



Tulasi Rāmāyaṇa

Notes from

*Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda's talks
held at Chinmaya Vibhooti from 24th to 31st Dec 2015*

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Introduction

Did Rāmāyaṇa really happen or is it just a myth? Was Rāma really an incarnation of God or was he just an ideal man who is over-glorified? There are so many versions of the Rāmāyaṇa...which one is the most authentic? These are some common questions that we have about this epic poem that has survived millenniums and is still fresh and inspiring. These questions were addressed by Pūjya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda, Global Head of Chinmaya Mission, while he recreated the entire story through his beautiful words during a camp on *Rāmācharitamānasa* at Chinmaya Vibhooti, Kolwan from 24th to 31st Dec 2015. The experiences of the camp cannot be expressed in words. All I can say is that attending the camp was one of the best things that happened to me. To hear directly from Pūjya Guruji about his favourite ideal – Lord Rāma is a different experience altogether.

This is a compilation of the notes that I had penned down during Guruji's talks. The main objective of this compilation was to re-live those talks and go through the story of Lord Rāma while I was penning down the notes. As they were shared on social media, requests came up on compiling the entire notes into a single document. That is how this e-book came into shape.

The language has been kept simple and so that even children can read and enjoy. There are some questions after every chapter which can help the reader to go through the main points of the chapter. For the Balvihar sevaks and sevikas the quiz would be helpful towards the end of the class.

An index of transliteration chart has been given to understand the exact pronunciation of Sanskrit and Hindi words used in the text. A glossary towards the end will also help in understanding the meanings of Sanskrit and Hindi words used in the passage.



Gratitude

My first and foremost thanks to all my friends who encouraged me while I was penning down the notes. To Neeraj Bhai from Chinmaya Jeevan Darshan who came up with the idea of a downloadable pdf. To my family who always encouraged me to write. To my dear friend Deepti Renjith for coming out with the beautiful sketches and V J Renjith for the overall designing of the book. To Swami Swaroopananda who first made me fall in love with Lord Rāma through his series of talks *Seven Days Seven Powers*. To Pūjya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda who painted the entire Rāmāyaṇa in my mind through his words. It is his words that I have penned down and whatever extra is there it is His grace that flowed through my pen.

Last but not the least, to Pūjya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda who chose me as an instrument for bringing out this e-book.

Unto HIM our best!

Vinay Nair

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Transliteration

In the book, Devanāgarī characters are transliterated according to the scheme adopted by the International Congress of Orientalists at Athens in 1912. In it one fixed pronunciation value is given to each letter; f, q, w, x and z are not called to use. According to this scheme:

sounds like		sounds like	
अ	a o in son	ड	ḍ d in dog
आ	ā in master	ढ	ḍh dh in godhood
इ	i in if	ण	ṇ n in under
ई	ī ee in feel	त	t
उ	u u in full	थ	th th in thumb
ऊ	ū oo in boot	द	d th in then
ऋ	ṛ ri in rim	ध	dh theh in breathe here
ॠ	ṝ	न	n
ए	e a in evade	प	p
ऐ	e ai y in my	फ	ph ph in loop hole
ओ	o	ब	b
औ	au ow in now	भ	bh bh in abhor
क्	k	म्	m
ख्	kh ckh in blockhead	य्	y
ग्	g (hard)	र्	r
घ्	gh gh in log-hut	ल्	l
ङ्	ṅ ng	व्	v in avert
च्	c ch in chuckle	श्	ś sh in shut
छ्	ch chh in catch him	ष्	ṣ s in sugar
ज्	j	स्	s
झ्	jh dgeh in hedgehog	ह्	h
ञ्	ñ n in banyan	·	ṁ
ट्	ṭ t in tank	:	ḥ (half h)
ठ्	ṭh th in ant-hill		



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Bālakāṇḍa



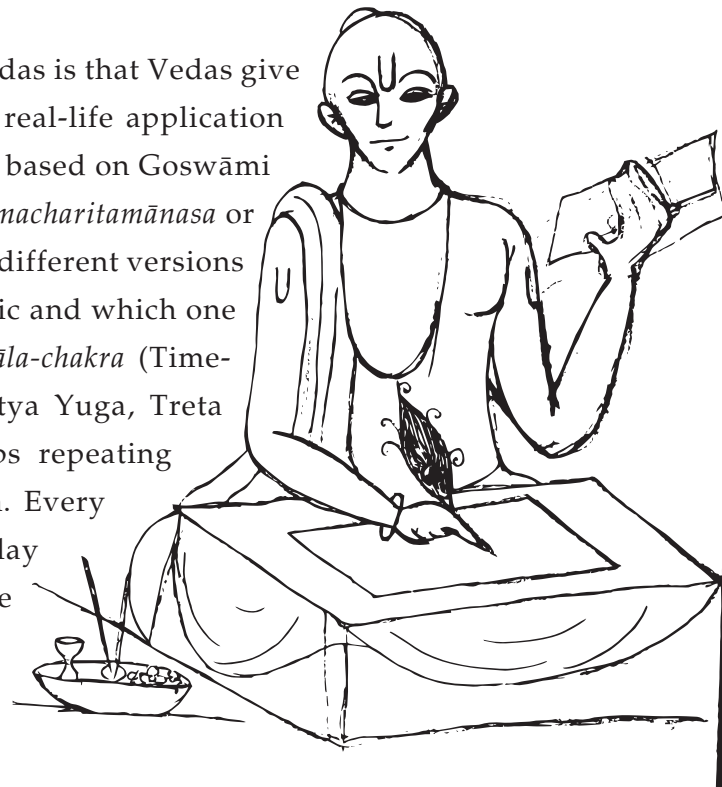


Story of Goswāmi Tulasidāsaji and Rāmāyaṇa

Rāmāyaṇa is a story that needs no introduction. It is one of the most famous epics ever written. There are hundreds of versions of Rāmāyaṇa written in various languages. Rāmāyaṇa, as we all know, is the story of Lord Rāma who is the avatāra of Lord Viṣṇu. While some of them believe that Rāmāyaṇa is just a story and it never happened, there are others who have total faith that it is a true story. Among the latter, there are some who believe that Rāma was just an ordinary mortal who happened to be a great person, there are others who say that he was God Himself who manifested in human form. Thus there are different opinions and versions of the epic Rāmāyaṇa.

Rāmāyaṇa doesn't come under Purāṇās (mythological stories). It comes under *Itihāsa* (which means, 'it so happened') or history. Why do people say that it is history? If it was just a story, how could there be so many hundreds of versions of the same story and how would the story be still alive even after thousands of years? Something that is imaginary cannot last for thousands of years. We are going to take ahead this discussion on the belief that it is a story from a believer's standpoint.

The difference between Rāmāyaṇa and the Vedas is that Vedas give *do's and dont's* whereas Rāmāyaṇa gives the real-life application of the teachings. The discussion of this talk is based on Goswāmi Tulasidāsaji's version of Rāmāyaṇa called *Rāmācharitamānasa* or *Tulasi Rāmāyaṇa*. There is no need to compare different versions of Rāmāyaṇa and argue which one is authentic and which one is not, because in Hindu philosophy, the *Kāla-chakra* (Time-Cycle) keeps repeating and every Yuga (Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dwāpara Yuga and Kali Yuga) keeps repeating and the same story goes on again and again. Every Yuga's story is the same but different *jīvās* play the same characters. E.g. Different *jīvās* have



played the role of Rāvaṇa in every Yuga, but the role of Rāma is played by the Lord Himself. So if any version of Rāmāyaṇa is different, it might be the story of some other Yuga.

Tulasidāsaji's time period is during the period of the Mughal ruler Akbar. His earlier name was Rāmbola. He was named so because it is said that when Tulasidāsaji was born, he didn't cry. Instead he said, "Rāma". He was born not as a baby but he looked like the size of a 5-year old child. His parents died when he was very young and he was taken care of by a maid. Even the maid died when he was young and he was taken care of by some saint. He became a scholar and used to give discourses on spiritual matters. But he was not a great devotee at that time. His life changed at an instance after he got married.

He was very attached to his wife. One day it so happened that his wife went to her house. It was for the first time he was staying away from his wife. Being unable to bear the separation even for a day, Tulasidāsaji followed her and went to her house. When he reached there she remarked, "If you would have had this much bhakti for Lord Rāma, you would have attained mukti by now." These words rang in his mind and that was the turning point in his life. He got the message for his life and left home to become a mendicant. This is the story in short about Goswāmi Tulasidāsaji.

Quiz:

1. What is the difference between Rāmāyaṇa and the Vedas?
2. Name the four Yugās.
3. Why is there no need to compare different versions of Rāmāyaṇa?
4. What was Tulasidāsaji's earlier name?
5. Which incident changed Tulasidāsaji's life?





About Rāmacharitamānasa and reason for Rāmāvatāra

Apart from Rāmacharitamānasa, Goswāmi Tulasidāsaji had written other texts - Gītāvali Rāmāyaṇa, Vinay Patrika, Kavītāvali Rāmāyaṇa and Hanumāna Chālīsā. In Rāmacharitamānasa, there are 7 Cantos. To enter into the lake (nectar) of Rāmāyaṇa, one has to enter through a ghāt. There are four ghāts, viz.,

Ghāt 1 is at Prayāga and is known as the Karma Ghāt (spoken by Bharadwāja Mahāriṣi to sage Yāgnavalkya)

Ghāt 2 is at Kailāsa Mānasarovara and is known as Jnāna Ghāt (spoken by Lord Śiva to Goddess Pārvatī)

Ghāt 3 is at Meru and is known Bhakti or Upāsana Ghāt (given by Kāka Bāsundi to Garuda)

Ghāt 4 is at Chitrakūṭa and is known as Dīna Ghāt (given by Tulasidāsaji to himself)

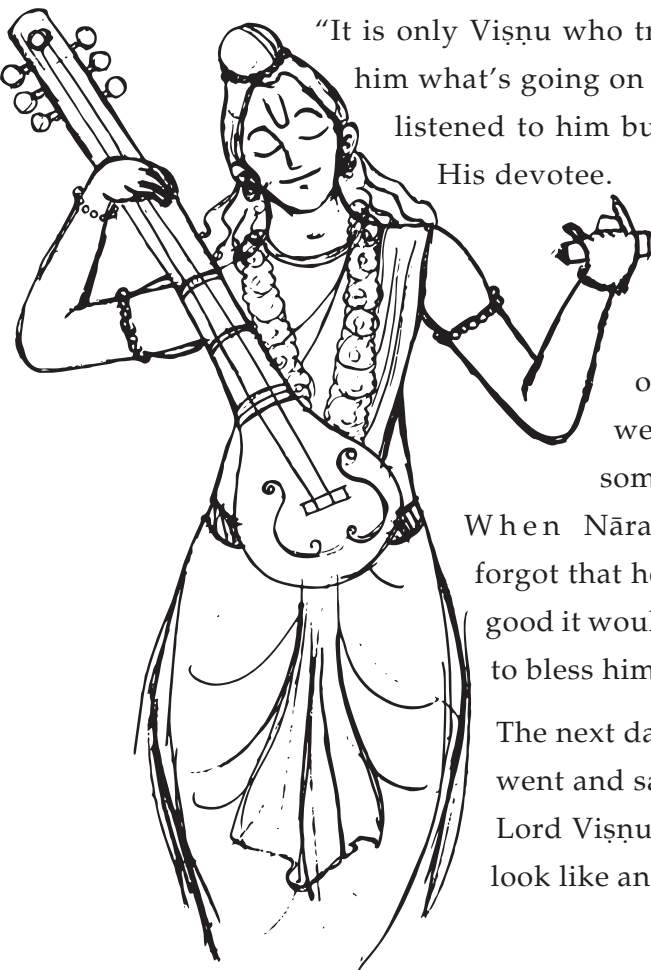
In Tulasi Rāmāyaṇa, hence we see appearance of Kāka Bāsundi, Bharadwāja Mahāriṣi, etc. In the beginning of the text Tulasidāsaji makes it clear why he writes the text. He says, "It is only to enlighten my mind, to purify my own mind, for purifying my own speech, and because of my love for Rāma that I am writing this book."

There is a story which explains the hetu (reason) for the happening of Rāmāyaṇa. It is an interesting story of sage Nārada. Nārada was a great devotee of Lord Viṣṇu. It is said that earlier whoever he taught, all of them took up Sanyāsa. It so happened that Nārada's brother's sons also took up Sanyāsa. On this, his brother cursed him saying, 'May you not be able to stay at one place for long time'. Nārada accepted this curse as a blessing because now he could travel all over and need not stay at one place. As he travelled spreading the greatness of Lord Viṣṇu, his devotion grew in leaps and bounds and he overcame Kāma (desire) and Krodha (anger). As his tapas became stronger, Lord Indra, king of the heavens, grew anxious. He always felt that people whose penance would grow stronger, they would be granted boons by the Gods and that they would replace Indra as the king of the heaven. He sent

his gang comprising of Kāmadeva and his team of heavenly denizens to interrupt his penance. But even though Nārada opened his eyes, he didn't get fascinated by the beautiful apsarās. And neither did he get angry. He just kept silent. Thus it was concluded that Nārada had conquered Kāma and Krodha. This news spread like wildfire. However, this impacted in a negative way on Nārada. He felt that he has achieved something great. He became proud of his achievement. Thus, his ego got inflated. It is said that when there is forgetfulness of God, ego arises.

With this ego, he went to Lord Śiva. He told Him, "Do you know what I did? I did severe penance and have conquered Kāma and Krodha." On hearing this, Śiva understood his problem. He said, "You have told this to me but do not go and tell this to Viṣṇu." Nārada was disappointed to hear this. He was expecting some appreciation from Śiva but he didn't get it. So with a broken heart he went to his father Brahma. Nārada was the mānasa-putra of Brahma. When Brahma asked about his whereabouts, he narrated the entire story. Brahma also understood that Nārada has come under the influence of his own ego. So he kept mum. Nārada understood that his father is also unhappy.

So, not adhering to Śiva's advise, he went to Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu was very happy to see Nārada and asked him to sit beside him. Nārada was pleased and said to himself, "It is only Viṣṇu who truly recognises my greatness." When Viṣṇu asked him what's going on in his life, Nārada narrated the entire story. Viṣṇu listened to him but felt sad to see the level of ego that had risen in His devotee.



As Nārada bid good-bye to Viṣṇu, he started walking when he saw a kingdom that was never there earlier. It was actually born out of the Māyā of Lord Viṣṇu. As he went into the kingdom, he was welcomed by the king who asked Nārada to predict something about the would-be groom for his daughter.

When Nārada saw the princess, he got lost in her beauty. He forgot that he had overcome desire and anger. He thought, how good it would be if he could marry her. He prayed to Lord Viṣṇu to bless him with Viṣṇu's beauty so that he can marry her.

The next day was the swayamwara of the princess and Nārada went and sat among the kings who had come for the marriage. Lord Viṣṇu played a trick at that time. He made Nārada's face look like an ape. But this ape-face of Nārada could be seen only

by the princess and two Rudragaṇās who were present in the palace. As the princess came near Nārada she showed a disgusting face when she saw Nārada. He felt it utter surprising as to why she showed such disgust. It was when he saw his face in the mirror that he could realise what had happened and he understood whose play it was. Having an unfulfilled desire, he was naturally caught by anger and he cursed his own Lord, Lord Viṣṇu, that may Viṣṇu be born as a human and may he also suffer separation from his beloved. He also cursed the two Rudragaṇās. No sooner he cursed, he realised his mistake and apologised to Lord Viṣṇu.

It is said that it is due to this curse, that Viṣṇu took avatāra as Lord Rāma and the two Rudragaṇās were born as Rāvaṇa and Kumbhakarṇa. Later Rāvaṇa, Kumbhakarṇa and Vibhīṣaṇa had done penance pleased by which Lord Brahmāji asked them to ask for a boon. Rāvaṇa asked for immortality but Brahmāji said that no one can be immortal. So he said that let him be very mighty and let him never be killed by any deva or asura. But due to his pride, he underestimated the power of humans and animals. This was one of the main purposes of Rāmāvatāra. It is said that Goddess Saraswati played a trick on Kumbhakarṇa by changing his words which came out as 'I want to sleep for 6 months'. Probably Saraswati Devi might have thought that if this giant would live then there would be scarcity of food for the others. Brahmāji granted the wish to the two brothers. When he asked Vibhīṣaṇa what he desired for, he said I want 'Haribhakti' (constant devotion and remembrance of the Lord). It is said that the three brothers Ravaṇa, Kumbhakarṇa and Vibhīṣaṇa symbolise the three guṇās - Rajas, Tamas and Sattva respectively.

The story of Rāmāyaṇa is full of symbolisms and the messages are virtues coated with stories that one can inculcate in his life.

Quiz:

1. Name the four other texts written by Tulasidāsaji other than *Rāmācharitamānasa*.
2. Name the Cantos in *Rāmācharitamānasa*.
3. Name the two things that Nārada conquered.
4. When does ego arise?
5. What is the story behind the curse on Lord Viṣṇu?
6. Who were the two Rudragaṇās born as?
7. What does Rāvaṇa and his brothers symbolise?

8. Match the following:

a. Kailāsa Mānasarovara	Bhakti or Upāsana Ghāt	Tulasidāsaji to himself
b. Prayāga	Dīna Ghāt	Bharadwāja to Yāgnavalkya
c. Meru	Karma Ghāt	Śiva to Pārvatī
d. Chitrakūṭa	Jnāna Ghāt	Kāka Bāsundi to Garuda





Birth of Lord Rāma

The birth of Lord Rāma is very well known. Daśaratha, the king of Ayodhyā, had three wives - Kauśalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyī. He was very happy except for one thing that he didn't have a child. After consulting his Guru, he did a Yagña and got pāyasam as prasād. Half of which he gave to Kauśalya, and the other half to Kaikeyī. It was then he remembered about Sumitra. So he asked both the wives to give a part of their pāyasam to Sumitra. Thus, Daśaratha was blessed with four sons. Kauśalya gave birth to Rāma, Kaikeyī to Bharata and Sumitra gave birth to the twins Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna. The names of the four children was suggested by sage Vasiṣṭha based on the qualities they showed after birth.

When Vasiṣṭha saw Rāma, he was awestruck. The sight of Brahman, the Supreme Lord of the entire Universe, taking a human form is something that any saint



would yearn for. Vasiṣṭha said that this boy will give happiness to all and all will revel in happiness in him. So he should be named Rāma - the one who revels in happiness. It is also said that when the maid who was serving Kauśalya was asked by Kauśalya what she needs as a reward for taking care of her during the delivery, the maid said, "I don't want anything. Just let me hold the baby in my lap". The very moment she keeps Lord Rāma on her lap, she goes into Samādhi. That is the level of happiness when one comes in touch with God.

It is also said that the sun was so engrossed in look at Lord Rāma that it forgot to set for one whole month. So it was day time for one whole month in Ayodhyā but everyone in the kingdom was so happy that nobody even noticed it.

After Rāma was born, he showed his swarūp with four hands holding śaṅkha, chakra, gada, padma to Kauśalya because in one of her earlier births Rāma had promised her that he would be born to her as her son in one of her later births. So Rāma showed this form to show her that he had fulfilled her promise. Immediately after he was born, he asked Kauśalya, "What do you want me to do?", to which Kauśalya says, "Please show you Śisulīla". Rāma was a man of his word. Right from his birth he had been fulfilling the words given by him to different people.

Of course, these are not to be taken literally but one should not fail to see the poetic beauty that Tulasidāsaji adds by showing the level of happiness that was around after Lord Rāma was born.

The reason why the four brothers were named so is also interesting. 'Rāma' means the ocean of bliss, a drop of which, when consumed by any beings in the all three worlds in the past, present or future, gives happiness. 'Bharata' means the one who nourishes the whole universe. 'Lakṣmaṇa' means the one who is virtuous and the one who has identified himself with the entire universe. 'Śatrughna' means the destroyer of one's enemy - the main villain - Ego.

As the children grew up, they were seen in pairs. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were one pair and Bharata and Śatrughna the other pair. Everyone loved watching the boys grow up. As they were in their kumārāvastha (around 10 years of age) they were given janayu and initiated into learning. They too had to go to the gurukula to study. Despite being the princes, there was no home tutoring. That was the culture that prevailed in India. Guru was given utmost respect. To get the knowledge, one had to go to the Guru and learn. Even if they were the kings or princes, they had to bow down before the Guru.

The common teaching to all the students was Dharmavidya - the knowledge of righteousness and good conduct. Then according to their varṇa, they were

taught the special sciences. The four brothers being kṣatriyās, they were taught Dhanurvedya (archery). The four brothers grasped things quickly and finished their education fast and came back home. Everyone was happy in Ayodhyā on their arrival and life was going good for all of them, especially for Daśaratha.

But very soon there was a twist in the story that would happen.

Quiz:

1. What is the meaning of Rāma, Laskshmana, Bharata and Śatrughna?

2. In his swarūp, what does Rāma hold in his hands?

3. What is the meaning of Dharmavidya?

4. Match the following

a.	Kauśalya	Bharata
b.	Sumitra	Rāma
c.	Kaikeyī	Lakṣmaṇa
		Śatrughna





Viśwāmitra arrives

All these happenings are described in the Bālakāṇḍa of *Tulasi Rāmāyaṇa*. In Bālakāṇḍa, the duties, responsibilities and virtues that are to be cultivated are given. Tulasidāsaji beautifully explains the dinacharya of Lord Rāma (an ideal way of spending a day) and also the jīvanacharya of Lord Rāma (an ideal way of spending one's life). Guruji Swami Tejomayananda beautifully puts jīvanacharya as - Learn - Earn - Turn - No return. Learn well during the days when one is a Brahmachāri (student). Earn well as one is a grihastha (householder). Make a U-turn in life to introspect and withdraw from worldly activities as one ends the grihasthāśram and gets into vānaprasthāśram (life after retirement). And finally make completely withdrawal from worldly activities focusing fully on God to ensure that one does not have to come back to this world (no return).

There is a turn in the story of Rāmāyaṇa that happens with the arrival of Sage Viśwāmitra. This is the first turn in the smooth sailing story. There are a few characters who come and change the course of the story at regular intervals.

Viśwāmitra Rīṣi was earlier a king and was called as a Rājariṣi. Later on with his tapas he became a Brahmariṣi. The name Viśwāmitra (friend of the entire world) was given to him because he loved all the creatures in the world.

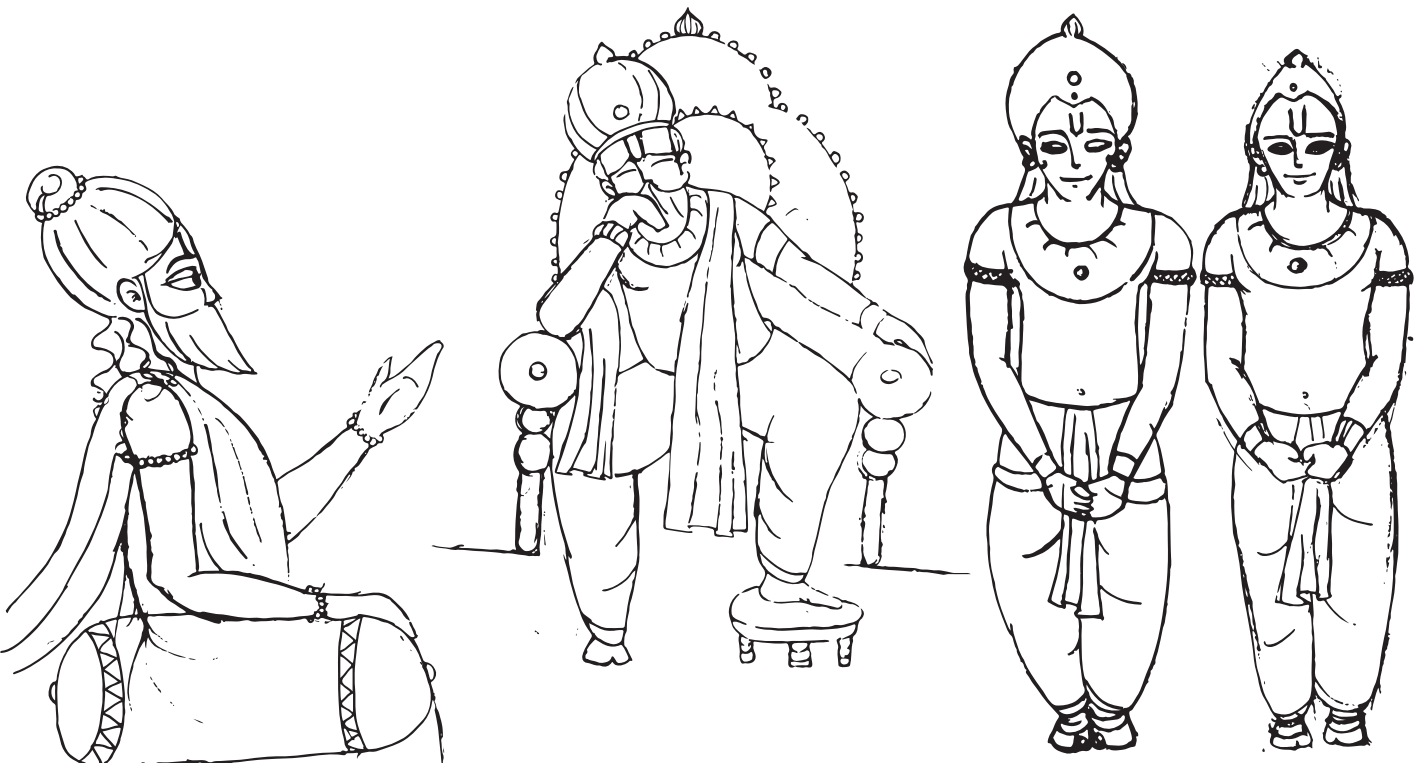
Viśwāmitra Rīṣi comes to Daśaratha's court. At the arrival of such a great sage, Daśaratha is very happy and makes all the arrangements and extends the best of hospitality towards the Rīṣi. After that he asks about Viśwāmitra's arrival. He replies that he is trying to do a Yagña in the forest and all the time two rākṣasās are disturbing the Yagña by throwing all garbage and rubbish into the fire altar. He then tells Daśaratha that he would like to take Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to protect the Yagña from the rākṣasās. When he hears this, Daśaratha becomes very tensed. He couldn't imagine sending his teenager sons for fighting the terrible and cruel rākṣasās. He says, "Oh great Rīṣi, I think you have made this statement without much thinking." This is a statement that a king like Daśaratha cannot afford to make about a great sage like Viśwāmitra. But he does that because his intellect gets covered by the attachment and love for his children, especially Rāma. And

Viśwāmītra knows this and hence in his mind he is pleased with Daśaratha's love.

Now, the question one might get at this juncture is, Viśwāmītra himself was a great king and a great Rīṣi. He could have fought the rākṣasās or even cursed them. Why to take the help of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa? Here, in Tulasi Rāmāyaṇa Tulasidāsaji says, with the curse of a Rīṣi a person goes to hell. But when Bhagawān kills a person, he gets liberated. Since Viśwāmītra was the 'mītra' of the entire Vishwa, he didn't want to kill even a rākṣasā. This shows the minds of great sages and how much they think of the well-being of everyone, even the wicked.

Daśaratha continues, "Oh great Mahārīṣi, you know after how many years I have begotten children. It is just now these boys have come back after their education. And they are so young. How could they fight against the mighty rākṣasās? More than that, you know how much I love Rāma. How can I stay away from him? How will I be able even to breathe when he is out there in the forest? I cannot even imagine the situation. Oh Guru, if you want, I myself will come and fight the mighty demons and kill them. Please do not ask for my sons." The plight of poor Daśaratha could be seen in his eyes.

Viśwāmītra looks at Vasiṣṭha and the latter gets the message. He reminds Daśaratha how he had asked for one son and he had begotten four. That too because of the Yagña that he had performed. So he should not forget the importance of a Yagña. It is for such a Yagña that Viśwāmītra wants to take Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. And he is asking only for two sons out of the four. Hence, the request should be granted. Moreover, Viśwāmītra is no ordinary sage. If he is taking the boys, he will surely protect them. Vasiṣṭha also tells Daśaratha that he can also foresee that it is not just to kill the demons that Viśwāmītra is taking the boys but their marriage will also happen in this trip. Guruji Swami Tejomayananda wittingly remarks, "Perhaps the last point was the most appealing for Daśaratha, as it happens with all parents."



Taking permissions from their father and Vasiṣṭha, both the brothers start their journey with Viśwāmitra on foot to Siddhāśram where they Yagña was supposed to happen. The sight must have pained the heart of Daśaratha and many a people of Ayodhyā because these handsome princes who have lived amongst the comforts of the palace and travelled in chariots are now going to the forest on foot.

As they enter the forests, they come across Tāṭaka, a fierce female demon. Rāma hesitates for a moment to fight a female but Viśwāmitra tells him that one should not look at the gender when one is fighting a terrorist. With one arrow Rāma kills Tāṭaka. Surprisingly, Tāṭaka takes the form of a beautiful denizen of Gandharva world. She was actually in this form because of a curse and she now got liberated by Rāma. Soon they enter the depth of the forests and Viśwāmitra gives the mantra 'Bala ati bala' to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa which would keep them fit and energetic even without having food and water. Both the brothers guard the Yagña without food, water and rest.

Soon the two demons Mārīcha and Subāhu (the children of Tāṭaka) come near the Yagña and laugh when they see two boys guarding the Yagña. But that was perhaps the last laugh of their life. Rāma kills Subāhu with one arrow and with a blunt arrow hits Mārīcha so hard that he is thrown hundreds of miles away. This is said to have happened in the modern day Patna in Bihar and Mārīcha is thrown to a place near the Arabian Sea where Mumbai stands today. Such was the effect. This created a deep fear in Mārīcha, so deep that he retired from this profession. It is said that he used to get scared even hearing of the two letters 'ra' and 'ma'. Viśwāmitra blesses both the boys and retires to his hut to take rest.



Quiz:

1. How does Guruji explain jīvanacharya?
2. What is the meaning of Viśwāmitra?
3. Why does Viśwāmitra want to take Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to the forest?
4. What was the name of the first demon that Rāma killed?
5. What was the name of the mantra given by Viśwāmitra to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa?
6. Name the children of Tāṭaka.
7. Which demon was killed and which one was thrown away by Rāma?





Ahalyāmokṣam

Next day morning Viśwāmitra tells Lord Rāma that they need to proceed for a 'Dhanuṣ Yagñā' at Janakapuri where King Janaka lives. Actually, Viśwāmitra wanted to get Lord Rāma married to Sītā Devi but he thought, the word 'marriage' might not seem very appealing to Lord Rāma but the word 'Yagñā' would definitely sound appealing. Hence he uses the word 'Dhanuṣ Yagñā'.

On the way to Janakapuri, they come across a deserted āśram which surprises Rāma. He thinks, King Janaka was the most prosperous king and there was no way that in his kingdom an āśram would be in such a condition. It is then he comes to know that the āśram belongs to Gautama Rīṣi who had a very beautiful wife Ahalyā. Ahalyā was a very pious woman who had performed a lot of austerities. At one particular instance, her mind becomes weak and she commits a sin. Raged by anger, Gautama Rīṣi curses her to become a rock. But later, he withdraws the curse by saying that she would be liberated when Lord Rāma would come to the forest.

As the three of them walk through the hermitage, the dust in Rāma's feet fall on Ahalyā and she takes back her lustrous form. When Ahalyā comes back to her original form she bursts into tears seeing the Lord. She falls at His feet immediately with reverence. Seeing the Lord in front of her she puts forth a request that may her mind always enjoy the nectar of bhakti at His lotus feet. Rāma smiles. He does not say 'Tathāstu' as it is normally said in return to a person who asks for a boon. The reason why Rāma only smiles is because he knows that Ahalyā is a Rīṣipatni and such a lady should be highly respected. His attitude is such that it would be a matter of pride if he would say 'Tathāstu' to Ahalyā because even though he was Lord Viṣṇu Himself, he had taken avatār as an ordinary man. This is what crosses Rāma's mind and he just smiles thinking in his mind that let the wish be fulfilled. Ahalyā tells Lord Rāma, "Now I feel what a blessing this curse was. It was because of the curse that I could have the darśan and touch of your lotus feet. Else, I would never have gotten the opportunity."

Ahalyā returns to her husband who accepts her heartily.



Quiz:

1. Name the Rishi who had deserted the āsram in Janakapuri.
2. Who was Ahalyā? Who cursed her and why? How did she get relieved from the curse?
3. Why didn't Rāma say 'Tathāstu' when Ahalyā asked for a boon?





Two handsome princes come to Janakapuri

King Janaka of Mithila, had a beautiful daughter whom he had adopted. She was none other than Sītā Devi. Real name of Janakapuri was Mithila and hence Sītā was also called Maithilī. Another name of Sītā was Jānakī. Mithila was the capital of Videha. Hence Sītā was also called as Vaidehī.

When she was at the right age for marriage (early teenage), Janaka had kept a swayamwara for Sītā Devi. But there was a condition put by King Janaka. There was a bow of Lord Śiva that Janaka had. The condition was that one would be able to lift and string the bow would win the hand of Sītā Devi in marriage. Kings from all around the country had come to contest for the marriage.

It was then that Janaka gets the news of arrival of Viśwāmitra and the two other princes. When he saw the two handsome princes, King Janaka was dumbfounded. Tulasidāsaji beautifully describes this part. Rāma was dark blue in colour and the most handsome. Lakṣmaṇa was in fair complexion and handsome too. Janaka asks Viśwāmitra who these young princes were. In his reply, Viśwāmitra asks Janaka to make a guess. And Janaka hits the bull's eye. He says, "It seems to me that the Lord Himself has taken two human forms and come before me." Viśwāmitra smiles but does not reveal the true identity of Rāma. He tells Janaka that they are none other than two sons of King Daśaratha. Janaka makes arrangements for stay for the three guests. As he leaves the guests' quarters, he thinks unto himself that how lucky his Sītā would be if she could marry Lord Rāma. As any other father would have been, he too went home with an anxious mind.

In the evening, Lakṣmaṇa indicates Rāma that he wants to take a tour of the kingdom. To this, Rāma requests Viśwāmitra if they could go around and see the kingdom. Tulasidāsaji says that Lakṣmaṇa didn't want to go. The actual reason was that he wanted the people of Janakapuri to see his Ramchandraji. For Lakṣmaṇa, there was no other objective in life. His only goal in life was the well-being and welfare of Lord Rāma.

As the two brothers set for the stroll, the entire villagers are out of their houses to see the two handsome princes walk the streets of Mithila. The children welcome them and show the specialities of their kingdom and other people come out of the shops and houses to get a glimpse of the charming princes. The women folk also come out with eagerness to see the princes and the news of the arrival of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa spreads like wildfire in the entire city. Soon the news reach the sakhīs of Sītā Devi and she also feels so happy. In her heart she yearns to see Rāma having heard about his charismatic personality. Soon, Rāma sees that it's time to return for their Guru would be waiting for them. And they return to Viśwāmitra Rīṣi's hut.

Tulasidāsaji never misses an opportunity to explain even the small parts of Rāmāyaṇa that one might miss in a general reading of the main story. When Viśwāmitra lies down, both Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa press his feet. Viśwāmitra knows the true nature of Rāma and he feels very embarrassed that the Lord is pressing his feet. He acts as if he has fallen asleep and the boys retire to their rooms. Here, and at many similar instances, one will be moved into tears by seeing the love of Lakṣmaṇa for Rāma. Lakṣmaṇa presses the feet of Lord Rāma till Rāma sleeps. Lakṣmaṇa's love for Lord Rāma cannot be expressed in words. His only objective in life is to serve Rāma. For him, there is no one who is more important or dearer to him than Rāma. Nowhere in the history do we find any brother like Lakṣmaṇa who lives the life of an ideal brother. Rāmāyaṇa shows such ideals and virtues. Even if one can inculcate atleast a small percent of it, his life will be transformed.

Quiz:

1. What was the condition kept by King Janaka?
2. Why did Lakṣmaṇa want to go to see the city of Mithila?
3. Mithila was the capital of which place?
4. What was the objective of Lakṣmaṇa's life?
5. What were the other names of Sītā?





Brahman meets Māyā

Next day morning, sage Viśwāmītra tells Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to go to Puṣpavāṭika and bring some flowers. Actually speaking, it is just a pretext Viśwāmītra makes so that Rāma and Sītā could see each other. Viśwāmītra, Vasiṣṭha and similar Rīṣis are trikālajñānīs who can see the past, present and future. That is how Viśwāmītra knows what's going to happen in Puṣpavāṭika.

When Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa reach the garden, Rāma asks the gardener whether he can pluck the flowers for Viśwāmītra. This shows the humility of Rāma. Nobody would have stopped him but he wouldn't do a single act which could be labelled wrong in context of Dharma.

They go around and suddenly Rāma's eyes fall on Sītā between a veil of creepers. She too was in the garden with her friends. There are no words in English that can



express the poetic beauty that Tulasidāsaji gives to describe this meeting of Rāma and Sītā. It is a matter of romance but he puts it in such a pure form without the slightest tinge of sensuality anywhere. He says, 'When Rāma sees the unmatched beauty of Sītā, the cool breeze starts blowing and there is fragrance in the air. Rāma could hear the tingling sound of Sītā's ornaments and his eyes are transfixed on Sītā. His heart is filled with love that he has never experienced before. He tells Lakṣmaṇa what is going on in his heart. He says that he is from the clan of Raghuvamśis which do not get affected by any sensual pleasure. If his heart has to melt, then this is definitely the lady that is meant for him.' Guruji asked us to notice that Rāma tells Lakṣmaṇa all this without any shyness because his love is so pure.

At this point, Sītā Devi has not see Lord Rāma. As they walk to some other part of the garden, one of the friends of Sītā Devi sees Lakṣmaṇa. She is swept away by seeing the beauty of Lakṣmaṇa. Let me just remind, the people of those times were very pure at heart and when they saw the beauty of a person there was no lust in their eyes, but only love and adoration. People like us of today's times cannot apprehend those feelings completely, for our hearts aren't that pure.

The friend comes back to Sītā Devi and her friends with her jaws dropped. Looking at her they realise that something has gone wrong. They ask her what happened and she is unable to utter a word. They press her to say something. With a lot of effort, she gains back her original poise and tells them, "Do you know, the two handsome princes from Ayodhyā who have come to our city yesterday... they are there in this garden right now. I just saw them." Everyone's heart is thrilled with joy and they all rush to the place from where they could peep and see the young princes. And then ... Sītāji sees Rāma. And then Tulasidāsaji says she lost her body identification. It was as though her heart merged with Rāma the very moment she saw his lustrous personality. Every single person who had seen Rāma was in total awe and adoration of His beauty. Those who had interacted with him could experience the same beauty in his words and character. So what to say of Sītāji's experience when she feels the divine love for Rāma! Sītā forgets where she is at the sight of Rāma. Her friends chuckle and allow her to be absorbed in her gaze. At this point, Rāma doesn't see Sītā.

In some time, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa leave the garden and go back to Viśwāmitra's hut. Sītā Devi goes to Pārvatī Devi's temple and prays to her that may she get Rāma as her husband. But her mind is in turmoil because of the condition that Janaka has put for the marriage. She thinks, why did her father have to put the condition at all. She prays from her heart and then something wonderful happens.

The garland on Pārvatī Devi falls down giving the indication that her wish will be granted. Thrilled and overjoyed, she goes back home.

Back in Viśwāmitra's āśram, Rāma tells Viśwāmitra what he felt and in return Viśwāmitra smiles. He knows that it is something bound to happen and the Lord is just playing his Līla for the sake of all of us. The next day they set themselves for Janaka's court. And then, a great event happened.

Quiz:

1. What is the meaning of trikālajñānī?
2. Give an incident that shows the humility of Rāma.
3. What happens in Puṣpavāṭika?

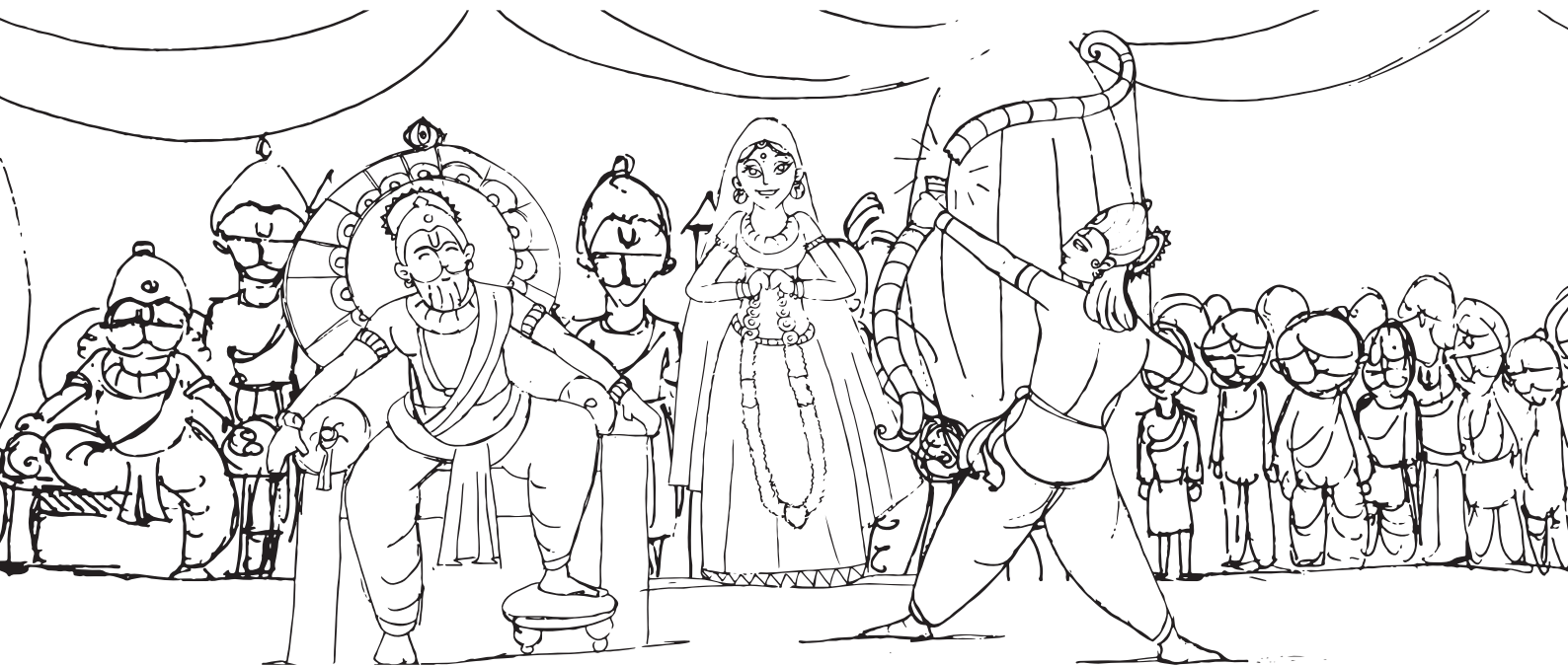




Sītāswayamwara

As mentioned earlier, King Janaka had put a condition that whoever is able to lift and string the bow of Lord Śiva, would win the hand of Sītā for marriage. So all the kings had assembled in the court of Janaka. Just then Janaka gets the news that Viśwāmītra is arriving there with Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. Immediately the entire atmosphere in the court changes. Janaka is very happy. Sītā is thrilled. Those who had heard about Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were waiting impatiently to see them. Those who had seen them were overjoyed that they could see them again. Among those present, there were also some kings who had great regard only for themselves. So there was also some jealous feeling that could be seen in some people in the court. Amidst all this commotion, all the arrangements are made for welcoming the three.

As the three great men arrive, everyone present in the court stand up in astonishment to see the young radiant men. As though time stood still when they entered the court. Even those who are jealous also got mesmerised by their beauty. The three are given special seats next to Janaka. As they sit down, indication to be seated is given to everyone else and that is when they come back to their senses and become their old selves.



One by one the kings start going to the bow to lift it up, but none of them could succeed. All the while Sītāji is constantly in prayers because she doesn't want to marry anyone else other than Rāma. When none of them are able to succeed, Janaka says that it seems as though there is no valiant king in this court who can win the hand of Sītā. On hearing this, Lakṣmaṇa could not stand. He took this as an insult. He said, "How can anyone say this when my Rāmachandraji is here? He turns to Viśwāmitra Rīṣi and continues, "If he has your blessings then he can lift any bow. Not just a bow, he can lift the entire Brahmāṇḍ. If he is unable to do it, then he will never ever lift any bow and arrow throughout his life." Lakṣmaṇa never got angry when anyone said anything about him. He only got angry when Rāmachandraji was insulted.

Rāmachandraji looked at Viśwāmitraji and sought his permission to give his try. Viśwāmitra nodded in agreement. As Rāma walked towards the bow, there were different thoughts in different people's minds. Those who were jealous, thought that how could this teenager boy succeed? Why has he come here only to get insulted. Many pray that let Rāma get the strength to lift the bow. But Sītāji prays that let the bow become as light as a feather. In no time, Rāma gets there and in the flash of a second, he lifts the bow and strings it. No one could see what had happened ... that was the speed in which he did it. And then, the bow broke and there was a huge sound that thundered. There was a roar among the courtiers as their joy knew no bounds for, their beloved Sītāji was going to get married to Lord Rāma. Sītāji was overwhelmed and didn't know how to thank Pārvaṭī Devi for granting her wish. King Janaka was excited. Lakṣmaṇa was the person probably who didn't have any excitement because he didn't have the slightest doubt on the ability of Rāma.

At the same time, there was a lot of commotion that started getting created. As it is common for the losers to find fault in the winner. So too there was a group of kings who started getting agitated because they had lost. While all this was going on, there came a messenger with the news that Paraśurāma was on his way to the court. Hearing this, the other kings start trembling. Because Paraśurāma had the reputation of touring the world thirteen times killing all the kṣatriyas before he retired. Some of the kings who were making the commotion started sneaking away from the court. Others trembled not knowing what to do. Very soon Paraśurāma arrived. Janaka, Viśwāmitra, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa offered their salutations to him. Paraśurāma blessed all of them.

It was then his eyes fell on the bow of Lord Śiva. The bow was used by Paraśurāma earlier. He got very angry on the sight and raised the question, "Who broke

this bow? He who has done it is my enemy.” On this, there is an interesting conversation between Lakṣmaṇa and Paraśurāma in Tulasi Rāmāyaṇa. Lakṣmaṇa teases Paraśurāma in the conversation driving Paraśurāma to become furious. Lakṣmaṇa says, “My Lord Rāma broke the bow. Actually he didn’t want to break it. He just took it and it broke. May be it was very old and rusted.” This annoyed Paraśurāma who replied, “That was no ordinary bow. That was Lord Śiva’s bow”. Lakṣmaṇa calmly said, “For us, every bow is alike.” This continues for some time when Viśwāmitra and Janaka intervenes and tells Paraśurāma not to get angry on Lakṣmaṇa because he is just a boy. Paraśurāma says that now Rāma will have to string Viṣṇu’s bow that is with ParashuRāma. If he can do that only then will Paraśurāma settle. Rāma readily agrees. No sooner he comes in front of Paraśurāma, the bow jumps itself to Rāma’s hands because it realises its own Master. Seeing this, Paraśurāma tells Rāma that he is now pleased and happy to see a true Kṣatriya who has now arrived. And now that Paraśurāma can peacefully retire to his abode. Saying this, he goes to the Badrikāśrama to meditate.

The entire episode is beautified by Tulasidāsaji and the beauty was magnified by Guruji in his talks. It is very natural for an agnostic mind to think how all this can be true and that it all seem to be exaggerated so much. But the point of studying Rāmāyaṇa is to inculcate the values and virtues through the story of Lord Rāma. As discussed in the first chapter, Vedas give out the ideal way of life in do’s and dont’s and Rāmāyaṇa gives it out in the story form. As we read Rāmāyaṇa, unknowingly the virtues take deep roots in our hearts.

Quiz:

1. Why did Lakṣmaṇa get angry?
2. Why were the kings afraid of Paraśurāma?





Return to Ayodhyā

Everybody is happy and Janaka Maharaj's happiness knows no bounds. He gets one more thought which he suggests to Viśwāmitra. He says that he has another daughter Ūrmila and if she can be married to Lakṣmaṇa then Sītā will also have a company with her in Ayodhyā. And lo! Viśwāmitra agrees to this and the happiness in Janakapuri grows in leaps and bounds. Someone then suggests that there are two cousins of Sītā and Ūrmila - Māṇḍavi and Śrutakīrti. Why not give their hands to Bharata and Śatrughna? And guess what? That also gets approved and everyone is so happy that Mithila nagari is full of celebrations.

We can see the role of the Guru and the position that the Guru used to hold in those times. Other than Rāma's, the other marriages are fixed without even asking the consent of the two brothers and their parents. The sheer faith that the Guru can never be wrong can be seen here.

Soon the message is sent to Daśaratha and he with Vasiṣṭha, Bharata, Śatrughna and others came to Mithila and the wedding of the four brothers took place ceremoniously. King Janaka kept pressing them to stay for some more time in Mithila. After a few days the wedding party gets ready to leave for Ayodhyā. The mothers were eagerly awaiting to welcome their sons and daughter-in-laws. What to say of the Ayodhyāwāsis (people of Ayodhyā) who were so excited to welcome the newly wedded couples, especially Sītā and Rāma.

This Canto comes to an end here. What we haven't mentioned here and what is discussed in detail in Tulasī Rāmāyaṇa was the things that happened in detail between these events. Tulasīdāsaji almost gives a day-to-day account of the happenings in the life of Rāma. He paints in our minds with great detail. He also points out the symbolisms behind many happenings. For example, he says, the pair of Rāma and Sītā is like Ānand (bliss) and Śanti (peace). Rāma is Jñānarūpa (personification of Knowledge) and Sītā is Bhaktirup (personification of devotion).

Breaking the bow symbolises breaking the bondage and attainment of liberation. In the beginning Rāma kills Tāṭaka and Subāhu, and throws Mārecha miles away. Tāṭaka represents durāśa (false hopes/desires) and her sons represent dukha



and doṣa. In *Vinay Patrika*, an entire song is given which gives out the spiritual meaning of Rāmāyaṇa. Bālakāṇḍa shows the duties of a son and a student. By merely reading ethics and moral science we cannot imbibe the virtues in our lives. Rāmāyaṇa is a Dharmaśāstra that helps us inculcate these qualities in us.

Quiz:

1. What are the names of the wives of Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata and Śatrughna?
2. What virtues did you learn in Bālakāṇḍa?
3. What do Tāṭaka, Mārīcha and Subāhu represent?
4. What is the name of the song written by Tulasidāsaji that gives the spiritual meaning of Rāmāyaṇa?
5. Name the major events in Bālakāṇḍa in the chronological order.





Ayodhyākāṇḍa





Second twist in Rāmāyaṇa

The second Canto of Rāmāyaṇa is Ayodhyākāṇḍa which is filled with very deep emotions. One needs to have a balanced mind to describe the entire Ayodhyākāṇḍa. Hence Tulasidāsaji prays to Lord Śiva to give him strength. Guruji explains why Tulasidāsaji prays to Śiva and not any other God. Śiva is the perfect example of a balanced mind. He is ever between dvandvas (pairs of opposites). He has two ladies with him - Pārvatī Devi as his consort and Ganga Devi emerging from matted locks. Still he is in meditation. On his head he has the crescent of the moon that emits the nectar of moonlight and in his neck he has poison. Around his neck he has a venomous snake and smeared on his body is the ash from the crematorium. Śankar Bhagawān is the substratum of all pairs of opposites. Hence, Tulasidāsaji prays to Śiva to give him strength to describe Ayodhyākāṇḍa which is mixed with emotions.

After the marriage celebrations of the four brothers happen in Ayodhyā, everybody is happy and life is sailing smooth. On one such happy day, while Daśaratha was getting ready for his daily affairs he saw his reflection in the mirror. He saw a grey hair on his head near the ear. Tulasidāsaji says that Daśaratha felt as though the grey hair was whispering into his ears of his old age and that he should retire. The entire Ayodhyāwāsīs wanted Rāma to be the king and Daśaratha himself wished the same. Even tradition holds true for royal families that the eldest son rules the kingdom. Lakṣmaṇa also wants Rāma to become the crown prince. Everyone wanted Rāma to be the crown prince except for Rāma. He felt, what a silly rule this Raghuvamśam has. When all of us four brothers have played, ate and grown up together, why cannot all four of us manage the kingdom? Why only the eldest one gets to become the ruler? Tulasidāsaji doesn't miss the opportunity to praise Lord Rāma's love for his brothers at this opportunity.

Daśaratha asks Vasiṣṭha for an auspicious day for the coronation of Lord Rāma. Vasiṣṭha smiles and replies, "The day Rāma becomes the king, that day is the auspicious day." Daśaratha wastes no time and announces the news of the coronation of Rāma to happen the next day. After coming from Janakapuri, Bharata and Śatrughna had gone to their maternal uncle's place and were absent

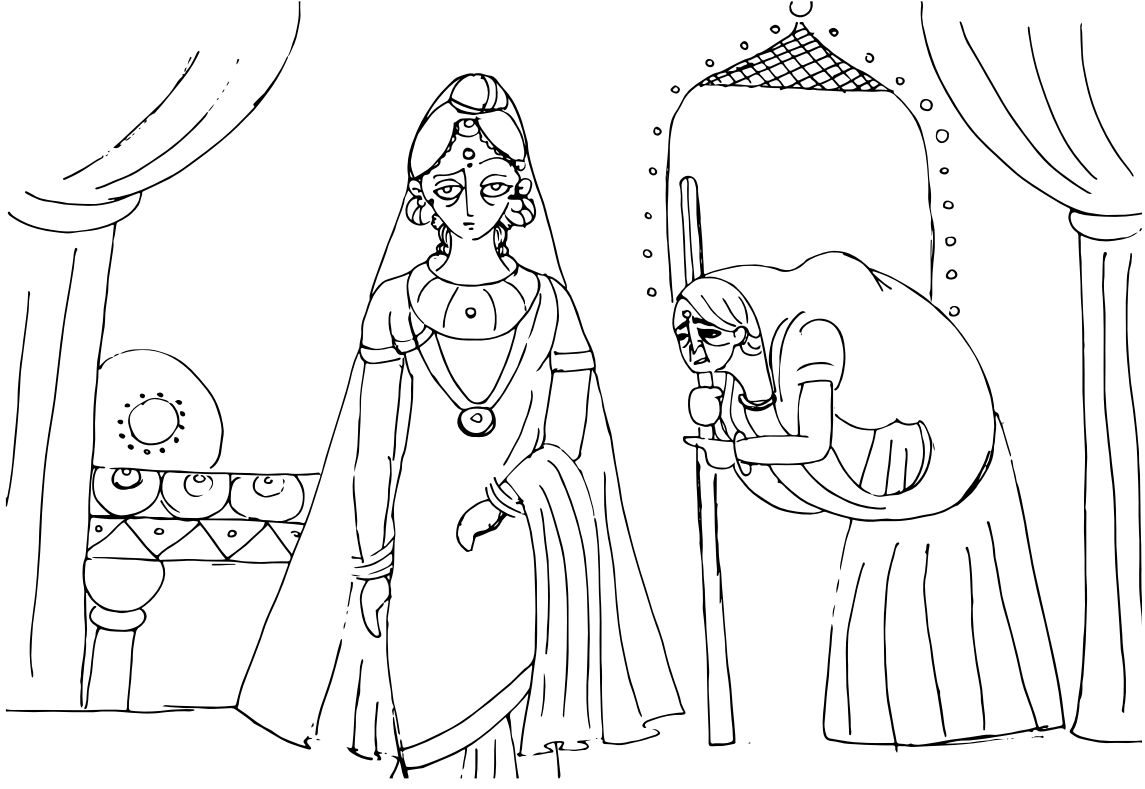
during this event. All the Ayodhyāwāsīs start celebrating and the arrangements were being made for the great event to happen the next day. But a great turn was waiting to happen when everything seemed to be going right.

There is a saying in Sanskrit '*Śreyāmsi bahu vighnāni*' - Meaning: There are many obstacles in any great venture. We may often feel that if we have undertaken a noble venture, the execution of the program would be smooth and that everyone would congratulate us for the great effort and support will arrive from all directions. But that does not happen most of the time. There is no noble venture that does not go through great difficulties and triumphs.

When the news of Rāma's coronation reaches swargaloka, the devatās go to Goddess Saraswatī praying to create an obstacle in the path because they felt that if Rāma stays happily in the palace then his birth would be futile. His birth was to slain many rākṣasās like Rāvaṇa. Goddess Saraswatī plants the seeds in the mind of Mantharā, the hunchback maid of Kaikeyī. It is to be noted that seeds get planted where they can get roots to grow. Mantharā means 'slow movement'. They refer to negative thoughts. They come in small waves and they become like an ocean even before we realise. In Bālakāṇḍa, Viśwāmitra had brought a twist to the story. In Ayodhyākāṇḍa, it is Mantharā who brings the twist.

Mantharā comes to Kaikeyī's quarters and sees that she is really happy about Rāma's coronation. Kaikeyī looks at Mantharā and sees her grumpy face. She is surprised and asks Mantharā, "What happened Mantharā? You look so sad. There is so much of joy around and why are you sad?" Mantharā gives a wicked look and replies, "You just be happy. Can't you see what's going on? You are very kind-hearted and that is why you are not able to see the plan that is set by Kauśalya". "Plan? What are you talking about?", asked Kaikeyī with surprise. Mantharā continues, "You are Daśaratha's favourite wife and everyone knows that. He spends so much more time with you as compared to the other two. From tomorrow when Rāma will become the crown prince, Kauśalya will become the Rājamāta and you will lose all your position and status. Rāma will have full power. He can even put Bharata behind the bars so that he is unrivalled. Later on, Rāma will kill Bharata and Śatrughna so that there is no one who can acclaim the throne. All this is going on and you are unable to see even an iota of it? What kind of a mother are you?"

These striking words hit Kaikeyī like a jolt. She became totally consumed by the poisonous waves of jealousy that Mantharā had instilled in her mind. Not knowing what to do, Kaikeyī asked Mantharā, "You are so right! I never saw all this coming. Now what do I do?" Mantharā gave her wicked smile and continued,



"Listen to me. I have a solution for the problem. Do you remember, long back once when Daśaratha Mahārāja was in the battle and you were with him? He had granted you two boons when you had saved his life. You are yet to encash the boons, right? Tell Daśaratha Mahārāja that you want to encash them now. Let the first boon be crowning Bharata as the king and the second boon be sending Rāma to exile in the forest for fourteen years. In fourteen years time, Bharata would have established a strong kingdom and Rāma can do nothing after coming back." Kaikeyī finds meaning in the meaningless words of Mantharā. Mantharā also suggests her a plan on how to present the idea to Daśaratha. She knew that Daśaratha would come there that night.

Quiz:

1. What is the Sanskrit saying which means there are many obstacles in any great venture?
2. Why does Tulasidāsaji pray to Śiva in the beginning of Ayodhyākāṇḍa?
3. What is the meaning of Mantharā? What does the meaning refer to? And why?
4. Who were the people who brought a twist to Bālakāṇḍa and Ayodhyākāṇḍa?
5. What was Mantharā's plan?





Preparation for the exile

At this time Daśaratha was in Rāma's quarters explaining what needs to be done the next day. After he leaves the quarters, he heads straight for Kaikeyī's room. When he enters the room, he couldn't believe what he was seeing! Kaikeyī was lying down on the floor in old clothes with her jewelry thrown off. He realises that something is not correct. He gently touches Kaikeyī to which she throws off his hand. He presses her to tell him the reason why she is depressed, but she doesn't utter a word. She was told by Mantharā that until he swears by Rāma, do not utter a word. After a lot of persuasion when he sees that nothing is working, Daśaratha swears by Rāma's name and then she takes out the tongue which had become poisonous. She says, "Do you remember you had granted me two boons long back? I want those two boons to be granted now." Daśaratha feels a bit relieved. He says, "Oh is that the matter? You see, I am becoming old and forgetful. You could have just told this to me. Why become so sad over it? So, tell me what do you want?" And then she utters the first wish. Daśaratha feels as if a big mace had hit his chest. With great effort he tries to regain his poise and asks her for the second boon. When she says that Rāma has to be sent to exile to the forest for fourteen years, Daśaratha just falls down on his knees. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. Kaikeyī was never like that. And there was no one who did not like Rāma. He cries, "Why do you want Rāma to be sent to the forest? What wrong has he done to you? What has happened to you?" Kaikeyī gets angry and says, "You had given your word. Now you cannot go back on it." Daśaratha pleads as much as he can but Kaikeyī was not ready to budge. He knows that Rāma will not resist from going to the forest. Never in his life had he failed to follow Dharma. How Daśaratha wished that Rāma would not follow this instruction just once in his life! But in his heart he knew that of all the people, Rāma would never do that. This was the most miserable night in Daśaratha's life. He was not this sad even when he didn't have children. How he wishes that this night would never pass and the next day's sun would not rise, for he couldn't stand the separation from Rāma.

The longest night passes and the sun rises the next day. Sumantra, Daśaratha's most trusted minister, was wondering why Daśaratha was not coming out from

the quarters even after sunrise. The guards of the palace are also wondering why is there a sense of sorrow when the day has to start with celebrations. It is said that there was never a day when Daśaratha did not wake up before sunrise. Sumantra understood that something was terribly wrong. He had the liberty to go to the quarters of Daśaratha or Kaikeyī, so he does that. To his utter shock he sees that Daśaratha is lying on the floor and Kaikeyī is in her old dress without any ornaments. He had never seen the king and queen in such a pathetic condition. He asks, "Mahārāja, what happened? Why are you in this state?" Choked with emotion, Daśaratha couldn't speak. Kaikeyī tells Sumantra to call Rāma immediately. Sumantra was the King's minister and not the Queen's. He wouldn't take orders from the Queen. He looks at Daśaratha who also instructs by action to bring Rāma. He quickly goes to Rāma's quarters. At that time Rāma is not even fully dressed. He tells Rāma to come to see the king immediately. Rāma realises that something is not right. He rushes to the king with Sumantra. He too is in shock to see the king like this. This was the first time in his life that Rāma had seen so much of sorrow. He asks, "Father, what happened? Why are you in such a miserable state? Have I done something wrong?" And Daśaratha bursts into tears because Rāma could never do something wrong. He couldn't utter a word to Rāma. So Kaikeyī slashes her sword-like tongue and says, "Rāma, I have asked for the two boons that your father had to grant me. Bharata will be the crown prince and you will have to go to the forest for fourteen years in exile." It is said that the earlier day when the news was declared that Rāma would be the crown prince, everyone was excited but he just smiled. When Kaikeyī said that he has to go to the forest, he had the same smile on his face. He said, "O father, for this small thing you are so sad? I feel so happy that I am given this opportunity. When we had gone to the forest with Viśwāmitra Rīṣi, we got so much Satsang. This is a great opportunity for me to learn from the great Rīṣis who live in the forest. I didn't want this kingdom at the first place only. But I couldn't disobey the law of Raghuvamśa and your wish. I am confident that there could be no better prince than Bharata. O dear father, please do not be distressed." Daśaratha holds Rāma's hand and Rāma tries to console him. As Kaikeyī sees this, she gets impatient. She fears that both Daśaratha and Rāma may change their minds. She says, "Do not delay. You have to leave immediately." Rāma smilingly replies, "Rāma doesn't speak twice." (Meaning: Rāma does not go back on his words).

Saying this, he takes leave of Daśaratha and goes to Kauśalya. One has to learn from Rāma how to break a sad news. He tells her, "Mother, do you know, father has given me a bigger kingdom - the kingdom of the forest. I can rule that for



fourteen years. Can you imagine the kind of Satsang I will be getting during this time?" Kauśalya bursts into tears. Rāma tries to console her. She says, "Rāma, of mother and father, mother holds a superior position. I am telling you not to go." But Rāma knows what is Dharma. Kauśalya too realises that it is not possible to stop Rāma. By this time, Sītā arrives there. Kauśalya tells Rāma to instruct her what she should tell Sītā. In those days, in front of the parents, the husband would feel shy to talk to his wife. That was the level of respect one had for the parents. Sītā too is anxious that what would be the command for her. Rāma says, "O Sītā, there would be so many wild animals and demons in the forest. You have lived your life in all the comforts of the palace. You will not be able to bear the wilderness of the forests. Moreover, look at the situation of our father and mother. It is your duty to be here and take care of them." Hearing this Sītā says, "O Lord, do you remember my father's words?" When Sītā's hand was given to Rāma, Janaka had told him that she would be with him throughout his life like a shadow. She says, "Where you are, my world is there. Either I will come with you in my physical form or my prāṇās will come with you. There is no greater sorrow than the sorrow of separation. How can I live in peace in these comforts when you are living in the forest? I will not be able to live without you." Rāma realises the truth in her words and agrees to her

wish. We should not fail to see that Sītā doesn't even ask why Rāma is being sent to the forest. Instead she says, "Why not me?". Can we even imagine the culture we had in our country? Where has it all disappeared?

Lakṣmaṇa also arrives at that point and he too gets the shock. He says, "O Lord, I am also coming with you." Rāma knew that Lakṣmaṇa would tell this. He says, "O brother, Bharata and Shatrughna are not here. Look at the situation of our father. If you are not here, then who will take care of our kingdom?" Lakṣmaṇa says, "O Prabhu, I am just a boy. I cannot do all the administration. All I know is to serve you. So there is no use of me staying back." Rāma knew that Lakṣmaṇa would not agree. He smiles and asks him to take the permission from his mother. Lakṣmaṇa rushes to Sumitra with an anxious heart. What Sumitra tells Lakṣmaṇa is a lesson for every mother in this world.

Quiz:

1. What were the two boons asked by Kaikeyī?
2. How did Rāma respond when Kaikeyī told him about the two boons?
3. What did you like about Sītā and Lakṣmaṇā's response when Rāma gave them the news about the exile?





Ayodhyā in tears

Sumitra was a noble wise woman. When Lakṣmaṇa tells Sumitra about the whole event, she is moved to tears. But she tells Lakṣmaṇa, "Do you know why all this has happened? It is because you are so fortunate. If Rāma would be the crown prince then there would be so many people to take care of him and you would be getting very less opportunity to serve him. But now in the forest, he is 100% yours. How lucky you are! Now, go and serve him for fourteen years." She adds, "Consider Rāma as your father and Sītā as your mother. Just as how the time when the sun rises we call it day time, similarly where there is Rāma, there is Ayodhyā. When Rāma and Sītā are in the forest, you have no duty to perform here. Only that mother can be called Putravatī whose son has become the devotee of the Lord. If the child is not a devotee then it's better to live childless. Serve Rāma and Sītā so well that there is no room for anger or any other desire even in your dream." Look at the advice given by Sumitra. To such a mother who gives such a high goal for her son, we cannot imagine what the son replied. Lakṣmaṇa says, "I will not have any other desire while I am awake. But I also don't want to have any desire while I am in sleep. I will not give a chance for that. So I will not sleep for fourteen years." And Lakṣmaṇa didn't sleep for fourteen years at all. He was constantly on guard. When Guruji explained this part, the entire audience was in tears seeing the love of Lakṣmaṇa for Rāma.

When Daśaratha comes to know that Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa, all three are going, he gets almost paralysed. Kaikeyī immediately gives Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā dresses for tapasvīs made out of the bark of a tree so that they don't delay in their departure. Sītā doesn't even know how to wear them and Rāma just wraps it on her clothes. When the three are set to depart, Daśaratha tells Sumantra that let them be taken on a chariot for a few days in the forest and then bring them back. May be by that time Bharata comes back, or Kaikeyī's mind changes. But in his heart, he too knows that Rāma won't come back.

Rāma distributes all the gifts he had received the earlier day for the coronation ceremony to the bhikṣūs. He tells the huge crowd who had gathered and were in tears to stay in Ayodhyā if they loved him. But they said, there is no Ayodhyā

without Rāma and they would stay only with Rāma. Sumantra offers the chariot and Rāma too thinks that it's not a good idea to stay back any longer because that would only make it difficult for everyone to see them depart. He quickly gets into the chariot with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa and they set off. In one of the Rāmāyaṇās it is said that Daśaratha runs behind the chariot weeping like a child asking them to stop. Rāma tells Sumantra not to stop and that he can tell Daśaratha that he didn't hear because of the loud commotion that was there around. Such was the state of Daśaratha.

Daśaratha looks at Kaikeyī and tells her, "You do not realise what you have done and what an ill-name you will get. You have not understood her own son Bharata because when he comes back he won't be happy for you at all." Saying this, he again bursts into tears.

The people of Ayodhyā followed the chariot until all of them reached Tamasā river. At night when they all fell asleep Rāma tells Sumantra to drive the chariot in such a way that the people cannot make out from the trail in which direction they all went. In the morning, the people wake up and are puzzled to see them disappeared. They try to find out the trail of the chariot, but in vain. Finally they go back with heavy hearts. It is said that after going back to Ayodhyā, they all did tapas for the love of Rāma.

Quiz:

1. What was the advice given by Sumitra to Lakṣmaṇa?
2. What was Lakṣmaṇā's reply to Sumitra?





Lakṣmaṇa Gītā

As Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā go on walking, they were nearing the kingdom of the tribal king Niṣādarāja. The king is pleased and invites them to their kingdom. But Rāma denies coming to their village because they have to live the life in the forest for fourteen years. So Niṣādarāja makes arrangements in the forest. There is a bed of leaves and flowers that is placed under a tree. The earlier day they were in the comforts of the palace and the next day they are going to sleep under the sky, under a tree on a bed of leaves having no blankets to cover themselves from the cold winds that blow in the forests at night. And what to say of the sounds of wild animals that roam at dusk. But they have no complaints, no regrets. Lakṣmaṇa and Niṣādarāja guard as Rāma and Sītā sleep. While they are guarding, Niṣādarāja starts murmuring and cursing Kaikeyī. On hearing this Lakṣmaṇa advises Niṣādarāja. This part is called *Lakṣmaṇa Gītā*.

He says, "Don't curse or grieve. It is only the effect of one's own karma's that one has to go through. It is nobody's fault. There are three ways of looking at life:

1. From the standpoint of Karma (action), everything is based on Karma. For every effect there is a cause.
2. From the standpoint of Jñāna (knowledge), everything that we see is the play of Māyā.
3. From the standpoint of Bhakti (devotion), the whole world exists in God, and God only does everything.

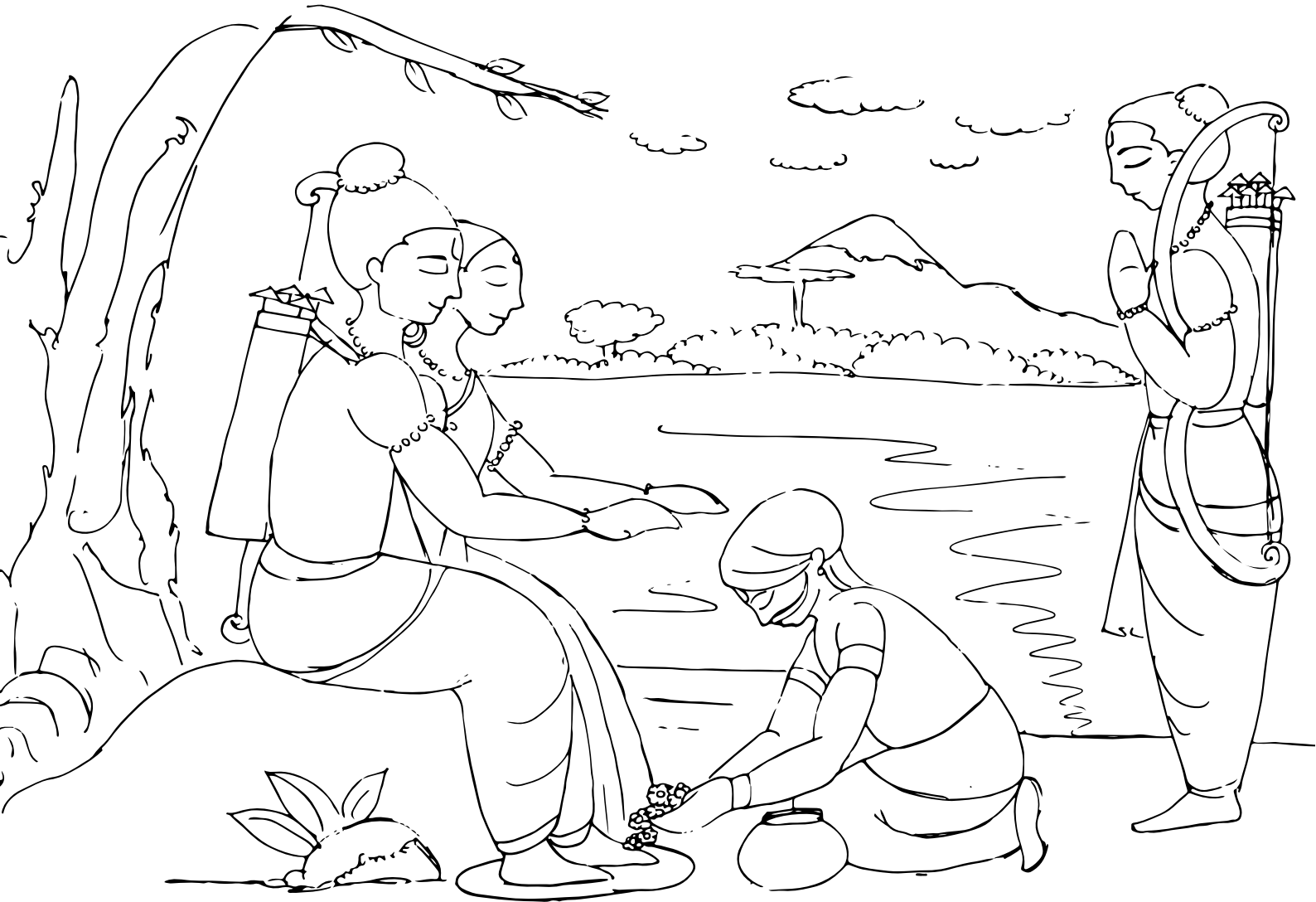
The difficulties that come in life is 'karmaphala' (the result of karma) but the sorrow that we face is 'ajñānaphala' (result of ignorance). Keeping the mind in peace is the result of 'bhaktiphala' (result of devotion)."

Even though Lakṣmaṇa Gītā seems to be short and sweet, the message is very deep and the commentary goes running into many pages.

When the sun rises, the three set forth for their journey. They come across a river that has to be crossed. Rāma calls for a boatman named Kevat. But the boatman denies to come near them. Rāma becomes curious and asks him why he is not

ready to come at which the boatman says, "I have heard that when the dust of your feet fell on a rock, it turned into a beautiful woman. What if I take you in and my boat turns into a lady?" Rāma replies, "Then it is good for you. Take her home." Kevat replies, "Then there will be one more mouth to feed. And my source of income will also be lost." Being left with no choice Rāma said, "Ok. Fine. We will call another boatman."

Hearing that Kevat came running saying he didn't mean he could not take them. The problem was the dust in the Lord's feet that he was scared of. He said that if he can wash the Lord's feet then there won't be any problem. Rāma smiles and steps forward. Kevat washes the feet of the Lord with utter devotion and it is said that even the ancestors of Kevat got liberated with the act. Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa step into Kevat's boat and he takes the three across the river. On reaching the other side, Rāma thinks what he can offer to Kevat as a token of gratitude for his service. Sītā immediately understands what's going on in his mind and removes a ring that she was wearing and gives it to Rāma. When Rāma offers the ring to Kevat he humbly rejects it saying that he doesn't want anything and that he feels fulfilled after having gotten the opportunity to serve the Lord even though for a short period. Rāma is pleased and blesses him with 'Vimal Bhakti' (which is considered more superior than even Mukti or liberation).



Niṣādarāja accompanies Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā to Prayāga (modern day Allahabad) where they meet Bharadwāja muni. Rāma asks Bharadwāja muni to show them a good place to stay in the forests. Bharadwāja muni calls for the Brahmachārīs who are studying in his āśram and immediately fifty of them came forward. He selected four out of the fifty who could guide them to a good place to stay in the forests. The four Brahmachārīs led the way followed by Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa. The four Brahmachārīs symbolise the four Vedas that show the right way of living, followed by Rāma (Brahman) who is followed by Sītā (Māyā) and behind Māyā is Lakṣmaṇa (the 'Jīva') i.e., between Brahman and Jīva is Māyā. What a beautiful way of portraying a deep philosophy! This is what one needs to see in Rāmāyaṇa. Those who feel it's just another story, do not realise the philosophy that is being expressed through the story.

Tulasidāsaji says that when Sītāji walks, she takes care that she doesn't put her foot steps on Lord Rāma's steps. And Lakṣmaṇa takes care that he doesn't step on Rāma and Sītā's steps. What a reverence! What a culture!

Quiz:

1. What is *Lakṣmaṇa Gītā*?
2. What is the message in *Lakṣmaṇa Gītā*?
3. Why was Kevat scared of allowing Rāma to step into his boat?
4. What does Rāma bless Kevat with?
5. Rāma followed by Sītā followed by Lakṣmaṇa – what does it represent?
6. To which muni's āśram does Niṣādarāja accompany Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā?





Daśaratha's death

After walking for many days they reach sage Vālmīki's āśram. It is to be noted that Vālmīki was a contemporary of Lord Rāma. Rāma asks Vālmīki where he can stay in the forest. In his reply Vālmīki mentions fourteen places where Lord Rāma can stay. And all those fourteen places indicate a devotee's heart. The fourteen places that he indicates are 5 sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin), 5 organs of action (hands, legs, tongue, anus and genitals), Manas (mind), Buddhi (intellect), Chitta (memory) and Ahankāra (ego). He goes further to explain what will happen if the Lord lives in each of these places. E.g. If the Lord lives in the ears of a person, his ears become like an ocean. One might wonder what that means. Ocean accommodates any amount of water and innumerable of rivers. There is no maximum capacity for the ocean. When the ears of a bhakta become like the ocean he will be able to give an ear to everyone and accommodate everyone without any bias or prejudices. Tulasidāsaji goes on explaining beautifully what happens when the Lord lives in the other thirteen places.

Rāma is pleased and he smiles. He asks Vālmīki to tell him a place to stay from a practical standpoint. Vālmīki suggest Chitrakūṭa to stay (which is in modern day Madhya Pradesh). Guruji said that out of the fourteen years in exile, they lived for atleast ten years in Chitrakūṭa. Mandākini river flows through Chitrakūṭa. The river is a tributary of Ganga which was brought to the place by Anusūya, wife of Atri Rishi.

How they spend their days in Chitrakūṭa is explained in detail in Tulasi Rāmāyaṇa. It is said that Lakṣmaṇa takes care of Rāma and Sītā just as how an ignorant person takes care of his own body (thinking that body is everything, an ignorant person goes on pampering the body and satisfying its needs). On the other hand, Rāma and Sītā take care of Lakṣmaṇa just as how the eyelids protect the eyes. The beauty of all these descriptions, similes and metaphors, is something that can only be experienced through Sanskrit poetry.

Niṣādarāja goes back to his kingdom. When he reaches there he is shocked to see that Sumantra is still waiting there. He asks Sumantra why he is waiting and he says that because of their love for Rāma the horses weren't willing to leave. That part was very touching when Guruji described how even animals loved Rāma and that how the beauty of an avatāra of Bhagawān cannot be explained.

Niṣādarāja tells Sumantra that there is no way Rāma is going to come back before the term of fourteen years. Sumantra doesn't know what to say to Daśaratha and the Ayodhyāwāsīs when he would be facing them. He tells Niṣādarāja, "I am so confused what to tell them when they would ask me how could you come back so heartlessly leaving the three in the forest?" The pain and dilemma of Sumantra is indescribable. He decides to go back to Ayodhyā during night time so that people would be asleep. But when he goes there he sees that people were waiting for him day and night.

He passes through all the people trying to convince them and reaches Daśaratha's palace. Daśaratha knew that they are not coming back but still there was a ray of hope that had kept him alive. When he realises that his wait is futile, he tells Kauśalya, "The darkness is spreading in front of my eyes and I am reminded of the curse on me by the parents of Śravaṇakumāra."

Long ago when Daśaratha was on a hunting expedition, he had killed Śravaṇakumāra, the only son of two very old blind parents, mistaking him for a deer when he was drinking water in a river. The old parents were deeply hurt and they cursed Daśaratha saying, "In our old age, our only pillar of support was our young son. We will now be dying with grief of not having him with us. May you also get a death out of separation from your son."

As mentioned in the curse, Daśaratha passes away crying, "Rāma, Rāma, Rāma..."

Vasiṣṭha sends a messenger to Bharata's maternal uncle where Bharata and Śatrughna are. He tells the messenger to inform them to come immediately and that Vasiṣṭha has called for them. He also tells him not to tell them of what happened. In Ayodhyā, they preserve the body of Daśaratha for the final rites have to be performed by the sons.

Bharata and Śatrughna sense some seriousness and leave immediately. Bharata was not feeling good since the past few days. His mind was in constant turmoil and he was wondering what could be the reason. When they reach Ayodhyā they are shocked to see the entire city that was happy had turned into nothing less than a cremation ground. He heads straight for Kaikeyī who welcomes him with all love and joy. Bharata asks her what happened and she says that she did everything for him. But some minor thing happened and his father passed away. Bharata is shocked. He starts wondering, how can some minor thing kill a great king like Daśaratha. On further enquiry she tells him the whole story. Bharata just falls down on the floor. It is said that Bharata was pained more that Rāma had been sent to the forest than the pain of Daśaratha's death. His pain grew exponentially when he comes to know that he was the cause of this. He tells Kaikeyī, "If you had



this intention in mind then why didn't you kill me the day I was born? I was so fortunate to have been born in this Raghuvamśa, having been born as a brother of Rāma...but I am so unfortunate that I got a mother like you. Didn't you feel any pain while asking for these boons? Why your tongue was not burnt when you uttered such harsh words? Tell me and to the whole world, which jīva in this world doesn't like Rāma? You are not my mother anymore. You are my enemy."

Mantharā comes in at that time and seeing her Śatrughna gets furious. He kicks her. But before he could do anything more, Bharata stops him. He tells Śatrughna, "This is no longer our home. We should leave this place immediately." From there they go to meet Kauśalya. Bharata's mind is lost in anxiety as he thinks what would be Kauśalya's reaction on seeing him – the very cause of the entire event. But when Kauśalya meets Bharata, she embraces him as though she has met Rāma. Both mother and son are soaked in tears. Bharata says, "O mother, let the sins of all the people in the world who have done wrong come upon me if I had any hand in this plot." Kauśalya says, "I know you can never think of any such thing. I know your relation with Rāma. It is not your fault." Bharata is moved into tears out of her compassion and love for him.

After the final rites, they call for a 'Sabha' (court) to discuss the question that was in everyone's mind - What next?

Quiz:

1. Which are the fourteen places suggested by Vālmīki for Lord Rāma to stay?
2. Which is the place where Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā stayed for almost ten years during their exile?
3. Who brought Mandākinī to Chitrakūṭa?
4. Why was Sumantra still waiting when Niṣādarāja went back to his kingdom?
5. What was the curse on Daśaratha? Who had given the curse?





Bharata's argument

A Sabha is called for. All the ministers and advisors of the kingdom are seated in the court. Vasiṣṭha tells Bharata that Bharata will have to take over the kingdom because the situation demands so. How Bharata counters with all his logic is very interesting.

Bharata says, "It is because of me all this happened and you want me to become the king? If you are saying this for the good of Ayodhyā then the moment I sit on this throne, this entire kingdom of Ayodhyā will go to Sutala such sins I have incurred. If it is not for Ayodhyā that you are saying this but for me, then I should be given the choice to decide what is best for me. My service lies in the good of Sītā and Rāma. But I am deprived of this because of my mother. I do not see any other way in which I can serve. Without serving Rāma if I rule the kingdom, its not worthwhile." Bharata gives many similes to describe how stupid it would be to rule the kingdom without serving Rāma. He says, "It would be like the person who wears all ornaments without wearing any clothes (Meaning: Without dispassion, Brahmavichāra has no meaning). How can one enjoy with a sickly body? How meaningless would it be to put all ornaments and good clothes on a beautiful body from which the prāṇa has gone away? Hence I request you to grant me permission to serve Rāma." Bharata knows that even though he has used the best of language, still he is offending the Guru for having not obeyed his wish. Probably, this is the first time in his life he has done something like this. It has pained him a lot and hence says, "Please forgive me for contradicting you but if I do not speak how will you come to know what is there in my mind?"

Dharma is that which leads to peace and prosperity in the world thus leading to spiritual unfoldment. One meaning of the word putra is 'son'. Another meaning is 'pūrayati pituh kāryam' - The son is one who fulfills the father's incomplete task. In that sense, Bharata was truly a putra for he was trying to fulfill his father's task that was incomplete. He also tries to add more logic to his argument saying that there is something like the letter of the law and the spirit of the law. He says that they need to think from that context before just going by his father's words. He also adds that if he rules then he would be just fulfilling Mantharā's wish. After all, it was Mantharā who planted the seeds in her mother's mind. By this time,

Kaikeyī had also realised her mistake and wanted Rāma to come back and rule the kingdom.

Bharata finally expresses his desire to go to the forest and bring Rāma back. There is a big uproar in the court. When Rāma was sent to the forest, there were some people who doubted whether Bharata also had a hand in this plot. But now, everybody is convinced and they are overjoyed. It is said that after Bharata made this statement, he became more dear to some of those who were present there than Rāma himself.

Bharata is the replica of Rāma in character and he too would never compromise on Dharma. In today's times we might not be able to accept or live the life that Rāma, Bharata, Lakṣmaṇa or Sītā lived. But it is the standards that they have set for us that we need to strive for. To whatever heights we can achieve that, we are blessed.

Quiz:

1. Give two meanings of the word 'putra'.





Rāma-Bharata milāp

Bharata starts walking to the forest to bring back Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa. He doesn't go in a chariot because he knows that Rāma too is walking. There were a lot of Ayodhyāwāsīs who were going in chariots, horses and in palanquins. Seeing Bharata walk, they all got down and started walking. Looking at the difficulty that the Ayodhyāwāsīs are facing, Kauśalya tells Bharata to kindly ride his chariot so that they others won't have to go through such difficulties. Bharata is not a stubborn person. So he gets back on his chariot and asks everyone to start moving ahead. Finally when Bharata is at the end of the procession, he starts walking once again. That is Bharata!

When they reached Tamasā river bank at Śringaverpur, they met Niṣādarāja. Bharata embraced Niṣādarāja and asked him to show the places where Rāma and Sītā stayed because those places were holy for him. Bharata sees the tree under which Rāma and Sītā had slept and bursts into tears. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't forgive himself. The next morning Bharata and Śatrughna take the form of ascetics and matt their long hairs as Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa had done when they had reached the same place. All Ayodhyāwāsīs cross the river and start walking towards Bharadwāja muni's āśram. When Bharata meets Bharadwāja muni, the muni tells him that even though this episode looks so painful, it has given an opportunity for others to learn about your devotion to Rāma. Otherwise normally Bharata was a quiet person and it was Lakṣmaṇa's devotion that people could see. It is now that people other than Rāma, Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa and Kauśalya, come to know of Bharata's reverence for Rāma. Bharadwāja muni keeps praising Bharata. He says, "The result of all puṇya is Rāma-darśan. And the result of Rāma-darśan is Bharata- darśan."

Looking at the entire Ayodhyāwāsīs come for Rāma, Bharadwāja muni is touched. He asks Bharata to give him an opportunity to show them the muni's hospitality. Bharata started wondering as to how Bharadwāja muni was going to accommodate and feed this huge retinue. But he agreed to it. Bharadwāja muni was a great tapasvi. He meditated and asked Indra to bring down the heaven for a night. Thus the heaven came down for a night and all the Ayodhyāwāsīs got to enjoy heaven that night. Everyone enjoy the heaven, except for Bharata and Śatrughna who were untouched by it. Their minds were fixed on Rāma-darśan.

The next day morning they start for the place where Rāma is residing. From a distance, Lakṣmaṇa sees dust arising. On a closer look he sees Bharata and a huge retinue. He starts doubting the intentions of Bharata and thinks whether he has come to attack Rāma. He starts feeling that power has now corrupted Bharata. Why he thinks like that is because, for Lakṣmaṇa, his only concern is the welfare and safety of Rāma. He tells Rāma that he will go there alone and take care of the entire army. But Rāma calms him down. He tells him that Bharata can never think like that. He says that power can corrupt only those who are corrupt and Bharata is a sādhu. How can he get corrupted by power? In Rāmāyaṇa, we see that Rāma is the example of samata and śringār and Bharata is the example of mamata and prem. Bharata is also a good combination of prem and vivek.

As Bharata sees Rāma from a distance, he falls down immediately prostrating to him. He is unable to walk further and feels as though his entire body is paralysed. Rāma runs down and lifts him up. He then first goes to Kaikeyī. He knew that she would realise her mistake and feel remorse for what she had done. He goes and consoles her. Rāma consoles Bharata also. Lakṣmaṇa also feels like running to Bharata and embracing him, but he feels that he is on a guarding duty. So he controls his emotions and only after Rāma has had enough time with Bharata that he goes and embraces Bharata and Śatrughna. Everyone is happy and rejoiced.

Bharata had brought everything for the coronation of Rāma. But Rāma convinces Bharata and he understands the point that Rāma is trying to convey. Bharata had brought waters from all holy rivers for the coronation ceremony. But Rāma tells him that he cannot come to Ayodhyā or else it would be like going back on their father's words. So Rāma tells him to pour them in a well over there. The well stands at Chitrakūṭa known by the name 'Bharatakūp'. Bharata asks Rāma to give him something to which he can hold on to while ruling the kingdom until Rāma comes back. It is here that Rāma gives the essence of Rāmarājya in a beautiful short and sweet way. He says, "The ruler should be like the mouth." What it means is that it might seem that of all parts of the body, mouth is the most selfish one because the hands, legs and other organs work to feed the mouth. But the mouth does not keep anything for itself. It gives everything to the stomach and all the nourishment goes to all the different parts of the body. Similarly, it might seem that the ruler or the government is ruthlessly collecting taxes. But a good ruler sees to it that all the taxes are properly used for the welfare of the entire society, not leaving even a single part of it. And he does not keep anything for himself. Most importantly, mouth is also just another part of the body. It does not consider itself to be something really superior than the other parts.



Bharata is happy but not satisfied. He says, "I would still require something (tangible) that I can hold on to while ruling...something that will act as a source of inspiration for me." Bharata had brought Rāma's sandals. Rāma takes his sandals and stands over it, and gives them back to Bharata. Bharata is now contented. For Bharata, the two pādukās are the two letters 'ra' and 'ma'. This also shows how important an idol is for a common man. For a normal person, imagining God as

formless is very difficult. The majority needs some symbol to hold on to. The symbol is not God, but a representation that reminds him of God. That is why we have different forms of God just like how we use different symbols like the National flag, Salute, Shaking Hands, etc.

When Bharata returns to Ayodhyā, he places the two pādukās on the throne of Rāma and sits below next to the throne. He comes to the court everyday for administrative affairs but does not live in the palace. He stays away in a place called Nandigrām where he digs a tunnel and lives below the ground because Rāma is living on the ground and he wants to be below the level of Rāma. He lives for fourteen years chanting the name of Rāma, doing austerities as Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were doing in the forest.

Tulasidāsaji says, if Bharata was not born, then who would have shown to the world how to do vrata-pālanam and who would have brought Tulasidāsa to Rāma had it not been for Bharata. Saying thus in the last verse of Ayodhyākāṇḍa, he concludes the second Canto.

In Ayodhyākāṇḍa, the first part is the glory of Rāma, and the second part speaks of the glory of Bharata.

Quiz:

1. Explain the essence of Rāmarājya.
2. Rāma and Bharata both are examples of two qualities. What are they?
3. How does Bharadwāja muni praise Bharata?
4. How does Lakṣmaṇa respond when he sees Bharata at a distance?
5. What do the pādukās symbolise for Bharata?
6. Why are idols important in worshipping? Explain in detail.
7. After going back, how and where did Bharata stay for fourteen years?
8. What does Tulasidāsaji say about Bharata?
9. The first part of Ayodhyākāṇḍa is the glory of _____ and the second part of Ayodhyākāṇḍa is the glory of _____.





Āraṇyakāṇḍa

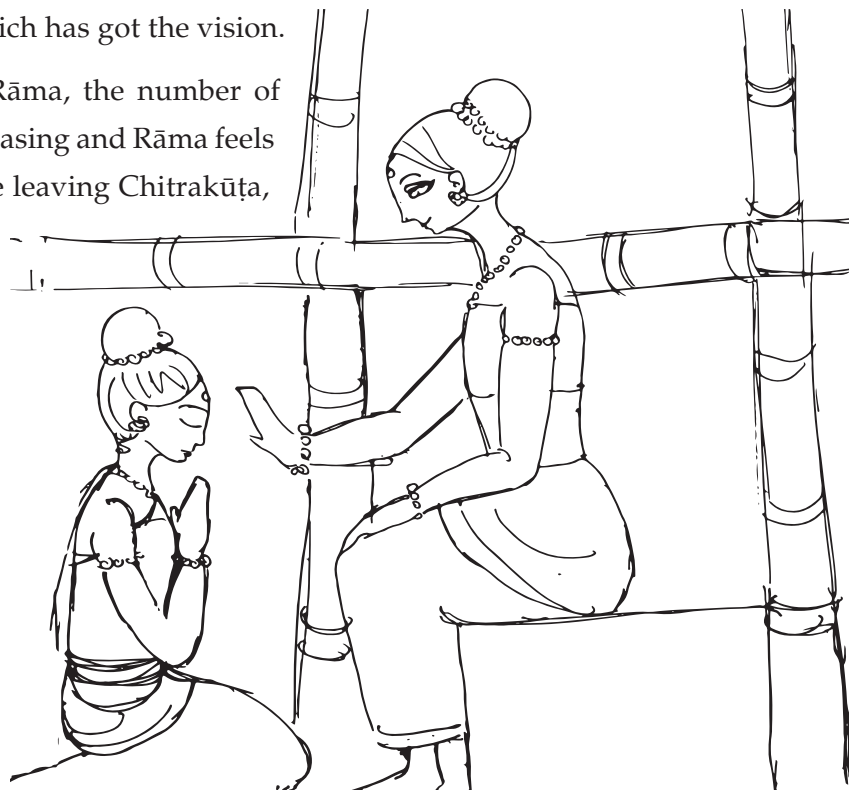




Last days in Chitrakūṭa

Āraṇya means forest. This is the period when all the three - Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā had spent in the forest. It is said that Rāma had his own ways of expressing his love to Sītā. He used to delight Sītā by making flower ornaments for her because he felt Sītā is so delicate and had left everything and come with him to the forest. One day, while Rāma was sleeping with his head on Sītā's lap, Jayanta, the son of Indra, wanted to test Rāma's power. He had always felt whether Rāma had really come to kill the Rākṣasās because he had always seen Rāma with Sītā. So he took the form of a crow and start pecking Sītā with his beak. She didn't move an inch because Rāma was resting on her lap. He kept on troubling her and in the end blood started coming out and flowing towards Rāma. When Rāma felt some sensation of liquid touching his skin, he opened his eyes and saw what Jayanta had done. He just picked up a blade of grass and chanted a mantra. The grass soon turned into Brahmāstra and started chasing Jayanta. Jayanta ran all around the universe and the weapon kept chasing him. He requested many devatās to give him refuge, including his own father Indra, but none of them were ready to give refuge as the weapon chasing was Rāma's. Finally, Nārada told him to surrender to Rāma himself and Jayanta did that. Rāma understood that Jayanta had realised his mistake and forgives him. But the arrow that has come out of Rāma's bow must meet a target (that's a rule). So Rāma just targets it to one of the eyes of Jayanta who is in the form of a crow. And even today we can see that the crow looks as if it has only one eye which has got the vision.

As more people get to know about Rāma, the number of people coming to Chitrakūṭa start increasing and Rāma feels that it is time to leave the place. Before leaving Chitrakūṭa, they went to Atri muni's āśram. The meaning of 'Atri' is 'one who has gone beyond the three guṇās (Sattva, Rajas, Tamas). His wife's name is 'Anusūya' which means 'one who has no jealousy'. Anusūya is the mother of Dattātreya.



Anusūya knew that Sītā is the personification of *pativratā nārī* (a wife devoted to her husband), hence she tells Sītā that for the sake of others she will tell the duties of a *pativratā nārī*. Anusūya tells her, "Goal of our life is Self-Realisation. To gain Self-Realisation, one needs Self-Knowledge. To gain Self-Knowledge there should be purity of mind. To gain purity of mind there are two ways - performing actions selflessly or by through upāsanās (worshipping the Lord). For a woman, her Lord is her husband. Worshipping her husband as the Lord is an opportunity for her to purify her mind."

Nowadays, many people are not happy with the term *pativratā*. They feel it is some kind of injustice towards the woman. Here we need to understand the purpose behind such ways. The happiness of a woman, in Indian culture, lies in the welfare of her family. In order to purify her mind through upāsana the best ideal in front of her that she can always see is her husband. In short, her husband, as an ideal, is always handy.

The scriptures were not biased towards a particular gender. They have given upāsanās for men also like *mātru devo bhava*, *pitru devo bhava*, *āchārya devo bhava*, *atithi devo bhava*. For a king, it is prescribed that he should look at his praja as God. All these were means for the men to purify their minds. We generally feel ok with these instructions but when it comes to *pativritā nārī*, some feel allergic.

Quiz:

1. Who was Jayanta? What was the wrong act done by him for which he got punished? How did Rāma punish him?
2. What is the meaning of Atri and Anusūya?
3. Explain *pativratā nārī*.
4. What is the goal of life? How can it be achieved?
5. What were the upāsanās prescribed for men?





Śri Rāma Gītā

Arvyate iti āraṇyam - Meaning: Forest is something that has to be sought after. After one completes the *grihastaśrama* one seeks a life of contemplation. Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā leave Chitrakūṭa and go towards Daṇḍakāraṇya. On their way, they meet great Rīṣis like Śarabhaṅga Rīṣi who could go to Brahmaloḳa whenever he desired, and Sutikṣṇa Rīṣi who was a disciple of Agastya Rīṣi. The details of these accounts and their discussions are described in *Rāmacharitamānasa*.

They soon head for Pañchavaṭi on the banks of Godāvāri river which flows through the present day Nasik in Maharashtra. Here they meet Jaṭāyu, the vulture, who later tries to save Sītā while she gets abducted. There are five types of faith spiritual seekers must have in Hinduism.

1. Faith in the existence of a Supreme God.
2. Faith in the authority of the Vedas.
3. Faith in the wisdom and nobility of a Guru.
4. Faith in oneself.
5. Faith in one's own Sādhana.

There is a dialogue between Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa which is known as *Śri Rāma Gītā* that happens during this period. Lakṣmaṇa sees an opportunity to ask him a few doubts that he had in his mind. Guruji said that Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa indulged in intellectual discussions during their spare time and they didn't wile away time by playing cards or any other means of killing time. Following is the dialogue:

Lakṣmaṇa: Prabhu, I want to know what is *Māyā*, *Jñānam* (Knowledge), *Vairāgya* (Dispassion), difference between *Man and Iswara* and what is *bhakti*. We keep hearing these words all the time but I need more clarity on this.

Rāma: Why do you want to know? Is it for more information or are you asking this out of curiosity?

Lakṣmaṇa: I want to know for the freedom from delusion and ignorance, and for the devotion for your lotus feet.

Rāma: I will tell you in brief (because Lakṣmaṇa is very intelligent, a brief answer is perfect for him). The feeling of 'I and mine', 'you and yours' is *Māyā*. What we see is just a perception of our senses and hence it is only our version of it. That itself is not the Truth. What we see is not the Absolute Reality but only a relative reality. *Māyā* is of two kinds - *Vidyā Māyā* and *Avidyā Māyā*. *Vidyā Māyā* is the *Māyā* that liberates and the *Avidyā Māyā* is that which creates bondage.



Coming to what is 'Knowledge'. Knowledge is that where there is One Reality expressed in different forms. Seeing this One Reality everywhere is Knowledge and not identifying with the body.

Now coming to 'Dispassion'. Dispassion is, not getting affected, dejected or elevated by the experiences around. Neither getting the pride of achievement nor the pride of renunciation is dispassion.

If your heart is behind your actions and your heart melts for God, that is *bhakti*. Remember, Bhagawān takes rest in the heart of his *bhaktās*.

Íswara is *sarvajña* (Knower of everything) and *Jīva* is *alpajña* (knower of only some things). God is omniscient and man is not. God is unlimited and man is not. Guruji gave a beautiful anecdote on this.

Man: What is the difference between God and man?

Saint: Man has this question and God doesn't.

Having heard this, Lakṣmaṇā's questions are answered and he is contented.

Quiz:

1. Give a meaning in Sanskrit for āraṇyam.
2. Pañchavaṭi is on the banks of _____ river which flows through the present day _____.
3. Whom do Rāma and Sitā meet at Pañchavaṭi?
4. Five types of faith that spiritual seekers must have.
5. What were the questions asked by Lakṣmaṇa?
6. Why did Lakṣmaṇa ask those questions?
7. What is *Jñānam*, *Vairāgya*, *Bhakti* and the difference between *Man and God*?





Śūrpanakha

The meaning of Śūrpanakha is 'one with long nails'. Śūrpanakha was a cruel, ill-hearted, terrible, lusty, sensual, ugly and elder sister of Rāvaṇa. One day she happened to see Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa and she got attracted by their beauty. She immediately comes to Rāma and expresses her desire of marrying him. He understands her thoughts and tells her (in front of Sītā) that his wife is with him so he cannot marry her. However she can express her desire to Lakṣmaṇa and try her luck. She goes to Lakṣmaṇa who tells her that he is with Rāma as a servant. If she marries him then she will have to serve that servant. And that looking at her he doesn't feel that she is a service-oriented woman. She goes back to Rāma and again Rāma sends her to Lakṣmaṇa. When this happens two or three times she gets wild and takes her terrible form. Lakṣmaṇa chops off her ears and nose. Blood starts oozing out and she is terrified. She runs to her brothers Khara, Dūṣaṇa, Triśara who have a band of fourteen thousand rākṣasās in the forest. They too are stunned thinking how could anyone disfigure Śūrpanakha. Guruji cracks a joke saying that she is already ugly, so how can someone further disfigure ugliness is the thought that her brothers had.



Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa know that she is going to come back to take her revenge. So Lakṣmaṇa tells Rāma and Sītā to go to a safe place and that he will take care of whoever is coming. Tulasidāsaji says that when Khara saw Rāma and Lakṣmaṇā's beauty his heart melted. He thought that he couldn't kill such handsome princes. So, in order to avoid a fight he said, "If you can give Sītā to us as against what you have done to our sister, we will let you go." Lakṣmaṇa laughs and says, "You coward, don't make excuses for running away. If you have come to fight, then fight." And the fight begins. To cut short the fight, Rāma invokes Māyā and the demons start seeing Rāma in each other. As they feel the other person is Rāma, they shout 'Rāma, Rāma, Rāma' and kill each other. Thus they die calling out Rāma's name. As soon as the devatās see that so many rākṣasās are killed, they do their favourite job, i.e., showering flowers on earth.

Rāma knows that even this is not the end. Śūrpanakha goes to Rāvaṇa crying. Rāvaṇa too is shocked looking at the form of Śūrpanakha. She accuses Rāvaṇa that he is not interested in the well-being of his people. He just wants to eat, drink and sleep. And suddenly she starts giving *Nīti śāstra* to Rāvaṇa. This is what Rāvaṇa hates - someone advising him. She says, a country with the below traits will be destroyed.

- * Wealth without Dharma
- * Even if good deeds are done but not dedicated to the Lord
- * Educated people but no common sense
- * Spiritual seekers in the company of sensual people
- * Arrogance
- * Drinking and other vices
- * Underestimating the enemy
- * Disease, fire, sin, snake

It is surprising that a person like Śūrpanakha gives such words of wisdom. Even Rāvaṇa was a man of knowledge. But such people being drawn by their ego and ego-centric and sensual desires are not able to act according to their knowledge.

She continues, "I just went to them to get Sītā for you. You cannot imagine the beauty of Sītā. All the queens that you have are nothing as compared to Sītā. But they came to know that I am your sister and they chopped off my nose and cut my ears." Thus she goes on...

On hearing this, Tulasidāsaji says, Rāvaṇa thought - 'Who is there who is not under my control? I rule the three worlds. Who can kill Khara and Dushana who are as strong as me? Is it the Lord who has taken avatār? If he has taken the avatāra, then I will not

surrender but I will fight with Him. And if I do, then I will definitely die. It's better to die with Bhagawān's hands. If he is not an avatāra and only a human, then I will win.' Again, we can see here, like Śūrpanakha, he too had the wisdom. But being governed by his vāsanās, he couldn't develop devotion for Lord and chose the way to fight him. And Rāvaṇa goes to Mārīcha.

Quiz:

1. Who was Śūrpanakha? Who were her brothers?
2. What is the advise from *Nīti śāstra* that Śūrpanakha gave to Rāvaṇa?





Sītā abduction

One might think that when Rāma is God himself, then he must have known about Sītā's abduction going to happen? Then why didn't he stop it? The purpose of Rāmāvatāra was to kill the anti-social elements (the rākṣasās), uplift Dharma (increase the level of standards) and show an ideal way of life. The Lord came down as an actor to play His role in His movie of Māyā. He himself is the actor and He himself is bound by His own script.

In Tulasi Rāmāyaṇa, just like Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa (another version of Rāmāyaṇa), it is said that Rāma had told Sītā about this abduction which is going to happen. One day when Lakṣmaṇa was away to gather some fruits, Rāma told Sītā, "My dear Sītā, listen, I want to do some Naralīla. Soon you will be abducted by Rāvaṇa. I want you to keep your real form in the fire and Māyā Sītā here." In one of the Rāmāyaṇās it is said that the Sātvik form of Sītā was in the heart of Rāma, Rājasik form in the fire and Tāmasik form was kidnapped. No one else other than Rāma and Sītā knew this. It is this *Tāmasik* form that went into the fire that had come out from the fire when Rāma asked Sītā later to perform the *agniparikṣa* when the war is over.

Rāvaṇa comes to Mārīcha and tells him that he cannot kidnap Sītā in the presence of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. So he shares a plan with Mārīcha. He says, "You go near Sītā in the form of a golden deer so that she will get a desire to have you. Rāma would then come to catch you and you keep running away from him." Mārīcha says, "What! You want me to go back to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa? I had retired from my previous job profile only because of those two." Rāvaṇa gets angry and he threatens to kill Mārīcha. Mārīcha now understands that either he will die at this moment with the hands of Rāvaṇa or he will die later with the hands of Rāma. He was wise enough to make the choice to die with the hands of the Lord. At this point, Guruji explained a part from *Nīti śāstra* which says about nine kinds of people with whom one should never have enmity.

1. *Śastri* - one who is holding a weapon
2. *Marṇi* - one who knows your secret

3. *Prabhu* - a very influential person
4. *Saṭha* - a fool / wicked person
5. *Dhani* - a rich person
6. *Vaidya* - a doctor
7. *Bandi* - there used to be people whose occupation was to sing glories of the King (in today's times, we can say - journalists!)
8. *Kavi* - poets (or even writers)
9. *Bhānas* - a cook

Mārīcha assumed the form of a golden deer studded with precious stones and went to Sītā. It would go near and when Sītā would try to touch it, it would run to a certain distance. Then it would go near and then go a little away again (just as how objects create desire in us). Sītā gets tempted and tells Rāma that she would like to keep it as a pet. Rāma asks Lakṣmaṇa to guard Sītā and chases the deer. The deer runs for a while, takes a pause so that Rāma can come near and then starts running again. After the chasing goes on for some time, Rāma finally pulls an arrow and shoots the deer. The deer cries aloud in Rāma's voice, "Lakṣmaṇa, Lakṣmaṇa..." and softly says, "Rāma, Rāma..." and dies. Listening to this cry, Sītā gets worried and tells Lakṣmaṇa to immediately go and check what happened to Rāma. Hearing this Lakṣmaṇa laughed because he knew his Lord and that nothing can happen to Rāma. But that laugh was very untimely. Sometimes one has to pay a price for laughing at a wrong time and that's what happened with Lakṣmaṇa too. Sītā got very angry and spoke very harsh words against Lakṣmaṇa.





In some other Rāmāyaṇas it is said that she accused Lakṣmaṇa of having bad intentions with Sītā if Rāma was dead. For a person like Lakṣmaṇa, hearing this was unbearable. In Tulasi Rāmāyaṇa, Tulasidāsaji says, "*Marma vachana jab Sītā bola*". Grammatically it has to be *Sītā boli*, Sītā being feminine gender but why did he write it incorrectly? Guruji explained saying that Sītā could never say such bad words. It was just not suited for her. Hence Tulasidāsaji used an error in grammar which can never suit Sītā.

Lakṣmaṇa draws a line (*Lakṣmaṇa rekha*) and asked Sītāji not to cross the line no matter what happens until both of them come back. While Lakṣmaṇa goes in search of Rāma, Rāvaṇa comes in the form of a sādhu begging for alms. He tries to cross the line but the kind of ancient sensor it was, it didn't allow Rāvaṇa to cross the line. He managed to convince Sītā to come outside and as she stepped out, he immediately came back to his original form and took her away. Sītā realises her mistake but it was too late by then. She cried and tried to escape. But how could the tender hands of Sītā fight the mighty hands of Rāvaṇa. Rāvaṇa threw her into the *Puṣpaka Vimāna* (airplane possessed by Rāvaṇa which could fly to the place that the owner desired of).

This entire episode has deep philosophical meaning. When the mind loses the focus from the Lord (Rāma) and runs to worldly objects (golden deer), the ten-headed monster Rāvaṇa (5 sense organs and 5 organs of action) get hold of us and our misery begins. Also when we doubt a sādhu like Lakṣmaṇa and trust a wicked person like Rāvaṇa, we have invited trouble for us.

Quiz:

1. What was the purpose of Rāmāvatāra?
2. According to *Nīti śāstra*, which are the nine kinds of people with whom one should never have enmity?
3. What does golden deer, Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa indicate in the story of Sītā abduction?





Two great devotees - Jaṭāyu and Śabari

In Bālakāṇḍa, we saw that the twist in the story was because of Viśwāmitra and in Ayodhyākāṇḍa it was Mantharā. In Āraṇyakāṇḍa it is Lakṣmaṇa. Had he not left his post, Sītā would never have got kidnapped. Now one might say, Rāma could also have stayed back and Sītā would never have got kidnapped. But here, we need to remember that Rāma did not do anything adharmic. He was doing what was right as a husband and that was to give happiness to his wife. But Lakṣmaṇa was told to guard by Rāma and when left the post, he did not perform his duty.

When Rāma meets Lakṣmaṇa on his way, he knows that something is not right. He asks Lakṣmaṇa why did he leave Sītā alone. Lakṣmaṇa says that he couldn't tolerate the words spoken by Sītā. Rāma makes him understand he should have looked at it like the words of an emotionally disturbed woman and not take it seriously and that he should not have budged from his duty. When they reach back, they couldn't find Sītā.

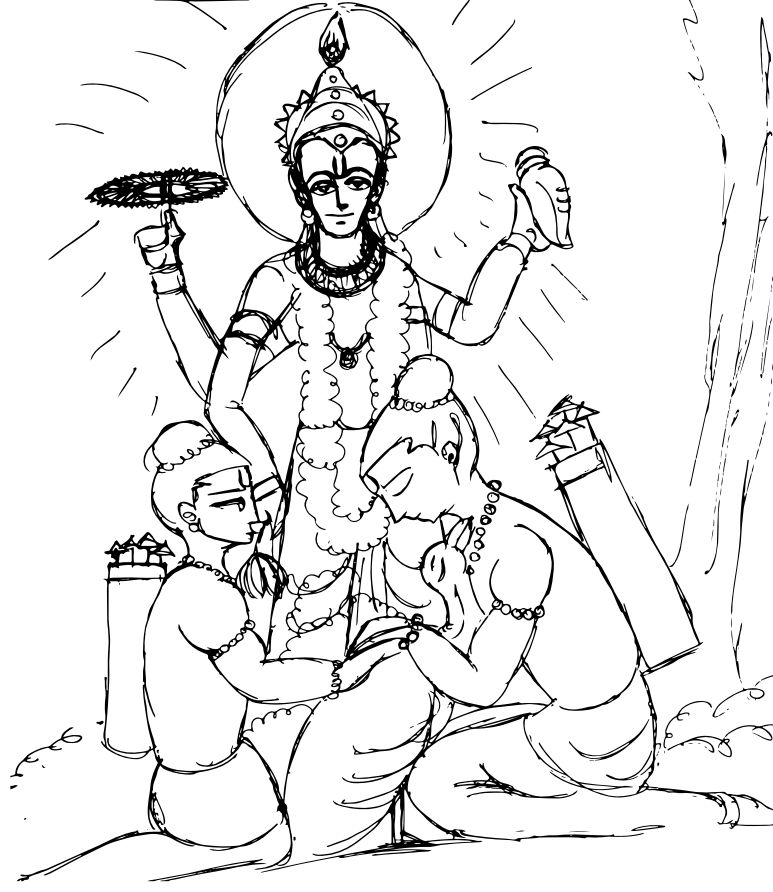
Meanwhile in the Puṣpaka Vimāna, Sītā was regretting her desire for the golden deer as she was helplessly crying. On their way to Laṅkā, Sītā looks down and sees some monkeys on the ground. She removes her ornaments, puts it into a bag and drops it on the ground. Those monkeys were none other than Sugrīvā's companions who later on help Rāma find Sītā with his army of monkeys.

During the flight, Rāvaṇa is attacked by Jaṭāyu, the vulture. Jaṭāyu is very old and he knows what is Dharma. When Jaṭāyu goes to fight Rāvaṇa, he knows his own fate. But he decides to stand up for a cause. Rāvaṇa cuts off its wings and Jaṭāyu falls down to the ground.

At this instance, Guruji paused to explain what is success. Today, we think success is achieving what we want to do. If that be true, then Rāvaṇa was successful in his act of kidnapping Sītā. But do we call him a successful person? Jaṭāyu failed in his mission, but do we call him a failure? The failure of Jaṭāyu was nobler than the success of Rāvaṇa. Guruji added the quote, 'If we don't stand for something, we fall for everything.' One needs to have an ideal in life for which it's worth

giving up one's own life. And Jaṭāyu is the perfect example for that.

As Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa go in search of Sītā, they find Jaṭāyu breathing his last. Rāma holds Jaṭāyu in his arms. Jaṭāyu feels blessed and narrates the entire event. He apologises to Rāma that he couldn't save Sītā. Rāma tells Jaṭāyu that what he has done is something that no ordinary mortal can do. Only a true devotee can do something like this. Rāma tells him that he will make him immortal. But Jaṭāyu replies that when he is in front of the Lord, why would he want to live a life in a vulture's



body? Rāma is so touched and pleased that he gives him Sārūpyamukti (the type of liberation where the devotee attains the form of Bhagwān Viṣṇu Himself where He has four hands holding Śankha, Chakra, Gada, Padma). And Jaṭāyu breathed his last in Rāma's arms. In a way, Jaṭāyu was more blessed than Daśaratha because he got cremated by Rāma. Even Daśaratha didn't have that fortune.

Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa continue the search for Sītā. They reach the āśram of an old lady Śabari who was a devotee of Lord Rāma. On the way they come across Kabandha who was earlier a Gandharva under the curse and Rāma releases him from the curse and liberates him.

Śabari is another character like Jaṭāyu and many other characters who come in Rāmāyaṇa for a short instance but leave a deep impact on us. Śabari was a tribal woman who was devoted to Mātāṅga Rīṣi. As Mātāṅga Rīṣi was departing, pleased with her devotion, he gave her a Mantra - 'Rāma'. She asked him who's Rāma and he replied, "You just keep chanting Rāma's name. Whoever is Rāma will come to your hut. You don't have to go in search of Rāma." There is a subtle message for all seekers in this statement.

Śabari had total faith on the Rīṣi and she kept chanting the name of Rāma even though she didn't know who Rāma was. When Rāma reached Śabari's hut, her eyes are filled with tears of joy and devotion. She tells Rāma, "I have never done any sādhana for you to arrive, and still you came?" She then remembers her Guru's statement and thinks that Rāma came because her Guru had said so. Please note...she doesn't think that Rāma arrived because she chanted his name.

At this point, Guruji says that those who do 'real sādhana' don't feel that they have done anything at all and those who do it superficially feel that they have done great sādhana. It is a way for us to know in which category we belong.

In Tulasi Rāmāyaṇa, it is said that Śabari gave juicy fruits to Rāma and Rāma ate the fruits again and again. Not just that, even after Rāma returned to Ayodhyā fourteen years later, when he was eating the food prepared by Kauśalya he was still reminded of Śabari's juicy fruits and were praising them. Looking at Rāma relishing the fruits, Śabari stands with folded hands and says, "I am a dull-witted person born in a tribal caste. I don't even know how to sing your praise." Rāma says, "Listen O Bhamini, I accept only one relation and that is of devotion." Rāma addresses Śabari as 'Bhamini' which means, 'beautiful' referring to her inner beauty. Further Rāma talks about nine types of devotion (*Navadābhakti*) through which one achieves three aims:

1. *Bhakti Upadeśa* for us
2. *Varadān* for Śabari
3. Great praise for Śabari

Actually speaking, devotion is only of one kind, i.e., unconditional love for God. But Rāma splits it into nine.

1. *Śravaṇam* (Listening): Here it refers to the listening that happens in *Satsang* where you get opportunities to hear the glories of the Lord, His stories, His līla, etc.
2. *Ramaṇam* (To Revel): Having listened to the glories of the Lord, reveling in it again and again.
3. *Pādasevanam* (Service to the Guru): By the Guru's grace only one gets clarity in knowledge.
4. *Guṇa gāna* (Singing the glory of the Lord): Sharing what you have heard in the *satsang* with others.
5. *Mantra jāp mama drudhaviśvāsa*: Chanting the name of the Lord with great faith.
6. *Dama, Śīlata, Uparati* (Self-control, there is no synonym for *Śīlata*, Self-withdrawal): Mental withdrawal from the world by self control and having *Śīlata*. 'Good conduct' is a meaning that can come close to 'Śīl' but even that does not fully describe *Śīlata*. The meaning of *Śīlata* can be seen through Rāma's behaviour. For those of us who don't know the meaning of *Śīlata*, we can just understand it as the humility and good behaviour in which Rāma would interact with the world.

7. See the whole world as the Lord and created by the Lord whose glories are sung by the saints. In Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa, Sage Vālmiki says, "Just as how without the breeze, the scent of the sandalwood trees cannot be spread; without the saints, the glory of the Lord cannot be spread."

8. *Santoṣa* (Contentment): Be contented with whatever you get. And not to think ill about anyone, even in your dream. If our dreams have to be good our mind has to be pure.

9. Respecting everyone in the world and have total faith only in God.

He says, if anyone is having any one of the nine types of devotion, then they are dear to me. And what to say of you Śabari, you have all the nine in full measure. That's how he sings the praise of Śabari. Usually it is the devotees who sing the praise of the Lord. Think, how great the devotee would be when the Lord sings the praise of the devotee!

Rāma asks Śabari if she knows where Sītā might be and she guides him to Sugrīvā's place near *Pampa* river. She had become a Yogini with her devotion for the Lord. Keeping the Lord in her mind, she lighted her own body from the fire within and says, "Now there is nothing left for me to do in this life." Thus her body gets consumed by the fire and she gets liberated.

Quiz:

1. Topic for Group Discussion: What is Success?
2. How did Jaṭāyu die? What blessing did he get towards the end from Rāma?
3. What is the subtle message in the advise given by Mātaṅga riṣi to Śabari?
4. Which are the nine types of Bhakti?





Nārada meets Rāma

Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa starts walking towards the place where Sugrīva stays. After walking for a long distance, they take a halt near a river. As Rāma sits on the banks of the river pondering on some thoughts, (or may be just gazing at the beauty of the place), Nārada comes there. When he sees Rāma, he feels that Rāma is unhappy. Within himself, he feels sad that it is because of him that Rāma had to take this birth and in a way it is he who is responsible for the sorrow of Rāma. He comes to Rāma and says that he wants a boon. Rāma nods his head in affirmation. Nārada says, "Out of your (Viṣṇu's) thousand names, let 'Rāma' be the most prominent name." Rāma says, "Alright."

Nārada is happy but he is not yet done. He tells Rāma that he wants to know why Rāma (Viṣṇu) stopped him from marrying the girl in his dream. Rāma replies, "Those devotees who are dependent only on me, I must protect them. You were totally devoted to me and I knew that it was just a moment of infatuation that you had. Your samskārās were not meant for marriage. It would have been a disaster for your life and your wife's life if you would have got married. Hence it was my duty to protect you." Like Krishna says in *Bhagavad Gītā*, '*Na me bhakta praṇaśyati* - My devotee will never perish'. God always ensures that His devotees are protected.

Rāma nama (name of Rāma) is the essence of the Vedas. It is the name for Kali Yuga. Once Goddess Pārvatī asked Śiva, "On whom do you keep meditating upon? The whole world chants your name and meditates upon you. Whose name is it that you keep chanting?" Śiva says, "I chant Rāma's name." That is the power of the name of Lord Rāma. Rāma nāma is the nectar for the Kali Yuga.

Āraṇyakāṇḍa ends here.

Quiz:

1. What is the meaning of *Na me bhakta praṇaśyati*?
2. Upon whom does Śiva meditate?





Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa





Two brothers - Vāli and Sugrīva

There lived two monkey-brothers Vāli and Sugrīva. Vāli was the son of Indra and Sugrīva of Sūrya. Vāli being the elder amongst the two, was the king of the monkey-band. He was a very powerful warrior. He had got a boon that in any fight he would get half the strength of the person whom he was facing apart from his own strength. He had defeated mighty warriors like Rāvaṇa and Dhundubi.

Once it so happened that a demon named Māyāvi and Vāli got into fight. The fight turned into a fierce battle. Finally Māyāvi ran into a cave. Before Vāli went inside, he told Sugrīva that if he doesn't come out in one month, then let Sugrīva assume that Vāli is dead. Sugrīva waited for a month outside the cave. After one month Vāli didn't come out. What came out was a stream of blood. Sugrīva got scared and recollected Vāli's words. He thought that it must be Vāli's blood and now Māyāvi would come out. So he kept a huge boulder at the entrance of the cave which would prevent Māyāvi to come out, and ran back to his kingdom. He declared the news of Vāli's death to everyone. Since he was to be the next king, he resumed the throne.

After a few days, Vāli came back tired and weary after the long fight. As soon as he entered the court and saw Sugrīva sitting on his throne, he fumed in anger. Sugrīva, on the other hand, was so happy to see his brother and ran towards him. He narrated how he misunderstood that Vāli was dead. But Vāli wasn't convinced. Of course, when a person's body is totally exhausted he can lose the balance of his mind at the slightest instance. Vāli shouted, "You cheated me because you wanted to get my throne. Now I am going to kill you." Saying so he started fighting with Sugrīva.

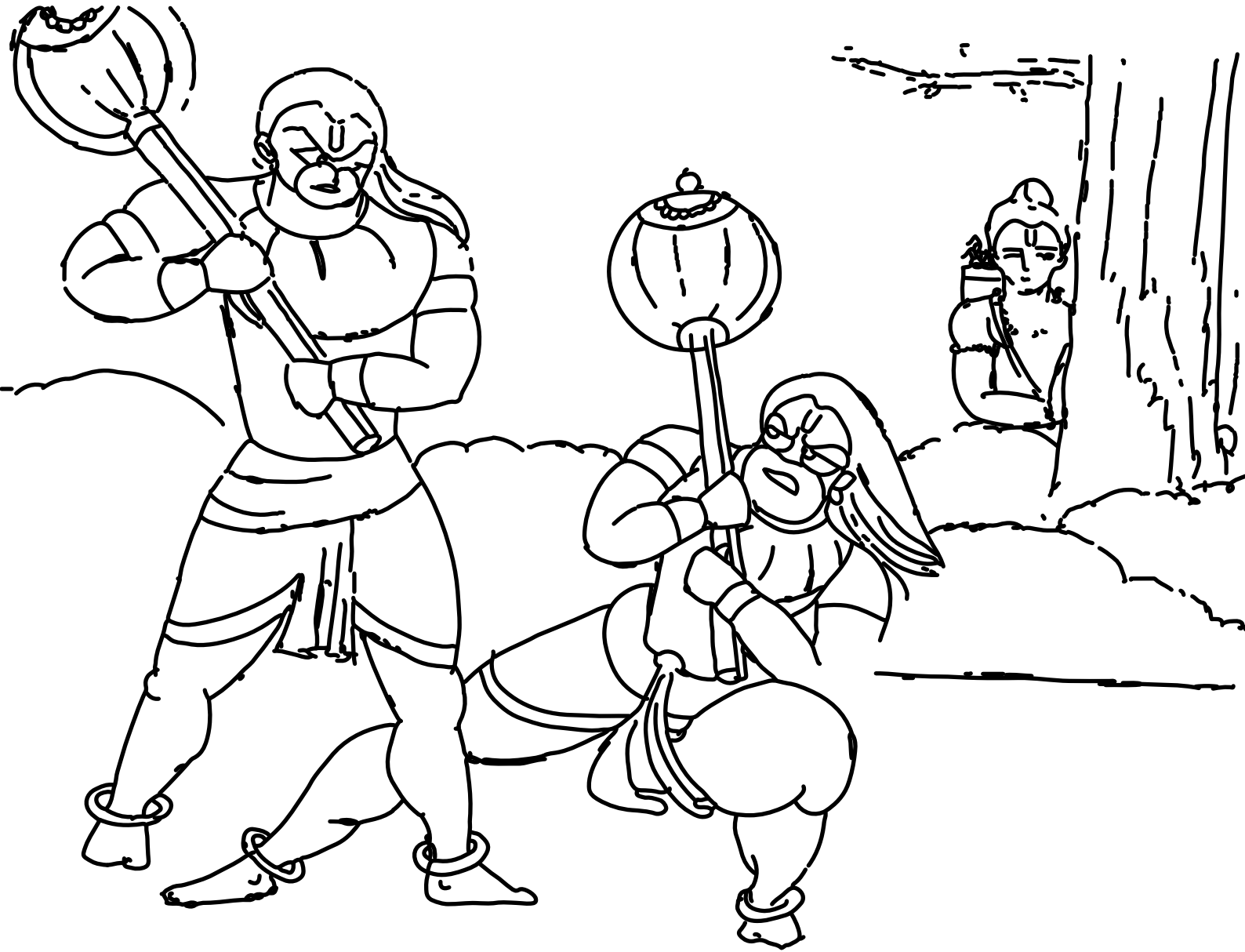
Sugrīva was no match for Vāli. So the only option he had to stay alive was to run. Vāli kept on chasing him. Sugrīva ran and tried to hide in all possible places in the forests but Vāli would find him out and chase him once again. Finally, Sugrīva settled in Rīṣyamukha mountain because Vāli had got a curse from Mātaṅga Rīṣi that if he would come to Rīṣyamukha then he would die. Meanwhile Vāli resumed the throne. He also kept Sugrīvā's wife with him.

It was during this time that Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa came to Rīṣyamukha. Sugrīva saw them coming from a distance and got scared. Even though he knew that Vāli won't come to Rīṣyamukha, he was scared that Vāli would send his soldiers to chase him out of the place. When he sees Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, he sees their strength and not their beauty. As the saying goes, as the thoughts so the sight. Sugrīva had a small set of monkeys who were loyal to him even during his exile. Among them was Hanumāna. Sugrīva asks Hanumāna to go immediately and check who were the two men who are approaching their place and what is their objective. Hanumāna bows down to his master and assumes the form of a Brahmachāri as he proceeds towards Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa.

When Hanumāna meets the two brothers he asks, "Who are you O dark and fair complexioned ones? You look like ascetics but you are carrying bows and arrows. The path is thorny but your feet are so soft. The weather here is so rough and you are so handsome and delicate. Why are you enduring all these difficulties?" Hanumāna being very wise and learned was getting to realise who was in front of him. He continues, "Are you Brahma, Viṣṇu or Mahesha? Or are you Nara and Nārāyaṇa? Or are you the cause of this entire universe?" Rāma smiles as he sees that Hanumāna had hit the bulls eye. He tries to hide and says that they were Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa from Ayodhyā and narrates the story of Sītā's kidnapping. But Hanumāna immediately recognises his Lord.

Then Rāma asks Hanumāna who he was. Hanumāna replies, "I cannot recognise you is understandable. But how can you, being the Lord of this entire universe, forget your devotee?" Saying this he falls at the feet of the Lord. At the very instance, he drops his Brahmachāri form and resumes his monkey-form. Immediately Rāma lifts him up with tears in his eyes. Rāma says, "You are twice as dear to me as Lakṣmaṇa. For me, a sevak is dearer."

Hanumāna had *Ananyabhakti* – a devotion where the devotee feels that he is the servant of the Lord and has no other identification about himself. In the presence of Lakṣmaṇa, Rāma said that Hanumāna was twice as dear to him as Lakṣmaṇa. How would we react to such a situation if we were in the place of Lakṣmaṇa or Hanumān? He added that when Hanumāna was asked later what was his opinion about Rāma's statement that He loved Hanumāna more? Hanumāna said that he knew Rāma loved Lakṣmaṇa more because Lakṣmaṇa was his external birth. When Lakṣmaṇa was asked what he felt about Rāma's statement, he said, "If my Lord has said something, then that must be true." (Pause). Think of the levels of faith of Hanumāna and Lakṣmaṇa.



At this instance, Guruji explains the reason for delay by Rāma in lifting Hanumāna up and embracing. It is because the Lord gives refuge to those who go to Him as they are. When Hanumāna went in a better form (Brahmachāri's form), Rāma did not give refuge to him. It is only when he came to his original form of a monkey that he was accepted. Hanumāna remembers this instance and later he advises Vibhīṣaṇa when the latter asks Hanumāna whether Rāma will accept him he being Rāvaṇa's own brother. Hanumāna tells him, "Bhagawān will accept you as you are. Surrender unto Him without any hesitation." This is a good advice to us. We need not pretend and try to show off in front of the Lord. He knows who we truly are. Surrender unto him as you are.

Quiz:

1. Why did Vāli get angry when he came back to his kingdom after killing Māyāvi? Narrate the entire story.
2. Which Rishi had cursed Vāli?
3. What was the boon Vāli had got?
4. Vāli was the son of _____ and Sugrīva the son of _____
5. What was the name of the mountain where Sugrīva was staying during his exile?
6. What is *Ananyabhakti*?
7. What are the questions that Hanumāna asks Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa when he meets them?
8. What does Rāma tell Hanumāna after he surrenders to Rāma?
9. What is the advice that Hanumāna gives to Vibhīṣaṇa?





Vāli gets mokṣa

When Hanumāna comes to know that Rāma has come to meet Sugrīva, he tells Rāma, "Please come to Sugrīva and have friendship with him. We just have to go up that mountain", pointing towards a mountain. Rāma says, "You want us to climb that mountain? We are already so tired. Can't Sugrīva come down?" Hanumāna says, "O Lord, why do you have to climb when your servant is here? Come on to my shoulders and I will take you both there." Saying thus, Hanumāna carried both Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to Sugrīva. Hanumāna is the best example of *pādasevanam* (serving (at) the feet of the Master).

Seeing Hanumāna come with Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, Sugrīva feels relieved. He realises that they are friends who are coming. Hanumāna tells each others' tale to Rāma and Sugrīva. Both of them become friends. Sugrīva says that he would definitely help find Sītā. Rāma feels surprised and asks him how can he say so confidently? On that Sugrīva brings the ornaments that were dropped by Sītā while she was being taken away in Puṣpaka Vimāna. Rāma's eyes are filled with tears. He looks at Lakṣmaṇa and says, "Do you recognise these ornaments? The earrings? The necklace? The bangles? Are these Sītā's?" To this Lakṣmaṇa says something that will bring tears to everyone's eyes. He says, "My Lord, I cannot recognise Sītāji's earrings, necklace, bangles and other ornaments. I only recognise her anklets." Lakṣmaṇa says so because he had never lifted his eyes above Sītāji's feet. He worshipped Rāma as his Lord and Sītā has his mother. The devotion of Lakṣmaṇa can only be felt. There can be no other person whom we can consider as an ideal brother other than Lakṣmaṇa.

When Rāma listened to Sugrīvā's tale, he was deeply saddened. In Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa, Rāma shows *mitradharma*.

1. The person who by listening to a friend's sorrow doesn't feel anything is not a friend.
2. A person whose mountain-like sorrow is like a grain to himself but his friend's small sorrow is very big for him, is a true friend.
3. A good friend is one who brings back his friend who has gone astray (Rāma shows this after Sugrīva gets back his throne and forgets about his word of finding Sītā).

Rāma asks Sugrīva to go and challenge Vāli to fight. He tells Sugrīva that during the fight, Rāma would hide behind a tree and kill Vāli. Sugrīva is terrified with the idea but owing to a little faith on Rāma, he goes to Vāli's court and challenges him. Vāli turns furious and accepts the challenge. At this, Vāli's wife Tārā who was a very wise one, says, "My Lord, there is some great force that is backing Sugrīva. Or else why would he come and challenge you when he knows about the strength and boon that you have?" Vāli ridicules her saying, "Women are very delicate and cowardly. Now you just see how I am going to crush his bones". Saying this, he goes to fight Sugrīva. Sugrīva is beaten black and blue and he is taken aback that Rāma is not killing Vāli. Somehow he manages to escape from Vāli.

Later, when he meets Rāma he says, "O Lord, you had told me that you would kill Vāli but you were standing there as if nothing was happening. Why my Lord?" Rāma replied, "Sugrīva, you and Vāli both looked so similar that I couldn't make out who is who. Had I shot an arrow and if it would have hit you then I would have gone back on my word that I had given to you. That is why I didn't shoot. Now you do one thing. You go tomorrow and challenge him again. But this time you wear a garland so that I can recognise you." Sugrīva trembles at the idea of going to Vāli once again, but manages to gather courage and go to Vāli once again. This time Tārā is certain that Sugrīva is definitely having some very strong person to back him up and she warns Vāli once again. Vāli doesn't heed to her advice for he is blind with anger and hatred. Both Vāli and Sugrīva enter into a fight. Rāma hides behind a tree and as soon as he gets an opportunity, he fires an arrow that hits Vāli on his chest. Vāli collapses on the ground. In a while Rāma comes next to him.

In some Rāmāyaṇas it might be mentioned that Rāma shot the arrow at Vāli from behind, but in Tulasi Rāmāyaṇa, it is said that it was shot on his chest. One might think why did Rāma hide behind a tree. Rāma was none other than Viṣṇu himself and he could have directly killed Vāli without getting affected by the boon that Vāli had. But then that would be disrespect to the person who gave the boon to Vāli.

When Vāli is about to die, he asks Rāma why did he kill him. On that Rāma tells him that what Vāli did was incorrect. Chasing the younger brother away and keeping his wife as his own wife is an act of Adharma. Not just that, even before this, Vāli had befriended rākṣasās like Rāvaṇa. On account of all the adharma he had done, Vāli deserved this death. Vāli is satisfied with the answer. But still Rāma says, "If you feel that what I did was wrong, stay in this body and I will make you immortal." Vāli replies with a smile, "Bhagawān, I am not a fool to

become immortal in this body of a monkey. Let me die now in front of you. My son Angada will serve you." Saying so, Vāli dies. Tārā comes running. Seeing that Vāli is dead, she bursts into tears. But she doesn't blame Rāma. When Rāma sees her crying, he gives her Self-Knowledge even without she asking for it.

Anyone who is even killed by the Lord attains Mokṣa. Vāli thus got liberated. He was never sad that Bhagawān killed him. Tārā and Angada too didn't have any questions or complaint. But still many of us keep asking why did Rāma kill Vāli. Only if we had a fraction of the intelligence those monkeys had, we could understand the actions of Rāma.

Quiz:

1. What did Tārā tell Vāli while she warned him?
2. Why did Vāli deserve to die?





The search for Sītā begins

After Vāli's death, Rāma asks Lakṣmaṇa and Hanumāna to arrange the coronation of Sugrīva as the king. He also asks Sugrīva to go back to his palace and take rest as it has been a long time that Sugrīva has lived roaming about the forest in the fear of Vāli. He was also away from his wife and who else would know the pain of being separated from his loved one better than Rāma? He didn't tell Sugrīva that he had fulfilled his promise of killing Vāli, and hence Sugrīva has to immediately help Rāma to find Sītā. But he also tells Sugrīva to remember the promise. But as it always happens, God gives and forgives, we get and forget. As soon as Sugrīva got back into his comforts, he forgot about the promise. He had lost his comforts so badly while Vāli had chased him out, that all the while he wanted to be only in his bedroom. Don't we see this in our lives too? We get very ambitious or take a resolve to do something noble at situations, but when we get into our comfort zones, we completely forget about those resolves.

The nature outside was changing. Looking at the nature change, Rāma has discussions with Lakṣmaṇa on Vedānta. This is something very subtle that we may fail to observe. During the time of leisure, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were not killing time or idling away their time, they got into some fruitful discussions on Vedānta. Earlier in Āraṇyakāṇḍa also we see *Śrī Rāma Gītā* where Rāma gives clarifications to Lakṣmaṇā's doubts in Vedānta. How to make use of time is something that we can learn from Rāmāyaṇa.

All the while Hanumāna, who is now serving Rāma, sees how Sugrīva has forgotten about the promise he had made to Rāma. He gives a gentle reminder to Sugrīva and immediately Sugrīva realises his mistake. The monkey army is immediately summoned. Meanwhile, Rāma also tells Lakṣmaṇa to give a reminder to Sugrīva about the search for Sītā. It is after a long time Lakṣmaṇa gets some order from Rāma. He is very happy that he is getting an order to execute from his Master. With fire in his eyes he goes to Sugrīvā's court. Throughout Rāmāyaṇa, we can see many instances where Lakṣmaṇa is fuming with fury. It is as though Lakṣmaṇa waits to assume this form when something happens where Rāma is affected.

When Sugrīva receives the news of Lakṣmaṇā's arrival, he quickly sends Tārā followed by Angada to calm him down. He knows that Lakṣmaṇā's anger would settle when he would see Tārā. To calm him down further, he sends Angada and



then Hanumāna. It is then Sugrīva comes out to face Lakṣmaṇa. He puts forward his sincere apologies for his forgetfulness. Immediately he resumes his form of a true king and orders his army of monkeys and bears, "All of you split into four groups and go to four directions. You have one month's time to come back and report whether you have found Sītā Devi or not. If you do not come back in one month, I will kill you." Sugrīva assigns the group leaders as they leave. The best among them are sent to the south. This band had Angada, Hanumāna, Jāmbhavāna, etc.

The monkey band marches through the forests looking for Sītā Devi. It was a sight to watch. Charged with a mission, they go through the forests aggressively. All the animals and demons get scared as they see this huge army passing through. It is said that on the way, when the monkeys see some asura, they catch hold of him and ask with fury, "Are you Rāvaṇa? This must be Rāvaṇa. Tell us, where is Sītā?" And they crushed them. When the demons died the monkeys realised that it could not have be Rāvaṇa because Rāvaṇa cannot be so weak. Thus they stomp throughout the day and at the end of the day they were very tired, thirsty and hungry.

Hanumāna then noticed a cave in which some birds fly inside with dry wings but came out with wet wings. He took the army inside the cave which was of Swayamprabhā Devi. They see a lake and quench their thirst. The Devi asks them to sit beside the lake and close their eyes. When they open their eyes they find themselves teleported to the shores of the ocean. We can imagine the wonderment of the monkeys.

It was very late by then and they were very tired of the whole day's hunt. Not knowing what to do, with stomachs groaning with pangs of hunger, they come out with ridiculous solutions. Angada says that even if they go back Sugrīva would be killing them. So let us fast unto death here itself. The condition of the army was that they seemed to die of hunger. They see vultures hanging around waiting for them to die. It is then they meet Sampati, brother of Jaṭāyu. When he comes to know of the valourous death Jaṭāyu met with, he is moved to tears. He swears that he would help them find Sītā. He closes his eyes and meditates. In his vision he sees Sītā Devi in Laṅkā.

Everyone is happy to know about Sītā Devi's location. Some monkeys start jumping with joy. But a question came to everyone's mind – who will cross the ocean? The one who has to cross had to be Balavān (strong), Buddhimāna (wise), Dhairyawāna (courageous) and Shraddhāwāna (with immense faith). Who among them had all these qualities?

Quiz:

1. What are the qualities required for the one who has to cross the ocean?
2. What happens when the monkey-band goes into the cave of Swayamprabhā Devi?
3. Who was Jaṭāyu's brother? How did he help Rāma?





Hanumāna's take off



Thus the discussion begins as to who will cross the ocean. Jāmbhavāna says that during his younger days he could do that but now he is too old to try such a feat. Angada says that he has got the energy to reach Laṅkā but he doubts whether he would have enough energy to come back. As everyone gives their say, Jāmbhavāna sees Hanumāna sitting silently in a corner. He knows that if there is someone who could do it, it is Hanumāna.

He goes to Hanumāna and reminds him of his strength. He reminds him how strong he was when he was a child and how he got cursed when he tried to eat Lord Sun thinking it is a fruit. Jāmbhavāna tells him that he is mighty beyond measure. However, this does not excite Hanumāna. But the moment Jāmbhavāna says that Hanumāna's birth itself is to do the work of Rāma, immediately

Hanumāna assumes the size of a mountain and his body shines like gold. He was willing to uproot the entire Laṅkā and bring back Sītā. But he asks Jāmbhavāna whether he should be doing it. Jāmbhavāna says that Hanumāna's job is to find Sītā and come back. Rest of the tasks will be done by Rāma. What needs to be noted down is that even though Hanumāna was highly motivated, he didn't get carried away and act in the way he felt is best. He consulted Jāmbhavāna who was wise and experienced, and took his advice. It's a big lesson for all enthusiastic people who are driven by a purpose.

Thus Hanumāna gets ready for the take off. All the monkeys pray for his success and stood at the shores of the ocean with folded hands. Hanumāna closes his eyes, prays to Lord Rāma, and with a mighty thrust on the ground he jumps high up in the air as though a rocket is shot into space shouting 'Jai Shree Ram'. The entire land shook by the force and for moments together everyone stood with their jaws dropping seeing him shoot like an arrow into the sky.

Thus ends the Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa.

Quiz:

1. From Hanumāna's action, what lesson can be learnt by the enthusiastic people who are driven by a purpose?
2. What was the motivating factor for Hanumāna to take the jump?





Sundarakāṇḍa





Obstacles on the way

The name of every other Canto is related to some event/thing in that section and one can easily make that out. But the name of this Canto can make one ponder as to why this is named Sundara-kāṇḍa?

Sundara (beautiful) is the adjective of this Canto. This Canto is about someone who is beautiful. Truly speaking, only two people are beautiful - Bhagawān and Bhakta. First part in this Canto is the glory of Hanumāna and the second part is the glory of Rāma. Guruji gave a beautiful explanation as to what is Sundar. Seeing, hearing, thinking about which your heart melts and is elevated to greater heights is called Sundar. And indeed there is nothing more beautiful than the life of Hanumāna.

As Hanumāna flies in the air, he is encountered by Mynāka Parvata - the flying mountain. It tries to persuade Hanumāna to take rest saying how long and tiring is the journey that he is taking. Hanumāna just smiles. He just touches the mountain, as though he has taken rest, and says, "Thank you". He adds, "How can I take rest when Rāma's work is unfinished?"

Hanumāna is no ordinary monkey. Reading about him will make one wonder if he was really a monkey. For him, his entire life's mission was to serve Rāma. When a person like that is driven by a divine mission, comforts and luxury are too tiny to lure him. Hanumāna is an ideal for those who take up a noble mission in their life.

The second obstacle that Hanumāna encounters is Surāsa - the snake who comes to check Hanumāna's intelligence. Surāsa says, "I am very hungry and you have to now satisfy my hunger." Hanumāna smiles. When Surāsa opens her mouth, Hanumāna doubles his size. Surāsa opens her mouth even wider. Hanumāna again doubles his size. Surāsa stretched her mouth even more wide. Hanumāna once again increases his size two-fold. This goes on for some time until suddenly Hanumāna became very tiny. Quickly he goes into the mouth of Surāsa and comes out. He says, "O mother, as per your wish I entered your mouth. I hope that satisfied your hunger. Now let me go and finish my duty."

While we are on a mission, many a times we would be encountered by obstacles which keep becoming more and more challenging. It is not the increase in the size of our ego that might help us to overcome it, but 'humility' that help us overcome the challenge easily.

The third obstacle was Simhika, the demoness who used to pull down things flying over it by their shadow. Simhika symbolises jealousy. Hanumāna immediately kills it without any second thought. The three obstacles that Hanumāna faces are from the sky, land and water. It symbolises *Ādidaivikam*, *Ādibhautikam* and *Adhyatmikam*. Hanumāna was capable to overcome all the three. And what made him capable is not a university or management degree. It is the devotion for the Lord and total surrender unto Him that made it possible for him.

In no time he reaches Laṅkā. He stands on the top of a mountain to get a bird's eye view of the place. He then assumes the size of a mosquito at night and enters Laṅkā. The guardian demoness of Laṅkā was Laṅkini. She sees Hanumāna and stops his from entering Laṅkā. Hanumāna gives a blow to her and she becomes unconscious.

Usually while entering auspicious places, we enter with our right foot. Hanumānaji entered Laṅkā with his left foot and it was as though the beginning of the bad times for Laṅkā. He takes the tour to understand the geography of the place. Suddenly he hears someone chanting Rāma's name in his sleep. He is surprised as to who this great devotee is and that too in the land of the enemy. It was none other than Vibhīṣaṇa, brother of Rāvaṇa who was a great devotee of Rāma. Hanumāna goes to Vibhīṣaṇa and both of them are happy to see each other as both are devotees of Rāma. Vibhīṣaṇa gets a doubt and asks Hanumāna, "Tell me Hanumāna, will Rāma accept me as his devotee if I go to him? Look at me, I am the brother Rāvaṇa who kidnapped Sītāji. Will Rāma even forgive me?" Hanumāna says, "Look at me. If He can accept a monkey like me as his devotee, what to tell of you who is a complete man? Go to Him as you are." This is a great message that Hanumāna gives not only to Vibhīṣaṇa but to all of us. When we go to the Lord, we do not have to go with any make up or artificiality. Just go to Him as we are and He will accept us.

Hanumāna leaves Vibhīṣaṇa's quarters and continues his search for Sītā. Under a tree in Aśoka Vāṭika, he sees a lady sitting very sad. He wants to confirm whether it is Sītāji or not. He sees that many demoness are guarding her. He waits for some time. Very soon the sun rises and in a while Rāvaṇa arrives there. On seeing Rāvaṇa, Sītāji wants to veil herself from his wicked eyes. Poor Sītā has got nothing to veil so she picks up a grass to use as a veil. Rāvaṇa looks at her and says, "Don't



you see all these queens who live with me? I can make you one like them and you can live amongst great comforts." As he continues he sees that Sītā is least interested in his talks. Finally he comes down to begging. He says, "Atleast look at me once." Sītā calls him shameless. Raged by her words, Rāvaṇa tells Sītā that she has got one month to decide. Else Rāvaṇa would himself kill her. He instructs all the demoness to trouble her as much as they can.

As he leaves, Trijaṭa, daughter of Vibhīṣaṇa comes. She had great devotion for Rāma. She calls all the Rākṣasis and says that she had a dream that a monkey had burnt down the entire Laṅkā. He killed all the hosts of Rākṣasās and the ten headed Rāvaṇa was riding a donkey southwards completely naked with his heads and hands severed. And that Vibhīṣaṇa became the king of Laṅkā and Sītā went back with Rāma to Ayodhyā. I feel this dream will come true in a few days.

Hearing this they all got scared and ran away from Sītā. Sītā tells Trijaṭa that she is her only friend. She requests Trijaṭa to prepare a pyre so that Sītā could burn herself in it. Trijaṭa consoles her says, "You know your Lord. Why are you losing your patience?" Sītā is so struck by grief that all she wants is to die rather than living for one more moment in separation from her Lord. She thinks why doesn't a star fall on her, why Aśoka is not making her griefless?

At that moment, Hanumāna drops a ring of Rāma.

Quiz:

1. Why is Sundarakāṇḍa named so?
2. Who is Sundar in this Canto?
3. Which are the three obstacles that Hanumāna encounters while he is flying to Laṅkā? What do they symbolise?
4. What advice does Hanumāna give to Vibhīṣaṇa?





The tale of a tail

The moment Sītāji sees the ring of Lord Rāma, she gets very excited. But then she starts thinking...How could the ring come here? Has someone stolen it? As more questions rise in her mind, Hanumānaji starts singing Rāmakatha (story of Rāma) and all her sorrows disappear. Sītā requests Hanumāna to reveal himself from hiding and he immediately jumps down. Seeing him, Sītāji turns away her face thinking this must be another demon of Rāvaṇa and another play of his. Of course, no one would expect a monkey to sing the Lord's glory. Hanumāna narrates the entire story of how she got kidnapped and how the monkeys got her ornaments when she dropped it. He says that the Lord is so Karuṇānidhāna (Sītāji's favourite attribute for Rāma was Karuṇānidhāna) that Rāma sent him for this noble task.

Hearing the entire story, Sītāji's eyes are filled with tears. She is getting to hear about her Lord after such a long separation that she couldn't hold on to her emotions. She asks Hanumāna, "Does he ever remember me?" Hanumāna smiles and says, "He loves you more than you love him." He narrates all pain that Rāma went through because of the separation from Sītā and how he cried like a child while searching for her. Sītāji is unable to control her tears and she just wants all this misery to end as soon as possible.

Suddenly she realises what a feat Hanumāna has achieved. How courageous and strong he is that he has come to the enemy camp fearlessly. She admires the strength of the Bhakta. But Hanumāna humbly replies that he is just a monkey who knows how to jump and that it was only God's grace. That reminded me of the quote by Pūjya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda, 'God never checks your ability, He only checks your availability.'

Pleased by Hanumāna's devotion, Sītāji gives him a lot of boons but Hanumāna doesn't look pleased with any of them. As stated in Hanumāna Chālīsā, '*Aṣṭa siddhi nava nidhi ke dāta, asa var deen Jānakī māta*', she gave the boon of aṣṭa siddhi (8 siddhis), nava nidhi (9 treasures) but still he wasn't contented. Sītāji understands what he ultimately wants. So she tells him that Rāma will love you as a child and Hanumāna becomes very happy. She blesses him with *Nirbharābhakti*. *Nirbhara* means 'completely', *Bhakti* means 'devotion'. *Nirbharābhakti* is that kind

of devotion where the devotee clings to the Lord without having any other desire. Just as a baby monkey clings on to the breast of its mother, a *nirbhara bhakta* renounces everything else and holds on only to God. What else can a true Bhakta seek as a boon?

Suddenly Hanumāna tells Sītāji that he is feeling very hungry as if he just realised the monkey-nature of his. Sītāji tells him that he can eat the fruits that are fallen on the ground. He goes to another part of Aśokavāṭika and starts shaking the trees. Whatever fruits fall down, he starts eating them as though religiously following Sītāji's advise. Naturally, this act attracts the demons who are guarding the place and they all come charging at him. He kills all of them and continues eating.

The news reached Rāvaṇa and he sends his son Akshaya Kumara to capture Hanumāna. Hanumāna punches Akshaya Kumara on his head and it goes into his stomach and he dies. Rāvaṇa sends another son Meghanāda but he too couldn't control Hanumāna. Finally Meghanāda, thinks that there is only one way to contain him and that is to use *Brahmāstra* (a very powerful weapon which was obtained after severe penance). Actually speaking, even *Brahmāstra* couldn't contain Hanumāna if he wished to, because he was a true bhakta who was doing the work of the Lord. But in order to respect *Brahmāstra*, Hanumāna surrenders. When he surrendered, he was surrounded by a lot of rākṣasās. He looks around to see on which side there are more rākṣasās so that he could kill them by his fall, and he does that successfully.

Hanumāna is taken to the court of Rāvaṇa. Everyone is happy that Hanumāna is captured. But just imagine the plight of Meghanāda. He had to waste his special weapon just to capture a monkey.

Hanumāna is presented before Rāvaṇa in the court. Hanumāna stands with his head held high and chest forward. Rāvaṇa with his angry looks starts questioning him and Hanumāna humourously mocks Rāvaṇa.

Rāvaṇa: Who are you?

Hanumāna: I am the servant of the Lord.

Rāvaṇa: Why did you destroy Aśoka Vāṭika?

Hanumāna: I was hungry.

Rāvaṇa: Why did you kill all the Rākṣasās?

Hanumāna: That was an act of self-defence.

Rāvaṇa: Do you know who I am?

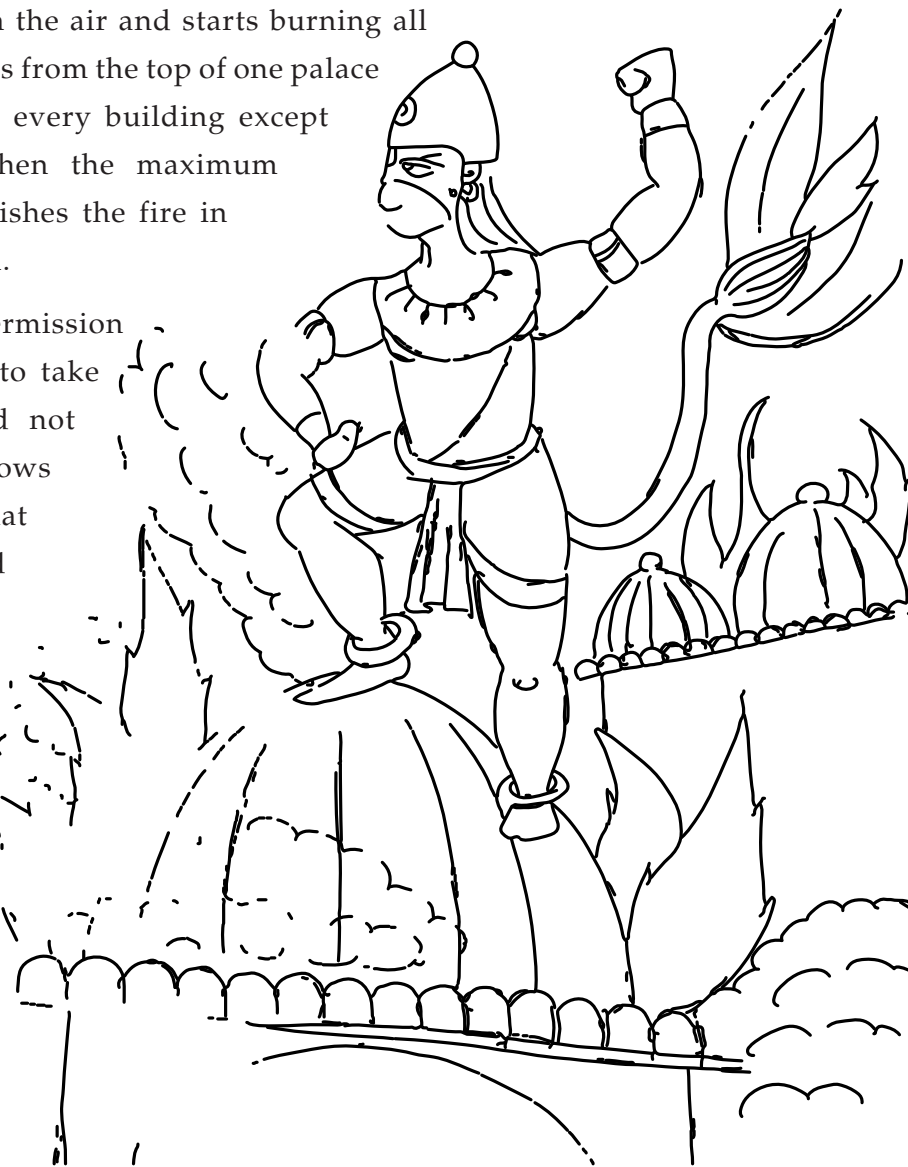
Hanumāna: Yes, I know you. You are the same Rāvaṇa who was defeated by Sahasrabahu and Vāli. Vāli had even kept you under his armpit for a long time.

Rāvaṇa becomes furious and roars in anger, "Don't you have any fear?" Hanumāna replies, "No, I don't. I am the servant of the Lord."

As Rāvaṇa is about to try to kill Hanumāna, Vibhīṣaṇa interferes and says that Hanumāna is just a messenger. And as per the ethics of warfare, one is not supposed to kill a messenger. Rāvaṇa says, "Ok. These monkeys have a great pride on their tail. Let's burn its tail and then he will get a taste of who I am." All the rākṣasās tie Hanumāna's tail with cloth pieces dipped in oil. As they do that they don't realise that the tail is growing in length.

They parade him throughout Laṅkā. Hanumāna gets a free tour of the place and he notes down all the places so that it might come to use during the war later on. After the entire tour of Laṅkā, they are finally ready to burn Hanumāna's tail. Hanumāna is also ready with a plan. The fire is set and all the Rākṣasās jump with joy. Hanumāna stays still. They are surprised that why is he not crying with pain. Hanumāna doesn't run immediately. He waits so that the fire becomes a big flame. When he sees that it is time now that the fire cannot be extinguished by the wind, he takes a big jump up in the air and starts burning all the structures of Laṅkā. He jumps from the top of one palace to another and burns each and every building except Vibhīṣaṇa's house. Finally, when the maximum destruction is done, he extinguishes the fire in the ocean and goes back to Sitāji.

He knows that if he asks her permission to leave, Sitāji would tell him to take her with him which he could not refuse. At the same time, he knows that he is not supposed to do that because Rāma has to come and rescue her. Neither is it right to leave the place without seeking Sitāji's permission. So he tactfully presents his question to Sitā saying, "Please give me something that I can show to Rāma so that he will



know that I have met you." Sītāji tells him the story of Jayant attacking her during the last days of Chitrakūṭa that we saw in the beginning of Āraṇyakāṇḍa. Only Rāma and Sītā knew this story. So she was sure that Rāma would be convinced that Hanumāna met her. She also adds that if Rāma doesn't come here to rescue her in a month's time, she would die.

Hanumāna bows his head and does the mighty take off once again...shooting at lightning speed like an arrow...flying across the ocean...dropping the jaws of those who see the sight and lands on the shores of Bhārata. Hanumāna has returned as a hero. All the monkeys dance in joy and everyone run to him asking about the tale of Laṅkā. When they get to hear the tale of the tail, they are all happy and all the more impatient to go to Laṅkā and fight the mighty rākṣasās.

This calls for a cheer for our superhero - Buddhimāna, Balawāna, our dear Hanumāna!

Quiz:

1. Which name of Rāma is Sītā's favourite?
2. God never checks your _____. He only checks your _____.
3. Which are the two boons that Sītā gives Hanumāna initially?
4. What's the meaning of *Nirbharābhakti*?
5. Name the sons of Rāvaṇa who tried to capture Hanumāna.
6. Who had defeated Rāvaṇa in the past?





The march for Laṅkā

The monkey-band along with Hanumāna, Jāmbhavāna and others come to Sugrīva. They tell Sugrīva of Hanumāna's achievement and Sugrīva is thrilled. When Rāma sees all of them, he enquires of the welfare of each and every monkey. His first question is not 'How is Sītā?' He is concerned with the well being of all those who toiled for him. Jāmbhavāna sings the glory of Hanumāna to Rāma and Rāma is so touched by the devotion of Hanumāna. Rāma feels that there is nothing that he can give in return for what Hanumāna has did. So he gives himself to Hanumāna. He embraces Hanumāna and Hanumāna feels that his life is blessed. It is only after that that Rāma asks him about Sītā.

Hanumāna tells him that her prāṇas are almost going to leave but the eyes carry the hope of seeing Rāma. Every moment is like a *Kalpa* (4.32 billion years) for her. After hearing this, there is no moment that Rāma wastes and he starts for Laṅkā. The monkey-band joins him. The entire atmosphere changes, the nature itself takes a change.

Meanwhile in Laṅkā, both Rāvaṇa and Sītā get omens that Rāma has started. Vibhīṣaṇa advises Rāvaṇa to give back Sītā and tells him that death is nearing him if he doesn't give back Sītā. But due to his arrogance and pride, Rāvaṇa pretends to be cool and unperturbed by what's going on the other side of the ocean. Rāvaṇa mocks Vibhīṣaṇa and asks him to leave Laṅkā if he is so scared. Vibhīṣaṇa had already decided that there is no point in staying with his brother. He had tried his best to convince him but he realised that it is futile to give any more words of advice. He leaves Laṅkā and reaches the other shore of the ocean where Rāma's army is. Vibhīṣaṇa is scared thinking whether Rāma will accept him because he was the brother of Rāma's enemy.

Seeing Vibhīṣaṇa, Sugrīva doubts his intention. Even Lakṣmaṇa doesn't feel like taking a risk that might be a threat for Rāma. Hanumāna just wishes that Rāma would accept Vibhīṣaṇa because he knows that Vibhīṣaṇa has come heeding to Hanumāna's advice to surrender along with his limitations. And Rāma sends a very profound message which is a true solace for all spiritual seekers. He says, "People think that everyone gets the result only according to one's own karma. If that be

true then none of us will ever get liberated. If the devotee surrenders completely unto God, then God removes his entire past karmas." One might think how can this be true. But there are examples of devotees getting liberated by complete surrender. The best example is of Ratnākara who transformed to Vālmīki just by chanting the name of Lord 'Rāma'. If the name itself is so powerful to liberate a dacoit like Ratnākara, what to say of the surrender to the Lord Himself?

Rāma readily accepts Vibhīṣaṇa. And what to say of Vibhīṣaṇa's joy, he feels so blessed that tears of joy overflow his eyes. Rāma then asks Vibhīṣaṇa what to do and how to cross the ocean because that was the biggest question in front of everyone. Vibhīṣaṇa advises Rāma to pray to Samudra devata (Lord of the ocean).

In the meantime, spies are sent by Rāvaṇa to Rāma's side. But when they come to Rāma, they turn into bhaktas of Rāma by just seeing him. Lakṣmaṇa gives them a letter for Rāvaṇa and says, "Tell him to give back Sītā and put an end to the war before it begins." The spies (now turned dūtās) go to Rāvaṇa and tell him, "The army that Rāma has is very huge. They have thousands of monkeys (By this time, the word 'monkey' was the scariest word for anyone in Laṅkā after Hanumāna having created the havoc). And it seems that Hanumāna was the weakest among all the monkeys. So you can imagine the strength of their army." Rāvaṇa shivers from inside but his ego doesn't allow him to show it outside.

On the other side, Rāma starts praying to Samudra devata. He prays for three days but there is no acknowledgement from Samudra devata. Rāma then realises that *lāton ke bhūt bāton se nahin mānte* (a saying in Hindi which means that some people just understand the language of the stick). He orders Lakṣmaṇa to bring him his bow and arrow. Lakṣmaṇa is once again thrilled because there are very few instances where he gets an order from Rāma to do something for Him. He brings Rāma's bow and arrows. Immediately, Samudra devata comes in the form of a Brahmin and pleads Rāma for forgiveness. He says, "Oh Lord, you only have created all of us and you know how *tāmasic* we are. That is why it took some time for me to respond. I will do the needful. Please forgive me." But Rāma tells him that now that he has taken up an arrow, it cannot go in vain. Rāma's arrow does not go back to its quiver just like how Rāma does not go back on the words that he has uttered. He asks Samudra devata a direction where he can shoot the arrow that he has taken. Samudra devata shows him a direction where all wicked people live and Rāma shoots the arrow in that direction killing all of them.

Sundarakāṇḍa concludes here.

Quiz:

1. Why did Rāma embrace Hanumān?
2. How many years make a Kalpa?
3. What is the profound message that Rāma sends when Vibhīṣaṇa surrenders?





Laṅkākāṇḍa





The bridge

There are many questions that arise in Rāmāyaṇa. One such is that when Hanumāna could fly and destroy Laṅkā, why the efforts of making a bridge and having a formal war to defeat Rāvaṇa? Or some might say that when Rāma himself was God, why did he have to take an army of monkeys...why not finish the job directly? Just like there are many questions, there are many answers too that one might find as to why the bridge had to be built.

Rāvaṇa had a chariot which could fly to any place. But it was used for abducting and was used only by him. Rāma thought of building a bridge so that even an ant can cross the ocean. Bhagawān always thinks of the totality. If one has to cross the ocean of samsar, one has to live the life of righteousness. When all monkeys came together for the work, it was not just one person's work. It became a Yagña where each one contributed for a higher cause. In the work of building the bridge there were great engineers like Nala and Neela. And even a squirrel could participate and get the satisfaction that he could contribute his bit to the great cause. Bhagawān's work is always like that.



For building the bridge, when Rāma put a stone in the water, it sank. He asked Hanumāna why it happened. And Hanumāna said, "When you drop someone, then they will drown in Bhavasāgara." They then write Rāma nama on the rocks and the rocks start floating on the water. Tulasidāsaji says, when Rāma stood on the bridge, all the creatures of the sea came on the surface and they all remained in Samādhi. Rāma immediately tells the monkeys to walk over the creatures to reach Laṅkā. The bridge they had made was thin but now there was a road made by the creatures to cross over. The symbolism behind is that you do only 1% and Bhagawān does 99%. Meanwhile in Laṅkā, Rāvaṇa enquires about the news about the enemy army. His courtiers tell him that the bridge has been built. Rāvaṇa is shocked from inside but covers it up as though he is not scared about the monkeys. Mandodari, Rāvaṇa's wife, tries to put some sense into him but in vain. She realises that Rāvaṇa's end is near. One of his sons also advises him but he gets angry. There was no one who could make Rāvaṇa understand of the potential danger he was in. And it was all because of his ego. Even today there are people who are in the Rāvaṇa-state.

As the day ended and the moon started cooling the earth with its light, Rāma's army takes rest after a heavy day's work. It must have been a sight to watch the night sky from the ocean. Rāma asks Hanumāna, "What is the dark spot on the moon?" Hanumāna replies, "The moon is a devotee of yours. He constantly meditates all the time on you. So he got the blue colour of yours as the dark spot." For Hanumāna, anything that he sees happening, he feels it is because of Rāma.

As the morning rises, they select Angada to convey a message to Rāvaṇa. Rāma wanted to give him one more chance to avoid the war. Angada seeks Rāma's advise on what message he has to convey. Rāma tells him to speak in such a way that they get back Sītā at the same time Rāvaṇa is also not hurt. Such is the compassion of the Lord. Even to the wickedest of the wicked, he is compassionate and wants to give them every chance to turn to Him. But what to say of Rāvaṇa, who had destined his fate.

When Angada reaches Laṅkā, he sees Rāvaṇa's kids playing. He gives one blow to one of them and he dies immediately. They get scared thinking that Hanumāna has come again. As seen in Sundarakāṇḍa, Hanumāna was the name that the Laṅkāwasis were terrified of. Having been terrified, they themselves guide Angada to Rāvaṇa's palace.

Angada reaches Rāvaṇa's palace. Rāvaṇa asks him, "Who are you?" "I am Vālī's son", replies Angada. "I am the great mighty king Rāvaṇa, do you know that?" says Rāvaṇa. Angada replies, "I know three Rāvaṇas. One that was taken to Pātāla

loka and jailed. Second is one who was defeated by Sahasrabāhu and third one by my father." Rāvaṇa gets angry and insults Rāma. Angada couldn't stand it. He puts his foot on the ground almost shaking the entire edifice and says, "If any of you alone or even as a group can lift my foot from here, you can keep Sītāji here." That was a very bold statement. Everyone in the court try one by one but fails. Then they try to do it collectively, still they don't succeed. Finally Rāvaṇa gets down from his throne. He bows down to lift and Angada makes fun of him saying that a great mighty king has come to touch the feet of a monkey. Saying this, he throws four out of ten crowns of Rāvaṇa. There is again a symbolism behind this. Nītiśāstra says that a king is supposed to follow four policies - Sāma, Dāma, Daṇḍa, Bheda. Since Rāvaṇa was not following any of these, these four crowns of Rāvaṇa were not required.

Angada comes back and tells Rāma that there is no other way but war to bring back Sītāji. They form a war strategy and the war is about to begin.

Quiz:

1. Why did Rāma build a bridge to go to Laṅkā?
2. What happened when Rāma stepped into the ocean?
3. Who is the messenger that Rāma sent to Laṅkā to give Rāvaṇa a last chance to avoid the war?
4. Angada throws four crowns of Rāvaṇa. What do they symbolise?





The war begins

The war between the two armies begin. Every day there is someone from Rāma's army who is unstoppable. One day it is Angada who is in great form, some day it is Hanumāna. Some other day, some other warrior. The fierce battle continues and one by one all the generals in Rāvaṇa's army die. All his sons die. Finally Kumbhakarṇa is woken up from his sleep to fight. Kumbhakarṇa knows that his time is nearing. Rāma comes in front of Kumbhakarṇa and Kumbhakarṇa says, "Dhanya, dhanya (blessed, blessed am I)". And Rāma kills Kumbhakarṇa.

But it so happens that Lakṣmaṇa is hit by a weapon and he becomes unconscious. Hanumāna immediately remembers the hospital of Sukheṣaṇa that he had seen while he was paraded throughout Laṅkā before his tail was set on fire. He lifts Sukheṣaṇa's hospital and brings it where Lakṣmaṇa is lying. Sukheṣaṇa says that if someone can get the herb Sanjīvani before the next day morning then only Lakṣmaṇa could be saved. Sanjīvani is a herb that is found in the Himālayās. Needless to say, everyone's eyes turn towards Hanumāna. Someone asks him how fast he could go and come back with the herb to which he replies that he would take the time taken to crack a mustard seed in boiling oil.

He reaches the Himālayās but since he is unable to make out which herb is Sanjīvani, he uproots the entire mountain and moves towards Laṅkā. Meanwhile Rāma is grieving on Lakṣmaṇa. He impatiently waits for Hanumāna. With tears in his eyes, Rāma says, "Lakṣmaṇa, you have done so much for me and look at you now...you are lying like this. What has happened to you? If I would have known that this would happen to you, I would have never started the war. What will I tell Sumitra if something happens to you?" The love that Rāma has for Lakṣmaṇa is explained very beautifully in this part of Tulasi Rāmāyaṇa.

Rāvaṇa's army is happy to hear about Lakṣmaṇa but they were equally saddened when they came to know that Hanumāna arrived with Sanjīvani and that Lakṣmaṇa is revived. Lakṣmaṇa is back in form and fights Meghanāda (also known as Indrajīt). It was a fierce battle where Indrajīt gets killed. Indrajīt was so powerful that his death was more celebrated by Rāma's army than Kumbhakarṇa or Rāvaṇa's death.

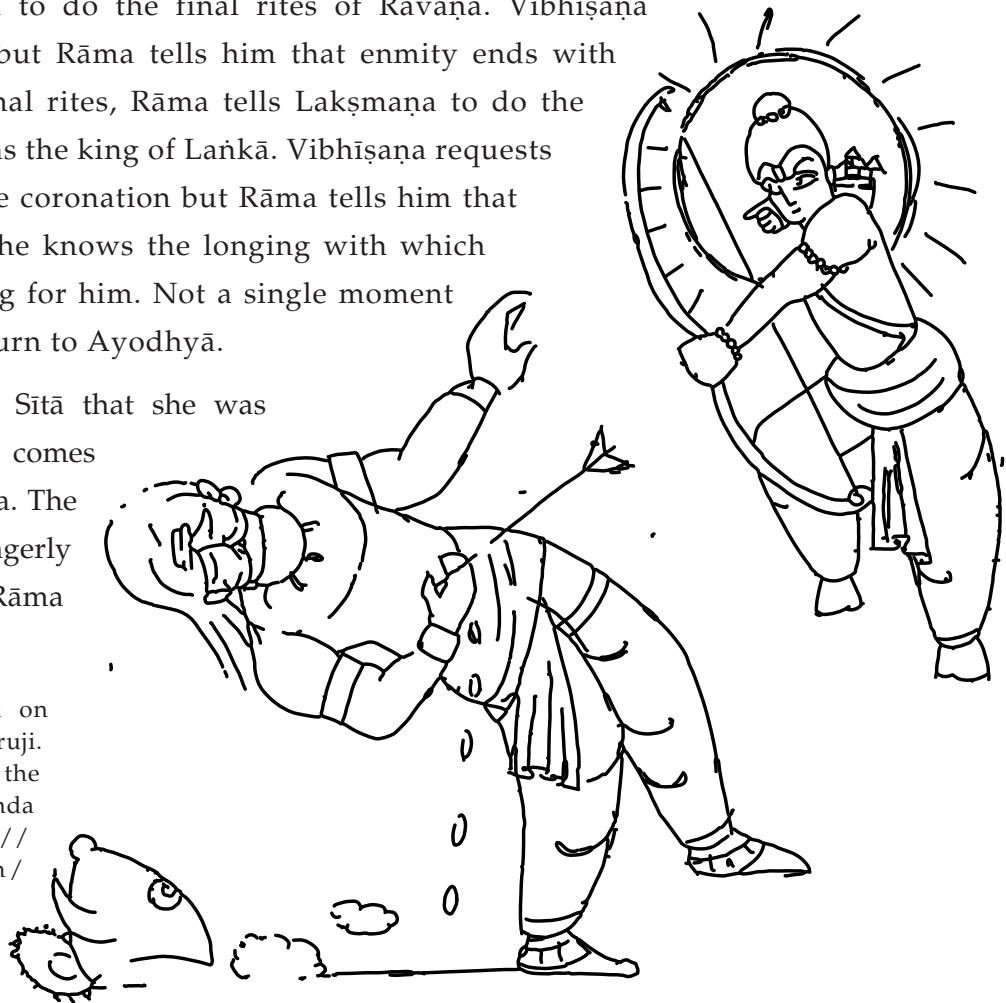
After everyone is dead, Rāvaṇa arrives at the battlefield in his powerful war chariot, equipped with all kinds of weapons and armour. Seeing this, Vibhīṣaṇa gets a doubt (out of the concern and love for Rāma) and asks Rāma how can he fight this mighty Rāvaṇa who is so powerful and has got such a mighty chariot with all sorts of high-end weapons and Rāma doesn't have even a foot wear, let alone a chariot. It is at this point that Rāma gives the description of Dharma-ratha (the chariot of righteousness). This conversation is famously known as Vibhīṣaṇa Gītā. After listening to the advice of Rāma, Vibhīṣaṇa is convinced about the secret formula for success that any person requires.

The deadly war between Rāma and Rāvaṇa begins. As Rāma severs the heads of Rāvaṇa, new heads start appearing. The symbolism behind this is – Rāvaṇa represents the ego and killing the ego is not easy. Finally Rāma looks at Vibhīṣaṇa and asks what's the issue. Vibhīṣaṇa tells Rāma the secret of killing Rāvaṇa. He says that there is a nectar in the naval of Rāvaṇa. As long as it is there, Rāvaṇa cannot be killed. Rāma fixes 31 arrows and shoots. 10 arrows sever the heads, 20 cut the arms and 1 hits the naval. With a loud cry the huge body of Rāvaṇa falls on the ground. There was a moment of silence and then there is a huge roar amongst the army of Rāma. The purpose for which they had come had been fulfilled. Everybody is overjoyed and start celebrating.

Rāma advises Vibhīṣaṇa to do the final rites of Ravaṇa. Vibhīṣaṇa hesitates for a moment but Rāma tells him that enmity ends with death. After Rāvaṇa's final rites, Rāma tells Lakṣmaṇa to do the coronation of Vibhīṣaṇa as the king of Laṅkā. Vibhīṣaṇa requests Rāma to stay back for the coronation but Rāma tells him that he cannot stay back for he knows the longing with which Bharata would be waiting for him. Not a single moment can be wasted for the return to Ayodhyā.

They get the news from Sītā that she was waiting to see Rāma. Sītā comes in a palanquin to see Rāma. The entire army of Rāma eagerly wait to see the reunion of Rāma and Sītā.

* There is a beautiful book on the subject written by Guruji. I have blogged notes from the talks of Swami Swaroopananda on Vibhīṣaṇa Gītā <https://vinayrnair.wordpress.com/category/Vibheeshana-gita/>.



Quiz:

1. Why does Kumbhakarṇa say 'Dhanya, Dhanya'?
2. How did Hanumāna know about Sukheṣaṇa's hospital?
3. What is the name of the herb that revived Lakṣmaṇa?
4. Why does Vibhīṣaṇa get a doubt whether Rāma can win against Rāvaṇa or not?
5. How does Rāma kill Rāvaṇa?





Agni-Parīkṣa

As Sītā's palanquin proceed towards Rāma, Rāma asks her to stop and get down so that the monkeys who have been eagerly waiting can see her. After Sītā gets down, we don't see a Bollywood style of reunion of Rāma and Sītā, rather we see something that one would never expect. Till now, we had seen Rāma's soft nature but when he sees Sītā, he stands there as a rock. He says, "Sītā, this war was because of you but not for you. You are now free to go wherever you want." His words thundered giving the listeners a 20000 volt shock. No one could imagine, of all people, Rāma saying such cruel words. What to say of Sita...she was almost killed by the words. For a moment she thinks whether it is Rāma who is saying this to her?

Sītā asks Lakṣmaṇa to prepare wood so that she can enter the fire. In those days, there was a fire test (*Agni-parīkṣa*) that people would undertake to prove their innocence. If they were innocent, then the fire wouldn't burn them. But if they were guilty, then they would be burnt in the fire. Sītā was willing to take the test to prove her innocence. The fire is lit. No one is able to accept that what they are seeing is true. She says, "Even in my dream if I had dreamt of anyone else, then let this fire burn me." Saying this, she enters the fire. And lo! She comes out safe. The entire crowd



starts cheering and the monkeys start jumping with joy. She had passed the test. *Dharmo rakṣati rakṣitah* (The one who protects Dharma is protected by it).

This is one of the instances in Rāmāyaṇa that is questioned by many people. Why did Rāma do such a thing? Why did he doubt Sītā? And here's the answer to it. The reason that Rāma does such a thing was to keep Sītā out of all blemish. He did this act so that even those who might have the slightest trace of doubt on Sītā's character (after been abducted by a rākṣasā and kept captive for a long time), would not have any doubt left on her. He knew that people would blame him for this in the times to come, but he was willing to take it for the sake of protecting the goodwill of Sītā. That is why, when we listen to Rāmāyaṇa, we hear people blaming Rāma, but no one blames Sītāji. Her status was always protected by Rāma.

When Sītā comes out, Rāma is in tears. He tells Sītā, "I had no doubt on you but people would doubt you. That would be very painful for me." Sītāji knew Rāma and she understood what he was trying to say. But mediocre minds can never understand Rāma and still keep blaming him.

Vibhīṣaṇa asks Rāma to come to his court but Rāma says that he cannot wait any longer. He says, "My Bharata would be waiting for me. Only one day is left for the fourteen years to complete and Bharata is a man of his word. As per his promise, he would give up his life the very next day if I don't reach Ayodhyā tomorrow."

Rāma thanks all the monkeys in the army. Indra is asked to drop Amrita on the bodies of all the monkeys who died in the battle and they are brought back to life. Vibhīṣaṇa gives Puṣpaka Vimāna to Rāma to leave for Ayodhyā. And Rāma calls in everyone - Jāmbhavāna, Hanumāna, Sugrīva and other commanders to jump in and they all leave Laṅkā.

They reach Bharadwāja Muni's āśram. Rāma sends Hanumāna to Ayodhyā to tell Bharata that they were on the way and also asks him to come back and report of what's going on in Ayodhyā.

That brings an end to Laṅkākaṇḍa.

Quiz:

1. What is the meaning of *Dharmo Rakṣati Rakṣitah*?
2. Why does Rāma make Sītā take the *Agni-Parīkṣa*?





Uttarakāṇḍa





Bharata's wait ends

As the fourteen years were coming to an end, Bharata had already sent people in different directions to look for Rāma. Everyone was waiting for Rāma - the Ayodhyāwāsīs, Bharata, Kauśalya, Kaikeyī, and everyone else. When Bharata doesn't get to hear from anyone he becomes anxious. He thinks, "Has Rāma forgotten me? How lucky is Lakṣmaṇa that he could be with Rāma throughout these fourteen years! If Rāma has forgotten me, it is not his fault. I am responsible for the problems that has risen because of me. But I know that Rāma will not forget me. When I look at myself I feel that he won't come back. When I think of Him, I know that he will definitely come. But if I live for one more day after fourteen years, then there is no meaner person than me." Such were the thoughts that were dwindling in the mind of Bharata.

As he is thinking, Hanumāna suddenly arrives there in the form of a Brahmin chanting Rāma's name. He tells Bharata that Rāma is just arriving. The moment he hears that Rāma is arriving, he forgets all his sorrows. He thanks Hanumāna and asks him who he is. Hanumāna replies that he is Vāyuputra. Bharata tells him, "I don't know what to give you in return for such wonderful news that you have brought." Hanumāna just smiles and bows.

Hanumāna played a very crucial role in saving the lives of many people at the right time. He consoled Vibhīṣaṇa when he was in distress and confused. When Sītā was about to give up her life, he saved her by assuring her of Rāma's arrival. He consoled Rāma by giving Sītāji's news. He brought the Sanjivani for Lakṣmaṇa thereby saving his life. Now he reaches Ayodhyā on time and saves Bharata's life. And at all times, Hanumāna just smiles when people thank him. He is never proud that he did things that others cannot even imagine. He only felt grateful that he got the opportunity to serve Rāma. Only if we could learn this one quality of Hanumāna!

Everyone in Ayodhyā was indebted to Hanumāna. The news of Rāma's arrival spread like wildfire. Everyone starts asking each other if they have seen Rāma and they wait at every place on the way from where Rāma would possibly come. It is then all of them arrive in the Puṣpaka Vimāna. Rāma shows the beautiful city of Ayodhyā to his friends (Sugrīva, Jāmbhavāna, etc). He tells them that Ayodhyā is more beautiful than Vaikuṅṭha.

The Puṣpaka Vimāna lands and Rāma tells the Puṣpaka Vimāna to go back to its real owner - Kubera, from whom Rāvaṇa had stolen it. Puṣpaka Vimāna is also very happy that it is also relieved from the bad deeds that Rāvaṇa used to do with it.

Rāma sees Vasiṣṭha. He runs towards him and prostrates unto him. Vasiṣṭha is so happy to see him. He asks Rāma, "How are you?" He replies, "With your grace, everything is fine." Rāma does Guru Vandana to all the Gurus present. Then he sees Bharata. Bharata runs to Rāma and falls at his feet. Rāma tries to lift him but he is not willing to get up. He says that he doesn't want to be at any other place. The description in Tulasi Rāmāyaṇa about Bharata's feeling about Rāma is so touching that one is bound to get emotional when they read these portions. Rāma forcibly lifts him and tightly embraces him. Rāma asks Bharata how he is doing but Bharata being choked with emotion, is unable to speak. All four brothers meet each other. Bharata and Śatrughna prostrate unto Sītāji. Everyone is delighted. Rāma takes countless forms and appears in front of everyone. Rāma and Kauśalya run to each other just as a cow and calf run to each other after being separated for a long time. Sītā meets all the mothers. Lakṣmaṇa also does prostrations to all the mothers.



Rāma introduces Vasiṣṭha to all his friends and tells them that it is because of his grace only that they could win the war. He introduces his friends to Vasiṣṭha saying that it is because of them that they could win the war. Rāma goes to Kaikeyī's palace first because he knows that she would be miserable. The real punishment or experiencing hell is when one feels remorse for the wrong act that one has done. There is no greater punishment. Kaikeyī had been experiencing it for fourteen years. Rāma consoles her and then goes to his own palace. He unlocks all the matted locks of the three brothers and he himself gives them a bath. All the mothers pour out their love on Sītā by giving her a bath. The joy of having their daughter-in-law back after fourteen years is inexplicable.

Vasiṣṭha says that let the coronation of Rāma happen the same day. Last time it was meant to happen the next day and it got delayed by fourteen years. He probably didn't want to take any chances. Vasiṣṭha invokes Indra and asks to send the Divya Simhāsan (Divine throne of the heaven) down to Ayodhyā. And then with all the Vedic rituals and mantras chanted, Rāma is coronated as the king of Ayodhyā. Flowers are showered from the heaven and all beings in the three worlds are happy. And here, Rāmāyaṇa in *Rāmācharitamānasa* comes to an end.

Quiz:

1. Give some important roles played by Hanumāna in Rāmāyaṇa.
2. Who was the real owner of Puṣpaka Vimāna?
3. How does Rāma introduce Vasiṣṭha and his friends to each other?



Synopsis | Tulasi Rāmāyaṇa

In Bālakāṇḍa we learn that obedience is the first step for success in life – *Āchāra prathamam dharmam*. Today we see that people find it difficult to follow an instruction. Children, youth and the adults don't like following the instructions by elders or superiors. They feel they have the right to question and right to know why they have to follow a particular order. Questioning is never wrong. But it can come after they have followed the instruction. Rāma was one of the greatest leaders of all times. He became one because he was a great follower. He followed all the instructions given by his Gurus and his father.

In Ayodhyākāṇḍa we get to learn a lot of things. Ayodhyā means 'no war'. Kaikeyī and Mantharā created 'I and my' feeling which destroyed all the peace. We also see that a person has to take the right decisions in life and his conduct has to be based on Dharma. Some people say that there is no such thing as right and wrong or good and bad, and that everything is relative. Right and wrong are never relative. The touchstone in Rāma's life was whether the thing was Dharma or not. He was an ideal husband. When the time arose for him to act as a king, he rose from the level of being a husband or son to the level of a king. He never compromised on his Dharma even at most tempting situations. Dharma is when a person rises above one's own self and selfishness.

In Āraṇyakāṇḍa through Sītāji we learn. Lord's human incarnation as Rāma is for our education and learning. We see from Sītāji's example of the desire for golden deer that if the mind slips and becomes extrovert, then life starts tumbling down. Even from Śūrpanakha we can learn. Śūrpanakha stands for extrovertedness and sensuality. Even though she came close to Rāma, her mind was not purified. Her mind represents Rāga (attachment). Śabari was an example of Anurāga (love without attachment). We should try to convert Rāga into Anurāga.

In Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa we see Vāli and Sugrīva who represent Karma and Jīva respectively. Jīva is bound by Karmas and it seems to have no escape from the Karmas. Rīṣyamukha parvat is the Satsanga. It is only when Sugrīva seeks refuge in Rāma that he is able to come out of his Karmas. We also see that all monkeys are brought together under Sugrīva who himself is under the command of Rāma. The number of monkeys are countless, just like our thoughts. During meditation, all the thoughts have to be brought

under intellect. Various monkeys represent various types of spiritual Sādhanas. All Sādhanas should have only one goal – Rāma bhakti.

In Sundarakāṇḍa, we see that there are only two people who are Sundar in the true sense – the Lord and his Devotee. Everything else that might seem beautiful are not so. Let us try to aspire to bring out this Sundarta (beauty in us).

In Laṅkākaṇḍa , we see that Rāvaṇa is the personification of Moha (delusion), lack of discrimination, infatuation falling prey to temptations outside. Rāvaṇa also stands for Abhimāna (ego). And we all have seen what kind of trouble one can get into when he gets into the Rāvaṇa-mode.

In Uttarakāṇḍa, we see that Rāma travels from south to north (uttara). Many people had raised questions on Rāma which gets answered in Uttarakāṇḍa. Rāma not only followed Dharma but also raised the level of Dharma.

As we all know, it is an eternal story that can invoke all good qualities in people as they read it. The characters of Lakṣmaṇa, Hanumāna, Bharata, Sītā, Kauśalya, Sumitra, Śabari, etc., personify the noble characters they lived. It is not a story that one might get bored after listening to many times. In fact, all of us have listened to the story of Rāmāyaṇa so many times but even then it attracts equally the young and old.

May the story of Rāmāyaṇa inspire all of us to lead a fulfilling life.

Siyāvara Rāmachandra ki Jai!

Pavanasuta Hanumāna ki Jai!

Umāpati Mahādeva ki Jai!

Bolo bhai sab santana ki Jai!

Quiz:

1. What is the meaning of *Āchāra prathamō dharmah*?
2. What is the meaning of Ayodhyā?
3. What was the touchstone in the life of Rāma?
4. Who represents Rāga and Anurāga in Araṇyakāṇḍa?
5. In Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa, what does Vāli and Sugrīva represent?
6. Name the two people who are truly Sundara?
7. What does Rāvaṇa personify?

Write an essay on the following.

1. Which character in Rāmāyaṇa inspired you the most? Write down who he/she inspired you?
2. Write in brief the good/bad qualities of the below personalities, and what did you learn from them.

- i. Rāma
- ii. Lakṣmaṇa
- iii. Bharata
- iv. Sītā
- v. Daśaratha
- vi. Kauśalya
- vii. Sumitra
- viii. Kaikeyī
- ix. Śabari
- x. Jaṭāyu
- xi. Hanumāna
- xii. Vāli
- xiii. Sugrīva
- xiv. Vibhīṣaṇa
- xv. Rāvaṇa
- xvi. Jāmbhavāna



Glossary

Amritam	–	nectar
Apsara	–	a female heavenly denizen
Asura	–	evil member class of divine beings
Bhakti Upadeśa	–	advice about devotion
Bhikṣū	–	one who beg for alms
Brahma	–	one of the three main Gods in Hinduism who is responsible for Creation
Brahmaṇa	–	a person who in pursuit of the study of Self-Knowledge
Brahman	–	The Supreme Self, the all pervading Reality, the ultimate cause of this entire Universe
Brahmāṇḍ	–	universe
Brahmin	–	the English word for Brahmaṇa
Devas	–	benevolent member class of divine beings
Dūta	–	messenger
Gandharva	–	celestial being
Ghāt	–	a flight of steps leading down to a river
Grahasthaśrama	–	householder's life (second among the four aśramas explained in Hinduism)
Gurukula	–	ancient system of residential schools
Janayu	–	sacred thread
Kalpa	–	a period of 4.32 billion years
Karma	–	action
Mamata	–	love
Mokṣa	–	liberation
Mukti	–	liberation
Pāyasam	–	sweet made of milk
Praja	–	citizens
Prem	–	love
Puṣpavāṭika	–	flower garden

Putra	–	son
Rākṣasās	–	demons; the third member class of divine beings (the most evil ones)
Sabha	–	gathering
Sādhana	–	austerities
Sādhu	–	renunciate, saint
Samata	–	balanced mind
Samādhi	–	blissful trance-like state
Sanyāsa	–	renunciation
Sanyāsī	–	renunciate
Śringāra	–	grace
Sutala	–	one of the nether worlds
Swargaloka	–	heaven
Tapas	–	penance
Tapasvī	–	mendicants
Tathāstu	–	so be it (may your wish be fulfilled)
Trikālajñānī	–	one who can see the past, present and future
Varadāna	–	boon
Varṇa	–	literal meaning is colour. In Hinduism, it refers to the four temperaments people have - Brahmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Śudra
Vāsanā	–	born inclinations
Viveka	–	ability to discriminate between good and bad
Vrata pālanam	–	sincere following of austerities
Yagña	–	A sacrificial ritual
Yogi	–	one who has mastered the science of Yoga
Yogini	–	a female Yogi



About the writer

A Mathematics teacher by profession and passion, Vinay Nair is the co-founder of *Raising a Mathematician Foundation* and head of the *School of Vedic Maths* through which he conducts courses, seminars, workshops, residential camps on Vedic Mathematics, Ancient Indian Mathematics and explorative learning in Mathematics for people of all ages. An affiliate of Chinmaya Mission since the past 14 years, Vinay Nair works along with Chinmaya International Foundation (CIF) for spreading the knowledge of Mathematics that has originated in India.



He is the author of the Online Course on Vedic Mathematics offered by (CIF) and his video DVDs on Vedic Mathematics has been launched by CIF. Recently he, along with his brother Veeraj Nair, came out with a colourful pictorial travelogue *Journey to the Himalayas* which is a fundraiser for **Chinmaya Pradeep**.

More articles by him can be viewed on www.vinaynair.wordpress.com.

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An appeal

One of the projects that has appealed to me the most is **Chinmaya Pradeep** that is coming up at Sandeepany Sadhanalaya, Powai. It is going to be one of the most interactive accounts of Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda's work and vision.

Swami Chinmayananda was not a personality, but a phenomena. In one lifetime, he accomplished a vision of the scale that is unimaginable for generations to come. His work benefitted every age group, inspired people from all walks of life, transformed millions. To showcase his work and vision as medium of inspiration, Chinmaya Mission Mumbai has conceptualised **Chinmaya Pradeep** - a first-of-its-kind permanent outdoor multi-media and multimediuM park in India - innovatively laid out in the vicinity of Swami Chinmayananda's kuṭiya (humble residence) in the premises of Sandeepany Sadhanalaya, Powai.

If you have liked this book, remember that it is only Swami Chinmayananda's teachings that has flowed unto you. Should you feel like giving back something, you can offer your donations on <http://www.chinmayamissionmumbai.com/chinmaya/chinmaya-pradeep/cp> which will go towards **Chinmaya Pradeep**. You can also order a copy of Journey to the Himalayas from http://sovm.org/registration_form.php?id=JTH which will also go towards the funds for **Chinmaya Pradeep**.

Thank you.

Unto Him, our Best!

Vinay Nair

