

## RAMAYANA—ITS DIRECT RELEVANCE TO REAL LIFE\*

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I accepted the invitation of my good friend Madhavan to deliver this Endowment Lecture in the name of his father with such alacrity that must have caused some embarrassment to him and to Shivarama Dikshitar. There are good reasons for my ready response. My great father held V. Krishnaswami Aiyer in supreme veneration. I enjoyed the blessings of Balasubramania Iyer during my tenure at the Madras University. K. Chandrasekhara Iyer, by a single essay in 'The Hindu' on my father, has strengthened the bonds between the two Krishnaswamy Aiyer families.

It is impossible for me to resist the desire to speak on the Ramayana, to place a few *Bilvas* before the feet of the Lord in the presence of learned Pandits and distinguished citizens of Madras. I was inducted into the Ramayana even as a boy of five when, at the instance of my great father and my learned tutor Satyagodavari Sarma, I learnt the first few hundred verses of the Bala kanda by heart. Oh! What an auspicious start on life's journey! The music haunts my senses to this day.

Ramayana, the immortal epic of immemorial origin will endure like the Himalayas

*Yavatsasyanthi Girayaha Sarithascha Mahithale*

*Thavath Ramayana Katha Lokeshu Prachrshyathi*

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It dwells in the minds of men through generations as long as human creation lasts by the decree of God. It is the code of conduct of humanity through the ages in its pursuit of true happiness and therefore it may sound impertinent to speak of its relevance to real life! However each man's life is his prime concern and because of its finiteness, it has to be made sublime through action and achievement, consistent with moral conduct and the well being of the wider community. Life is real, life is earnest and man, in racing through his allotted span - ah, too, too brief - has to strive, to seek and not to yield, till he becomes a *Kritha Karya* leaving his footprints on the sands of Time.

The Epic has the most exalting introduction in all literature - the interaction between two great minds, Divine in power and magnitude, those of Narada and Valmiki.

*Tapasvadyaya Niratham Tapasvi Vagvidam varam*

*Naradam paripapracha Valmiker munipungavam*

Valmiki asks Narada the question that dominates his thoughts

*Konvasmin sampratham Loke Gunavan kaschaviryavan*

*Dharmagnascha Krithagnascha Satyavakyo Dhridavrathaha*

Who in the wide world is the perfect human being, good and great, dutiful and grateful, true and resolute?

Narada, true to his nature loses no time and gives a direct answer - Yes, there exists one, Sri Rama, invested with such qualities,

*Ikshuvakuvamsa Prabhavo Ramo Nama Janaisruthaha*

*Niyathathma Mahaviryo Dyuthiman Dhrithiman vashee*

and then follow verses of exquisite beauty and rhythm summarising the epic - as though intended for mortals who cannot complete the formidable task of reading through the entire course of twenty four thousand verses. And to make things easier there is the *Sangraha Ramayana*, a



jewelled necklace of titles from *Viswamitra Samagamam*, *Janakyascha vivaham* to *Ramabhishekabhyudayam*, *Sarva sainya visarjanam*. Even in such a summary intimate details are mentioned – *Kopam Raghavasimhascha*, *Pithuscha Salilaknyam* – *Ratrow Lankavarodhanam* – Rama's anger at Sugriva's procrastination, homage to the departed father and invasion of armies at night.

Let us move through the story in temporal sequence reflecting on the relevance to real life. The birth of Rama and the brothers follows the Yagna performed by Dasaratha on the advice of elders. It is not for us to discuss the social customs of an age which allowed polygamy or polyandry, atleast for Kings and princes, consistent with harmonious relationship between husband and wife and desire for progeny. The hero of course was an *Ekatatni vratha*. Succession to the throne was by primogeniture which, in a democracy, should be interpreted as one leader or Prime Minister at a time – there will be enough confusion if a Deputy Prime Minister does not act like a Deputy! The manner in which the four brothers grow up is a perfect example of domestic harmony – eating, riding, learning and sporting together.

*Nachathena vina nidra labhathe Purushothamaha*

*Mrishtamanna mupaneethamashnathi nachatham vina*

True to human nature there is grouping among brothers – Lakshmana with Rama and Satrugna with Bharatha. Such alignment may not have salutary consequences in real life. In the epic the pairing is perfect, consistent with fraternal bonds, to the delight of the fortunate father.

*Sachathurbihirmahabhagaihi Puthrair Dasarathapriyaihi*

Action starts with the arrival of Viswamithra with his characteristic impatience

*Shigra makhyatha mamprapthum Kousikam*

*Gadhinassutham*



The social conventions of the age were such that sages and scholars were respected by monarchs. A great society must honour its savants and scientists. So did Dasaratha who greeted Viswamithra with acclamation

*Yathamrithasya Samprapthihi, Yathavarsha monoodake  
Yatha sadrusadareshu puthra janman prajasyacha  
Pranashtosya yadha labhow, Yadha Harsha Mohodaye*

How true in human experience - as welcome as a life saving drug, as rain in a drought-strickenland, as the birth of a son to a lawfully wedded wife, as the recovery from financial loss! Viswamithra demands the services of Rama

*Swaputhram Raja Sardoolam Ramassatya Parakramam  
Kakapaksha dharam viram, Jyeshtam me Datumarhasi*

What a grand concept - transcendent talent may reside in youth as it does in sciences, sport and in letters - the venerable sage needs the help of young Rama to destroy the powerful Raakshasas. He is able to locate his 'Raman and Ramanujan' like a true Guru but a doting father pleads

*Una shodasha varshome Ramo Rajiva lochanaha  
Nayudha योग्यathamasya pasyami saha Raakshasaihi*

Rama is barely sixteen not yet prepared to fight the Raakshasas. Here, as in many crises, the Poet presents the two sides to every question to understand the wisdom or folly of the final choice. Here Viswamitra, the farsighted seer, perceives the future in the present - Rama is destined to kill even Ravana in due course. So he does not wait to convince Dasaratha,

*Mithya pratigna Kakutsa, Sukhibhava Sabandhava*

He accuses him 'false to your lineage you are not keeping your word'. The Emperor yields and Viswamitra takes his imperial wards to the forest for the missions impossible they are destined to fulfil.



Once under his care he addresses his wards with solicitude and affection,

*Kowsalya supraja Rama, purva sandhya pravarthathe  
Uthishta Nara Sardula, karthavyam Daivamanhikam*

He wakes them with the exhortation 'Oh! heroic princes, get up to do the daily tasks of Divine decree? Yes, it is *Daivamahnikam* that I am here today at the Sanskrit College sharing the sweetness of *Ramacharithamritham* with you. Viswamitra imparts knowledge as a labour of love, an ecstatic experience.

*Kathabhirabhiramabhi Abhiramow Nripathm jow  
Ramayamasa Dharmathma Kousiko munipungavaha*

The 'Raja Sardoola' has to learn from the greatest of Gurus, Viswamitra a *Rajarshi* turned *Brahmarshi*, and receive from him the gift of *Brahmasthanam* which would send Ravana to his doom,

*Dadamithe Mahabaho Brahmamastra manuthamam*

There is no more exalted relationship than that between *Guru* and *Sishya*, no more sacred purpose than the transmission of knowledge from each generation to the next.

After the completion of the appointed tasks, Viswamitra takes Rama and Lakshmana to Janaka, King of Mithila. Marriage is an event as important as the choice of career - perhaps even more. What a gracious partner in life is Sita!

*Pativratha Mahabhaga Chayevanugatha sada*

a devoted wife to whom her husband is her life. Her suitor must not only be handsome beyond dreams - *Drishtichittapaharina* but valorous and strong enough to lift the *Shiva Dhanus*, which Rama did with considerable ease to the astonishment of all.

*Athyathbhutam achinthyamcha natharkithamidam Maya  
Janaka readily offers Sita to Rama,*



*Iyam Sita mama suta, saha dharma charithaya*

*Prathichhachainam bhadranthe panim grihnishva paninam*

Every wedding is to be reckoned *Sita Kalyana vibhogam* – the thrill of being imparadised on earth by finding companionship in the journey through life.

Rama is now qualified for *Pattabhishekam* and Dasaratha feels the time has come for him to seek tranquillity in retirement,

*Soham Vishrama michami Puthram krithva Prajahithe*  
and crown Rama as the ruler of the Empire.

*Ichamohi Mahabahum Raghu veeram Mahabalam*

*Gajena Mahatayantham Ramam chattravritthananam*

It is at this exalted moment that jealousy strikes its vicious blow.

*Tasyabhisheka Sambharan Drishtva Bharyatha Kaikeyi*

Instigated by Manthara – life is too full of Mantharas and Sakunis – she demands the banishment of Rama to the forest and the crowning of her son Bharatha in fulfilment of promises made to her by Dasaratha. The King has to yield to the fatal decree, for the culture of this ancient land is such that conformity of speech and action is an inexorable law and promises made must be kept at any cost – life, wife, wealth and empire.

*Ahamhi Sitam Rajyancha prananishtam Dhanaanicha*

*hrishto Bhrata svayam dadya Bharataya prachoditaha*

Rama, the *Sthirapragna* is unperturbed and accepts the decree to save the honour of his father and please his step mother,

*Pithurvachana nirdeshat Kaikeyahpriyakaranath*

It is still a human crisis. The mother is stricken with grief, the father distracted out of his senses and Lakshmana smitten by anger. Should Sita follow Rama to the forest



and Lakshmana accompany them? The arguments bring to fore the emotional tensions of real life and the decision is taken after painful and poignant cogitation. At one stage Sita had recourse to admonition,

*Kimthva manyatha Vaideha Pitame Mithiladhipaha*

*Rama! Jamatharampraphya sthriyam Purusha vighram*

Did my loving father give me in marriage to you who cannot protect me in the forest - Are you a woman in man's garb?

And so the Trinity of the Ramayana, Rama, Sita and Lakshmana move to the forest on their fourteen year exile. Bharatha now enters as the centre of the Poet's attention. On returning to Ayodhya he finds Rama banished and watches helplessly his father die in grief. He bursts with anger against his fond and foolish mother and resolves to summon Rama back to Ayodhya. His love for Rama rivals that of Lakshmana but is expressed through *Thyaga*, sacrifice, rather than through companionship as is the case with Lakshmana. He seeks Rama in the forest and the meeting of the brothers is one of the most touching episodes in human emotion at its exalted intensity. When Lakshmana threatens to fight Bharatha, Rama chides him,

*Kimatra Dhanusha karyamasinavasacharmana*

*Maheshwase Maha praigne Bharate swayamagate*

Is this the time for use of arms? High-souled Bharatha is coming to seek us with brotherly love.

The poet is at his best in describing the person of Rama.

*Dadarsha Ramamasinam Abhitaahpavakopamam*

*Simhaskandam Mahabahum Pundarika nibhekshanam*

*Prithivya Sagaranthaya Bhartharam Dharmacharinam*

At the sight of such a vision Bharatha is overtaken by emotion and falls prostrate even before reaching the feet of Sri Rama,



*Padavapravya Ramasya papata Bharato rudan*

Then follows a whole disquisition on how a sovereign should rule as Rama inquires of Bharatha about the state of the Kingdom and the welfare of its people. Bharatha pleads in vain for the return of Rama and a solution to this crisis in conscience is found through *Paduka Pattabhishekam* representing sacrifice and action, *Tyaga* and *Dharma*. Bharatha has to rule according to *Kshatriya Dharma* but Rama's *Paduka* is the symbol and source of Sovereignty.

The action shifts to the life of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana in the forest in happy communion with nature—too happy to let the threesome in peace. Fate strikes without warning. Maricha as the golden deer decoys Rama and Lakshmana, as Ravana abducts Sita to Lanka. The epic is charged with *Shadrassa - Sringara Karunya Hasya Veera Bhayanakaihi Roudradibhischa samyuktam* - Love, tranquillity, anger, disappointment, pity and heroism in supreme intensity rising to a crescendo at the final confrontation of Rama and Ravana.

Rama is stricken with grief and even this matchless warrior has to seek the help of new friends to redeem his beloved Sita. The meeting of Hanuman and Rama is a perfect paradigm of first contact leading to lasting friendship. How should Hanuman address these princely strangers?

*Rajarshi Deva Pratimow Thapasow Samsitavratow  
Kimartham thain vanam gheram Pampakanana manditham  
Agatha sanujodurgam Nanavyala Mrigayutham*

Rama and Lakshmana speak of Anjaneya thus

*Nanrigvedavinithasya Nayajurveda dharineha  
Nasamavedavidusha shakyaamevam Prabhashitham*

No one, unless he is learned in the Vedas, can speak so well. True to their lineage Rama and Lakshmana do not



explain their predicament in longwinded accents, Rather they say

*Eiswaryenascha Hinascha Vanavasarithaschasa*

By a stroke of misfortune we are here as exiles.

Then follows *Sugrivasakhyam* and the destruction of Vali, a tyrant more powerful than Ravana. Here again the poet indulges in exchange of arguments discussing the propriety of the elimination of Vali. Well, all tyrants must fall — no two fall alike, some die at the single stroke of a weapon, some like Ravana after a holocaust of 'blood, toil, tears and sweat'. That is human history from Ceasar to Hitler.

The dying Vali makes his last request

*Nathvathmanamaham soche natharan nacha Bandhavan*

*Yatha Puthram Guna jyeshtam Angadam kanakangadam*

He is not so much concerned about beautiful Tara as of his dear son Angada. That request is honoured, for Angada becomes one of the generals of Sugriva's army in the invasion of Lanka.

Then follows Anjaneya's flight to Lanka and his locating Sita in *Asoka Vana*, the soul-stirring theme of the *Sundara Kanda* — rightly so named by Valmiki. It is an episode of exquisite beauty unmatched in all literature. Shakespeare confessed the sad incompetence of human speech when he wrote that Cleopatra's beauty beggared description. But Valmiki is eloquent in the description of Sita as seen by Hanuman.

*Sitam Padma Palasakshim Manmathasya Rathim thatha*

*Ishtam Sarvasya Jagataha Poornachandranibhananam*

*Vrilitham Dukkha sanhapbham Parimlanam Tapasvinim*

Hanuman is a direct witness to the flamelike purity of Sita in the presence of Ravana when she spurns his illicit passion,



*Nahi Gandhamupaghraya Rama Lakshmanyasthyaya  
Shakyam Sandarshane sthathum suna Sardoolayoriva*

You will flee like a dog before the awesome tiger when you see Rama and Lakshmana - could words be stronger from a helpless captive to a demoniac captor drunk with power.

*Ramasya Dhanusha shabdam shroshyasithvam Mahasvanam*  
Your heart will stop at the booming sound from Rama's bow.

How should Hanuman, a stranger, reveal his identity and mission to a grief stricken Sita? He sings the praise of her Lord and the story of his journey to the forest in lyrical verse in sacred Sanskrit, unintelligible to the Raakshasi women around her.

*Raja Dasarathonama Ratha Kunjara Vajiman  
tasya Puthram priyo Jyeshtastharadhipanibhaonam*

*Ramo nama viseshagnaha shrehta sarva Dhanushmatham*  
The conversation between Hanuman and Sita is the most luminous part of this immortal epic, enlightening our mortal minds with wisdom suffused with emotion.

Sita delights in hearing the description of Rama by Hanuman. The nectar flows in verse after verse

*Ramah Kamalapatraksha sarva sathva manoharoha*

*Roopa Dakshinya sampanna prasutha Janakathmaje*

*Thejasaditya Sankasa Kshamaya Prithivisamaha*

*Brihaspathisamo Bindhya, yasasa vasavoramaha.*

but it is also sadness mixed with pleasure,

*Amritham visha samrishtam thwaya Vanara bhashithum*

When Hanuman takes leave of her she expresses her appreciation, worthy of the Divine messenger,

*Vikranthasthwam, Samarthastham, pragnaswtham*

*Vanarothama*

*Samartha* - so pregnant with sense signifying heroism crowned with achievement,



Hanuman returns to Rama to convey the news of his meeting Sita and her message that she can wait no more than a month for her redemption from her intolerable state of captivity.

So it is time for heroic action - *Dhanusha Karyam*, for total war to lift the curse of Ravana from the brows of men. One wonders how the sage of sages, the Apostle of prayer and contemplation could conceive of a war of epic magnitude comparable only with itself.

*Rama Ravana yor Yudham sughosham Romaharshanam*  
*Rama Ravana yor Yudham Rama Ravana yoriya*

It is poetic vision par excellence. Hyperbole is the vehicle by which a poet transmits the tides of passion, conflict, heroism, frustration, trial, tribulation and ultimate triumph. The invasion of Lanka by Rama and Lakshmana with the armies of Sugriva has its parallel in real history—the Second World War, Operation Overlord, the Invasion of Europe across the Channel from the beaches of Normandy to the heart of Berlin. Eisenhower warns his armies that the enemy is battle-hardened and will fight savagely. Millions had to die and the battle rages through all its phases—fluctuations of fortune, frustration, despondency, struggle, resolution, recovery and ultimate triumph. So it is in the epic.

Sage Agasthya advises Rama the *Avatar*, now a human on earth, to invoke the blessings of God through

*Aditya hridayam punyam Sarva satru vinasanam*  
*Jayavaham japennithyam Akshayyam paramam Siyam*

Even all powerful America has inscribed in its national motto 'In God we trust'. More things are wrought by prayer than the world dreams of.

Blessed with the sacred *Mantra*, Rama releases the *Brahmastra* to destroy Ravana and redeem a tormented world.



In our times such a situation arose in World War II before the final victory over Japan. To use or not to use the Atomic Bomb—who holds the responsibility? Oppenheimer or Truman or the pilot who delivered the bomb or the billions who had to be redeemed by the destruction of millions of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. No one can answer.

On victory, Sita is summoned to the presence of Sri Rama. Then follows the most poignant episode in this timeless epic. Sita had to go through *Agni Pravesam* – ordeal by fire – to prove her chastity to the world outside and be accepted by her redeemer.

*Amrishyamana saa Sita vivesha jwalanam sati*

It is the law of life – truth has to be vindicated by proof. Hanuman had to deliver the *Anguliyam* to Sita and the *Choodamani* to Rama to prove the completion of his task as their common messenger

What is provable is the truth in truth.

The stage is set for *Rama pattabhishekam* in Ayodhya.

*Abhyasinchinnaravyaghras prasannena sugandhina*

*Salilena Sahasraksham vasavo vasavam yadha*

*Prajagur devagandharva Nenruthuschapsarogana*

*Abhisheke thatharhaseya thatha Ramasya Dhimathaha*

At this ecstatic hour Sita presents Hanuman with the *Mukthaharam*, the dearest gift to her from Rama, with the acclamation of the Lord himself.

*Pradehi Subhage! Haaram yasya thushtaasi Bhamini*

*Pourusham vikramo Buddihi yasmin nethani sarvashaha*

*Dadowsaa Vayuputhraya tham Haaramasitheskshenaa*

Can there be a more gracious gesture of generosity and gratitude – human nature rising to Divine stature – a gift of love given as a gift of esteem.



What a start to Rama Rajya so well described by the epic poet -

*Prahrishta muditho Lokasthushta pushta sudharmikaha*

*Niramayohya rogascha Durbhiksha Bhayavarjothaha*

a happy world free from fear, want and disease, a world of universal affluence and tranquil harmony.

*Nithya pramuditha sarve yadha Kritha yuge thatha,*

ideals and objectives to be inducted into the Charter of the United Nations or a One World Government to ensure a war-free world.

I shall close with a personal note with your kind permission, for no relevance to real life is more relevant than that to one's own experience. I was once summoned to the presence of Nehru, then Prime Minister, at the instance of my well-wisher C. Subramanian when I presented to him my band of students aspiring for opportunities for creative work. He suddenly confronted me with the question 'What do you want to be done for such young aspirants?'. I thought of Hanuman's talent for the right word to the right person at the right moment. Here was the Prime Minister, the elected *Sarvabhowma* with power to sway the lives of millions and the destinies of nations asking me to name the gift I needed. I could not waste that magic moment by asking for a small personal advancement—a professorship, or a department with an expense account! I asked for an Institute for Advanced Study as at Princeton where Einstein found his haven. Nehru smiled and I knew that the pleasure or anger of great men cannot be without consequence.

*Amogha krodha Harshascha*

and MATSCIENCE was born out of that smile.

This Sanskrit College had a similar origin—it was created out of the vision of the great V. Krishnaswami Iyer and



blessed by Sri Sankaracharya. Madhavan and his brothers are carrying on the mission of spreading, with these learned Pandits, the music of Sanskrit from Mylapore. Yes, I have a fondness for Mylapore.

*Rakshitha jeeva Lokasya swajanasyabhi rakshitha*

Even Sri Rama, the *Avatara Purusha* with his universal love was closer to his associates. So also the readers of Ramayana have their favourite *Kandas* - for my wife it is *Sundara Kanda*, for me the *Bala Kanda* into which I was initiated by my natural preceptor, my great father. It has been the guiding light of my life.

Thank you,