever befall Rama and that this was all the plan of the wily

¹¹⁸ Sita renounced Ayodhya, the palace and all the dreams of happiness she had, and followed Rama into the forest, when he was exiled; but, the sight of a golden deer aroused her latent desires, and she had to face a series of calamities as a consequence of the emergence of 'attachment' to worldly objects! Time had conspired to keep the roots of desire alive in her heart. (**SSS Vol.7 p.121**)

demons. Sita was not convinced. She even used harsh words that hurt Lakshmana, while compelling him to go to the rescue of Rama. “*Oh! Lakshmana! Perhaps you wish to make me your wife when Rama dies.*”¹¹⁹” Of course, this too was as per the divine plan that would unfold itself in the future. Left with no other option, Lakshmana agreed to go in search of Rama. However, before he left the *Ashram*, he drew a line around the hermitage and asked Sita not to step out of that line under any circumstances till Rama and himself returned. (*SSS Vol.41 p.113-114*)

In fact, after Lakshmana left the *ashram*, Sita too was deeply distressed at her own behaviour towards Lakshmana, She wailed,

*Oh! Lakshmana! My brother-in-law dear!
I spoke bad words about you. Oh! Man of noble
qualities!
Unable to bear those words and deeply hurt
Did you move away from me?
(Telugu song)*

She begged to be pardoned for her unbecoming behaviour. But, alas! What had happened had already happened. The damage had already been done. (*SSS Vol.40 p.193*)

As soon as Lakshmana left the hermitage in search of Rama, Ravana approached the *Ashram* in the guise of a *rishi*. He stood before the *Ashram* and asked for food saying “*Bhavati bhiksham dehi*” (Oh Mother, give me food). (*SSS Vol.41 p.113-114*)

¹¹⁹ *SSS Vol.40 p.191-192*

Sita heard the cry. She knew that it was Ravana. She brought tubers and fruits in her palms, and came through the door and stood outside. But Ravana dared not go near her to receive them. He said, "I shall not come close to any hermitage. This is my vow." He wanted Sita to offer the alms into his hand. Sita replied, "No, I cannot cross the line that was drawn by my brother-in-law. Come yourself, revered guest! Receive it from me here." At this, the mendicant who was really an impersonation, urged, "Lady, I will not cross the line and come beyond it. Nor can I accept alms given from beyond a line. It is not proper for ascetics like me. Come, give it to me, I am hungry. I am very hungry." He acted the part so well, with many a gasp and gesture that Sita decided to give him the alms she had in her hand, crossing the line and getting near him. All this happened in a trice. No sooner did she cross the line than Ravana drew her by the hand and lifted her away into a waiting chariot. He did not pay heed to her lamentations, but drove the chariot into the distance with terrible speed. Sita screamed out, "Oh Rama! Lakshmana! Come and save me from this wicked monster." The anchorites and forest-dwellers around Panchavati heard the cry but could not save the person who lamented. The entire forest faded green to brown, when the voice of agony passed through it. "Oh Rama! Oh Master, save me! Oh save me! Save me from this monster!" that was the cry that reverberated in the forest and made all things that move and do not move, sorrow-stricken.

Sita warns Ravana:

Sita was admonishing Ravana inside the chariot. "Ravana! You are building a royal road for your own destruction. You are effacing your empire, your subjects, your dynasty, completely,

without trace. You are perpetrating this vileness with a laugh on your face; but, the day will come when you will pay for it with tears in your eyes. Mean wretch, this vicious act is unbecoming of a person who has practised austerities like you.” She gave him many a piece of advice and warning. She also called upon Rama and Lakshmana to rescue her. (*RKR V Part II p.56-57*)

SITA IN LANKA

In Ashokavana:

Ravana took Sita to Lanka and kept her in confinement under a tree in the *Ashokavana*. Sita then lamented for her indiscreet act of becoming crazy about a golden deer and the consequences that followed. She lamented, “Oh! Why did that sinful animal (golden deer) come to the vicinity of our hermitage? Why did I develop a fascination for that golden deer? Why did I request Rama to catch that deer and bring it to me?” Of what use is all this repentance at this stage? She found herself in captivity in Lanka. (*SSS Vol.41 p.114*)

Sita too felt very sorry that she had to encounter this pitiable situation because she did not pay heed to Lakshmana’s words. Sitting in *Asoka Vana* in Lanka, she was pondering,

“Will I ever move out of this prison?

Will I ever be able to see Rama?

Oh! My dear brother-in-law Lakshmana!

I hurled several abuses at you, Oh! Noble one!”

She was repenting, “Lakshmana! I am undergoing this punishment for having hurt your feelings.” Sita, however, was spending her time with courage and confidence constantly contemplating on Rama. She assured herself that her own conscience was her witness and none could do anything to her. (*SSS Vol.39 p.239*)

Sita was imprisoned in the Asoka gardens. There was none there whom she could call her own. She was a helpless and weak woman. She gave up food and sleep. Though in a weak condition, she did not give in to the mighty Ravana¹²⁰. (*SSB 1996 p.111*)

¹²⁰ **Virtues—the true wealth**

Her innate strength protected her from any harm. Ultimately, Ravana’s strength turned out to be highly inferior in comparison to Sita’s inner strength. Her strength was associated with Divine effulgence. That strength is inherent in everyone and not merely in Sita alone. That is the reason it is said, “*Mamatma sarva bhutantaratma.*” Starting from the millionaire to the pauper, everybody has this power latent in him. Why must not man utilise this power?

When the lamp is shining in your own house, how foolish it is to go for the light in your neighbour’s house! You would be called a fool. Similarly, you need not conduct any investigations. You need not banish yourself to the forests. You need not perform meditation. All you have to do is to turn your vision inward. Follow the divine command. There is no greater wealth than that. Good virtues alone are the true wealth in this world.

*Good virtues, good intellect, dedication, devotion, discipline,
And duty consciousness—these are the qualities taught by true
education.*

These are the things that a student ought to learn.

Where are these good qualities? What is this body that you are so proud of?

*The bowels are full of excreta, the support is entirely by bones;
All this is covered by the dirty skin.*

Ravana kept three ladies to guard Sita during her incarceration in the *Ashokavana*. One was Sarama¹²¹, the wife of Vibhishana, younger brother of Ravana. The other two ladies were Ajata and Trijata, who were none other than daughters of Sarama. They were very considerate towards Sita, keeping up her sagging morale all the while by their comforting words. Sita wondered whether such good people also existed in Lanka. In fact, it was due to their consoling words and protection that Sita could bear her ordeal courageously. (*SSS Vol.41 p.114-115*)

Hanuman sees Sita

At that time, Sita was in the company of Sarama, the wife of Vibhishana, and her two daughters, Ajata and Trijata. Hanuman found that these three ladies were the only friends of Sita in Lanka.

It was due to the solace and assurance provided by them that Sita survived. (*SSB 1996 p.58*)

Trijata's Dream

Trijata was deeply attached to the Lotus Feet of Rama. She was a pious devotee, who had both worldly wisdom and spiritual

*At every moment, it gives foul odour.
Never does it generate pleasant smells.*

This is the body you are so proud of! What is your true Self? It is not this body. Do not consider the *swaroopa* (form) as the reality. It is the inner nature (*swabhava*) that is important. If the inner Self is developed, the outer body will enjoy happiness by itself. (*SSB 1996 p.111-112*)

¹²¹ See Chapter, *Vibhishana* - **THE SERVICES OF VIBHISHANA'S WIFE AND DAUGHTERS:**

experience. She spoke to her companions keeping watch over Sita, "Comrades, last night, I had a dream, which I must relate to you. But first, let us serve and revere Sita and win her grace. For listen to the story that revealed itself to me in my dream. A monkey entered Lanka, slaughtered the Rakshasas and set the city on fire! Ravana had no clothes on. He was riding, of all animals, a donkey and moving fast in the southerly direction. And his head, I noticed, was shaven close. Besides, I found that his arms were severed from the body. Vibhishana was crowned the emperor of Lanka. Throughout the length and breadth of the land, the name of Rama was resounding. Then Rama sent for Sita. Sisters of the Rakshasa clan! Take note. I never get dreams. I haven't seen any so far. So if I dream at all, know it will certainly come true. It will happen just as in the dream. Moreover, the realisation, in actual fact, of this dream will not take long. Things must happen just as I dreamt, within four or five days." (*RKR Part II p.131-132*)

Ajata too counselled Sita, saying, "Oh! Mother! It is true. I too had a similar: dream. You need not be sorry any more." Both of them gave a lot of love and kindled faith in Sita. In fact, their father Vibhishana was a devotee of Rama. Hence, his daughters too developed devotion towards Rama. (*SSS Vol.39 p.240*)

The Rakshasa women were amazed at the revelation. They forthwith prostrated at the feet of Sita and silently resumed their routine duties. Seeing the behaviour of Trijata, Sita addressed her, "Trijata! Rama Himself must have sent you here to be one of this group that is around me. Truly, it is because there are a few women like you in this Lanka that unfortunate persons like me

are able to sustain our chastity and virtue. Or else, what will be the fate of women like me? You heard didn't you, the expressions Ravana used just now? He has given a month's respite. If Rama does not come within that month, I, or rather, this body, will be cut to pieces and it will be plucked and eaten by vultures and crows. Being the consort of Rama, I can never tolerate that horrid fate for this body. Tell me some plan through which I can get rid of this body sooner."

Hanuman heard these words from the branch of the tree. He was overcome by sorrow, when Sita spoke in that strain of despair. At this, Trijata fell at Sita's Feet and assured her, "Mother! Do not lose hope, Rama is no ordinary being. His might and majesty are unequalled. It will ever be so. You are certain to be saved by him. He will arrive very soon and hold your hand in his. Do not lose courage." She consoled her by loving words and left for home. (*RKR Part II p.132*)

Hanuman then dropped Rama's ring in front of the lady under the tree, to further confirm whether she was Sita. The lady grasped the ring with great ecstasy and showered a volley of questions at Hanuman. She asked him, "Are you the messenger of Rama, or are you a trickster sent by Ravana to deceive me?"

The demons here assume strange forms and indulge in strange deeds." (*SSB 1996 p.58*)

"Is this true, or am I dreaming? Can it be true? How can this golden ring worn on the golden finger of my Lord be found in Lanka? Is this Rakshasa magic or mere hallucination? No, I

should not hesitate any longer, after recognising it as my Lord's, to take it in my hand. It will be a sin if I refrain from handling it." So saying, she took it and placed it on her eyes in reverence. Tears of gratitude flowed from her eyes. "Rama! Are you granting me your Darsan, the joy of your presence through this ring?" she said and raised her head. There she saw a small monkey sitting on a branch of the tree and reciting in deep devotion, "Rama, Rama," continuously.

In a flash, she remembered the incidents in Trijata's dream as related by her. "Ah! Good days seem to be fast approaching. For ten long months, I have not heard the name of Rama pronounced in this Lanka. This day, I am able to see a living being reciting the holy name. I also received the dearly loved ring of my Lord," she exulted. (*RKRV Part II p.133*) The sight of Hanuman, as a messenger from her Lord Rama, gave her great joy because all her thoughts were centred on Rama and Hanuman sang glories of Rama and described how he came to adore Rama. (*SSS Vol.22 p.116*) Inner Charm is the genuine Beauty. Sita interned in *Asoka Vana* in Lanka, was suddenly confronted by a monkey; but, that ugly creature struck her as full of beauty¹²², when it brought her

¹²² Beauty is not present in creation; beauty is present in us, in the nature of atma. There is one example: Sita's mind was filled with sorrow when she was in Ashokavana and Ravana tried to show her many beautiful things and attract her. However, all that beauty caused no attraction to Sita. To make Sita forget her sorrow, he created several attractive things. But on the last day, looking at a monkey who was sitting on a tree and uttering the name of Rama, she found great beauty and attraction and she began to enjoy the beauty of the monkey. Is a monkey beautiful at any time? But the name of Rama which was enshrined in the mind of Sita, joined with the name of Rama uttered by Hanuman, and the two together created the attraction and beauty and the beauty was not in the monkey.

the long awaited message from Rama! The loveliness of the *Vana* (garden), the appealing scenery, the bright beautiful ware that Ravana spread before her could not win her heart; but, the one word, Rama endeared her to the strange monkey crouched on top of the tree under which she was encircled by ogresses. (SSS Vol.8 p.128)

*Hanuman pleaded in many ways with Sita to come with him to Rama sitting on his back*¹²³ ... **Sita** smiled and said, “Hanuman, if I was to sit on our back and go back to Rama, you would be accused of committing the same sin of abduction as Ravana. I do not want you to get such a bad name. Rama himself must come¹²⁴. (SSB 2002 p.119)

Without wasting any time, Hanuman instantaneously leapt across the ocean to convey the message of Sita’s whereabouts, to Rama. While the monkeys were busy eating fruits in Madhavana, Hanuman, forsaking food and sleep, hurried to Rama to convey the good news. He said, “Sri Rama! Sita is verily a jewel amongst women, chaste and virtuous. Her plight is like that of a parrot confined in a cage of arrows. She was surrounded by

When there is prema, whatever we may look at, it will be beautiful and good. The young cow looks attractive to the old crow. We will be disgusted with the sight of a crow but mother crow will always be happy when looking at young crow. It is only a contact with our own *prema* that will make appreciate and be happy. **Viswamitra always proclaimed that these two aspects, beauty and happiness, really come out of our own mind.** (SSB 1977 p.141)

¹²³ See Chapter, *Hanuman* - **Hanuman pleads with Sita to come with him to Rama sitting on his back:**

¹²⁴ See Chapter, *Hanuman* - **Sita refuses to return on the back of Hanuman saying that one has to keep the dharma of pathivratha**

many demons, who were brandishing their swords to kill her. I found Sita trembling at the sight of these terrible women.” Hearing these words of Hanuman, Rama, overcome with emotion, wanted to rush to Lanka to fight Ravana at once. Hanuman and Sugriva restrained Rama and told Him that it would take some time to make arrangements for the battle against Ravana. All the great warriors then rallied together to hold deliberations and devise strategies to defeat Ravana. (*SSB 1996 p.58-59*)

Ravana, the trickster

Meanwhile, Ravana made great efforts to inflict more pain on Sita¹²⁵. He commanded Vidhyut Jihva, an expert in magic, to make an artificial head like that of Rama, so that he could subject Sita to great anguish and sorrow. He also ordered him to make arrows that were of the exact make as those of Rama. Vidhyut Jihva did as he was told. The head and arrows were placed in front of Sita. Ravana then went to Sita and said, “Sita, see the fate of Rama. You have always set your hopes high on Rama. He is dead now.” Sita could not endure all this. She was filled with deep agony.

She joined her hands and said, “Oh Ravana! Do me the favour of chopping off my head and burning my body along with the head of Rama. I cannot survive without Rama. This is my last wish.” Sita started weeping. At that time Ravana received the news

¹²⁵ See Chapter, *Mandodari* - **Mandodari asks Ravana to assume the form of Rama:**

See also Chapter, *Mandodari* - **Mandodari implores Sita to save her Evil Husband:**

from Meghanada that he should see him immediately to discuss an urgent matter, and Ravana left the spot at once. Sarama, the wife of Vibhishana, said to Sita, “Mother, there is none in the world who can slay Sri Rama. Ravana has many magicians who resort to trickery and deceit. The head of Rama is not the real head. Ramachandra is safe and happy. This is simply an artificial head and you should not worry.” She then placed her hand on the artificial head of Rama. The head vanished instantly.

On the second day, Ravana came to Sita and said, “Sita, Rama is going to die in a few hours. You will be my Queen, and my palace will be yours. No one can satisfactorily describe my wealth, my glory, and my valour. I am omnipotent and omniscient. Make up your mind to marry me.” Sita plucked a blade of grass¹²⁶ under her foot and said, “Ravana, your wealth in comparison with Rama’s opulence is as small as this blade of grass. Rama is Immortal, Effulgent, Wise and Eternal. There is a world of difference between you and Rama¹²⁷. You are as low as this lowly blade of grass.” At these words of Sita, Ravana

¹²⁶ Though Sita was imprisoned in Lanka, Ravana did not dare to touch her. He knew that he would be reduced to ashes if he touched her without her consent. He was all the while pleading with her to accept him. When Ravana stooped to the level of denigrating Rama and threatened her, she without even looking at his face, plucked out a blade of grass and threw it before him saying, “You are a mean fellow. You are not worth even this blade of grass. How dare you denigrate Rama in front of me, you vile and vicious wretch”. (*SSS Vol.41 p.115*)

¹²⁷ The demon king Ravana used to coax her frequently to become his queen. However she flatly refused to submit herself to his overtures, saying, “You are in no way comparable to Rama, the embodiment of Truth and Righteousness. “Your might and power cannot be compared to that of Rama.” Such was her intense faith in Rama. One has to develop such strong faith in Divinity. (*SSS Vol.41 p.250*)

became furious and screamed, “Sita, I am giving you only two months’ time; if you do not yield to me, my cook will come here, cut you up into pieces, and serve you as a flavoured dish to me. I will eat your flesh. This is my last warning to you.” So saying, Ravana withdrew. (*SSB 1996 p.64-65*)

Sita spent ten months thus in Lanka. But, she never looked at the face of Ravana. Ravana donned several kinds of vestures, played several tricks and made several promises to Sita during those ten months. But, Sita was unrelenting. She abhorred his very presence castigating him, “Fie on you! You don’t even match the nail of the foot of Rama.” When Ravana started abusing Rama, she lost her temper and declared, “Rama is a man of supreme valour. He is courageous and profound in character. You are a mean fellow and trivial in nature. You don’t deserve to utter even the name of Rama.” Unable to make her submit to his overtures, Ravana left that place giving her time of ten days to bow to his wishes. (*SSS Vol.39 p.239*)

The good tidings

After Ravana had been killed in the battle, Rama bade Hanuman to convey the glad tidings to Sita. Hanuman reached the Asoka gardens in one mighty leap. He was eagerly awaiting the day when he could communicate such joyous news to Sita. Upon his arrival, he placed before Sita this news. (*SSB 1996 p.91*)

Sita pleaded with Hanuman, “Get me the boon of meeting the Embodiment of charm and compassion, my Lord, Rama. Do you not know that all this fighting and killing in war was for my sake, for the sake of restoring me to my Lord? Take me soon to the

Lotus Feet of Rama,” she said plaintively. Hanuman could not bear the anguish that was patent in the words of Sita. He leapt into the sky and reached Rama in a trice. He narrated all that happened during the meeting. Rama gathered Angada, Vibhishana and others and told them to proceed to the place where Sita was and directed them to bring Sita respectfully to his presence. They went to the Ashokavana where she was so long interned. (*RKR V Part II p.263*)

Vibhishana directed that Sita may take bath, wear fine silk clothes and bedecked in jewels, when she moved out of the Ashokavana. But Sita cast aside the suggestion. She said, “Rama is the most precious jewel I have. That one jewel is enough for me. Seeing him is the bath I shall be satisfied with. The prostration I shall do for him is the silk cloth for me. I do not like to wear anything that was once Ravana’s property.” Vibhishana was moved by the depth of her yearning. He asked the maids to respect her wishes. They also said that Sita was desperately wishing for darsan of her Lord. (*RKR V Part II p.263-264*)

Vibhishana said, “Mother! You must prepare yourself to see Rama. I shall get the aerial chariot ready for you.” So saying, he left to make all arrangements. His spouse Sarama and daughters Trijata and Ajata made Sita wear various ornaments and decorated her. Sita was shedding tears. Though this was a happy moment, she recollected all the events of the past. She was looking forward to seeing Rama again and thought:

*I am being released from this prison and am going to see
Rama with my eyes.*

*I am going to see Sri Rama with my eyes soon.
 Lord Rama, who had wedded me, could not keep me with
 Him.
 It has been ten long months since we were separated.
 I am now being released from this prison. I shall be seeing
 Rama again.
 O my dear Lakshmana. How much I had derided you,
 virtuous one!
 How deep must have those words hurt you, my son that
 you had to leave me.*

These thoughts made her feel very sad. At such a time, the news of Rama's victory came like a cool shower. She was struck dumb with joy and could not even speak to Hanuman. She could hardly move. She did not know what to do. She had been waiting eagerly for this good news for ten months. (*SSB 1996 p.91*)

The Vanaras bore the palanquin on their shoulders. The Rakshasa women who had survived, the Vanara warriors, and others were jumping with excitement, on both sides of the road, when Sita passed through. They stood on tiptoe and even jumped high to get a clearer and nearer view. But Sita did not turn to right or left. She bent her head and was sunk in one single thought—Rama. When a little distance had yet to be covered, Sita came down from the palanquin, for, she felt that she should go to her Lord in humility, walking the distance¹²⁸. She walked

¹²⁸ Hanuman bowed before Sita and got a vision of Lakshmi rising out of the waves of the ocean of milk. He felt that, that Vision was enough compensation for all the births he had to undergo. While the palanquin neared the camp, there spread everywhere a sublime splendour from it,

slowly towards Rama. As she neared Rama, the Vanaras standing along the path fell at her feet and cheered, “Jai, Jai Sita Ram.” When she came within a short range, Rama declared that she should not be brought to him immediately, but that she had to go through the Ordeal of Fire!¹²⁹ (*RKRV Part II p.264*)

Fire Ordeal:

But, Rama did not even look at her. He said, “I cannot look at Sita. I have taken birth to redeem this world. I have to set an ideal to this world. People may point an accusing finger at Me for taking back Sita, who had spent ten months in Lanka. I cannot take her back without first putting her to a test.” Sita was shattered. She looked at Hanuman and said, “Oh Hanuman! Had you conveyed this news to me, I would have gladly taken my life there itself. Why did I have to be brought here amidst these *vanaras* (monkeys) and *rakshasas* (demons) to be humiliated thus?” (*SSB 1996 p.92*)

which astonished the *Vanaras* (sub-human or monkey) hordes. Rama sent word that Sita may alight and walk the remaining distance, so that they may fill their eyes with her glory. This is not mentioned in the books. (*SSS Vol.4 p.15-16*)

¹²⁹

Two purposes of Sita's fire ordeal

When Sita was about ten yards away, Rama, who is butter when He melts and steel when He hardens, said, "Stop, I can accept you only after you pass through Fire." Lakshmana swooned at this thunderbolt; the monkeys who had to bring the fuel for the Fire bent under the weight of even twigs. The Fire Ordeal served two purposes- to scorch the slanderous tongues, which haunt the tracks of *Avatars* (Divine Incarnations) at all times; and, to retrieve from the Fire the real Sita who had entered into it, prior to abduction by Ravana. (*SSS Vol.4 p.16*)

Meanwhile, Rama sent word through Lakshmana to light a fire into which Sita was to jump. She was to be affirmed by the God of fire himself as a precondition for Him to take Sita back to Ayodhya. At these words, Lakshmana flared up. He had never spoken against Rama before. Now he said, “Rama! Have You gone mad? Has Your intelligence dwindled? What are You saying? You might have been affected by some fault, but there is none in that great lady Sita. She is a highly chaste lady. She is an ideal for all women, and You are talking so degradingly about her! If this is what You had in your mind, why did she suffer for ten months? Have You considered that?”

Rama knew Lakshmana’s heart and Lakshmana knew Rama’s heart. Upon hearing Lakshmana’s outburst, Rama replied, “Lakshmana, we are now living as ideal¹³⁰ men. We have to set

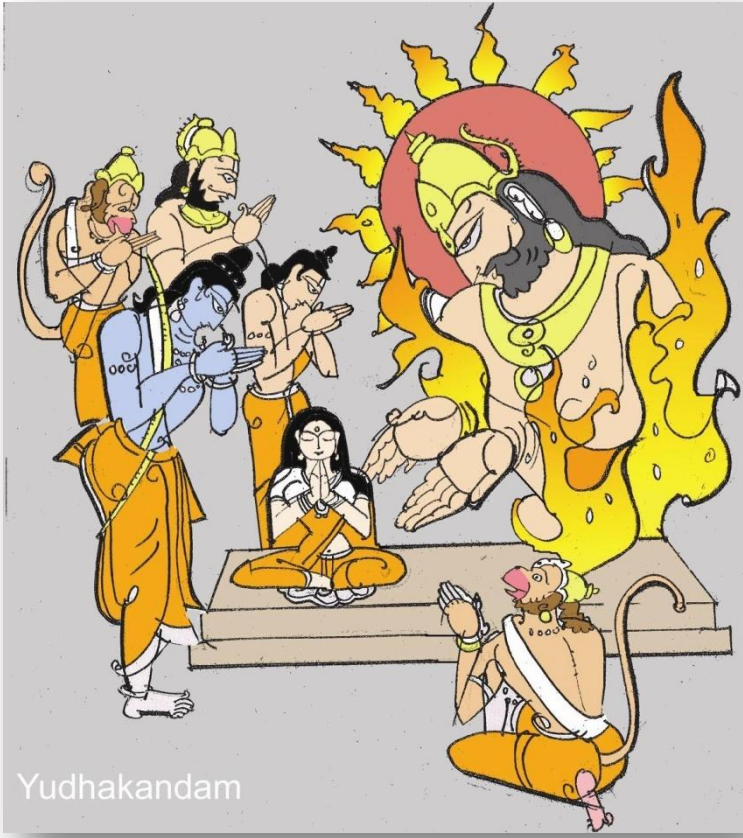
¹³⁰ Students, householders, elders, and youngsters must look at the ideal here. When Sita got down from the aerial chariot, Angada, Sugriva, and the others sat respectfully with bowed heads. But there were some amongst the monkeys who were of low character and they strained their necks to have a look at Sita. Rama then stated that the behaviour of Angada and the others is the character of the virtuous while that of the other *vanaras* is the character of the wicked. The former is the aspect of the human, while the latter is the aspect of the monkeys. What is the attribute of a human being? He bows his head in respect to the elders.

Sita is the very incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi herself. She is the spouse of Sri Rama. She should not be looked at with open eyes. Even Lakshmana himself bowed his head. Though he had stayed with her for ten years, not once did he look at her face. It is the look that prompts the thought. Today, the vision is full of spite and venom. You must have heard many people say that they have been struck down with fever due to someone’s evil eye. Hence, the vision must be under one’s control. (*SSB 1996 p.92*)

standards for men to follow. I know her greatness. But her goodness must be brought out. People say that so and so is a great man. But being good is far more important than being great. Hence I must prove to the world that she is a great lady, but more than that, she is a good lady.” (*SSB 1996 p.92-93*)

The Vanaras were stunned into silence and despair. But they had to go and collect dry sticks and fuel for lighting and feeding the fire for the rite of ordeal. The Vanaras had carried on their shoulders huge mountain peaks and rocks before and during the war with Ravana. Now, those very Vanaras were finding little sticks of dry wood too heavy for their strength, for, their hearts were heavy at the thought of Sita being put through this new trial! Of course, Rama knew that Sita had a spotless character and was the very embodiment of virtue. Vibhishana, Angada, Sugriva and others knew that the fire ordeal was only to convince the world. The fact was, the *Sakthi* that “was” Sita was transmitted and installed in Fire, when they were in the Dandaka Forest. The Sita who was in Lanka was but the Body. The Sakthi or the Vital Core was all the while fostered in Fire by Fire. She had now to pass through Fire so that she might emerge as the real Sita, embodied Sakthi. (*RKRV Part II p.264-265*)

Sita welcomed the rite. For the world will be convinced that her heart was pure and unblemished. She was happy to see the flames leap up. Lakshmana, however, was overcome with grief,



Yudhakandam

Source of the Painting:

Painting by Sri K V Bhima Rao exclusively for this book

for he himself had to supervise the rite. Sita consoled him with her soft counsel. “Lakshmana! When I was married, the Brahmins lit the Fire on the wedding day and sanctified the function. Today, Fire will give me new birth. After that, I will wed the Lord again. Feed the fire well, for that is the right thing to do.” Lakshmana was moved by her pang of separation, her yearning for reunion, her loyalty to righteousness, her attachment to justice and her intelligent analysis of the situation. He shed tears and folded his palms in reverence and stood silent. For, he could find no words to express his feelings. Fixing his gaze on the face of Rama, he piled firewood on firewood and lit the fire till it blazed. Sita was elated when she saw the leaping flames. She had no trace of fear in her mind. She walked towards the fire and standing before it said, “Oh Receiver of Sacred Offerings!

By word or deed or thought I have not dwelt in my mind on anyone other than Rama, my Lord, Oh Purifier. You reside in the heart of every living being. Become as cool as sandal paste to me, when I enter you.” (*RKR Part II p.265*)

With tears flowing down her eyes, she went around the fire and prayed, “If I am indeed the embodiment of Truth, if at any time there has been no evil feelings in me, may this fire cool down. Except for Rama’s name, at every point of time, I had no other thought or name in my mind. But then, when Ravana was taking me away from Chitrakoota, he had caught hold of me and put me on the chariot. What could I do to prevent him from touching me? Even then, I thought of only Rama. If You have decided to test me after all that, I shall obey Your command.” (*SSB 1996 p.93*) “Oh Receiver of sacred offerings! By thought, word and

deed I have not dwelt in my mind on anyone other than Rama, my Lord. I am the daughter of earth and the chaste wife of Rama. If that be so, may I come out of this fire unscathed.” So saying, she entered the fire¹³¹. (*SSS Vol.40 p.196-197*)

*She prostrated before Rama and moved into the Fire*¹³². All the gods and goddesses appeared there¹³³. They were critical of Rama’s action. They remonstrated with Him for knowing everything and yet doing such a foolish deed. But the fact was that Rama was totally satisfied with Sita’s innocence. Otherwise, why would He subject himself to so many difficulties, give up food and drink, come to Lanka and be injured by the Rakshasas?

Once, after a battle with Meghanada, Rama’s body was covered with blood. Lakshmana fainted unable to bear the sight. Such was the love that bound the two. Why would the two face so many obstacles together? Why would they have built the bridge across the ocean? Was it not for Sita? Rama knew Sita’s purity.

¹³¹ Under Section, *Rama*, See Chapter, *Heroism And Heroic Warrior – The War Begins - The Fire Ordeal*

¹³² *RKR V Part II p.266*

¹³³ Dasaratha also came there, to assure Rama that Sita was Purity itself; and also, to satisfy his parental craving to see his son. He appreciated the steadfastness of Rama in the respect he had for his father’s wish; he also saw the *Vanaras* rise again from the battlefield and gather around Rama. The *Rakshasas* (demonic persons) had already attained liberation for they had the vision of God when they drew their last breaths. "The *Vanaras* came down to be My instruments and so they have no death, neither are they born, except at My Command," said Rama. Man too must become His instrument in order to escape death and birth. (*SSS Vol.4 p.16*)

He said, “I may know your nature. But people are like crows that keep cawing about imaginary things.”

Then Sita said, “Will the koel bird give up its lovely singing just because the crow would caw in between. O Rama! People may gossip like crows. But You are the koel. Why must You be wary of what the people say?” Everyone present supported Sita by saying, “She speaks the truth!” People never spot the defects within themselves, but the defects of others appear magnified to them. Rama was not like that. Rama had absolutely no faults within Himself. But He had to behave thus to set an ideal to the people. *(SSB 1996 p.93-94)*

The God of Fire, Agni, appeared in the form of a Brahmin bringing with him the real Sita, and offered her at the feet of Rama, just as the Lord of the Ocean of Milk offered Lakshmi at the feet of Lord Vishnu. *(RKRV Part II p.266)* The lord of fire appeared when Sita jumped into the fire, and handing over Sita to Rama, said, “Sita is a lady of the highest chastity. She is the very embodiment of the Goddess Lakshmi (goddess of wealth). She possesses a heart which is spotless and free of all defects and blame.” *(SSB 1996 p.94)*

The fire god offered *Sita* at the feet of Rama, saying, “Oh Rama, You are the omniscient Lord. You know very well the pure heart of Sita. How then could you not recognise her purity?” Rama declared, “It is true that I am aware how pure and chaste Sita is. Yet, I have a responsibility to make her purity known to the world. It is only to prove her unblemished character to the world

that I ordered her to enter the fire and come out unscathed.” (SSS *Vol.40 p.197*) Rama accepted Sita. (*SSB 1996 p.94*)

She shone on the left of Rama, like a golden lily by the side of a full-blossomed blue lotus. The gathering of gods expressed their joy by sounding heavenly drums and trumpets. (*RKRV Part II p.266*)

HAPPY AYODHYA

After killing Ravana, when Rama returned to Ayodhya along with Sita, the people of Ayodhya welcomed them enthusiastically hailing their return with great festivity Saying, “Rama has come. Mother Sita has come. Ayodhya is shining in the effulgence of their glory. This is a great day for Ayodhya.” There were many great celebrations on their return to Ayodhya and the people were overjoyed to see Rama and Sita whom they revered as Lord Narayana and Lakshmi.

Sita counselled Rama, “Transform this kingdom into a kingdom of joy where everybody can lead their life happily.” (SSS *Vol.40 p.112-113*)

EXILE FOR SITA

Departs to Vaikuntha in her Subtle Body:

It was the practice for messengers from the Court to travel.... all over the empire, and report personally to the Ruler the

information they had gathered during their secret wanderings..... A messenger who had come on this duty approached Rama with a hesitation that a washerman admonishing his wife..... The words struck the heart of Rama like an arrow... He went near Sita and spoke to her pleasantly.... “Janaki!Go to your holy Home.” That very moment, Sita fell at the Feet of Rama and went to Vaikuntha (Heaven) in her subtle body. No being, anywhere, nothing, was aware of this fact. Sita in her gross physical frame only was standing before Rama on Earth¹³⁴. Rama said, “Brothers, as I have ordered, take Janaki into the forest this very morning.” Rama addressed Lakshmana himself directly, “Lakshmana!” he began, “Grasp the implications of what the people are saying. Take Janaki in a chariot and leave her to herself in a deserted place with no human habitation on the bank of the Ganga and then return.¹³⁵”

Lakshmana¹³⁶ heard the command of the Lord... Stocking the chariot with provisions and clothing, he made Janaki sit in it and then, drove off. They reached the bank of the Ganga. *Leaving Sita there*, Lakshmana... remembering his duty to follow the commands of Rama, made his heart as hard as rock and drove fast until he reached the City. (*RKRV Part II p.305-311*)

¹³⁴ Under Section, *Rama*, See Chapter, *Rama's Reign- The Reign Of Righteousness - Rama Rajyam - Exile for Sita: Sita departs to Vaikuntha in her subtle body:*

See also from the same chapter - *Maya Sita leaves to spend her days in Hermitages:*

¹³⁵ Under Section, *Rama*, See Chapter, *Rama's Reign- The Reign Of Righteousness - Rama Rajyam - Exile for Sita:*

¹³⁶ See Chapter, *Lakshmana - EXILE FOR SITA*

Meanwhile, Sita fainted in despair. Of course, it was all playacting. She recovered consciousness after a little while, sat up and poured out her grief in words. “Oh Ramachandra! From birth, my life has been filled with sorrow. Alas! Life clings to my body, however much I am invaded by grief.” She cried out like this for a long time, bewailing her fate. That moment, the sage Valmiki was passing through the forest on his way to his hermitage from the Ganga where he had gone for his ritual bath. Her words fell on his ears. He was surprised that a woman’s voice was calling out for help from the recesses of the forest. He followed the voice to its source, searching all round, and at last, came to her very presence. She recognised him as the sage Valmiki and related to him all that had happened to her. “Oh Monarch of Monks,” she appealed, “I am daughter of Emperor Janaka. I am the wife of Sri Ramachandra. The whole world knows this. I do not know why he has deserted me and cast me away. Can the dictates of destiny be escaped from? Great among Sages! Lakshmana brought me here and left. He did not tell me why he had to do so.”

Valmiki¹³⁷ listened to her tale of woe. He consoled her and comforted her; “Oh Daughter! Your father, the Emperor of Mithila, Janaka, is my friend, my disciple. He has reverence and faith in me. Dear one, do not worry at all. Feel that my hermitage is your paternal home. All will be well with you. You will certainly re-join Rama. You will achieve that desire.” Taking Sita to be his own daughter, he directed her to have a bath in the Ganga and return. After the cleansing bath, she prostrated before

¹³⁷ See Chapter, *Valmiki*

Valmiki, and the sage led her to the hermitage, giving her affectionate assurances. He offered her roots and fruits and pressed her to eat a few. She could not refuse the pleadings of the great elder. Thereafter, Sita spent her days at the hermitage, in constant meditation on Rama and his glory and in sharing peacefully with the pupils and disciples of Valmiki the tasks incidental to the upkeep and maintenance of that spiritual household. The residents of the hermitage as well as Valmiki regaled her with interesting and wondrous stories and entertained her with humorous anecdotes and incidents. (*RKRV Part II p.311-312*)

SITA MOTHERS TWIN BOYS:

Sita who fostered the charming twins, Lava and Kusa, (*SSS Vol.7 p.463*)

Sita gave birth to them in the hermitage of Sage Valmiki. (*SSS Vol.21 p.232*) Sita brought up Lava and Kusa¹³⁸ to be great. (*SSS Vol.36 p.158*)

ENDING THE PLAY:

Sita was desirous of fulfilling the “vow” if that was the wish of Rama. So she accompanied Lakshmana to the presence of Rama. Seeing the Group she made this pronouncement as the Truth: “Oh Gods! Oh Elements Five! I have not dwelt even in my

¹³⁸ See Chapter , *Lava and Kusa*

dream on anyone other than Rama, in mind, speech, body or deed. Oh Mother! Goddess Earth! Take me into yourself.” Immediately, the Earth sundered where she stood, with a great rumbling and from the trench so formed, there arose a Divine Lion-Throne, with the Goddess Earth seated therein. As She came to the surface, She held out Her Hand, and lifting Janaki from the ground, She blessed her thus. “Oh Janaki! From birth until today, no day passed without your sorrowing therein. You streamed tears always. Come! In My Home, be happy.” The next second, they were both out of sight. Her glory spread over the three worlds. This was clearly seen by Lakshmana and others.

They shed tears. Rama acted the role of a saddened person. He thought within himself. “Janaki has gone in consonance with the inclinations of my mind. She was always moving in accordance with the plans I had in mind. Now, we should also proceed to our Vaikuntha residence.” But to others, he appeared sad and grieving a little. Soon he left for the Capital City with his brothers and sons. (*RKRV Part II p.332-333*)

CHARACTERIZATION AND INTERPRETATIONS

There are several inner and subtle meanings in the story of Ramayana. In fact, Sita was not the sister of Rama, as has been portrayed in some texts. If she were to be the sister of Rama, how could King Janaka offer her as bride to Rama? Unfortunately, people do not realise these inner meanings (*SSS Vol.41 p.115*)

The main characteristics of Sita are chastity, tranquillity and good character. When necessity arises she is also able to teach Rama the path of Dharma (*SSB 1972 p.195*)

Sita was the daughter of Mother Earth. She was the daughter of the Universal Mother who supports the *chara* (moving) *achara* (unmoving). She was gem among women who demonstrated by her own example, the principle that a married woman shall walk in the footsteps of her husband. (*Beacons of Divine wisdom Part 1 p.108*)

Meaning of the name, Sita:

The name Sita consists of four sounds or letters ‘Sa’ stands for the *Brahma Thathwa*; ‘E’ for *Srishti Thathwa*; ‘Tha’ for *Preethi* (delight and ‘Aa’ for *smahara* (destruction). The inner meaning of the word ‘Sita’ is Supreme power that is associated with the creation, sustenance and destruction. Sita was not merely ‘Bhoojatha’ (daughter of Mother Earth), but ‘*Para Sakthi*’ (Supreme Power) associated with *Srishti* (creation), *Srishti paripaalana* (sustenance) and *dusta samhara* (Destruction of evil-minded). That is the reason why the epic Ramayana has been extolled as “*Sithayascharitham mahath*” (It is life history of Sita, that is glorious). In fact, it is Sita who was responsible for one of the chapters in Ramayana being named “Sundara Kanda”. All the demons in Lanka right from the King Ravana down to an ordinary citizen were queer in form, nature and thoughts as well. The chapter ‘Sundara Kanda’ contains details as to how Sita who was divinely beautiful in form, nature and thoughts cleansed the queerness of those ugly demons. That is the reason why the chapter was named “Sundara Kanda”. (*Beacons of Divine wisdom Part 1 p.109*)

Sita’s Other Name ‘Raamaa’

Sita has another name, ‘Raamaa’. It is natural to find variations in form, attributes, thinking and behaviour in case of a wife and husband. However, in the case of Sri Rama and Sita there is absolutely no difference in their names and, attributes, thoughts and feelings as also their behaviour. Once, Hanuman had an opportunity to have the darshan of Mother Sita during the absence of Sri Rama Himself took on the form of Sita, a lady. There was absolutely no difference in their forms, especially in the eyes, ears, nose, teeth and lip

movement. That was the manifestation of the “Raamaaa Rama” form (a form in which both Sita and Rama were included). (*Beacons of Divine wisdom Part 1 p.110*)

The Story of Sita

Sita is an ideal woman possessing all the qualities that an Indian woman should possess, such as chastity, purity and so on. Because the *Ramayana* describes all these qualities perfectly, it is called “The Story of Sita”. Sita is the embodiment of all the *dharma*s that are found in the world. She is called Bhoojatha, daughter of the Goddess of earth and she has the qualities of her mother. The main characteristics of Sita are chastity, patience and virtue. When necessity arises, she is also able to teach Rama the path of *dharma*. As an illustration of this, we may consider the situation when Rama said to Sita: “You are very delicate and cannot face the conditions in the forest. I shall return soon and I request you to stay in Ayodhya and take care of your mother-in-law and father-in-law.” Prior to that, Rama went to his mother and told her that he was going into the forest for fourteen years to vindicate the promises of his father and asked her to give him her blessings. The mother then said that she could not leave him for a moment and she too would follow him into the forest. Rama taught some principles of *dharma* even to his mother saying, “Mother, father is old. Stay and serve him. I am going into the forest for his sake and will be back after fourteen years. Serve my father who is like a God to us. To you, your husband is greater than everyone else and must be looked after. While I am away, look after his health.” Recalling this, Sita said, “You have taught some principles of *dharma* to your mother and you have asked her to stay and look after her husband. Does not the same apply to me, your wife? Should I not follow you and serve my husband? Looking after one’s husband is as important to Kausalya as it is to me. Husband is God to a wife. I consider you as God and I must follow you to the forest.” Rama tried then to pacify her in another way. He said, “You may be able to bear all the conditions in the forest but if you come with us, you will be a great responsibility on our shoulders because the forest is full of wild animals and we will have to protect you as well as ourselves. Stay at home and do not cause us trouble.” Sita replied, “You say that there are many cruel animals in the forest and the most cruel animal amongst them is the lion, the king of beasts.

When the lion of my husband is with me, how can other animals harm me?" He said, "Even if there are no animals that may harm you, I will have to leave you at times to go and get something to eat. If at that time, some harm comes to you, it will be very difficult for me or my brother to protect you." At once, Sita replied, "Rama, you are a great warrior, a great hero and a very capable person. This fact was proved when you broke the bow of God Siva. I know your abilities fully. The words you spoke to me just now are not befitting your dignity. If Rama is not able to protect one person, how will he protect the whole world? Even to protect you from such infamy, I should follow you into the forest."

Rama could not say much more. He quietly said to her, "My mother will be stricken with grief at my going away. It would be better if you stay behind and console her." Sita then said, "You are Rama and I am Sita. You are the moon and I am the moonlight. If the moon is in the forest how can moonlight be in Ayodhya? Where there is moon, moonlight will always be there." Rama could not reply. Rama tried to tell her to stay in Ayodhya but Sita did not listen to those words. She said pitifully, "Rama, I am very young. You will be away for fourteen years while your brothers enjoy the company of their wives, and the maids of the palace enjoy the company of their husbands. Seeing this, I will get jealous and bad ideas will form in my mind. To rid me of such thoughts, take me with you." There is no possibility of such bad thoughts ever entering Sita's mind. Rama said, "Your heart is pure, your character is perfect and I know that such bad ideas will never enter your heart." She then fell at his feet and said: "You are going into the forest where there will be many thorns on the way. Because my mother is the goddess of the earth, she will be very kind to me. I can request her to let you go happily on your way. At least for this take me with you." I have narrated this sequence of incidents leading to Sita falling at the feet of Rama because Rama's heart melted only when she fell at his feet. (*SSB 1972 P.195-197*)

Sita is the daughter of the king of Mithilapura whose name was Videha. Videha means one who has no body or one who has no consciousness of his human body. Sita can be identified with wisdom, and Sita marries Rama or becomes one with Rama who is *dharma*.

When wisdom comes together with *dharma*, in the ordinary course, such a good event will meet with some obstacles. It is customary and quite natural that every good thing is met with by some obstacles. Sita is the embodiment of wisdom and she had been taken away by Ravana, who symbolises selfishness and ego.

If one wants his little wisdom to disappear, all that one has to do is to promote his selfishness, jealousy and ego. Ravana symbolises selfishness, jealousy and ego. To make a search for Sita, who had been taken away by the bad qualities, selfishness, jealousy and ego, Rama, in the form of *dharma*, along with the other *Purusharthas*, i.e., *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*, makes a journey. (*SSB 1977 p.81-82*)

During the course of their journey, Rama and Lakshmana had to inflict much violence on the demons. Though Sita had tried to restrain them, eventually she herself became a victim of the evil ways of the demons. Sita had rightly said to Rama that the three evils, namely, untruth, lust, and violence, are the causes of all the evils in the world. Sita, the symbol of *Prakriti* and the embodiment of truth and righteousness, possessed noble conduct. Her example is worthy of emulation by every woman of India. That is why the *Ramayana* is also described as the story of Sita. (*SSB 1996 p.47*)

Insisted on accompanying Rama to forest

Sita too, insisted on accompanying her husband to the forest, since the true wife can keep alive in the company of the husband; she had never before exposed herself to sun and rain; but she spent her days in terror –striking forest, as in duty bound, and unsullied joy. (*Bhagavata Vahini Chapter 35 p. 179*). She renounced everything that she thought would give her comfort in the palace of her father –in- law and preferred to follow Rama into the forest. She secured the Proximity and Presence of the Lord. (*SSS Vol.9 p.204*) What is the reason? Sita thought, believed and put into practice the ideal that to a wife, her husband is of utmost importance. This is the essence of the culture of our land. (*SSB 1973 p.231*)

Desires Keep One Away From Divinity

Sita, who was wanting to be close to Rama, was willing to sacrifice all her ornaments, sacrifice all her wealth and every one of her possessions¹³⁹. Because of this supreme sacrifice, it is possible for her to go close to Rama. (*SSB 1977 20*) However, the enticement of *Maya* at times is irresistible.. If you want Rama to be with you, *Kama* has to be given up. If you have worldly desires, then Rama will not be near you. You have to choose between Rama or *Kama*, that is, either you cling to God or to his *Maya* (*SSB 1973 p.231-232*) When desire for evanescent overcomes man, he is doomed; he becomes distant from the goal. But, alas, when she saw the false golden Deer, she yearned for it, and sent both Rama and Lakshmana after it, so that she might fondle it and feed it and have it as a pet. What was the result of this fatal desire? She was forced to live far away from the Lord and pine for Him in great anguish. (*SSS Vol.9 p.204*)

When Sita thus developed a desire for a worldly object, the very next moment she was separated from Rama, the Divinity. It is common knowledge that the more you develop desires for worldly things, the greater you become distant from Divinity. Less luggage more comfort, makes travel a pleasure. Therefore, we have to reduce our luggage of desires. Sita had all along reduced her desires in order to be in close proximity to Rama. But the moment she developed a desire for golden deer, Rama moved away from her¹⁴⁰. She could not bear the agony of that separation. (*SSS Vol.40 p.183-184*) If our worldly desires and worldly attachments become stronger, we move further away from God. If we cut out the worldly desires more and more, we get closer and closer to *Paramatma*. (*SSB 1977 20-21*)

¹³⁹ Before going to the forest, Rama distributed his wealth to the poor. Sita also followed Rama and distributed clothes and jewels. Thus, she attained Rama by leaving her worldly desires. . (*SSS Vol.33 p.134*)

¹⁴⁰ In the first place when she removed *Kama* (the desire for possessions) she became one with Rama. The meaning of this episode is, so long as you are tied to *Kama*, you cannot hope to get Rama or God. (*SSS Vol.27 p.108*)

Today's man likewise is bound by desire. When you give up desire, you can attain God.

Na Karmana Na Prajaya Dhanena Thyagenaikena Amrutathwa Manasu

(Immortality can be attained only through sacrifice; neither wealth nor progeny nor good deeds can confer it).

You can attain Rama only through sacrifice. From the *Ramayana*, you have to learn the lesson of sacrifice. You have to install the principle of Rama in your heart. Rama practised *Sathya* and *Dharma* all His life. You should firmly adhere to these principles in your life¹⁴¹. (*SSS Vol.33 p.134*)

Law of Karma:

But Sita's words at that time exceeded all reason. It looked as if she was not thinking clearly at all. She started uttering very harsh words. Lakshmana could no longer bear those harsh words. Therefore, he unwillingly left the place because he had no alternative. The words that Sita uttered while urging Lakshmana to go were such an innocent person like Lakshmana did not deserve them at all. Sita was not an ordinary woman. She was the consort of Narayana Himself. She was the incarnation of Lakshmi Devi. In spite of all that, the inevitable law by which one has to experience the results of one's own karma was to be demonstrated here in that situation.

After the death of Ravana, when Sita was asked to go through the ordeal of having to walk into fire to prove her purity, Rama uttered several harsh words because He wanted to test her and set an example to the world. For ten

¹⁴¹ The *Ramayana* is replete with many lessons for mankind. It tells us that worldly tendencies lead us to sorrow, whereas spiritual tendencies lend contentment and happiness to mankind. Sensual pleasures are like passing clouds. These pleasures give temporary joy, whereas *Atmic* realisation bestows eternal Bliss. There is no sorrow for those people who live in the Bliss of God. But unfortunately, people today do not wish to follow the example of the great devotees of God, who live in eternal Bliss. To people, *abheesta* (desire) has become dearer than *adarsha* (ideal). Desires are ephemeral, whereas ideals are eternal. (*SSB 1996 p.47*)

months, Sita had been waiting for the vision of Rama and when Rama appeared, He never showed any compassion, but was even using very harsh words. When Sita was in tears, Rama would show no kindness and no compassion. On the other hand, He was so harsh so harsh that he said, “Sita, I will not show any grace to you. You can choose to remain and live with Lakshmana or Bharatha.” Sita was not an ordinary person, The moment she heard such words from Rama, she realised that this was the result of the harsh words she had used when talking to Lakshmana. The result of one’s own Karma is so invincible that one can never escape it This situation in Ramayana illustrates the law of Karma very well and sets an example to human beings. It teaches human beings always to be good, to do good and see good. (SSB 1977 p.30)

The source of joy

During her separation from Rama and her captivity in the Asoka gardens, Sita was feeling despondent. Ravana had decorated the gardens in a most pleasing manner, in the foolish hope that by seeing these decorations, Sita would accept him. Sita did not succumb to this worthless and temporal beauty around her. However, when a small monkey sat on the branches and sang the glory of Rama:

*Rama, Rama, Rama, Sita;
Having taken birth in the Solar race and earning
the love of Sita,
Releasing Ahalya from the Rishi’s curse and
blessing His devotees
This is Lord Sri Rama...
Rama, Rama, Rama, Sita.*

Sita heard it with great delight. She was anxious to know who was singing the glory of her Lord in this land of *rakshasas* (demons). She lifted her head and looked around. Is a monkey a pleasing sight? Does it have any beauty? It has a funny appearance. But at that time, the monkey looked most beautiful to

Sita¹⁴². That beauty lay in the singing of the name of Lord Rama. When she heard the name of her beloved, she was delighted. That is why it is said that ‘Beauty is joy.’ That joy lends substance to life. Beauty without joy is of no use. In this way, the *Ramayana* teaches the value of beauty and joy.

What was it that gave Sita and Rama enormous joy? It was nothing but the happiness of the people that gave extreme joy to them. The practice of Truth and Righteousness by the people gave joy to Sita and Rama. They never asked anything else from the people. They were always giving away to people several things and looking after them with much love. It was always down the ages; this has been the feature of all Avatars. (*SSB 1996 p.106/107*)

Great Pathivratha:

Day in and day out, she was contemplating only on Rama and none else. No other thought developed in her mind. That is how she became a great *pathivratha*. Finally when Rama killed Ravana and released her from captivity, He subjected Sita to a test, before taking her back into His fold. He directed her to enter the fire and come out unscathed. The god of fire appeared before Rama and testified, “Sita is a great *pathivratha*. She does not at all think of any other matter but constantly contemplates on Your name.” Why did Rama put Sita to such a test? It is only to make the world know about her chastity. Later, when Rama returned to Ayodhya and started ruling His kingdom, a washerman engaged in a quarrel with his wife commented, “Sri Rama took back His wife Sita who lived for ten months in Lanka in the captivity of Ravana. I am not so foolish.” The news reached Rama. Again Rama put Sita to test by forsaking her. He knew that she was a great *pathivratha*, but he took decision to make the world know about her chastity.

¹⁴² Sita was interned by the cruel King Ravana in the most beautifully laid-out garden in Lanka called Ashokavana, the forest of No-sorrow. The flowerbeds, lawns, trees and creepers, bowers and groves were most pleasing to the eye and refreshing to the mind. But, Sita derived no joy there from! She found therein only empty vanity, lust for power and foul pleasure. She felt real Ananda when an ugly monkey started repeating the name of Rama from the branch of the tree under which she sat! That name was for her the source of unfailing Ananda. (*SSS Vol.6 p. 40-41*)

There is no other individual who can equal the chastity of Sita. Rama wanted to prove the chastity and devotion of Sita to the world. (SSS Vol.40 p.184)

Sita too kept up the *Dharma* of women. She declined to return to Rama on the shoulders of Hanuman for she said, she would not of her own will contact another male; nor would she deny Rama the chance of proving his prowess by destroying the wicked person who stealthily carried away His Consort. That is the *dharma* of a *pathivratha* (chaste woman)¹⁴³. (SSS Vol.4 p.293)

Ideal Wife

Sri Rama was accompanied by Sita in *Treta Yuga*, who led the life of an ideal wife and set an example to mankind in chastity. Sita in spite of the great difficulties she encountered while living in exile and spending ten long months in captivity in Lanka, never lost her poise. She steadfastly held on to Ramanama with single - minded devotion. She never wavered even. She gave up food and sleep totally and constantly contemplated on Ramanama. She could not visualise any other form except that of Sri Rama, who was *Ekatma sarva bhutantaratma* (one *atma* that dwells in all beings) Even in birds and beasts, she was seeing only the form of Sri Rama¹⁴⁴ That one *atma principle* is referred to *Hiranyagarbha*, which is pure gold. Pure gold is always referred to as 24 carat gold. (SSS Vol.40 p.182)

¹⁴³ These ideals have weakened now; women as well as men are tempted to yield to the convenience of the moment; they do not attach importance to the deeper springs of righteousness. Tree shade or tent, what we want is sleep, they seem to say. The end justifies the means, that is the philosophy. Fair ends through foul means, how can this be right? He who has to instal Rama in his heart is sheltering a beast therein. What a tragedy! (SSS Vol.4 p.293)

¹⁴⁴ **Dharma of the wife – Prapatthi**
When Sita was fixed in the Dharma of the wife, she saw Rama in all beings. Though she was surrounded by frightful female monsters, she did not notice them; though she was interned in charming garden, named Garden of No-grief (Asoka), she did not see any flower around her. Her eyes, her mind, her thoughts were filled with Rama only. This is the condition of Prapatthi, surrender of all faculties to the Lord. (SSS Vol.6 p.98)

Sita was prepared to face any trouble and make any sacrifice for the sake of her husband. She sought no comfort for herself. She dedicated her life to the service of Rama. (*SSS Vol.21 p.87*)

Hanuman said to Rama: Sita is verily a jewel amongst women, chaste and virtuous. (*SSB 1996 p.58*)

Sita’s wise counsel to Rama

Sita also tendered wise counsel to Rama and advised Him not to destroy all the demons. She suggested that only those who committed the evil deeds should be punished. Justice does not lie in destroying the entire clan. Women are great because they show the right path to men. They are in fact the light of wisdom in the world. They, therefore, deserve protection and reverence. Sita symbolises *Jnana Thathwa* (principle of wisdom). Sita told Rama that goodness was universal, irrespective of caste, creed and community. It is because of women like Sita that men have made progress in life. (*SSS Vol. 37 p.103*)

Feelings depend on our possessions, be it arms or wealth. Sita once told Rama: “Lord! These animals living in the forest have done no harm. Is it not a great sin to harm these creatures when they have not disturbed You in any way? The Rakshasas are moving about in the Dandaka forest. None of them have crossed Your path. Then why have You taken upon Yourself to harm them? These thoughts of killing and harming are fostered in You because of the weapons You carry. If You keep these weapons away, such thoughts would not occur. In You are present Truth and Righteousness; but there is also the quality of violence that appears to negate the good qualities. Keep violence at a distance You will then become an embodiment of non – violence.”

Sita illustrated this point with a good example. Indra once saw a sage meditating. He wanted to test if the mendicant was in deep meditation or was just pretending superficially. He transformed into a soldier and appeared before the sage with a huge sharp sword. He said: “O sage! I am going on an urgent mission. The sword is highly valuable. I propose to leave it in your custody. I shall collect it upon my return. Please keep it safe till then.” The

sage agreed and gave his word to guard the sword. From that moment, his entire mind was only on the sword. He had to take the sword wherever he went! This was because he had given his word to protect it. However, because he had the sword with him, certain violent thoughts started invading his mind. Gradually, the good effect of all his penance was diminished. What is the reason? It is the effect of the object. (*SSB 1996 p.122*)

Glorius Example of Sita's Noble Charater

Lakshmana set out on a journey to a *Munipalle* (a place where hermits reside) to leave the pregnant Sita there, as per the command of Sri Rama. Sita told him "Oh! Lakshmana! There is reason in Rama sending me to the forest for fear of getting a bad name in society. The duty of the king is to provide good governance. He has to lead an ideal life so that others can emulate his qualities. He had to work for the welfare of all people in his kingdom irrespective of whether one belongs to him or otherwise., in a spirit of total sacrifice. I don't feel sorry even if Rama forsakes me. His glory and reputation keep me happy. Long live His divine glory!' This is gloriousexample of Sita's noble character. (*Beacons of Divine wisdom Part 1 p.120*)

Noble Mother

Lava and Kusa could become powerful and famous due to their noble and virtuous mother Sita. Amma (mother) is the first word that man picks up in life. The first letter of the word 'Amma' also happens to be the first letter of the alphabet. (*SS June, 99 p.141*)

Every person, man or woman, should respect the parents, install the Divine in the heart and pray to God constantly. It is everyone's duty to bring a good name to the parents. It was because of the noble behaviour of Lava and Kusha¹⁴⁵ that their mother, Sita became renowned. When Lava and Kusha were engaged in a battle with Rama, Lava aimed an arrow at Rama with a prayer that if their mother Janaki was a *Sadhvi* (a supremely noble woman) the arrow should render Rama unconscious. Rama became unconscious when the arrow hit him. See what happened. The mere thought of his mother lent so much power to his arrow!

¹⁴⁵ See Chapter, *Lava And Kusha*

This shows that when you cherish the mother and seek God’s grace, the blessings of the mother become more powerful. (*SSS Vol.30 p.109*)

Sita’s compassion

Here, there is another story. When Hanuman went to Sita to convey the glad news, he said, “Mother! I have to convey glad tidings to you. But I must also seek your permission to carry out a task. These demons, who had troubled you so long, must also be killed. I shall tear them to pieces. Pray, grant me permission to do so.” Sita then said, “Son! There is nothing to blame them for. They have only been executing the command of their master. So, it is the fault of their master, not theirs.” (*SSB 1996 p.94*) *In fact, I suffered not because of these demons, but because of separation from Sri Rama.*¹⁴⁶”

She then narrated a story to Hanuman. A hunter once went shadowing a tiger. But it caught sight of him and started to chase him. The hunter ran and climbed up a tree. The tiger kept a patient vigil below while the hunter waited for it to move away. The hunter then looked up and saw a bear on the higher branches. The tiger addressed the bear, “O bear! This is my prey that I have been chasing for such a long distance. It has now climbed the tree. Send my prey down to me, so that I may feed on it. The bear then said, “O tiger! This tree is my residence. The hunter has sought shelter here as a guest. It is my bounden duty to protect him. Hence I cannot push him down.” But the tiger still did not give up and leave. Soon, the bear fell asleep. The tiger then addressed the hunter, “O hunter! I am interested only in my meal. It does not matter if it is you or someone else. I shall spare you and let you go, provided you push down that sleeping bear to me. I shall eat him and then go my way.” This hunter was infested with evil feelings. Out of sheer selfishness, and in order to save himself, he pushed down the sleeping bear. The poor bear, while tumbling down, managed to hold on to a branch and saved itself from death. This is the protection that good people are always given. The bear was a kind soul, and its goodness saved it. It is not good to repay kindness with harm. The bear slowly climbed back. The tiger then told the bear, “O bear! Despite your having shown such kindness to this man, he has repaid it by harming you. He is one without any sense of gratitude, having forgotten the good done

¹⁴⁶ *SS June, 98 p.143*

by you. Hence, it is wise to send him down.” Then the bear answered, “Son! Each man’s sin is his own, his merits are his own. He will reap the consequences. Doing good is my nature, doing bad is his nature. He will suffer for his sin. I shall reap the benefits of my goodness. I cannot push him down.” (*SSB 1996 p.94-95*)

Narrating this story, Sita said: “No doubt these demons put me to a lot of suffering without knowing what in truth and what is Dharma. Being the consort of Rama, I cannot stoop down to their level and seek revenge. I do not want to cause harm to anyone.” (*SSS Vol.32 Part I p.190-191*)

Sita then continued, “Similarly, my nature is that of compassion. Hanuman, though they have put me to much trouble, I cannot wish to put them to death for that. Giving trouble is their nature. Suffering with tolerance is my nature. Hence, do not punish them.” Hanuman was thrilled on listening to this¹⁴⁷. (*SSB 1996 p.95*)

Hanuman said, “O mother, it is but natural that you, being the consort of Lord Rama, are broad – minded and noble hearted. You are the embodiment of Dharma. It is a mistake on my part to think that you would permit me to punish these helpless demons,” Then Sita said, “Hanuman, not only me but all the women are endowed with noble qualities like compassion and love.” (*SSS Vol.32 Part I p.191*)

Sita Principle

Sabari replied, “No woman who knows the Rama- principle will be ignorant of the Sita-principle¹⁴⁸, that Gem of womankind, that Crown of virtue, that Light of femininity.

¹⁴⁷ In this world, there are several who have obtained kindness and yet repaid kindness with harm. Such people are demons. But he who returns good for harm is the very embodiment of Divinity. (*SSB 1996 p.95*)

¹⁴⁸ See Chapter, *Sabari - What Guru Rishi Mathanga has taught her – Sita Principle- Sabari develops inner Fire of Yoga and reduces her body to ashes – her breath merges in the Rama:*

Sita Sanctified the Entire Earth

Sita always used to contemplate upon Sri Rama’s divine name and form. When Rama decided to abandon her in the forest giving weight to the words of an illiterate villager in a remote corner of His kingdom even though Sita was pure and unblemished, she never found fault with Him. On the other hand, she considered Sri Rama’s happiness and welfare as her own. She could bear her separation from Sri Rama with fortitude and quiet dignity and got her twin sons Lava and Kusa educated in the Royal disciplines of Astras and Sastras (arrows and weapons). She demonstrated her noble character to the entire world upholding the Truth and Righteousness so assiduously followed by her husband Sri Rama. She gave birth to two sons, Lava and Kusa who were Embodiments of *Jana* (wisdom) and through them she spread the *Rama Katha* (The story of Sri Rama) to the whole world. Thus Sita sanctified the entire earth. (*Beacons of Divine wisdom Part 1 p.108-109*)

Remember always that it is easy to do what is pleasant; but it is difficult to be engaged in what is beneficial. Not all that is pleasant is profitable.

Success comes to those who give up the path strewn with roses, and brave the hammer-blows and sword-thrusts of the path fraught with danger.

- *Bhagawan Sathya Sai Baba*

8.2 URMILA

Among men, each one is himself the cause of his fortune, good or bad. He is himself the builder, the architect. Fate, destiny, predetermination, the Will of God—every one of these explanations is toppled by the principle of Karma. God and man can be reconciled and affiliated only on the basis of this Sutra or principle of Karma. When man realises that God has no share in causing his suffering and that he is himself the sole cause, that no blame attaches to any other person, that he is the initiator as well as the beneficiary—the cause and the effect—of his acts, that he is free to shape his future, then he approaches God with a firmer step and a clearer mind.

--Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

URMILA

In Hindu epic Ramayana, Urmila was the daughter of King Janaka of Mithila and the younger sister of Sita. She was the wife of Lakshmana, the younger brother of Lord Rama. They had two sons, Angad and Dharmaketu.

When Lakshmana was leaving for Vanvas she asked him to take her with him. But Lakshmana refused, with the reason that she had to take care of her in-laws. In many dramas of Ramayana it has been shown that she obeyed her husband's order by taking care of her in-laws. She was supposed to be very beautiful. Urmila means the person who has met (mila) the Heart (Ur). She remained a faithful wife for 14 years. It is said that Lakshmana asked her not to shed tears when he left to the forest. She sees her husband go by, she witnesses the death of her father-in-law and despite that she does not shed a tear. Most poems describe the anguish felt by Ram and Sita, but not many extol the many virtues of Urmila. From the story of Ramayana it is believed that Urmila's misery was even worse than Sita being away from her husband for 14 years. Though not much text is available about her role in Ramayana, it is also said that Lakshmana asked her to sleep all the time when he was away, in exile with Lord Rama.

She slept for all the fourteen years in which Lakshmana was away; she neither opened her eyes once nor did she eat or drink.

- *From Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia*

URMILA¹⁴⁹: Wife of Lakshmana, daughter of Kushadwaja¹⁵⁰, brother of Janaka. (*Glossary of the Vahinis*)

HER BIRTH

Urmila was the daughter of Saaka, the brother of Janaka. (*SSB 1996 p.32*)

Sita was born of mother earth and Urmila was Janaka's real daughter (*SSS Vol.35 p.120*)

HER MARRIAGE

Janaka¹⁵¹ started making preparations for the wedding of his daughter to Rama. Kushadwaja was the brother of Janaka. He had two daughters named Mandavi and Sruthakeerthi. King Janaka too had a second daughter Urmila. As the marriage preparations were going on Sage Vashishta consulted Kusadhwaja and proposed that his two daughters be given in

¹⁴⁹ Also spelt as **Urmilaa**

¹⁵⁰ Kushadwaja (Kushadhvaja): Brother of King Janaka; King of Sankasya. (*Glossary of the Vahinis*)

¹⁵¹ See Chapter, *Janaka - Proposals for Lakshmana, Bharatha and Satrugna:*

marriage to Bharatha and Shatrughna. Kushadwaja promptly agreed. Janaka shed tears of joy at the turn of events and was prepared to give his second daughter Urmila to Lakshmana¹⁵².
(SSB 2002 p.55-56)

Highly Virtuous

Sita, Urmila, Mandavi and Sruthakeerthi were highly virtuous. They came from a highly reputed family. King Janaka was known to have mastered his senses. He was an acknowledged expert in Jnana Yoga. Daughters from such a family cannot be ordinary mortals. (SSB 2002 p.59)

Life of Sacrifice

While Sita felt extremely sad at the thought of separation from Rama and accompanied Him to the forest, Urmila showed exemplary spirit of sacrifice, (she was not at all perturbed by the thought of separation from her husband¹⁵³) and felt that her husband Lakshmana got the rare opportunity of serving Sita and Rama in the forest for 14 years. But Urmila does not find a place of prominence in the Ramayana. Both Sumitra and Urmila were highly pious and virtuous. They lead a life of sacrifice.

She was a Painter

Lakshmana went to his wife Urmila to inform her about his decision to go with Rama. Urmila was highly virtuous. Her spirit of Sacrifice and generosity was unparalleled. Being unaware of the happenings, she was painting a picture of Rama's coronation.

¹⁵² See Chapter, *Lakshmana - Lakshmana marries Urmila:*

¹⁵³ *SSS Vol.40 p.111*

She wanted to send it to her father Janaka. As she deeply engrossed in her work, all of a sudden Lakshmana entered and called her in a raised voice. She was startled and at once stood up. As she got up in a hurry, she accidentally spilled over the paint on the picture she was painting. She felt sad having spoiled the picture. (*SS May 2002 p.158*) She lamented, “Alas! This beautiful picture of Sri Rama’s coronation scene is totally spoiled now.” (*SSB 2002 p.61*)

Then Lakshmana said, ‘Rama’s coronation is stalled because of Kaikeyi, and the picture of coronation that you are painting is spoiled because of your husband Lakshmana. So, don’t worry about it.’ (*SS May 2002 p.158*) She had spent the entire fourteen years painting the pictures of Sita and Rama. (*SSB 2002 p.89*)

Urmila happy that her husband was lucky to serve Sita and Rama:

Lakshmana conveyed his decision to Urmila to accompany Rama to the forest. Will any wife keep quite when she comes to know that her husband is going to the forest for 14 years? Urmila could have asked many questions: “why should you follow Rama? You are under no obligation to go to the forest. Only Rama is ordered to go. So, you need not go with Him. Any ordinary woman would have argued in this manner. But Urmila did not raise any objection. In fact, she was very happy that her husband got an opportunity to serve Sita and Rama. She said, “You are very lucky to have got this great opportunity. Please follow them without wasting a minute.” She asked him to go with Sita and Rama, saying, “I don’t want to come in the way of your going

with Sita and Rama. Please do not waste even a minute. Go with them at once and be in their service” (*SSS Vol.35 p.98*)

Urmila - Her spirit of Sacrifice unparalleled:

Take, for instance, the example of sisters-in-law of Rama. In families today, there is no harmony between the wives of brothers. But, look at how Lakshmana’s wife, Urmila, behaved. She told Lakshmana that he was fortunate to have the opportunity to serve Rama, which had been denied to her. She said: “I would also like to come with you. But if I come, my presence will detract your single-minded service to Rama and Sita. I shall stay back, while you dedicate yourself wholeheartedly to their service.” Urmila thus made a greater sacrifice than even Sita. (*SSS Vol.24 p.63*)

As Urmila was endowed with a great spirit of sacrifice, she was not at all perturbed by the thought of separation from her husband getting the opportunity to serve Rama and Sita, she said to Lakshmana, “Sanctify your time by serving Rama and Sita. Very few have such a great fortune. Go happily. “Saying thus, she bade farewell to Lakshmana. (*SSS Vol.40 p.111*)

Her broadmindedness and utter selflessness

Urmila did not pressurise him to allow her to accompany him. She entreated him to serve Sita and Rama with utmost devotion. She said, “Think of their well-being always and serve them diligently. Forget me altogether for the next fourteen years.” Will any wife speak in such a selflessness manner? No. Her broadmindedness and utter selflessness moved Lakshmana to tears. He praised her, saying, “Urmila, I never knew that you

were so broadminded. I will always treasure your noble intentions in my heart. Urmila said, “Don’t think of my noble intentions. Think of the nobility of Sita and Rama and obey their command. See to it that they are never put to any inconvenience.” It is difficult to find many examples of nobility and sacrifice set before the world by Sumitra and Urmila. (*SSS Vol.35 p.124*)

Urmila asks Lakshmana a promise before going to the forest: (Lakshmana) informed her that he was accompanying Rama and Sita to the forest to serve them. She was very happy with his decision. She entreated him to serve Sita and Rama with utmost devotion. She said. “Dear husband, my mother-in-law Sumitra gave birth to you and your brother Satrughna to tread the path of service. You are meant to serve Rama. And Satrughna has to serve Bharatha. So, discharge your duties. (*SS May 2002 p.158*)

She said, “You are going to live in the forest without me for 14 years. It is possible that you may think of me and mention my name at some time or the other. So, I want you to promise that you would not think of me or mention my name at any point of time¹⁵⁴..If you think of me you will not be able to serve Sita and Rama wholeheartedly¹⁵⁵.” Contemplate constantly on the Divine Names of Sita and Rama and serve them with all sincerity and devotion. If I accompany you to the forest, you may not be able to devote your entire time to their service. I will stay back not to become an impediment in your way”. Hearing the words of

¹⁵⁴ *SS May 2002 p.141-144*

¹⁵⁵ *SS May 2002 p.158*

Urmila, Lakshmana was surprised and elated, “Can one find such a noble and devoted wife anywhere in the world?” he thought to himself. He took leave of her and left the place immediately. (*SS May 2002 p.141-144*)

Urmila’s courage and strength of Character:

Urmila’s courage and strength of character now came to the fore. Lakshmana had already informed her that Sita too was accompanying Rama to the forest. Urmila was thrilled that her sister would accompany Rama and serve him. But she did not insist on following Lakshmana. On the contrary she told Lakshmana, “Lord! I know that you are proceeding to the forest with the sole objective of serving Sita and Rama. May you succeed without any obstacles? You must spend your days and nights in steadfast service to Rama and Sita. You need not worry about the welfare or even think about me. Never be concerned that you are not present by my side at Ayodhya to look after me. Forget Ayodhya itself because henceforth, the forest is your Ayodhya itself. This Ayodhya without Sita and Rama is the forest. Hence, do not give any scope for concern about me. On my part I shall happily contemplate on you and spend my time here.” Urmila thus gave tremendous courage to her husband. She felt that Lakshmana’s service to Rama and Sita would be disturbed if he constantly thought of her. Hence she extracted a promise from her husband that he would not even think about her during the course of exile for fourteen years. She proposed, “In the forest Rama will be your father and Sita your mother. Your primary concern should be to serve them faithfully. Hence, forget all of us here.” This was the promise she took from Lakshmana before cheerfully sending him to the forest. Kausalya

might have grieved a little, but not Urmila. This is the attribute of an ideal daughter-in-law. She must always encourage her husband by giving him strength appropriately. A housewife is also called “*Grihalakshmi*’ and *Dharmapatni*. Urmila discharged her duty as *Dharmapatni* encouraging Lakshmana to tread the path of righteousness. (*SSB 2002 p.61-62*)

LESSONS TO BE LEARNT FROM URMILA’S CHARACTER:

Urmila was King’s Janaka’s own daughter, whereas Sita was his foster daughter who was picked up from earth while ploughing it. Sita was *Sakti Swarupini* (Embodiment of Primal Energy). Since she was born of earth, she had one hundred percent magnetic power. So also Sri Rama, who was *Paramatma*, verily. That is the reason why King Janaka gave his daughter Sita in marriage to Sri Rama. His own daughter, Urmila was married to Lakshmana, who was none other than *Adisesha* (the serpent upon whose coils Lord Narayana reclined), who supports the entire earth. Urmila was a woman of soft nature. She never developed a desire for the objective world. She always led a simple and pious life, unmindful of the bodily comforts. The daughter of King Janaka had no attachment to the physical body. (*Beacons of Divine wisdom Part 1 p.127*)

Good conduct, good actions:

Bharatha¹⁵⁶ took Hanuman to Urmila and introduced him. She never stepped out of her room. Wherever she was at the time of Lakshmana’s departure to the forest, she remained in the same room for fourteen long years until his return. Such was her determination. She asked Hanuman as to where he was coming from. Hanuman narrated to her in detail whatever happened right

¹⁵⁶ See Chapter, *Bharatha - Bharatha mistakes Hanuman for Rakshasa -- Nobility of Sumitra and Urmila and their faith that Lakshmana was under Divine care and protection.*

from the time Lakshmana fainted in the battlefield. On listening to hanuman's narration, Urmila laughed and¹⁵⁷ she said, "Hanuman, don't you know even this? The very breath of Lakshmana is filled with the divine name of Rama. How can any danger befall with such a person¹⁵⁸? Therefore, he is perhaps sleeping peacefully. All the pain and suffering must be Rama's alone. No danger can befall my husband. He will always remain safe." What we need to recognise here is that the wives of the four brothers were virtuous and noble as their husbands. The happiness and prosperity of the husbands depended on the noble qualities of their wives. The good conduct and good actions of the wives were also responsible. Their character gave their husbands tremendous support. (*SSB 2002 p.89*)

Embodiments of truth and righteousness

The sense of devotion and surrender of Urmila and Sumitra have not been given any place of prominence in the Ramayana. They were embodiments of truth, righteousness and sacrifice. Their ideals are the beacons of ideal life for the world. Everyone should become a Su-mitra (good friend) and a Su-putra (ideal son). The country needs ideal men and women. (*SSS Vol.35 p.126*)

Nobility of Heart:

Urmila had a very compassionate heart. She always entertained noble thoughts. She did not feel sad even for a moment when her husband Lakshmana accompanied to the forest. She was always contemplating on Sri Rama during his exile. Not only she, the wives of Bharatha and Satrughna (Mandavi and Sruthakeerthi) were also engaged in constant contemplation of Sri Rama and praying for His return to Ayodhya. Thus, when they were in constant contemplation of Rama, their strength increased day by day. If you analyse the underlying meaning of every incident in Ramayana, all of them point to only one principle – the principle of unity; unity between the brothers, unity between their wives, etc. ...During the entire period of 14 years of Rama's exile to the forest, all the brothers and their wives thinking and

¹⁵⁷ *SSS Vol.35 p.126*

¹⁵⁸ *ibid*

wishing for the well-being of Rama only, so were their mothers. Such was their nobility of their hearts. (*SSS Vol.38 p.85-86*)

Noble qualities

Urmila was happy that her husband was under the divine care and protection of Rama. Urmila... was a noble and courageous woman¹⁵⁹. (*SSS Vol.40 p.194-195*)

Urmila meets Lakshmana after fourteen years:

Sumitra brought her daughter-in-law, Urmila to Lakshmana. It was fourteen years since Lakshmana and Urmila had seen each other. She fell at her husband's feet and said, "Lord! It was your total dedication to Rama that has saved and protected you so far. You should always think of Rama. It was that sacred name that guarded and guided you." She was overjoyed and applied vermilion to Lakshmana's feet, as was the custom in those days. Sumitra praised her that it was her good wishes and blessings that had kept her son Lakshmana safe and secure. (*SSB 2002 p.129*)

¹⁵⁹ See Chapter, *Lakshmana* - **LAKSHMANA'S WIFE URMILA:**

8.3 MANDAVI

The term *Sthree* should not be treated lightly. The Bhagavath Geetha lists seven attributes to the feminine principle' Fame, Wealth, Speech, Wisdom, Intelligence, Fortitude and Determination. The Mother principle, which embodies these seven potencies, is highly sacred. Wherever you turn, you will see manifestations of the feminine principle in Nature.

The mother fosters the child in the womb and goes through all travails to protect the child. There is no greater love in the world than maternal love. Hence the ancients accorded the highest honour to the mother and declared: "*Matru devo bhava*" (Esteem the Mother as Divine) and. "*Pitru devo bhava*" (Esteem the father as Divine). For every person the first preceptor is the mother. It is from the mother that a child learns its first words of speech, the first steps in movement and many other primary lessons in behaviour. Hence, the mother stands out as the reflected image of *Prakriti* (Nature).

- *Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba*

MANDAVI

*In the Hindu epic Ramayana, **Mandavi** was the daughter of Kushadwaja, a brother of King Janaka of Mithila and hence a cousin of Sita. She was the wife of Bharatha, the younger brother of Lord Rama. They had two sons, Thaksha and Pushkara. The Pushkara mentioned here is not related to Nala in Nala charitra.*

- *From Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia*

MANDAVI¹⁶⁰: Wife of Bharatha, daughter of Kushadwaja, and niece of Janaka. (*Glossary of the Vahinis*)

HER LINEAGE:

Janaka's younger brothers, Kushadwaja had two daughters namely Mandavi and Sruthakeerthi and were given in marriage to Bharatha and Shatrughna respectively. (*SSS Vol.40 p.107*)

¹⁶⁰ Also spelt as **Maandavee**

SISTERS' MARRIAGES

It is the asterism of Magha today. This is a good day to commence the rites and have the preliminary ceremonials. The day after, under the asterism Uttaraphalguna, I (Janaka) seek your assent to gift the two daughters of my brother, Mandavi to Bharatha and Sruthakeerthi to Satrughna in marriage.”

Hence, we are ready to bless the marriages of his daughters, Mandavi and Sruthakeerthi with Bharatha and Satrughna. Our wish is that these Royal dynasties should be bound close by these marriages.” (*RKRV part I p.182-183*)

Then Janaka and his brother, Kusadhwaja, brought their daughters to the dais. They had been given ceremonial baths and elaborately and beautifully decorated as befitted brides on the wedding day. They wore veils, and followed their fathers, with thousands of maids following them, carrying fruits and flowers, heaps of red and yellow cosmetic fragrant, rice grains, jewels, and gems. It seemed as if the treasures of Mithila were flowing in a full scintillating stream in the wake of the wedding. (*RKRV Part I p.187*)

Janaka spoke these words to Rama at that time: “Rama! Here is Sita, my daughter. She will tread your Dharmic path from now on. Accept her. She brings prosperity, peace and joy. Hold her hand with yours. She is highly virtuous and true. From this moment, she will follow you like your shadow, ever.” With these words, he poured water on the hands of Rama, to set the seal on the gift.

Then he came near where Lakshmana was. He said, “Lakshmana! I am giving you this bride, Urmila, accept her,” and with the prescribed Manthras, he completed the ceremony of gifting her to the bridegroom. Similarly, he approached Bharatha and pronouncing the Vedic Manthras traditionally used for the wedding, he gifted Mandavi to him as his bride. In the same manner Sruthakeerthi was gifted by him with the pouring of holy water and Vedic recitation to Satrugna¹⁶¹. (*RKRV part I p.189*)

INNER PERCEPTIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF MANDAVI

Mandavi was also a great devotee of Rama. She also lived in Nandigrama for fourteen years serving her husband..... Mandavi was a virtuous lady, who was devoted to her husband by paying due obedience to the mothers-in-law and her husband. She shone as an ideal to others. She too became an ascetic with her hair in a single plait. When Rama was entering Ayodhya followed by the three brothers and their wives, people could not distinguish between Sita and Mandavi. Sita shone like an ascetic due to fourteen years of contemplation on Rama. Mandavi also shone like her since she was always immersed in the contemplation of the Lord. Brahmavid Brahmaiva Bhavati (The one who realises the Brahman becomes Brahman himself). As all the bothers had oneness of thought and feeling, their four consorts also had the same. All of them constituted an ideal home. (*SSB 2002 p.82-83*)

¹⁶¹ See Chapter, *Sruthakeerthi - Sruthakeerthi -An expert in reading the Omens: While four brothers spread ideals, their wives did not lag behind*

Principle of Unity

Not only Urmila but Mandavi and Sruthakeerthi were in constant contemplation of Sri Rama – The principle of unity. (SSS Vol.38 p.85-86)

The world today is suffering from selfish politics, nihilistic religion and heartless competition. This is indeed a disgraceful state of affairs. Man has completely forgotten his fundamental divine nature. At such a crisis, the thing that is most urgent is shanti, prema. There are the drugs which will cure this dreaded disease. No other specific can ameliorate the illness. To get shanti, prema is the only means. The fuel prema yields the divine flame of shanti. Prema brings about unity of all mankind and this unity combined with spiritual knowledge will bring about world peace.

-Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

8.4 SRUTHAKEERTHI

SRUTHAKEERTHI

In the Hindu epic Ramayana, Sruthakeerthi¹⁶² was the daughter of Kushadwaja, a brother of King Janaka of Mithila; hence, she is a cousin of Sita. Her name signifies "she whose fame is heard". Sruthakeerthi was married to Shatrughna, the youngest brother of Lord Rama. She bore him two sons.

- From Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia

SRUTHAKEERTHI: Wife of Satrugna, daughter of Kushadwaja, and niece of Janaka. (*Glossary of the Vahinis*)

HER BIRTH:

Sruthakeerthi was the daughter of Kushadwaja, brother of Janaka¹⁶³. (*SSB 1996 p.32*)

HER MARRIAGE:

Sruthakeerthi¹⁶⁴ was gifted by (Janaka) with the pouring of holy water and Vedic recitation to Satrugna. (*RKRV Part I p.189*)

¹⁶² Also spelt as Shrutakirti or Shrutkeerti, Sruthakeerthi, **Shrutha-keerthee**

¹⁶³ See Chapter, Urmila – **Her birth**

SRUTHAKEERTHI - AN EXPERT IN READING THE OMENS:

All arrangements were made for return Journey to Ayodhya, but Mandavi and Sruthakeerthi were hesitating to start on that day. Sruthakeerthi was an expert in the science of reading omens; felt that it was not an auspicious day for the journey. But they could not tell it openly to everybody; so they said that they would join the group later. However, Dasaratha refused to agree to the suggestion and wanted them to get ready for the journey. Urmila who heard from Mandavi, the cause for hesitation said to Sita that the day was not auspicious for starting the journey. Then Sita replied to her: “Why should you worry when the Lord Himself is coming with us? Lord Rama is an Embodiment of Time. When the Lord Himself is coming with us, we should not wait for any auspicious time Rama will look after us if anything untoward happens on the way. (*SSB 1996 p.34*)

WHILE FOUR BROTHERS SPREAD IDEALS, THEIR WIVES DID NOT LAG BEHIND

What we need to know is that, while as the four brothers spread their ideals to the world, their wives too did not lag behind in doing the same. As her husband, Shatrughna ruled the kingdom; Sruthakeerthi lent admirable support to him just as Mandavi stood by Bharatha. They never aspired for anything else. Except at the time of dawn and dusk when they would go to mother Kausalya for her blessings, they never had any other

¹⁶⁴ See Chapter, Mandavi – Sisters’ Marriages

commitments. The good influence of such noble characters can be felt throughout Ramayana. (*SSB 2002 p.90*)

HER CHARACTER:

Sruthakeerthi is extremely noble. She always tried to lighten the burden of her husband Shatrughna by giving him suitable advice. She would never utter words that could harm others. ‘Shruta + Keerti’, as the name suggests would always listen to good only. In turn, she would always speak what was good and conveyed that which was pleasant and pleasing to the ear. She would encourage only what was good and beneficial to others. Dasaratha’s daughters – in-law were real gems. (*SSB 2002 p.92*)

Readers! Though Gurus of the common type have increased in numbers, there is available for man, a Guru, far more supreme and far more compassionate than any or all of them. He is no other than the Avatar of the Lord. He can, by the mere expression of His Will confer on man the highest consummation of spiritual life. He can gift it and get man to accept it. Even the meanest of the mean can acquire the highest wisdom, in a trice. He is the Guru of all Gurus. He is the fullest embodiment of God as man. Men can cognise God only in the human form. The Bharatiya Spiritual Stream has been declaring, over and over again, that adoring God in the human form is the highest duty of man. Unless God incarnates as man, man can never hope to see God or listen to His Voice.

-Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

9. SONS OF RAMA

Mothers in ancient days used to teach, the children about right conduct, morality and devotion.

The first preceptor for a child is the mother. For this reason, Bharatiya culture gave the first place to the mother among the four persons to be revered as divine: mother, father, guru and guest. The mother gets the first place because she bears the child in the womb for nine months and nourishes him with her own blood.

-Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

9.1 LAVA AND KUSHA



Cusa.

Summary of the Photo (from Wikipedia)

Description **English:** Watercolour painting on paper of Kusa, one of Rāma's sons. He is shown as a crowned male with purple skin. He has two arms with which he holds a bow over his right shoulder and a flower in his left. He wears a yellow dhoti and a red shawl is draped over his shoulders. He has jewellery on his ears, at his neck and on his wrists and ankles. He has sectarian marks on his arms and neck. Foliage is shown in the foreground and the near distance with hills in the far distance. The painting is surrounded by a black border.

Date 19thC(early)

Source http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_details.aspx?objectid=182859&partid=1&searchText=ramayana&fromADBC=ad&toADBC=ad&numpages=10&images=on&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx¤tPage=15

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LAVA AND KUSHA

Lava or Luv and his twin brother Kusha, were the children of the Lord Rama and his wife, whose story is recounted in the Ramayana. Lava is known as the founder of Lavapura that is, the modern day city of Lahore which is named after him. The Southeast Asian country Laos and the Thai city Lopburi were both named after him.

Born in the Forest after Sita had been banished from Ayodhya, they were educated and trained in military skills and were under the care of Sage Valmiki. When Rama performed the Aswamedha Yagya, then they challenged their father (who was at this point unknown to them) to a duel by holding up the Yagna horse. When Rama found out their identity, he took them back to Ayodhya.

Kusha, also called "Kush," was believed to be the ruler of a kingdom centred at Kasur in ancient times, and the present day Pakistani city still references him in name. The illustrious line of kings which ruled Kashi (Kasi), also called Varanasi, was derived from him. The Mauryan dynasty, an empire that ruled the Indian sub-continent (320-185 BC) claimed descent from Kush.

Lava and Kusha were born in Maharishi Valmiki's Ashram. Before their birth had requested Valmiki to accept her sons as his disciple. Valmiki formally started training Lava and Kusha when they were around 5 years of age. He trained them in archery and they were able to release arrows at the speed of sound. He also taught them about divine & celestial warfare. He made them masters in archery so that no one on this earth could defeat them in war. He established a connection between his mind and Lava and Kusha's mind and directly transferred all his knowledge to them. After military skills, he taught them the art of singing and playing the veena (lute). He taught them the Ramayana, which was written by Maharishi Valmiki himself, keeping Rama as the centre point. Later, Lava and Kush used their singing skills to infuse love for in the Ayodhya's people.

- *From Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia*

LAVA: Twin son of Rama and Sita

KUSHA¹⁶⁵: One of a pair of twin sons of Rama and Sita.
(*Glossary of the Vahinis*)

LINEAGE

Sita gave birth to *Lava and Kusha* in the hermitage of Sage Valmiki. They were taught various branches of knowledge by

¹⁶⁵ Also spelt as Kusa

him. Sita also was teaching them many lessons and imparting to them many skills. (*SSS Vol.21 p.232*)

Sita fostered the charming twins, Lava and Kusa. (*SSS Vol.7 p.63*)

*Brought up by the noble
exemplar of womanhood, ,
The twins, Lava and Kusa,
achieved glory;
(Telugu Song)
(SSS Vol.25 p.382)*

Sage Valmiki wants to proclaim to the world the Ramayana:

Kusha and Lava (the sons of Sita) who were dressed like ascetics and who could sing melodiously and move the hearts of the listeners by their charming music came to Valmiki and offered their salutations to the sage. The two children were like twin birds. They were extraordinary children. They were utterly fearless. They would not shrink from anyone out of fear. When the two appeared before Valmiki, the sage told them "Children! I have composed the Ramayana with a pure and unsullied heart through arduous effort. You should proclaim to the world this sacred story." Lava and Kusa reverentially accepted the sage's command. They offered their *panamas* (salutations) to Valmiki and said: "*Guruji!* Give us your benediction. We shall go forth into the world and make the Ramayana known to every nook and corner of the land." (*SSS Vol.30 p.93*)

They took *thambura* in one hand, wore garlands of *rudraksha* around their necks, smeared *vibhuti* on their foreheads, and went to each and every street singing the glory of Lord Rama. They sang, “Oh people! listen to the sacred story of Lord Rama. Let your life be His Story.” (*SSS Vol.32 Part II p.70*)

At one place, many sages had come together in a big assembly. Lava and Kusha went to them and sang the Ramayana in their sweet voice. The sages listened to their recitation in rapture, oblivious to everything. They felt that such moving story should be propagated to the whole world.

The Ramayana in blissful song sung by Lava and Kusha:

The two boys went along singing and entered Ayodhya. Standing in the heart of the city they went on singing the Ramayana. All the people strolling on the road stopped to listen to the song. They were rooted to their places and were lost in the music of the great epic. This is known as *Bhaava-samaadhi* (the state of blissful feeling). The hearts of the listeners were filled with the bliss of the soulful music. At that moment Rama was coming in his chariot to the spot. He heard the singing. Returning to the palace, he sent word to the two boys to come to his palace for singing their songs. In this manner Lava and Kusha sang the story of Rama in a manner that moved the hearts of one and all—from commoners to King Rama himself. (*SSS Vol.30 p.93-94*)

Sing the glories of the Lord like Lava and Kusha

When Lava and Kusha went about singing the glories of Raama they had no nervousness or apprehension¹⁶⁶. Lava and Kusha forgot all bodily considerations and sang from their hearts the glory of Rama. They thus taught what is relevant to youths today--the path to a God-oriented life. There is nothing greater than chanting the name of the Lord¹⁶⁷. In this manner Lava and Kusha went about glorifying the greatness of Rama joyously and telling the people how they should adore God. (*SSS Vol.30 p.99*)

LAVA AND KUSHA AND THE ASWAMEDHA YAGA PERFORMED BY RAMA

Lava and Kusha capture the sacred sacrificial Horse

In the Hermitage of Valmiki, Janaki was living with her twin sons, each redoubtable in splendour like the Sun. Those two boys saw the Horse, read the golden plate tied around its brow and led

¹⁶⁶ Today, young persons hesitate to put on any auspicious marks on the forehead when they visit temples and do not venture to fold their palms in reverence when they meet ciders. There is nothing greater than chanting the name of the Lord.

People are eager to listen to gossip.

But the ears are deaf to the sweet names of God.

You do not hesitate to go to the films endlessly;

But your eyes find it hard to look at God in the sanctum.

What for are the eyes given? What for do you have ears? You should remember God's name and go to the abode of God.

¹⁶⁷ Today's youth should take a resolve to spread the love of God among the people without any hesitations or fear. They should make every man realise the sweetness of the Lord's name, the divinity enshrined in it and the purity associated with it. These feelings should emanate from the heart. That is true *namasmarana* (reciting the Lord's name). (*SSS Vol.30 p.99*)

it away, to be bound and kept at the hermitage. Then, they came forward eager to fight back the guardians of the horse, with an arrow-case tied around their waists and bows and arrows in their hands. By that time, the warriors accompanying the Horse reached the place. They saw the Horse tied to a tree and finding that it was done by those boys, they cooled down. They said, “Sons! Your parents are indeed blessed to have such charming children. Well. Let that horse loose, and go home.” But the little boys replied, “Oh ye heroes! You have come for battle and not for begging, we believe. When you beg the horse from us, you are tarnishing the fair name of Kshatriya.” Hearing this, the guardian soldiers said, “Brave boys! Yes, do not tarnish the fair name of the Kshatriyas. That is why we ask you to be careful in speech.” The boys only laughed at this repartee. They said, “Ah, how brave must be the person who sent this horse under the protection of people like you? If you have no strength to take it from us, you can proceed home.” (*RKRV Part II p.323*)

Satrughna confronts Lava and Kusha

When the boys, Kusha and Lava, spoke so sharply and sarcastically the soldiers were provoked to fall upon them in spite of the fact that they were but tender boys. Lava shot a succession of arrows at them, quite in a sportive manner, humming tunes within himself and rather carelessly as if engaged in a play. The bodies of the warriors were shot through in so many places that they were rendered meshy. They fell fainting on the ground. Some of them ran into the camp of Satrughna. They cried, “Maharaja! Two boys, evidently children of the hermits, have captured our Horse and in the fight that ensued, they have killed a large number of our soldiers.”

Satrugna was enraged at this effrontery¹⁶⁸. He gathered the four sections of his army and marched towards Kusha and Lava. When he confronted them, and saw their handiwork, on the field, proving their overwhelming prowess, he was shocked into shame. “How can I enter into battle with these two boys?” he heted. Satrugna¹⁶⁹ addressed them thus: “Oh ye children of hermits: Let loose the Horse and go home. You are worthy of worship. It is not right to wage battle with you.” (*RKRV Part II p.323-324*)

The boys would not yield. They said, “King! What is your name? From which City are you coming? Why are you moving through this forest at the head of an army? What is the reason for your letting this Horse wander about as it likes? Why have you tied this gold plate round its brow? Well if you have the strength and the courage, remove the plate from its brow, loosen the Horse and take it home.” When Lava and Kusha spoke straight and sharp like this Satrugna bowed his head in shame and ordered his men to take up arms and march forward. At this, the boys laughed among themselves. “Aha! This King is pretty powerful! But listen. Can a lion be frightened when you clap your hands?” They took up the bow and arrow, remembering their Guru, the sage, Valmiki. Their arrows shattered the chariot of Satrugna to pieces. They also entered his body in many places and made it a patchwork of holes. His veteran warriors fainted and fell. They

¹⁶⁸ See Chapter, *Satrugna* - Satrugna’s encounter with Lava and Kusha during Aswamedha Yajna

¹⁶⁹ See Chapter, *Satrugna* - Satrugna meets Rama’s Sons:

called each veteran forward and shot arrows at them with fatal effect. (*RKRV Part II p.324-325*)

Rama informed about Lava and Kusha’s exploits:

Soon, Rama was informed of the exploits of the two boys from the hermitage. Of course, he knew that they were not children of the hermitage. But he did not disclose that fact. He made them believe that what they said was true. He doubted for a moment how anyone could battle against the tender boys belonging to the monks. At last, he said, “Fighting cannot be avoided. Take Lakshmana with you and proceed.” Those who had fled to Rama had to return perforce to the same place. Rama also commanded, “Bring those two boys hither. Since they are from the hermitage, they do not deserve death in any case.” (*RKRV Part II p.325*)

Lava and Kusa fight Lakshmana

Lakshmana marched forward at the head of a fully equipped army. He reached the place where the engagement had already taken place. He saw the heroic warriors who had fainted and fallen. He was surprised at the audacity of the ascetic boys. He addressed them thus: “Boys, I warn you, save yourselves. Flee from this place back to your homes. You are Brahmin boys and it would be harmful for us if we fight against you. It is against the injunctions of scripture. Get away from before my eyes.” Kusha and Lava greeted these words with a peal of laughter. “Oh Brave Commander! See how your brother has fared. Take refuge in your own home soon.” Lakshmana heard them and with one look at Satrugna who had fallen in a faint, he took up his bow and arrow. (*RKRV Part II p.325-326*)

But he doubted whether fighting against the children of monks was right or not. He tried to persuade the boys themselves. “Boys,” he said, “you have no reasoning faculty. You are mere boys. There is no profit in fighting against you. Go, bring those who are supporting you in this adventure.” Even while Lakshmana was importuning thus, Kusha, without paying the least attention to his suggestion, shot an arrow right against him. The earth shook in terror at the impact of that arrow. That arrow spread all over the sky. Its splendour was such that even the sun was rendered dim. (*RKRV Part II p.326*)

Unable to withstand the valour of Kusha and Lava, Lakshmana grew in anger and fell on them with enormous violence. He placed his chariot before them and began attacking them with no dread of the consequences. The brothers broke his arrows into pieces. They fought most admirably, with many new stratagems. Lakshmana threw his mace at them and when it hit Kusha, he suffered great pain. He rolled on the ground. Seeing this, Lava got enraged. He aimed an arrow at the chest of Lakshmana. Though it hit him straight, being a stronger and older hero, he did not fall. Lava jumped on him and they both had a personal duel with fists. The contest was balanced with no one winning; both of them used many holds and evasive tactics. Each of them fought using all his strength. Lava pounded Lakshmana with his thunderbolt hits. Lakshmana bore the brunt with pain and appreciated the little fellow’s mettle and skill. Meanwhile, Lakshmana took Rama’s name and aimed an arrow at Kusha. Kusha who had raised himself up fainted and fell again. He remembered Valmiki and as he fell and so he could stand up soon. He recovered his bow and arrow and attacked Lakshmana.

Though Lakshmana replied with an arrow that he had used against Meghanada, it could not harm the boys. The boy cut it into pieces, and the pieces fell on the ground. Lakshmana said to himself, “Ah. These calamities are happening to me since was exiled. I can never have peace unless I discard this body.” Just then Kusha fixed on his bow the Brahma arrow that Valmiki had taught him to use. At the very prospect of its release, the three worlds shook in fear. He aimed it straight at the heart of Lakshmana and let it go. Lakshmana was hit and he lost consciousness. (*RKRV Part II p.326-327*)

Bharatha also falls:

Messengers carried the news to Rama. Bharatha was sunk in sorrow. He folded his hands and stood before Rama. “Lord!” he said, “We are experiencing the consequences of the wrong we committed when we exiled.” Rama told the brother, “What! Are you adopting this tactic because you are afraid of fighting in battle? Well, if that is so, I myself can go into the field. Get me the chariot. Adjourn further rites in the yaga. I shall go and find out the antecedents of those boys. Brother! Send word to our former allies and friends. Bring Hanuman to the battlefield.” Then, Rama reached the spot where the fighting was going on. Rama was surprised to see the streams of blood. (*RKRV Part II p.327-328*)

At that very moment, Kusha and Lava, the unbeatable warriors, also came to the place. The Vanaras who accompanied Hanuman to the field were stricken with terror. But Hanuman addressed the brothers and said, “Boys! The parents who have given birth to such magnificent heroes as you are, are really blessed.” But

Kusha declared, “Oh Monkey! If you have no strength to meet us in battle, go back! Don’t prate.” At this, Bharatha developed much anger. He shouted to his men, “Well! Use your weapons!” When he said so, the Vanaras cast upon them trees, rocks and mountain peaks. Lava pulverised all of them by means of a single arrow. In a short time the forces of Rama were in complete rout. The field was one full flood of blood. All the valiant soldiers lost their lives. At last, even Bharatha fell fainting. (*RKRV Part II p.328*)

Rama’s interaction with Lava and Kusa

Then, Rama came into the battle area, red with anger, at the head of a large army. He saw the two boys and without letting arrows against them, he got them near him and asked, “Boys! Who are your parents? Where are they living? Which is your native land? What are your names?” In reply, Lava said, “Oh King! Of what use are these inquiries? You brothers, all four of you, have the same mannerism, I believe. Come, take up bow and arrow, and fight. Why do you bother about parents and native place. This is no parley, preliminary to marriage negotiations. No, this is serious business.” But Rama insisted on continuing. He said, “Boys, your bodies are so tender. I shall not fight with you until I know your names and your lineage.” (*RKRV Part II p.328-329*)

“King. Our mother is a daughter of Emperor Janaka. Janaki is being fostered by the sage Valmiki. We do not know the name of our father nor do we know the lineage to which we belong. Our names are Kusha and Lava. We reside in the forest,” they said. Rama pretended to have discovered just then that they were his children, and told them, “Boys! Give fight to the army which is

coming behind me.” Saying this, he raised up Angada, Jambavantha, Hanuman and others from the fainting fit into which they had fallen. He also raised Lakshmana, Bharatha and Satrughna so that they might see the happenings of the future. Then, he addressed the soldiers. “Men of the army, Fight, so that fame and status might be protected and strengthened.” Then, when the battle was renewed, Rama watched with immense delight the heroism of the boys with their bows and arrows, and their superior skill and bravery. (*RKRV Part II p.329*)

Hanuman is bound and taken home by the Twins:

The Vanara heroes failed to find any means to overpower the boys. So, they spoke to one another that no one in the fourteen worlds could gain victory over them. They could not say or do anything more. They had to keep silent.

Just then Kusha fell upon Rama. The impact forced Rama to faint¹⁷⁰ and fall. Kusha pulled down the decorative ropes and chains on the chariot and the horses of Rama, and both brothers bound Hanuman with them. They led Hanuman at the end of the rope and took him home. They also took other Vanaras and a few bears, all with bright coloured clothes and decorations on them. The sacrificial Horse was among the possessions they paraded. With these, they approached the mother, Janaki. They prostrated

¹⁷⁰ Lava aimed an arrow at Rama with the prayer that if his mother Janaki was a *Sadhvi* (a supremely noble woman) the arrow should render Rama unconscious. Rama became unconscious when the arrow hit him. See what happened. The mere thought of his mother lent so much power to his arrow! This shows that when you cherish the mother and seek God's grace, the blessings of the mother become more powerful. (*SSS Vol.30 p.109*)

before her and offered the booty acquired as homage to her.
(*RKRV Part II p.329-330*)

ENDING THE PLAY

Sita is shocked to hear the account

Janaki was amazed at the sight of the Vanaras and others, as well as the way in which they were decorated and dressed up. Just then, Valmiki the Sage reached the place, evidently overcome with anxiety. He described all that had happened before. He loosened the bonds on Hanuman, Jambavan and others and bewailed, “Boys! What is this you have done? You have come here after felling to the ground Rama, Lakshmana, Bharatha and Satrugna.” Sita was shocked at this. She said, “Alas, dear Children! On account of you, the dynasty itself has been tarnished. Don’t delay further. Prepare for my *sati*, that I may ascend the same. I cannot live hereafter.” Sita pleaded for quick action. (*RKRV Part II p.331*)

Sage Valmiki proclaims that the Brothers are the Sons of Rama:

The Sage Valmiki consoled her and imparted some courage. Then he went with Kusha and Lava to the battlefield and he was amazed at what he saw there. He recognised the chariot and the horses of Rama and finding Rama, he fell at his feet. Rama rose in a trice and sat up. Kusha and Lava were standing opposite to him. Valmiki addressed Rama thus: “Lord! My life has attained fulfilment. Oh, how blessed am I!” Then, he described how

Lakshmana had left alone in the forest, and how lived in his hermitage, where Kusha and Lava were born. He said, “Lord, Kusha and Lava are your sons. May the Five Elements be my witness; I declare that Kusha and Lava are your sons. (*RKR V Part II p.331-332*)

Rama revives the fallen Vanaras:

Hearing these words, Rama embraced the boys and stroked their heads. Through the Grace of Rama, the fallen Vanaras and warriors rose alive. Lakshmana, Bharatha and Satrugna caressed and fondled the boys. (*RKR V Part II p.332*)

Rama installs the sons with administrative authority:

Thereafter, calling the sons to his side, Rama advised them about the means and methods of administration of the empire. Then he formally invested them with the insignia of imperium. He also gave valuable advice on political and administrative matters¹⁷¹. Kusha was installed in Ayodhya and so Lava was awarded the Northern Region, the treasure chest of riches. The City of Lavapura¹⁷² was fixed as his capital City. Rama gave away cows, lands, clothes and money to the fullest to each. (*RKR V Part II p. 334*)

¹⁷¹ Under Section, *Rama*, See Chapter, *Pathihapaavana - Teachings And Advice - ADVICE ON GOOD GOVERNANCE*:

¹⁷² Lavapura: City given to Lava, the modern Lahore. (*Glossary of the Vahinis*)

QUALITIES OF LAVA AND KUSHA

Be prepared for any sacrifice for the sake of the Divine

Lava and Kusa were princes of royal blood. They carried in their hands tambourines. They set out on the great task of propagating the *Ramayana*, chanting the *shlokas* (verses) all the way. Are there any today who will undertake such a task? Many will fear being mocked by the public. Even persons who may wish to do *bhajans* in public are afraid of being jeered at.

Devotees should be able to transcend such considerations. Why should anyone who is doing something holy be afraid of public ridicule? People should be prepared for any sacrifice for the sake of the Divine. The joy to be derived from chanting the Lord's name is ineffable. Without the constant remembrance of God, there can be no experience of the Divine. Whatever the name that may be chanted, when it is done wholeheartedly the fruits of it will be certain. Everything should be done with a pure heart. (*SSS Vol.31 p.73*)

LOVE THE MOTHER AND REVERE THE FATHER:

Rama attained godhood because he was the son of Kausalya. Lava and Kusha became heroic children because of their great mother, Sita Devi. It is the noble thoughts of the mother which make the children great. A mother may go wrong in other respects, but she will always strive for the well-being of her children. Hence every son has to love the mother as the primary duty. Then he should love the father and revere the preceptor. The mother confers the body. The father protects it. The preceptor imparts knowledge and wisdom. For every human being all three are essential for getting on in the world. (*SSS Vol.30 p.104*)

Every person, man or woman, should respect the parents, install the Divine in the heart and pray to God constantly. It is everyone's duty to bring a good name to one's parents. When the children are good, they bring a good name to the parents. It was because of the noble behaviour of Lava and Kusha that their mother, Sita, became renowned. When Lava and Kusha were engaged in a battle with Rama, (*SSS Vol.30 p.109*) Lava and Kusa remembered their mother with great reverence and aimed an arrow at Him. Rama fell into a

swoon when the arrow struck Him. Such is the power of one's mother's blessing. (*SSS Vol.21 p.232*)

God-realisation is the supreme achievement:

In the world today such mothers are rare. Many mothers are worried about the future of their sons if they adhere to the righteous path. They fear that such children may not be successful in life. In ancient days mothers thought otherwise. They would be immensely happy if they found the children devoted to God. They would feel happy with the thought. "My son will be a good man. He will earn a good name." (*SSS Vol.30 p.109*)

Cherish Bharatiya culture

Find out the cause as Lava and Kusa did when they found their mother Sita was in tears. They asked their mother: "Oh Mother! Why are you weeping? Here we are, more valiant than Sri Rama. We can bring for you a Golden Mountain if you desire *it*." (Bhagawan sang a Telugu song which was both sweet and deeply moving). The boys held her feet and declared that they would not leave until she revealed the cause of her grief. See what the children of Sita, the daughter of the Earth Goddess, did to assuage the grief of their mother. Which son of Bharat today is trying to wipe the tears of Bharat Maatha? This is deepening her grief. She laments: "I have ninety crores of children. But of what use are they? They are not relieving a mother's sorrow." Mother Bharat's grief affects the whole world. (*SSS Vol.28 p.350-351*)

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