

Sri Ramanavami Utsava



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Theme:
Sama Dharma In Ramayana

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Unlearn what is not in Valmiki?

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Abstract

The notion of "human race superiority" does not appear in Valmiki's original *Ramayana*. In his work, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, Yuval Noah Harari argues that this idea was absent in the early human era. This raises the question: could the *Ramayana* be reflective of such an era? Harari suggests that the notion of human race superiority only emerged later, as did the concept of class or caste inferiority. If this is true, it raises a crucial question: how can the *Ramayana*, which predates the idea of human race superiority, contain references to class inferiority? In fact, the *Ramayana* does not depict any human class or caste as inferior in Valmiki's original narrative.

Harari's passages

Just as there is no barrier between humans and other beings, neither is there a strict hierarchy. Non-human entities do not exist merely to provide for the needs of man....The world does not revolve around humans or around any other particular group of beings. (page no.44)

When animism was the dominant belief system human norms and values had to take into consideration the outlook and interests of a multitude of other beings such as animals, plants, fairies and ghosts. For example, a forager band in the Ganges Valley may have established a rule forbidding people to cut down a particularly large fig tree, lest the fig tree spirit become angry and take revenge. Another forager band living in the Indus Valley may have forbidden people white-tailed foxes because a white-tailed fox once revealed to a wise old woman where the band might find precious obsidian.

Hunter-gatherers picked and pursued wild plants and animals, which could be seen as equal in status to Homo sapiens. The fact that man hunted sheep did not make sheep inferior to man, just as the fact that tigers hunted man did not make man inferior to tigers. Being communicated with one another directly and negotiated the rules governing their shared habitat. In contrast, farmers owned and manipulated plants and animals and could hardly degrade themselves by negotiating with their positions. Hence the first religious effect of the agricultural evolution was to turn plants and animals from equal members of a spiritual round table into property (page no. 151).

(Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens, A Brief History of Humankind*, McClelland & Stewart, a division of Random House of Canada Limited, a Penguin Random House Company, 2014).

MRYS society

When I went through these passages, I could easily connect the Vedic Mantras with these passages. Nowhere does the MRYS (Mantras of Rig-Yajus-Sama-Vedas) say humans are superior to other species. Only as a penalty to this notion of human-race-superiority, humans developed gradually the 'notion of class inferiority' which means considering one human class as superior or inferior to another human class. Considering any human class as ugly idiotic or immoral is a prejudice. I see MRYS as the prejudice-free literature. MRYS is predominantly animistic where rivers, plants, mortar, plough, furrows, forest, rain, thunder, sun and moon are worshipped. Thus, it almost matches with Harari's observations.

But MRYS does not reflect an entirely tribal society. It talks about cultivation though it does not have huge landlords. It talks about 'Rajanyas' (chiefs). "Let all the people wish you so that you don't fall from kingship. (10.173.1)." This Rig Vedic passage shows that kingship can be sustained only if the people wish it. This is a democratic element in the kingship of Rig Veda.

Strikingly MRYS, a huge literature that runs approximately 26,000 lines does not mention the name of any city town or village, though it gives the names of rivers and mountains. Since the names of villages and towns are absolutely absent in society-reflecting literature, it indicates that they were not named at all. This shows two things: The notions of ownership of the lands were not strong in the MRYS. The society that MRYS reflects is a semi-agricultural society where the people lived happily with Mother Nature without having strong prejudices and rigid hierarchies which were going to victimize the human race.

Misconceptions regarding MRYS

Some scholars misunderstand some Vedic passages to show how the MRYS has prejudices. I have detailed this in my book 'Veda, My Passion' (Webolim, 2021) and established their views as misinterpretations. So, let me not go into it in detail now. Here I take only two examples.

1. Dasyus which means thieves in any Sanskrit literature are misinterpreted as Indian Aborigines to show that the Veda suppresses Indian Aborigines when the Veda talks of the subjugation of Dasyus. Please understand that Dasyu is not a separate race or a separate ethnic group or community in the Veda. It just means thief in Veda or any Sanskrit literature.

2. The famous Purusha Sukta (Rig Veda, 10.90.12.) describes the Shudra as the feet of the cosmic being. This is the only place which appears to look down on a particular human class in the whole of MRYS. Therefore Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in his work 'Who were the Shudras?' (Thacker & co., Ltd. Bombay) wonders how this comes in a literature which stands for the peaceful co-existence of different carriers. He observes it as a later addition. In one way he is correct because Purusha Sukta in Sama Veda is devoid of the identity of Shudra with feet. This portion of Sama Veda is older than the tenth book of Rig Veda where Purusha Sukta occurs. This means that the tenth book of Rig Veda takes this Purusha Sukta from Sama Veda and adds the Shudra-passage into it.

But with all these, we need a better explanation. It has to be understood that the feet were not at all considered inferior anywhere in the MRYS. We should not see MRYS from the standards and notions of our world. In another Mantra, the word 'Mula,' which means foundation, is used for denoting feet (10.87.10.). त्रेधा मूलं यातुधानस्य वृश्च । Thus calling Shudra as feet means describing Shudra as the foundation.

Thus it becomes clear to me that the MRYS is a prejudice-free literature.

Absence of the prejudice of class-superiority in Ramayana

Now, when we come to Ramayana of Valmiki, it reflects a more urbanized society, which has the names of cities, villages and even kingdoms like Kosala, likely to have strong prejudices and strict hierarchies. Let us examine.

Surprisingly Valmiki's Ramayana never expresses any kind of prejudice to any human community or class. (Through Ramayana here, I mean only the epic that runs from its II-VI books which are its original. My translation of the epic has several research articles regarding how they are original and this is the view of many researchers.).

The epic calls Rakshasas as cruel in general. One may say that this can be viewed as prejudice. But Valmiki never describes Rakshasas as a class found in humans or sapiens. He considers it as a separate group, perhaps something like Neanderthals. Neanderthals were cruel. This is a fact. Rakshasas also have to be perceived in this way. Tigers are cruel or wild. This is not a prejudice. It is a fact. The same

applies to Neanderthals and Rakshasas. I am not saying that Neanderthals and Rakshasas are one. But I took it just for a comparison.

In the same way calling Vanaras as Chapalas (quick and fickle-minded) also cannot be called as a prejudice as they were not taken in sapiens group at all. They are taken to be a separate group. This has to be viewed as describing Erectus or apes as Chapalas. Again, I am not making all the three one here. it is just a comparison.

Valmiki never stamps any sapien- groups like the people of Anga-kingdom or Shudras or Nishadas as cunning or fickle-minded etc. This is what I intended to say. It is highly interesting to note that the epic which runs for some 40,000 lines does not have human-class prejudice despite its urbanisation. However, Ramayana-society certainly was not as urbanised as the later Mahabharata or Gupta Era.

Solution for the problems found in urbanisation

This indicates the possibility of the near absence of these kinds of prejudices even when a society can get urbanised. What I feel is that the increases in suppression and further prejudices can be found only when urbanisation is quick. The absence of prejudices in Ramayana society may suggest that if urbanisation is gradual, slow, and caring the development for all around, then we may avoid the risk of facing high prejudices. Development for all around is called Abhyudaya in Shastras. 'Abhi' means around. 'Ut' means upward. 'Aya' means movement. Abhyudaya means development around. This Abhyudaya is considered to be one of the two dimensions of Dharma in early Shastras.

Absence of the prejudice of human-race-superiority in Ramayana

Another interesting thing is that the epic does not have even the notion or prejudice of human-race-superiority. Nowhere in the epic, do we see a direct proclamation that animals and birds are inferior to humans. Sita says, 'The difference between Rama and Ravana is the difference between a lion and a dog; an elephant and a cat.....' Even here the comparison is based on might. A lion is mightier than a dog; an elephant is mightier than a cat..... this is an objective fact. Sita does not add any notion here.

Seeing some animals like apes, donkeys or pigs in dreams is considered to be a bad omen in three places of epic. This seems to be the only place where few animals are looked down. But even here I feel generally in our culture not all bad omen-indicating beings are looked down upon. For example, when we start a journey, it is inauspicious when a Brahmin comes. This is a belief. This does not put a Brahmin down. But owls and donkeys are believed to be good omens in India, though they are looked down upon in general in the same India.

If a person is to be ridiculed, he is called a dog or piggy. These kinds of expressions are common in the literary works which we come across. But they are absent in Ramayana.

Below given are the two exceptions.

1. Kumbhakarna says to Ravana, 'without knowing the meaning of Shastras, some persons having animal-intelligence.....' (6.63.14.)
2. यान्ति राजर्षयश्चात्र मृगयां धर्मकोविदाः । तस्मात्त्वं निहतो युद्धे मया बाणेन वानर । अयुध्यन्प्रतियुध्यन्वा यस्माच्छाखामृगो ह्यसि
Men capture beasts, either covertly or overtly, with snares and contrivances. The meat-seeking men in general kill beasts, even if the beasts are speedily sprinting or standing steadily, fully dismayed or undismayed, vigilant or unvigilant and even if they are facing away. This is not considered as wrong. Even the great kings who are experts in Dharma go hunting. Therefore,

I killed you in Yuddha (war/combat) through an arrow. Since you are a Vanara I killed you whether you fight with me or not (4.18.40-42.).

The first one is by Kumbhakarna who is a Rakshasa. Rakshasas looked down on even humans. Therefore, there is no surprise if this comes to Rakshasa's lips. But the same cannot be expected from a Sapien in the epic. But the next one (only one) is from a sapien.

The verses are a little complicated. It seems that Rama takes advantage of Vali to be an animal to hunt him. He seems to convey this. Still, the verses are not clear. It first talks about hunting in various ways. Then it talks about killing Vali in a fight. The word Yuddha has to denote the involvement of both the parties. But here Vali is not involved in the fight with Rama. Can it be called Yuddha at all? Is it not just a hitting? Shri Sitarama Shastri in his Shrimad Valmiki muni hrudaya tattva sara prakashika (Trichinopoly united printers ltd, 1943) raises this question.

Then Rama identifies Vali with an animal to justify his act. Though Vali is a Vanara, can he be taken as an animal in the context of giving justice? When we closely read the epic, we understand Vanaras to be a group which are eloquent. They are scholars. They perform Vedic rituals. They had their cities and kingdoms. They cannot be merely called animals. Rarely Valmiki does do it only to make the reader feel some symbiotic relationship to establish his idea of universal welfare. Otherwise, in the context of justice, it is not good to take him as an animal. He does not have animal features except a tail and the name 'Vanara' which can mean monkey literally.

Therefore, I go here by the Western (i.e. Gujarati-Marati) reading/recension of Valmiki's Ramayana.

तस्मात्त्वं निहतो वध्यो मया बाणेन वानर । अवध्यमानो युद्धेसौ सौम्य शाखामृगो ह्यसि ॥

“Even the great kings who are expert in Dharma go for hunting. Therefore, you are killed through an arrow, since you deserve capital punishment. You are a Vanara, indestructible in war....”

This means that due to his crimes of adultery, rape and incest, he deserves capital punishment. Since Vali is indestructible in war Rama took the method of hunting which is adopted for some uncontrollable beasts that harm the people. The Western reading's expression here is highly convincing in the epic where no sapien especially Rama-like-character looks down on animals.

Vali's destruction is controversial. With any controversial issue, generally, interpolations in arguments are expected to happen in a lofty way. E.g. In Mahabharata, the marriage of Draupadi (which is taken as controversial) has different elements added in different recensions or readings, getting overloaded with many unnecessary explanations. But the same story which occurs later in Aranya Parva is not only short but also gives a convincing answer precisely (to me). In the context of answering Vali, the Western recension is short, sharp, and precise.

In the same way, Rama's words in the Gauda reading appear better than in north-south readings in the below context. कपोतो वानरश्रेष्ठ किं पुनर्मद्विधो जनः. If even a dove gave refuge to the hunter who hunted its wife, why can't the one like me? (Northern-southern readings, 6.18.25.) कपोतो वानरश्रेष्ठ किमुताहं विभीषणम्। ॥ If the dove gave refuge even to the hunter who hunted the dove's Love, then why cannot I give refuge to Vibhishana who surrendered in the true sense (Gauda or Bengali reading, 5.91.5.)?

Thus, in Ramayana, the notions of human race superiority and class inferiority are absent.

Valmiki and Darwin

In fact, Valmiki paints, sometimes as we mentioned already, Vanaras as animals only to make the reader to feel the symbiotic relationship through which the universal welfare can be well established. In fact, Valmiki is the one who brings for the first time different living creatures into one family tree (3.14.). This is later echoed in Mahabharata and several other Puranas.

An attempt to bring all species in a single-family-tree is brilliant, though it is just a literary masterpiece without getting couched in a scientific language just like Darwin's one. The common spirit that we need to understand here in the ancient literary Valmiki and new scientific Darwin is the single-family tree of all species in the world. Somehow, we all belong to the same family. Apes, dogs, birds and fish are only our distant relations. This is the quintessential conveyed.

Women-related-prejudice in Ramayana?

But the literature which is free of several other prejudices appears to have some women-related prejudices. Women are called Chapalas in a few places. Rakshasas especially Ravana describes women like this in several places. This need not come in to account since prejudices and judgmental approaches are not new to Rakshasas in the epic. Sita calls herself as Chapala. Though this can be taken as prejudice, this is a sign of Sita's humbleness. Responding to the harsh words of Sita, while Rama went to catch the deer, Lakshmana describes women in general as Chapalas since he was in high rage getting provoked. These are the very few places where women-related prejudices are found in the epic.

It is a great surprise in such a huge epic that has around 36,000 lines, only five to six places have women-related prejudices while the world literature of the medieval world is filled everywhere with the same.

Some viewed the story of Kaikeyi and Shurpanakha as misleading to the huge catastrophe revealed women-prejudice of Ramayana. This is wrong as Ramayana also talks about Vali and Ravana who faced catastrophe due to turning deaf ears to their wives. The former is not to put down the women. Neither the latter is to glorify them. Valmiki records the story as it is, in which good and bad are there in both genders.

Dasharatha in his catastrophe caused by Kaikeyi, says in Ramayana, "All women are not Kaikeyis in the world (2.12.103)."

Less interpolated

The absence of prejudices in such a huge epic suggests that the epic is less interpolated. If there are many interpolations, the interpolators will definitely add various foul prejudices in the epic. We see this in Ramayana-re-makers who add so many of their strong prejudices of their times in their retellings. We need to thank our ancestors for preserving Valmiki's Ramayana in its pristine form only with less interpolation, unlike Mahabharata.

Vedic maturity of Ramayana

What is called maturity? Whom do we call immature? Generally, whomever we see deciding and acting based on the above prejudices, we call him immature. Wherever we feel something as uncourteous, we can find someone calling another to insult him by name of some caste or race or animal or sect like catlike, dog, piggy, womanly, paganish, Jewish, Shudra-like, Brahmin-like or German-like or Bengali-like or Malayali-like.

An ideology or even religion may indeed influence sometimes a group of people, a state or even a nation to some extent. In such a case, a group of people can have some features based on it. But

without closely examining, a person stamping another as bad merely because he is a Jew or German, Bengali or Bihari is severely wrong. This is uncourteous and the decision based on this is immaturity.

Unfortunately, many masterpieces we read, especially those of the medieval age, related to literature, history and religion contain this feature. As the Veda and Ramayana are free of all these prejudices, they are the fittest ones in guiding us in Dharma.

Final word

The scripture which is absolutely free of all prejudices alone deserves the highest honour regarding being Pramana (instrument of knowledge) for Dharma.

Guha, a tribal equal of Rama

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तत्र राजा गुहो नाम रामस्यात्मसमस्सखा।

निषादजात्यो बलवान् स्थपतिश्चेति विश्रुतः।।2.50.33।।

- *There lived the mighty king Guha who was born in the race of nishadas (hunters) and became famous as their lord. He was a friend to Rama who was like his own self.*

Introduction

The Ramayana, one of the greatest epics of Indian tradition, is not merely a tale of heroism, devotion, and duty but also a text that subtly highlights the values of equality and inclusivity. A core theme of the Ramayana is Rama's inherent nature of treating all individuals with fairness and respect. His actions consistently show that he values people for their wisdom, righteousness and experience rather than their social status, wealth, caste, power, or education.

One of the most profound examples of this is his relationship with Guha, the Nishada king. Rama does not see Guha as a subject or subordinate, but as an equal friend—his **आत्मसमस्सखा** “*aatma sama sakha*” (a friend equal to himself), demonstrating his ability to look beyond material distinctions and value people for who they are. Unlike superficial egalitarianism, where equality is often a facade, Rama's approach is authentic and deeply rooted in respect and friendship. This paper explores how Rama's interactions with Guha in the Ramayana highlight his unprejudiced nature and how this principle remains relevant in contemporary society.

Rama and Guha: A Friendship Beyond Social Barriers

When Rama, accompanied by Sita and Lakshmana, enters the forest during his exile, Guha, the chieftain of the *Nishadas* (hunters) rushes to meet Rama with his elders upon hearing of his arrival. When Rama notices Guha coming towards him, with great enthusiasm, he rushes with Lakshmana to meet Guha and embraces Guha. (“*Overwhelmed with grief (to see Rama in bark), Guha embraced Rama.*” 2.50.36)

तमार्तस्सम्परिष्वज्य गुहो राघवमब्रवीत्।।2.50.36।।

Rama's behaviour towards Guha stands out. Unlike a king who sees a tribal chief as a subordinate, Rama greets Guha with warmth, trust, and genuine friendship.

Although Guha cannot be considered his equal in **status, education, wealth, or birth**, Rama calls him **his equal**, denoting that for a relationship to be truly equal, none of these **material constructs or societal prejudices** matter. What defines a true bond is the **loyalty, wisdom, and righteousness** that one holds. Going forward, it is noticeable how this phrase "*aatma samah sakha*" isn't merely words, but rather a deep feeling Rama holds towards Guha in his heart.

On the other hand, Guha, despite being a tribal chieftain, does not see himself as equal to Rama but as his humble servant. He expresses deep gratitude, believing that everything he possesses is a blessing from Rama ("*I am seeking supreme fame in this world through the attainment of dharma and acquisition of abundant artha by the grace of Rama alone.*" 2.51.5).

अस्य प्रसादादाशंसे लोकेस्मिन् सुमुहद्यशः।

धर्मावाप्तिं च विपुलामर्थावाप्तिं च केवलम्।।2.51.5।।

Yet, despite this reverence, Rama **does not assume a superior stance** but treats Guha as **his true friend** rather than a subject. This interaction highlights Rama's ability to recognize the inherent worth of individuals **beyond societal classifications**.

When Guha, overwhelmed with emotion, offers food and hospitality, Rama politely declines, as he has taken a vow of asceticism. However, he does not reject Guha's offering dismissively but instead **acknowledges the devotion** behind it. In this incident, we note that Guha does not hesitate to approach Rama with his elders. This interaction underscores Rama's **accessibility**—Guha, although at a 'lower status' than Rama, does not have to go through intermediaries but meets Rama directly, showing that even tribals had direct access to Rama.

At this juncture, Rama **inquires about Guha's well-being**—not just about his personal health but also about his kingdom, revenue, and allies. ("*Rama embracing him tightly with his strong arms said, 'O Guha it is fortunate that I am able to see you and your relations in good health. Hope, all is well with your friends, kingdom and revenue.'*" 2.50.42)

भुजाभ्यां साधु पीनाभ्यां पीडयन्वाक्यमब्रवीत्।।

दिष्ट्या त्वां गुह पश्यामि ह्यरोगं सह बान्धवैः।

अपि ते कुशलं राष्ट्रे मित्रेषु च धनेषु च।।2.50.42।।

This shows that Rama is not merely passing through but genuinely cares about Guha's land and his people. Equal relationships, especially friendship are often marked by **emotional reciprocity**, and Rama treats Guha with the same warmth and concern that he would extend to his brothers or closest allies.

A true king is responsible not only for his immediate kingdom but also for maintaining harmony with those on the outskirts. However, unlike other rulers who might see tribal communities as subordinates, Rama treats Guha and his people as his own.

Upon understanding Rama's predicament, Guha offers his kingdom to him with utmost sincerity and respect. (*"O mighty armed prince, welcome to you This entire land belongs to you. You are our master and we, your servants. Rule this kingdom happily."* 2.50.38).

स्वागतं ते महाबाहो तवेयमखिला मही।।2.50.38।।

वयं प्रेष्या भवान्भर्ता साधु राज्यं प्रशाधि नः।

However, Rama respectfully declines, reaffirming that Guha is truly just his *Sakha* (friend) and not a political tool to exploit. Rama does not take advantage of Guha's loyalty for his own benefit. He **does not expect sacrifices** from Guha but acknowledges his devotion and **treats him with fairness**.

In this complete episode, Rama inquiring about Guha is done on the basis of genuine care and **not as a formality** done by a ruler to a subject. Similarly, we can notice how comfortable Guha is about offering food and hospitality, Guha is more driven by **concern and love** than by having to extend a formal invitation. And this is only possible when Rama **not only gives but also receives without discriminating**. We can understand that Guha's invitation and hospitality are not a mere formality in Guha's action the following night.

That night, as Rama rests before crossing the river, Lakshmana remains awake to guard him. Guha, moved by this devotion, offers to keep watch, saying that he and his people **would protect Rama** even against a four-winged army. This instance shows that Guha does not see himself as an outsider but as someone **deeply connected to Rama and his cause**. Guha also quips that Rama is **the dearest man to him**. (*"For me, there is none dearer than Rama in this world. I speak the truth. I swear by truth."* 2.51.4).

न हि रामात्प्रियतमो ममास्ति भुवि कश्चन।

ब्रवीम्येतदहं सत्यं सत्येनैव च ते शपे ॥2.51.4॥

Despite Guha's assurances, Lakshmana refuses to sleep, and the two spend the night discussing Rama, Ayodhya, and the trials ahead. Guha's commitment is evident—not only does he offer his resources and protection, but he personally stays awake by Rama's side out of **love and concern**. This **unwavering loyalty** would not have been possible had Rama treated Guha merely as a subordinate. Instead, their friendship is one of **mutual trust and shared responsibility**.

At dawn, Rama prepares to leave and advises Guha:

“Take care of your kingdom and remain vigilant. A ruler's greatest duty is the well-being of his people.”

This parting message further cements Rama's **respect** for Guha, treating him as a responsible leader too.

Fourteen years later, as Rama completes his exile and returns victorious, he has not forgotten Guha. Before even reaching Ayodhya, he instructs Hanuman:

“Go to Sringeripuram which is seen from the sky, meet Guha the leader of Nishadas and tell him of my inquiry and well-being. He will be very happy to hear that I am in good health free from anxiety. He is equal to me and my friend.” (6.128.4-5)

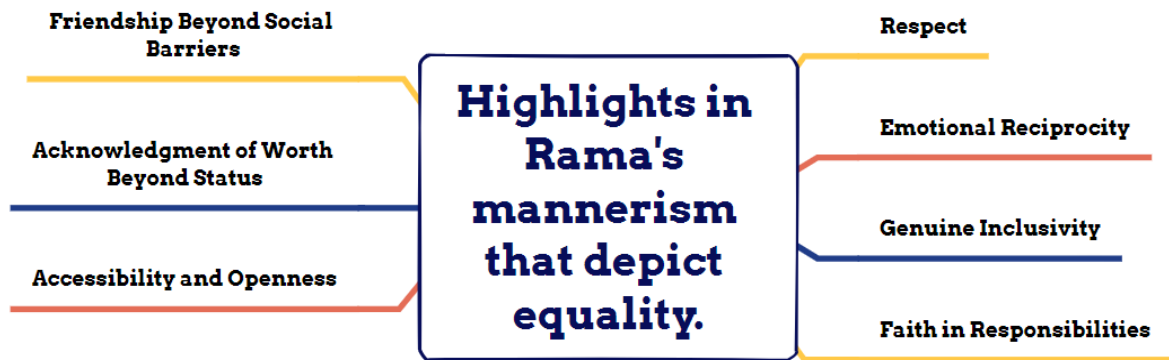
शृङ्गबेरपुरंप्राप्यगुहंगहनगोचरम् ।

निषादाधिपतिंब्रह्मिकुशलंवचनान्मम ॥6.128.4॥

श्रुत्वातुमांकुशलिनमरोगंविगतज्वरम् ।

भविष्यतिगुहःप्रीतस्सममात्मसमस्सखा ॥6.128.5॥

Despite forming new alliances with Hanuman, Sugriva, and Vibhishana, Rama does **not let these relationships overshadow his deep bond** with Guha. He ensures that Guha is among the first to know of his return, proving that his friendship is **not based on convenience or circumstance**. Whether during exile or after victory, Rama's **consistency** in his character highlights that his approach to equality is **not circumstantial** but an intrinsic part of his dharma. Also, in the same instance, he proudly calls Guha explicitly as his atma samah sakha once again, showcasing that he is **genuinely unbiased** and unaffected by any probable societal prejudices as well.



Superficial vs. Genuine Equality

In many societies, there is a tendency to project an image of inclusivity and egalitarianism, but in reality, hidden biases and social hierarchies still persist. Many rulers and leaders may outwardly claim to treat everyone equally, but their actions reveal otherwise. Rama, however, does not just perform acts of equality for appearances—his interactions with Guha and others from different social backgrounds are driven by sincerity. He does not see Guha as a ‘lower’ being, nor does he treat his loyalty as an obligation. Instead, he cherishes the friendship in its truest form, making no distinction between Guha and his other royal allies.

Those who engage in performative equality may:

- Publicly claim to support inclusivity while privately maintaining discriminatory practices.
- Interact with people from lower social backgrounds for political or personal gain or rather than out of genuine respect.
- Offer assistance as an act of charity rather than mutual respect.
- Change their behavior based on social situations, treating others as equals only when it benefits them/ when they need to exploit them.

In contrast, Rama:

- Treats Guha with unwavering consistency, from exile to his victorious return.
- Seeks Guha’s well-being not out of obligation but from genuine concern.
- Declines Guha’s generous offer to govern Shringiberapura, affirming that their friendship is genuine and not a backup resource to exploit for political convenience or personal gain.
- Respects Guha’s wisdom and leadership, treating him as an equal in matters of governance and protection.

A Model for Leadership and Society

Rama's friendship with Guha sets an example of how leadership should be exercised. A true ruler does not merely govern but nurtures relationships with all sections of society. By treating Guha as his equal, Rama reinforces that a kingdom thrives when there is respect and cooperation between its ruler and its people, including those from the outskirts. His mannerism reflects the true Vedic principles said in mantras like

दृ॒ते दृ॑ ह॒ मा मि॒त्रस्य॑ मा॒ चक्षु॑षा॒ सर्वा॑णि भू॒तानि॒ समी॑क्षन्ताम्।
मि॒त्रस्या॒हं चक्षु॑षा॒ सर्वा॑णि भू॒ तानि॒ समी॑क्षे। मि॒त्रस्य॒ चक्षु॑षा॒ समी॑क्षामहे ॥

Dr̥te dr̥ḥha mā mitrasya mā cakṣuṣā sarvāṇi bhūtāni samīkṣantām।
Mitrasyāham cakṣuṣā sarvāṇi bhūtāni samīkṣe। Mitrasya cakṣuṣā samīkṣāmahe॥

"May all beings look at me with the eye of a friend. May I look at all beings with the eye of a friend. May we all look at one another with the eye of a friend."

- Yajur Veda, 36.18

स॒मा॒नो मन्त्रः॑ स॒मि॒तिः स॒मा॒नी स॒मा॒नं म॒नः स॒ह चि॒त्तमे॑षाम् ।
स॒मा॒नं मन्त्र॑म॒भि मन्त्र॑ये वः स॒मा॒नेन॑ वो ह॒विषा॑ जुहोमि ॥

Samāno mantraḥ samitiḥ samānī samānam manaḥ saha cittam eṣām |
Samānam mantram abhi mantraye vaḥ samānena vo haviṣā juhomi ||

"Common be the prayer of these (assembled worshippers), common be the acquisition, common the purpose, associated be the desire. I repeat for you a common prayer, I offer for you with a common oblation"

- Rigveda 10.191.3

अ॒ज्ये॒ष्ठासो॑ऽक॒नि॒ष्ठास॑ ए॒ते सं भा॑त॒रो वा॒वृ॒धुः सो॒भ॒गाय॑ ।
यु॒वा पि॑ता॒ स्वपा॑ रु॒द्र ए॒षः सु॒दु॒घा पु॒षिः॑ सु॒दी॒नो म॑रु॒द्गणः॑ ॥

Ajyeṣṭhāso akanīṣṭhāsa ete sam bhrātaraḥ vāvṛdhuḥ saubhagāya |
Yuvā pitā svapā rudra eṣāḥ sudughā ṛṣniḥ sudinā marudbhyaḥ ||

“ No one is superior or inferior; They are brothers, of whom no one is the elder, no one the younger, but who grew up together for their mutual prosperity; may their father, Rudra, ever

youthful, and Prṣṇi (their mother), grant favourable days for the Maruts.”

- *Rigveda 5.60.5*

सहृदयं सांमनस्यमविद्वेषं कृणोमि वः।
अन्यो अन्यमभि ह्येत वत्सं जातमिवाघ्न्या ॥

Sahrdayam sāmanasyaṃ avidveṣaṃ kṛṇomi vaḥ |
Anyo anyam abhi haryata vatsaṃ jātam ivāghnyā ||

"I establish concord among your hearts and minds, free from malice. May you love one another as a cow loves her newborn calf."

- *Atharvaveda 3.30.1*

The essence of these Vedic mantras promotes unity and equality among all beings, emphasizing a vision of harmony and impartiality. This principle is reflected in Rama’s interactions with those around him, such as his relationship with Guha. Their bond is not dictated by birth or status but by mutual trust and devotion, embodying the Vedic ideal of seeing all beings with an equal and friendly gaze.

The Timeless Importance of Rama’s Unbiased Nature

The Ramayana is more than a religious or historical epic—it is a guide to ethical living and governance. Rama’s treatment of Guha stands as a prime example of his unprejudiced nature and principle of equality, which is relevant even today. By acknowledging and practising these values, societies can move towards greater harmony and inclusivity. Rama’s ability to reach out to individuals without bias teaches an important lesson—true nobility lies not in one’s birth but in one’s actions and character. His friendship with Guha stands as a shining example of how leadership and respect are built not on social status but on integrity and mutual recognition.

In a world still grappling with social divisions, Rama’s unwavering commitment to treating people with genuine fairness and love serves as an inspiration. His story urges us to look beyond superficial differences and build true relationships. This principle is not only a cornerstone of the Ramayana but a timeless ideal that continues to hold immense significance in shaping a more just and inclusive society—where worth is determined not by status but by virtue and character.

Different Communities in Bharata's journey

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Abstract: This essay shows how the different communities of people in Ayodhya were involved in the journey to Chitrakoota with Bharata to bring Rama back to Ayodhya. This essay also highlights how that equilibrium and equality are repeated in the history previously (in the Vedas) and later too.

The different communities involved the journey of Bharata are described by Valmiki in Ayodhyakanda. Firstly, the royals are described:

अग्रतः प्रययुस्तस्य सर्वे मन्त्रिपुरोधसः। अधिरुह्य हयैः युक्तान् रथान् सूर्यरथोपमान् ।।

नवनागसहस्राणि कल्पितानि यथाविधि। अन्वयुर्भरतं यान्तमिक्ष्वाकुकुलनन्दनम्।।

षष्ठी रथसहस्राणि धन्विनो विविधायुधाः। अन्वयुर्भरतं यान्तं राजपुत्रं यशस्विनम्।।

शतं सहस्राण्यश्वानां समारूढानि राघवम्। अन्वयुर्भरतं यान्तं सत्यसन्धं जितेन्द्रियम्।।2.83.2-5।।

“All the ministers and priests get into the chariots yoked with horses, shining as the Sun and go ahead of Bharata. Nine thousand elephants accompany Bharata with sixty thousand chariots filled with archers, furnished with weapons of various kinds and with hundred thousand cavalries.”

Next, various communities of Ayodhya are described to be following Bharata in his journey:

मणिकाराश्च ये केचित्कुम्भकाराश्च शोभनाः। सूत्रकर्मकृतश्चैव ये च शस्त्रोपजीविनः।

मयूरकाः क्राकचिका रोचका वेधकास्तथा। दन्तकारा स्सुधाकारा स्तथा गन्धोपजीविनः।।

सुवर्णकाराः प्रख्यातास्तथा कम्बलधावकाः। स्नापकोष्णोदका वैद्याधूपकाश्शौण्डिकास्तथा।।

रजकास्तुन्नवायाश्च ग्रामघोषमहत्तराः। शैलूषाश्च सह स्त्रीभिर्ययुः कैवर्तकास्तथा।।

समाहिता वेदविदो ब्राह्मणा वृत्तसम्मताः। गोरथैर्भरतं यान्तमनुजग्मुः सहस्रशः।।2.83.12-16।।

“The people including merchants, lapidaries, skilled potters, those who live by manufacture of arms, carpenters, those who make various articles from peacock feather, sawyers, workers who make artificial ornaments, those who pierce gems and pearls, those who make articles of ivory,

those who live by perfumery, highly reputed goldsmiths, weavers of blankets and other woolen goods, those who provide hot-water baths for others, physicians, distillers and vendors of spiritous liquors, fumigators, washer-men, tailors, chiefs of villages and hamlets, dancers with their women-folk and fishermen journey to see Rama. Thousands of cultured Bramhins, Vedic pandits ride on bullock carts.”

It is also particularly mentioned that all the people involved in Bharata’s journey are travelling to see and bring Rama back voluntarily and that they are all happy.

परिष्वजानाश्चान्योन्यं ययुर्नागरिका जनाः।।2.83.10।।

“They happily hug each other and undertake the journey.”

Here different communities are mentioned based on their features and jobs like people who live by manufacturing arms, and people who make articles of ivory. We can see the same before and after the period of Ramayana too.

Before Ramayana’s period:

In the Taittiriya Samhita, these kinds of communities are given salutations seeing one god in all of them.

नमः सहमानाय निव्याधिन आव्याधिनीनां पतये नमो नमः ककुभाय निषङ्गिणे स्तेनानां पतये नमो नमो निषङ्गिण इषुधिमते तस्कराणां पतये नमो नमो वञ्चते परिवञ्चते स्तायूनां पतये नमो नमो निचेरवे परिचरायारण्यानां पतये नमो नमः सूकाविभ्यो जिघांसुश्चो मुष्णतां पतये नमो नमोऽसिमञ्चो नक्तं चरञ्चः प्रकृन्तानां पतये नमो नम उष्णीषिणे गिरिचराय कुलुञ्चानां पतये नमो नम इषुमञ्चो धन्वाविभ्यश्च वो नमो नम आतन्वानेभ्यः प्रतिदधानेभ्यश्च वो नमो नम आयच्छञ्चो विसृजञ्चश्च वो नमो नमोऽस्यञ्चो विध्यञ्चश्च वो नमो नम आसीनेभ्यः शयानेभ्यश्च वो नमो नमः स्वपञ्चो जाग्रञ्चश्च वो नमो नमस्तिष्ठञ्चो धावञ्चश्च वो नमो नमः सभाभ्यः सभापतिभ्यश्च वो नमो नमो अश्वेभ्योऽश्वपतिभ्यश्च वो नमः कुलुञ्चानां पतये नमो नमोऽश्वपतिभ्यस्त्रीणि च ॥ ४। ५। ३॥ नम आव्याधिनीभ्यो विविध्यन्तीभ्यश्च वो नमो नम उगणाभ्यस्तृहतीभ्यश्च वो नमो नमो गृथसेभ्यो गृथसपतिभ्यश्च वो नमो नमो व्रातेभ्यो व्रातपतिभ्यश्च वो नमो नमो गणेभ्यो गणपतिभ्यश्च वो नमो नमो विरूपेभ्यो विश्वरूपेभ्यश्च वो नमो नमो महञ्चः, क्षुल्लकेभ्यश्च वो नमो नमो रथिभ्योऽरथेभ्यश्च वो नमो नमो रथेभ्यो रथपतिभ्यश्च वो नमो नमः सेनाभ्यः सेनानिभ्यश्च वो नमो नमः, क्षत्तृभ्यः संग्रहीतृभ्यश्च वो नमो नमस्तक्ष्मभ्यो रथकारेभ्यश्च वो नमो नमः कुलालेभ्यः कमरिभ्यश्च वो नमो नमः पुञ्जिष्टेभ्यो निषादेभ्यश्च वो नमो नम इषुकृञ्चो धन्वकृञ्चश्च वो नमो नमो मृगयुभ्यः श्वनिभ्यश्च वो नमो नमः श्वभ्यः श्वपतिभ्यश्च वो नमः रथेभ्यः श्वपतिभ्यश्च द्वे च ॥ ४। ५। ४॥

“Salutations to carpenters. Salutations to car makers. Salutations to potters. Salutations to smiths. Salutations to bird keepers. Salutations to foresters. Salutations to bow and arrow makers. Salutations to hunters. Salutations to hound keepers. Salutations to dogs. Salutations to lord of dogs.” (Only a part of the mantras has been given the English translation).

Thus, the Veda acknowledges and salutes the different communities.

After the period of Ramayana:

1. The writers of Rama’s story are not categorized just to be from one community. For example:
 - Kamban (author of Ramavatharam in Tamil, 9th century) was of weaver’s community.
 - Balramdas (author of Jagmohan Ramayanam in Telugu, 15th century) was a farmer.
 - Ezhuttechan (author of Kilipattu Ramayanam in Malayalam, 16th century) was of fishermen’s community.
 - Buddha Gonna Reddy Garu (author of Ranganatha Ramayanam in Telugu, 13th century) was a warrior (commander in chief of Rani Rudrama Devi).
 - Bhoja (author of Bhoja Champu in Sanskrit) was a king (kshatriya’s clan).
2. The writers of the story of Rama were also beyond religions. For example:
 - Rama’s story comes in Tripitaka, the primary text of Buddhism
 - Guru Gobind Singh has authored Ramavatharacharitam.
 - Indonesian Ramayana or the Kakawin Ramayana of the Indonesian muslims
3. The writers of the story of Rama were also beyond regions. For example:
 - Ramavatharam of Kamban from Tamil Nadu
 - Ranganatha Ramayana of Buddha Gonna Reddy Garu from Telangana
 - Saptakanda Ramayana of Madhava Kandali from Assam
 - Jagmohan Ramayana of Balramdas from Odissa
 - Molla Ramayanam of Molla from Andhra Pradesh
 - Sriram Pacali of Krittibas from Bengal
 - Thorave Ramayanam of Narahari from Karnataka
 - Kilipattu Ramayana of Ezhittechan from Kerala
 - Ram charita manas of Tulsi Das from Chitrakoot
 - Bhavartha Ramayana of Eknath from Maharashtra
 - Girdhar Ramayana of Girdhar from Gujarat
 - Kashur Ramayan of Prakash Ram Kurigami from Kashmir
 - Maithili Ramayan of Shri Chanda Jha from Nepal
 - Mapilla Ramayana of Mapilla muslim
 - Indonesian Ramayana of Indonesian Muslim
 - Ramakien compiled by King Rama I from Thailand

In Periya Purana (A Shaivite hagiography) and Bhakta Mal and Bhakta Vijaya (Vaishnavite hagiographies) each chapter is dedicated to the story of several devotional saints belonging to different communities.

Examples

Kannappa Nayanar- hunter

Appar- Velaalar

Sundara Murti Nayanar- Adi Shaivar

Kora Kumhar- pot maker

Ravidas- Cobbler

Sena- barber

Choka Mela- carpenter, etc.

Though they belong to different communities they become the contents of the chapters of Hindu hagiographies, by which equality is established.

Summary:

Various communities of Ayodhya people follow Bharata in his journey towards bringing Rama back. These were the people who also cheered that Rama should be their king while Dasharatha made his decision. They are described equally in the same magnitude in the 83rd chapter of Ayodhyakanda. Before Ramayana's period too, the Vedas talk about seeing one god in different communities and offering salutations to all of them. The same way, the followers of Rama and writers of Rama's story later in the history are also of different communities. Though devotional saints belong to different communities they become the contents of the chapters of Hindu hagiographies, by which equality is established.

The people's Ramayana in Tamil Nadu:

Voices Across Castes and Regions

- Sri Jataayu, Renowned Kamba Ramayana exponent, Tamil scholar & author

From the very earliest times, the great epic of Ramayana has been embraced in the Tamil culture, across different castes, communities, and regions. It has found varied expressions in literature, temple legends, sculptures and epigraphs, classical performing arts and folklore.

Literature:

Multifarious references to Ramayana are found in Sangam Literature anthologies of Tamil (200 BCE to 300 CE), and the subsequent early *Kavyas* of *Silappathikaram* and *Manimekalai*. *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*, the collection of the hymns of *Azhwars* (6th – 9th century CE), hailed as the canonical Sri Vaishnava scripture is filled with rich and evocative portrayals of Ramayana legends, some of them very unique and rooted in the native Tamil soil, like the mention of squirrel helping in the building of Setu bridge by *Thondaradippodi-Azhwar*, Rama lullaby and Dasharatha-like lamentation of *Kulasekhara Azhwar* and the “*Pongaththam Pongo*” dance of the defeated Rakshasa army by *Thirumangai Azhwar*.

Kamba Ramayanam, the Tamil literary magnum opus of 12th century CE is well known. Its author Kambar lived in the Chola country and belonged to the *Uvachchar* caste who were traditional Kali temple priests (or temple musicians according to some historians). There is ample internal evidence of Kambar’s wide and deep erudition in both Sanskrit and Tamil classics, philosophy and aesthetics. His chief patron was *Sadayappar*, a wealthy and generous agrarian landlord of the Vellalar caste. As per the legends, Kambar’s work received divine endorsements through miraculous incidents – viz. the roar from the Narasimha deity idol in Srirangam temple when it was read out in the assembly of poets, and the coming to life of a dead Brahmana boy of the Dikshithar clan in Chidambaram. It is evident that this great Kavya has been hailed and respected by the learned people from all sections of the society.

Rama Nataka Keerthanai is a much-celebrated Tamil musical opera, the songs from which are still rendered in the Carnatic classical music concerts of the present times. In a sense, it can be called a musical adaption of Kamba Ramayanam, with many lively and sparkling phrases and metaphors used by common people. Its author *Arunachala Kavirayar* (1711-1778 CE) of Seerkazhi belonged to the Vaishya caste and he composed this opera on the request of two Brahmana music Vidwans, who popularized it by rendering the songs across the villages and towns in the Kumbakonam region. Kavirayar is hailed as one of the three Tamil Music Trinity composers who lived prior to the period of the famous Carnatic Music Trinity comprising Thyagaraja et al. When this opera was staged as a play, people from different castes enacted the roles of the characters. In a touching anecdotal story recorded by Thanjavur Swaminatha Athreyar, Thyagara gets immersed in one such play and prostrates to Sri Rama on the stage, played by a local blacksmith, impelled by his emotional Bhakti.

Thakkai Ramayanam, composed in the 1600s CE, is yet another, but a very different adaptation of Kamban's work in the Kongu region. It was meant to be sung to the accompaniment a small drum called *Thakkai*, a musical instrument resembling *Damaru*. Its author *Emperuman Kavirayar* of Sangagiri was a revenue officer and was well versed in Sanskrit and Vedanta. He was patronized by the Kongu ruler *Nallathambi Gangeyan*. This work has expressions soaked in devotion and has delightful references to local culture. For example, while describing Vanara's search for Sita in the Southern direction, the poet mentions the names of all the major hills in the Kongu region and says that Hanuman, Angada and all the Vanaras hopped on them, thus sanctifying those regions. Interestingly, the only surviving manuscript from which this work got published was preserved by the *Shantalinga Veera Shaiva* monastery in the region.

Sthala Puranas, Sacred Geography, Lineage legends

With the major spread of Ramayana across *Bharata-varsha* over the centuries, every region of the Indian subcontinent wanted to associate itself with *Rama-Katha* and become a part of the Sacred Geography by creating Sthala Purana legends and stories. Tamil Nadu is no exception with many such sacred spots.

A few examples:

- Rameshwaram island, Rama Setu, Dhanushkoti and Thiruppullani have the much popular and ancient sacred association with Ramayana, as these Tirthas are mentioned in texts like Skanda Purana.
- Many sacred spots along the entire east coast, from Kodiakkarai all the way up to Rameshwaram, with big and small shrines with Ramar Paadam, or footprints of Rama.
- Multiple temple towns have the legend of Jataayu Moksham, of Sri Rama performing last rites for the bird Jataayu as part of their Sthala Puranam – Thirupputkuzhi near Kanchipuram, Vaitheeswaran Kovil (Pullirukku Velur), Jataayu Tirtham in Tirunelveli.
- Kanyakumari district has places like Villukkuri, that literally means mark made by the bow (of Rama) and Thaatakai Malai, a huge boulder resembling the fallen demoness Tataka killed by the young Rama. Marundhu Vaazh Malai, a hillock rich in rare medicinal herbs is believed to be a slice fallen from the Sanjeevini Parvata carried by Hanuman.

Like elsewhere in India, royal dynasties and warrior communities in Tamil Nadu also identified themselves with Rama's lineage. Cholas proclaimed themselves as belonging to Surya Vamsha and included Raja Shibi of the Puranic Ikshvaku dynasty among their ancestors. Vanniyars, a prominent community in the Northern Tamil Nadu identify themselves as Kshatriyas coming in the lineage of Rama in their Jati Purana legends.

Temple sculptures:

Ramayana sculptures in distinct styles and Ramayana references in epigraphs and copper plates are seen in Tamil Nadu from the start of the Pallava era (6th century CE) through Chola, Pandya, Vijayanagara and Nayaka periods all the way through 19th century. The enchanting sculptures at Thirukkurungudi and Srivaikuntham Vishnu temples and Kumbakonam Ramaswamy temple are the finest examples of Rama art. It is notable that many Shiva temples also contain

depictions of Ramayana scenes, like the famed Ramayana miniature panels of the 11th century CE Alanthurai Mahadeva temple at Pullamangai near Thanjavur. Beautiful bronze idols of Rama, Lakshmana, Sita and Hanuman were created with unique aesthetic features and distinctive postures were created around 10th century CE in Tamil Nadu during the Chola era and can be seen in many temples like Paruththiyur, Vaduvur and Thillai Vilaakam. Worshipful bronze images in the same style continue to be made till the present times.

Folklore and folk arts:

In the Tamil folklore, Mahabharata was more popular than Ramayana, as themes like Arjuna's multiple marriages and progeny born out of them, Draupadi's rage and her transformation as Devi and Krishna's war strategies and grace etc. captured the imagination of the Tamil masses more. The scant references to Ramayana do mention Rama, Sita, Hanuman as noble and divine personalities.

Villuppaattu or the "bow song" was a very popular folk storytelling art form till a few decades ago but is near extinct now. Though all kind of Puranic and religious themed stories were rendered in this art form, Ramayana was the most performed one, thanks to the bow association. *Iraama Keerthanam* was a musical composition specially written for *Villuppaattu* performances, narrating the complete Ramayana story. Its author was *Pandaaram Thiruvanantham* (1758-1828) of the Travancore region, who belonged to Saiva Vellalar community. There were similar compositions like *Ayodhi Kathai*, *Iraamar Vanavaasam*, *Vaali Vathai* etc. specially written for *Villuppaattu*.

Thol Paavai Koothu or the leather puppetry was an art form that was created with the purpose of taking Ramayana story to the masses. It became popular in Southern Tamil Nadu, along with the migration of the Telugu communities from various regions of Andhra. This art form, near extinct now uses richly painted leather puppets for different characters of the epic pulled by the strings. The songs sung during the performance remain oral tradition and have never been written down. This Koothu is performed over ten days in villages, covering the entire story in great detail. After the Rama Pattabisheka episode is staged, additional stories like Mayil Ravana, Matsya Vallabha, Ashvamedha (Uttara Kanda) are also performed.

It is important to note that these Ramayana folk art forms narrate a myriad set of strange and exotic stories, some of which are not part of any known Ramayana text, as these are created in the imagination of the village folks, often connected with the joys, sorrows, frustrations and grievances of their everyday lives that are expressed using *Rama-Katha* as a medium. Some of these stories are virtuous and have devotional sentiments while some of them have perverted and deliberately spiced up concoctions reflective of the weaknesses of the human minds that created them.

Since the Tamil folklore studies so far have been dominated by the academics and scholars with either Marxist or Christian Missionary outlook, all the published material on this subject attempt to portray the folklore as a revolt against the "Brahminical upper caste" hegemony or oppression of women or deliberate denigration of Hindu divinities without any sense of reverence etc. There is an urgent need to study them afresh with reinterpretations, bringing out

the harmonious and sacred aspects that form the bedrock of such folklore, along with the distortions and perversions.

Conclusion:

This write-up summarized the key points of the detailed presentation made by the author on this topic in the Valmiki Ramayana Conference 2025.

**The people's Ramayana:
Voices across Castes and Regions in Telugu states
Telugu Ramayana Treasures**

**STG Antarvedi Krishnamacharya, Sri Ramayana Pathaka in
Bhadrachalam Temple**

The people of Telugu states have forged an unbreakable bond with Rama, characterized by an immense and unwavering love. It's unparalleled in its depth, with no other community embracing Rama as wholeheartedly as the Telugu people. This profound connection is evident throughout the region, with the Telugu states being utterly immersed in the majestic saga of Rama. The land of Telugu-speaking people has been purified by this all-encompassing devotion. Every village, no matter how remote, boasts at least one temple dedicated to Sri Rama Chandra. Ramayana recitals are an integral part of daily life, and the people begin every endeavor with an invocation to 'Srirama.' Even the youngest members of the community are blessed with the slogan 'శ్రీరామరక్ష- నూరేళ్ల ఆయుస్సు' (May Rama's protection be upon you, and may you live for 100 years). Rama's presence permeates every aspect of life in Telugu states, leaving an indelible mark on the people's thoughts, words, and actions.

మ. శ్రమపొందస్, క్షుధయుస్ బిషాసయునుదీరస్ గ్లిష్టకార్యాంత వి
శ్రమమొందస్, నిదురింపఁబండు కొన, నిద్రస్ మేలుకొన్నస్ వ చో
గ్రిమ భాగంబుల సర్వభూ ప్రజకుః దండ్రీ! రామచంద్రా! యట
న్న మహావాక్యమె గోచరించె సుమహానందంబు సంధించుచున్

The Ever-Reflecting Glory of Rama Katha in Telugu

The words of **Kalpavriksha-like poets** echo everywhere across Telugu land. The **beautiful story of Rama** has taken many forms in Telugu literature—as **poetry, prose, Champu, Harikatha, Yakshagana, folk songs, Dandakams, and Keerthanas**. It has deeply touched the hearts of poets and devotees alike. Since the time of

Nannaya, the stream of **Rama Katha literature** has been flowing like a **pure and vast river**, continuing till today and uplifting countless souls. By the time **Ramayana was first composed in Telugu**, the Sanskrit versions had already flourished in **Puranas, poetry, and dramas**, enriched with new creative expressions. As a result, the **influence of Valmiki Ramayana**, along with **Adhyatma Ramayana and other sacred versions**, is clearly visible in Telugu Rama Katha. Elements that Valmiki did not mention—such as **regional traditions, cultural practices, and new imaginative details**—found their place in Telugu retellings, making them unique yet deeply connected to the original essence.

1. The Evolution of Champu Ramayanas

Let us explore the different forms in which **Rama Katha** emerged in Telugu literature, starting with **Champu Kavyas**. **What is Champu Kavya?** A **Champu Kavya** is a literary work that blends both **prose (Gadya) and poetry (Padya)**. Telugu literature has witnessed the creation of many **Champu Ramayanas**, each contributing uniquely to the grand tradition of Rama Katha. According to **Andhra literary historians**, the **earliest Telugu Ramayana** is said to have been composed by **Bhaskara Mantri (1190–1220 CE)**, the **grandfather of Tikkana Somayaji**. However, this work is **not available today**. The first available **Telugu Ramayana** is **Ranganatha Ramayanam** by **Gona Buddhareddy**, composed in the **Desi poetry tradition**.

Key Champu Ramayanas in Telugu Literature

The first structured **Champu Ramayana** is **Bhaskara Ramayanam**, written by **Hulakki Bhaskara (14th century CE)**. After this, several **Champu Ramayanas** were composed, including:

- **Molla Ramayanam** – by **Molla (14th century)**
- **Ramaabhyudayam** – by **Ayyalaraju Ramabhadra Kavi (1540 CE)**
- **Raghunatha Ramayanam** – by **Tanjavur Raju (1673 CE)**
- **Accha Telugu Ramayanam** – by **Kuchi Manchi Thimma Kavi (17th century CE)**
- **Srimad Andhra Valmiki Ramayanam** – by **Vavikolanu Subbarao (Vasudasu, Modern Era)**

- **Gopinatha Ramayanam** – by **Venkata Kavi**
- **Champu Ramayanam** – by **Rigveda Kavi Venkatachalapati**
- **Srimad Andhra Champu Ramayanam** – by **Allamaraju Rangasayi**
- **Ramodayam** – by **Rangayya Kavi**
- **Kausalya Charitam** – by **Layagrahi Garudachala Kavi**
- **Malika Ramayanam** – by **Shatakavi** (a collective effort by Akundi Venkata Sastri, Pantula Lakshminarayana Sastri, Deva Guptapu Venkata Ramana, Kaviraju Chintalapudi Sanyasiravu, Moola Peranna Kavi, Upmaka Narayana Murthy)
- **Sri Yogananda Andhra Ramayanam** – by **Chillarige Yoganandayya Pantulu**
- **Sri Janamanchi Seshadri Sharma Ramayanam**
- **Sri Venkata Parvateshwara Kavula Ramayanam**
- **Ramayana Kalpavriksham** – by **Kavi Samrat Viswanatha Satyanarayana**

These works showcase how **Rama Katha** flourished in Telugu literature, with each poet bringing their own creative expression, devotion, and literary excellence to the timeless story of Sri Rama.

2. Dvipada Ramayanas in Telugu

Telugu poetry follows different metrical structures, broadly divided into **Vruttas (classical meters)** and **Jaatis (folk-based meters)**.

In its metrical composition, as Appakavi stated in the verse:

"Kanda Bhedamulaarugaa ka yutsahamu taruvoju madhyamaakkartalunaidu deepiyu manjeeradvipada pattri pada chatushpada..."

The six types of Kanda (metrical variations) are prominently present: Utsaham, Taruvoju, Akkara, Dvipada, Tripada, Chatushpada, Panchapada, Shatpada, Ragada, Kalika, and Utkalika. Among these **Dvipada** belongs to the Jaati Chandas.

What is Dvipada?

The word **Dvipada** means "**two-lined verse.**" Unlike classical **Chandas** where verses typically have four lines (padas), Dvipada has **only two lines per stanza**. This makes

it structurally similar to **Vedic meters** like the **Trishtubh**, which has three lines. Poetic scholars like **Vinnukota Peddanna** and **Peddiraju** (కావ్యాలంకార చూడామణి కర్త) referred to this form as **Dvipadi**, which later became popular as **Dvipada**.

Historical Development of Dvipada

- **Dvipada existed even before Nannaya's time** and gained prominence in Telugu literature.
- **Palkuriki Somanatha** is often credited as the **first poet to use Dvipada extensively**.

Scholars have defined the characteristics of the **Dvipada** meter as follows:

- Each line contains **three Indra ganas** followed by **one Surya gana** in sequence.
- It follows the **rhyme scheme (Prasa Niyama)**.
- The **first syllable of the third gana** in each line serves as the **Yati (caesura) position**.
- Each line consists of **four ganas**, maintaining a total syllabic count of **no less than 15 matras and no more than 18 matras**.

For long time, **Dvipada was merged with other poetic forms like Manjari Dvipada, Taruvoju, and Dviradagalaragada**, before evolving into an **independent metrical tradition**. Dvipada became the foundation for later meters like **Seesa, Ataveladi, and Tetagiti**, playing a crucial role in Telugu poetry.

Dvipada Ramayanas in Telugu

The **first known Ramayana in Dvipada** was **Ranganatha Ramayanam** by **Gona Buddha Reddy**. This pioneering work set the stage for many later adaptations of the **Valmiki Ramayana** in Dvipada by various poets, including:

- **Annamacharya**
- **Kattavaradaraju**
- **Ganapavarapu Venkata Kavi**

- **Bhosale Ekoji**
- **Chada Raghava Reddy**
- **Eleshwarapu Subrahmanya Sastri**

Even in **modern times**, over **ten poets** have composed **Dvipada Ramayanas**. Just as **Anushtubh** is the **fundamental meter** in Sanskrit poetry, **Dvipada** holds a similar primary place in Telugu literary tradition. It remains an essential form for narrating great epics like the **Ramayana**.

3. Shlesha Ramayana Kavyas in Telugu

Telugu literature has explored the **Ramayana** in various poetic forms such as **Champu**, **Dvipada**, and others. Among these, **Shlesha Kavyas (double-meaning poetry)** stand out as a remarkable literary achievement.

What is Shlesha Kavya?

- **Shlesha (Pun or fun) Kavya** refers to poetry where a **single word conveys multiple meanings**, often telling **two or more different stories simultaneously**.
- Shlesha Kavyas are primarily known for their scholarly depth and satirical essence. Expressing multiple meanings through a single word requires extraordinary intellect and poetic mastery. While composing a single verse with dual meanings is challenging, writing an entire epic in this style is an even greater feat, demonstrating the poet's remarkable talent.
- Such poetry can be either **intellectual (Pāṇḍitya-pradhāna)** or **satirical (Vyāngya-pradhāna)**.

Origins of Shlesha Poetry

The birthplace of such Shlesha Kavyas is **Sanskrit** literature. Many poets have written epics where each verse can be interpreted in two distinct ways. Some notable Sanskrit Shlesha Kavyas include:

1. **Raghava-Pandavīyam** – Kaviraja Suri
2. **Raghava-Naishadhīyam** – Haradatta Suri
3. **Raghava-Pandava-Yādavam** – Chidambara Sumati
4. **Sapta-Sandhāna Mahākāvya** – Megha Vijaya

These works are also called **Anekartha Kavyas** (poems with multiple meanings) because they incorporate multiple interpretations within a single structure.

Types of Shlesha Kavyas

Based on the number of stories embedded within a single poem, they are classified as:

- If a single poem conveys two stories, it is a **Dvyarthika Kavya** (e.g., Ramayana+Mahabharata);
- If it contains three stories, it is a **Tryarthika Kavya**;
- If it carries four stories, it is known as **Chaturarthika Kavya**.

However, regardless of the number of stories, all such works are generally referred to as **Dvyarthika Kavyas**. Using limited words to convey multiple interpretations is followed in different poetic methods, such as **Shlesha**, **Anuloma-Viloma poetry**, **Garbha Kavya**, and **Kshuthaka Chitra poetry**.

Anuloma-Viloma Poetry (Palindrome Poetry)

One of the techniques used in these Kavyas is **Anuloma-Viloma (palindromic poetry)**, where:

- A verse, when read **normally (Anuloma - top to bottom)**, tells **one story**.
- The same verse, when read **in reverse (Viloma - bottom to top)**, tells a **different story**.

This creates two separate narratives within the same text. These Kavyas are also known as **Gati-Pratyagati Kavyas** or **Pratiloma Kavyas**, and composing them is an extremely difficult task, and **no full-length Telugu work exists** in this style. However, **Pingali Suranna's Kalā-Pūrṇodaya** contains an **Anuloma-Viloma verse**. Composing **Dvyarthika Kavyas** in Telugu is extremely challenging. It requires profound mastery of the language, and even if one succeeds in creating a technically correct poem, it may not always captivate readers with poetic brilliance. However, **Pingali Surana** achieved both literary excellence and technical prowess, earning a distinguished place among classical Telugu poets.

Shlesha Ramayana in Telugu

The first known **Shlesha Kavya** in Telugu was written by **Vemulavada Bheemakavi**, titled **Raghava Pandaviyam**. Unfortunately, this work has been lost over time. The earliest available **Shlesha Kavya** in Telugu is **Raghava Pandaviyam** by **Pingali Surana**, composed in the 16th century, which simultaneously narrates:

1. **Ramayana (Raghava's story)**
2. **Mahabharata (Pandavas' story)**

రెండర్థంబుల పద్య మొక్కటియు నిర్మింపంగ శక్యంబు గా కుండుం దధతిఁ గావ్య మెల్ల నగునే
నోహో! యనం జేయదే పాండిత్యంబున నందునుం దెనుఁగుకబ్బం బద్భుతం బండ్లు ద
క్షుండెవ్వఁ డిల రామభారతకథల్ జోడింప భాషాకృతిస్ (పీఠిక-10)

Poetic Brilliance of Pingali Surana

Pingali Surana himself highlights the difficulty of writing a poem with dual meanings and integrating the stories of both **Ramayana and Mahabharata** within a single work: *"It is already difficult to compose a single verse with two meanings, Who can then weave together the stories of the Ramayana and Mahabharata into one grand epic? This requires extraordinary scholarship and poetic genius."*

Example of a Shlesha Verse from Raghava Pandaviyam

This verse from Raghava Pandaviyam describes two different events—**Rama breaking Shiva's bow** in the Ramayana and **Arjuna piercing the rotating fish target** in the Mahabharata.

అనుపమ దివ్య విక్రమ సమగ్రుఁడు రామవిభుండు జిష్టుఁడా
యనితర భేద్య రౌద్ర ధనువశ్రమభంగిగ వంచి
బాహులీ ల నెరసి నభ్రగానిమిషలక్ష హృదంబకవృత్తి
నుర్వరా జన హృదయాక్షివర్తనముఁ జాలఁగ నద్భుతవార్ధిన్ ముంచుచున్ 2-56

Interpretation as Ramayana:

- **Anupama Divya Vikrama Samagra Vibhudu** = The incomparable and supremely valiant Lord Rama
- **Jishnudu** = The victorious one (Rama)
- **Raamavibhudu** = Sri Ramachandra
- **Anitara Bhedya** = Impossible for others to penetrate
- **Raudra Dhanus** = The bow of Rudra (Shiva)
- **Ashrama Bhangiga Vanchi** = Effortlessly bending and breaking it
- **Abhraga Animesha Laksha Hrith Ambaka Vruttin** = Delighting millions of celestial beings (Devas)
- **Urvara Jana Hridaya Akshi Vartanam** = Captivating the hearts and eyes of the people
- **Chaalaga** = Excessive / Abundant
- **Adbhuta Vardhin Munchuchun** = Immersing them in an ocean of wonder
- **Bahulilan Nerasi** = Radiating his strength through his arms

Meaning: Lord Rama, with his unparalleled might, effortlessly broke Shiva's bow, astonishing both the celestial beings and the earthly spectators.

Interpretation as Mahabharata:

- **Anupama Divya Vikrama Samagra Vibhudu** = The incomparable and supremely valiant warrior Arjuna
- **Jishnudu** = The victorious one (Arjuna)
- **Raamavibhudu** = A Beautiful Lord
- **Anitara Bhedya** = Impossible for others to pierce
- **Raudra Dhanus** = The fierce bow
- **Ashrama Bhangiga Vanchi** = Effortlessly aiming and striking
- **Abhraga Animesha Laksha Hrith Ambaka Vruttin** = Targeting the motionless fish's eye (Matsya Yantra)
- **Urvara Jana Hridaya Akshi Vartanam** = Captivating the hearts and eyes of the spectators
- **Adbhuta Vardhin Munchuchun** = Immersing them in an ocean of wonder
- **Bahulilan Nerasi** = Radiating his strength through his arms

Meaning: Arjuna, with his supreme valor, aimed at the revolving fish's eye by looking at its reflection and pierced it with his arrow, astonishing the gathered kings and spectators.

This single verse artistically narrates both Rama breaking Shiva's bow and Arjuna piercing the Matsya Yantra, showcasing the poet's mastery in **Shlesha poetry**.

Later Shlesha Kavyas in Telugu

Following the tradition of **Raghava Pandaviyam**, many poets composed **Shlesha Kavyas** centered around the Ramayana. Some notable works include:

- **Ramakrishna Vijayam** – Mariganti Singaracharyulu
- **Achalatmaja Parinayam** – Tirumala-Bukkapattanam 'Kireeti' Venkatacharyulu
- **Dharatmaja Parinayam** – Kottalanka Mrutyunjayulu
- **Shivaramabhyudayam** – Poduru Pedaramayatya
- **Lanka Vijayam (Ravana Damniyam)** – Pindiprolu Lakshmanakavi
- **Raghava Vasudeviyam** – Kottapalli Singaracharyulu
- **Ramakrishna Upakhyanam** – Sripada Venkata Chalapathi
- **Khalakarna Vishayana Ramayanam** – Pannala Brahmanna
- **Nirvachana Bharata Garbha Ramayanam** – Ravipati Lakshminarayana
- **Andhra Raghava Pandaviyam** – Ravuri Doraswami Sharma
- **Raghava Naishadhiyam** – Ravuri Doraswami Sharma
- **Raghava Pandava Yadaviyam** – Elakuchi Bala Saraswathi
- **Yadava Raghava Pandaviyam** – Nelluri Veeraraghava Kavi
- **Ramakrishnarjuna Rupanarayaneyam** – Oruganti Somashekara Kavi
- **Raghava Pandava Yadaviyam** – Ayyagari Veerabhadra Kavi
- **Nala Yadava Raghava Pandaviyam** – Mariganti Singaracharyulu

These works continue the rich tradition of **Shlesha poetry**, showcasing Telugu poets' linguistic mastery and literary excellence.

4. Tryarthika Kavyam (Triple-Meaning Poetry)

After the success of **Dvyarthika Kavyas** (poems with dual meanings), poets sought to push the boundaries of poetic ingenuity even further. This led to the emergence

of **Tryarthika Kavyas**, where a single verse conveys three different narratives. One such remarkable work is **Yadava Raghava Pandaviyam**, composed by **Nelluri Veeraraghava Kavi**.

Example Verse from Yadava Raghava Pandaviyam

ఆ. "శ్రీల కిరవు బహుళసీతభానుకులులకు నాటపట్టు సజ్జనాస్పదంబు మహి నయోధ్య కాంతి
మధురసాలోజ్జ్వల నాగపురి దనర్చు నవ్యలీల.

This verse carries three distinct meanings, narrating the stories of the **Yadavas** (Krishna's lineage), **Raghavas** (Rama's lineage), and **Pandavas** (Mahabharata heroes) simultaneously.

Interpretation as Yadava Story:

- శ్రీలకు + ఇరవు Śrīlaku + Iravu → A place for wealth and prosperity
- బహుళ + సీత + భాను + కులులకున్ + ఆటపట్టు Bahula + Sītha + Bhānu + Kululakun + Āṭapaṭṭu → A stronghold for multiple rulers of the lunar dynasty (Chandravamsa)
- సజ్జన + ఆస్పదంబు Sajjana + Āspadambu → A haven for virtuous people
- మహిన్ Mahin → In this world
- అయోధ్య Ayōdhya → An unconquerable city
- కాంతిన్ Kāntin → Radiating brilliance
- మధుర + సాల + ఉజ్జ్వల Madhura + Sāla + Ujvala → The city of **Mathura**, adorned with shining ramparts
- నాగపురి Nāgapuri → The city of **Dwarka**
- నవ్యలీల Navyalīla → Filled with Krishna's divine pastimes
- Tanaṛchu → Oppu (Agree / Accept)

Interpretation as Raghava Story (Ramayana):

- బహు + లసిత + భాను కులులకు Bahu + Lasita + Bhānu Kululaku → A place for the famous warriors of the **Solar dynasty (Suryavamsa)**
- మహిన్ అయోధ్య + నాగ + పురి తనర్పు Mahin Ayōdhya + Nāga + Puri Tanaṛchu → **Ayodhya**, the glorious capital city
- కాంతిన్ Kāntin → Radiating with Rama's divine aura
- మధుర + సాల + ఉజ్జ్వల Madhura + Sāla + Ujjvala → Its ramparts shine with unmatched beauty

Interpretation as Pandava Story (Mahabharata):

- మధుర Madhura → **Sweet (Pleasing)**, referring to the grandeur of Hastinapura
- నాగపురి Nāgapuri → Referring to **Hastinapura**, the city of the Kuru dynasty
- నవ్యలీల + తనర్పు Navyalīla + Tanaṛchu → An abode of fascinating new adventures

This verse brilliantly intertwines the **Yadava, Raghava, and Pandava** stories in a seamless poetic flow, showcasing the poet's extraordinary skill.

5. Satirical Poetry (Tittu Kavithvam) in the Ramayana

Telugu literature has a rich tradition of **Tittu Kavithvam (satirical poetry)**, which is often considered a branch of **Shlesha Kavyas**. This genre emerged as an artistic expression of frustration or distress, where poets, when deeply hurt or disappointed, channelled their emotions into poetic satire. Even within this tradition, the **Ramayana** has maintained a prominent place. One notable poet in this genre is **Pindiprolu Lakshmana Kavi**, who composed **Lanka Vijayam**, a two-canto epic using satirical poetry. In this work, the poet cleverly combines **personal grievances with the timeless tale of Rama**, weaving criticism into his verses while maintaining literary excellence.

Similarly, **Pannala Brahmanna** composed **Khalakarna Vishayana Ramayanam**, employing satirical poetry to depict the **Ramayana** in a unique style.

These works demonstrate that the **Ramayana** remains a central inspiration across multiple literary genres, including **Shlesha Kavya**, **Anuloma-Viloma poetry**, and **Satirical Kavya**, proving its enduring impact on Telugu literary tradition.

6. The Ramayana in Sub-Narratives (Upakhyanas)

After **Maharishi Valmiki** composed the Ramayana in Sanskrit, **Vyasa Bhagavan** integrated the story of Rama into various **Puranas** as a sub-narrative (**Upakhyana**). The Ramayana appears in:

- **Bhagavata Purana (Ninth Canto)**
- **Mahabharata (Aranya Parva)**

Similarly, in Telugu literature, despite the existence of full-fledged **Ramayanas**, several poets incorporated the Ramayana as a sub-narrative in their works. Examples include:

- **Ramopakhyana in the Mahabharata**
- **Ramopakhyana in the Bhagavata Purana**
- **The Ramayana in the Harivamsa**
- **The Ramayana as part of Yayati Charitra**

These instances highlight how the **Ramayana** was interwoven into multiple literary and scriptural traditions beyond standalone epics.

ఖండ కావ్యాలలో రామ కథ

7. The Ramayana in Khanda Kavyas (Minor Epics)

While the **Ramayana** was primarily composed as a **Maha Kavya (grand epic)**, its themes were also explored in the **Khanda Kavya** (minor epic) tradition.

According to **Sahitya Darpana**, poetic compositions are classified into three forms:

1. **Maha Kavya** – A structured epic with **Sarga Bandha (canto divisions)**, following the **Panchasandhi framework** (five narrative segments) and enriched with **various Rasas (emotions)**.
2. **Khanda Kavya** – A fragment of a **Maha Kavya**, narrating a **single episode** in an independent poetic form. **Vishwanatha** defines Khanda Kavya as:
“*Khandakavyam bhavet kavyasyaikadeshanusarich*”
(Khanda Kavya is a standalone piece derived from a larger poetic narrative.)
3. **Kosham** – A collection of standalone verses.

Khanda Kavyas are sometimes referred to as **Kshudra Kavyas**, but the term "**Kshudra**" **does not imply inferiority**—it simply means "**concise or short**". **Laghu Kavyas** (short poems) gained immense popularity, and several **Khanda Kavyas** narrate the **Ramayana** in Telugu.

Examples of **Ramayana-based Khanda Kavyas** include:

- **Sandhya Savitri**
- **Udata Bhakti**
- Several other poetic works inspired by minor episodes from the Ramayana.

These compositions **focus on specific incidents** from the Ramayana rather than retelling the entire epic.

8. Uttara Ramayana (Later Ramayana Traditions)

Many poetic works have been composed focusing exclusively on the **Uttarakanda** (the last book of the Ramayana), often considered a later addition to Valmiki's text.

Some notable works include:

- **Nirvachana Uttara Ramayanam** by Tikkana
- **Uttara Ramayanam** by Kashabhupati Vithala Raju (written in Dwipada meter)
- **Uttara Ramayanam** by Kankanti Papparaju
- **Govinda Ramayanam**
- **Nirvachana Uttara Ramayana Shesha**

These works explore Rama's **later life, his rule in Ayodhya, the fate of Sitha, and the concluding events of the epic**. Through **Upakhyanas, Khanda Kavyas, and Uttara Ramayanams**, the **Ramayana's influence extended across diverse literary traditions**, ensuring its continued **relevance and adaptation** in Telugu literature.

9. The Ramayana in Folk Literature

It is no exaggeration to say that **folk literature** has breathed life into the **Ramayana**. Several regional and oral traditions have preserved and celebrated Rama's story through **folk Ramayanams**, which have been passed down for generations. Some notable ones include:

- **Kuchikonda Ramayanam**

- **Sharada Ramayanam**
- **Dharmapuri Ramayanam**
- **Ramakatha Sudharnavam**
- **Moksha Gunda Ramayanam**
- **Sookshma Ramayanam**
- **Sankshepa Ramayanam**
- **Guththenadeevi Ramayanam**
- **Adhyatma Ramayanam**
- **Chitti Ramayanam**

Additionally, several folk **songs and ballads** based on the Ramayana have become an integral part of the oral tradition, such as:

- **Srirama Dandamulu**
- **Ramayana Gobbipata**
- **Srirama Javili**
- **Adavi (forest ballads)**
- **Shanta (peace hymns)**
- **Pendli Setu (wedding songs related to Rama's marriage)**
- **Govinda Namamulu (devotional songs invoking Rama's name)**
- **Urmila Devi Nidra (songs depicting Urmila's sacrifice)**
- **Lakshmana Devara Navvu (Lakshmana's laughter)**
- **Putrakamishti Patalahoma (sacrificial rituals for begetting children)**
- **Kusha-Lava Yuddham (battle of Kusha and Lava)**
- **Kushalayakam (the story of Kusha and Lava's return to Ayodhya)**

These **folk Ramayanas** continue to resonate with people, as many of these songs remain **popular and widely sung even today**.

10. The Ramayana in Keertanas (Devotional Hymns)

Among the **nine forms of Bhakti (devotion)**, **Sankirtana (devotional singing)** is considered one of the most powerful. Many **Vaaggeyakara (composer-saints)** composed keertanas that **glorified Lord Rama** and brought people closer to the divine.

Notable composers who wrote **Ramayana-based Keertanas** include:

- **Annamacharya (Annamayya)**
- **Bhakta Ramadasu (Bhadrachala Ramadasu)**
- **Saint Tyagaraja**
- **Tumu Lakshmi Narasimha Dasu**
- **Kshetrayya**
- **Narayana Teertha**
- **Adhyatma Ramayana Keertanas**
- **Parankusha Dasu Keertanas**
- **Prayaga Rangasharma's Keertanas**
- **Sonti Sitaramayyagaru's Keertanas**
- **Mysore Vasudevachari's Keertanas**
- **Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar's Keertanas**

These **composers and saints** have **immortalized the Ramayana in devotional music**, offering their compositions at **the feet of Sri Rama**. Thus, the **Ramayana's influence is not confined to classical epics but extends into folk traditions and devotional music**, making it a **living tradition that continues to inspire generations**.

11. The Ramayana in Yakshagana

Though the name **Yakshagana** has Sanskrit origins, it is a **traditional Indian musical-theatrical art form**, deeply rooted in **regional storytelling traditions**. Telugu Yakshagana, in particular, has beautifully absorbed the **Ramayana's themes and narratives**, blending them with **music, dance, and dramatic expressions**.

Notable **Ramayana-based Yakshaganas** include:

- **Velpuri Venkata Kavi's Ramaleela Yakshaganam**
- **Mummadi Devula Tirumala Kavi's Geeta Raghunandanam**
- **Srinadu Venkatarya Kavi's Ramayana Yakshaganam**
- **Malli Basava Reddy's Srimad Rama Vara Mayana Yakshaganam**
- **Ugirala Papayya's Ramanaataka Yakshaganam**
- **Nidaduru Venkatacharya Kavi's Samagra Rama Nataka Yakshaganam**
- **Dharmapuri Ramayanam**
- **Adhyatma Ramayanam**

- **Mitte Mari Ramayanam**
- **Sugriva Vijayam**
- **Kommalapati Ramayanam**
- **Sundarakandam**
- **Sita Swayamvaram**
- **Sita Kalyanam**
- **Sri Rama Natakam**
- **Rama Pattabhishekam**
- **Shanta Kalyanam**
- **Ahalya Sankrandanam**
- **Sri Rama Vijayam**
- **Ramadasu Natakam**
- **Veedhi Bhagavatamulu** (street performances of Bhagavata tales)
- **Bhagavatula Hari Padamulu** (songs in praise of Hari)
- **Bommalaatam (puppet plays)**
- **Santha Veluru Kushalava Natakam**

Each of these works presents Rama's story in a **musical and theatrical format**, making it accessible and engaging for audiences. The **Yakshagana tradition** continues to keep the **essence of the Ramayana alive** through its **melodious compositions and dramatic storytelling**.

12. The Ramayana in Harikatha

Harikatha, a **unique Telugu literary and musical tradition**, combines **storytelling, singing, and moral discourse** to entertain and educate audiences. It is one of the most **beloved forms of devotional storytelling**, and the **Ramayana** has played a **central role** in this tradition.

Some significant **Ramayana-based Harikathas** include:

- **Mokshagunda Ramayanam**
- **Yadārtha Ramayanam**

In addition, **Harikatha exponents** have narrated individual episodes from the Ramayana, transforming each **significant event** into an **enchanted standalone Harikatha performance**.

The **Harikatha tradition** has ensured that the **Ramayana remains a living and evolving narrative**, touching the hearts of **devotees and listeners** with its **divine essence and musical appeal**.

13. The Ramayana in Burrakatha

Burrakatha is a **unique oral storytelling tradition** that belongs exclusively to the **Telugu people**. It is a **popular folk art form**, characterized by a **blend of poetry, prose, humor, rhythm, and melody**, making it an entertaining yet deeply **philosophical** storytelling medium.

The **Ramayana** has found a **special place** in Burrakatha, with several well-known **narratives** gaining immense popularity. Some of the most famous **Ramayana-based Burrakatha performances** include:

- **Nadira Sampoorna Ramayanam**
- **Sri Rama Jananam** (Birth of Sri Rama)
- **Sita Kalyanam** (Marriage of Sita and Rama)
- **Paduka Pattabhishekam** (Coronation of Rama's sandals)
- **Sugriva Vijayam** (Victory of Sugriva)
- **Lanka Dahanam** (Burning of Lanka)
- **Ravana Samharam** (Destruction of Ravana)
- **Lava Kusha** (Story of Lava and Kusha)

Apart from these major narratives, **many other Burrakathas** based on **Ramayana episodes** have emerged over time, reflecting the **deep cultural and spiritual impact of Rama's story**.

14. The Ramayana in Proverbs and Folk Sayings

The influence of the **Ramayana** extends far beyond literature, performances, and storytelling. It has **deeply permeated everyday language**, especially through **folk sayings, idioms, and proverbs**. These expressions, often filled with **wisdom and humor**, continue to be used in **day-to-day conversations** by common people. Some notable examples include:

- అగస్త్య బ్రాత Agastya Brata (Agastya's Brother)

- అంగద రాయభారం Anga Rayabhaaram (Angada's Diplomacy)
- అలో లక్షణ Alo Lakshmana (A surprising turn of events)
- రామ-రావణ యుద్ధం Rama-Ravana Yuddham (A battle between good and evil)
- కలియుగ రావణాసురుడు Kaliyuga Ravaanasurudu (A modern-day Ravana)
- ఉడతా భక్తి Udataa Bhakti (A small but sincere devotion, like the squirrel in Ramayana)
- చుప్పనాతి సూర్పనఖ Chuppanaati Soorpanakha (Someone cunning like Surpanakha)
- తా జెడ్డ కోతి వనమంతా చెడిచింది Taa Jemma Kothi Vanamanthaa Chedichindi (A single bad influence can ruin an entire community)
- సీత పుట్టుక లంకకు చేటు Sitha Puttuka Lankaku Chetu (A significant event leading to unexpected consequences)
- కట్టే, కొట్టే, తెచ్చే Katte, Kotte, Techche (Everything has a consequence)
- రామాయణమంతా విని రాముడికి సీత ఏమవుతుంది అన్నట్టు Ramayanamanthaa Vini Ramudiki Sitha Emavutundi Annattu (Hearing an entire story but missing the most important detail)
- రామబాణం Ramabaanam (An unfailing solution, like Rama's arrow)
- రామరాజ్యం Ramarajyam (A just and ideal rule, as in Rama's kingdom)
- విశ్వామిత్ర సృష్టి Viswaamithra Srushti (A powerful creation, like Viswaamithra's divine works)
- లంకలో పుట్టిన వారెల్లా రాక్షసులే Lankalo Puttina Vaarella Rakshasule (All those born in Lanka are demons)
- వాలి-సుగ్రీవులా ఉన్నారే Vaali-Sugreevula la Unnaare (Two people constantly at odds, like Vali and Sugriva)
- ఇంటిగుట్టు లంకకు చేటు Intiguttu Lankaku Chetu (An internal issue leading to great disaster, like Vibhishana's betrayal of Lanka)

These **proverbs and sayings** are a testament to how deeply the **Ramayana is woven into the Telugu cultural consciousness**. They **preserve moral lessons** while ensuring that the **legacy of the Ramayana** remains an **inseparable part of Telugu identity**. Telugu people have **not just embraced the Ramayana in literature and performances**, but have also **infused its essence into their daily lives**, making it a **living tradition** that continues to **guide and inspire generations**.

తెలుగులో రామ కథ వెలుగులు.....

శ్రీరాముడన్నా రామకథన్న తెలుగువారికి అనిర్వచనీయమైన అనుబంధం, అనుపమానమైన ఆనందం. రామకథలో తెలుగుజాతి మమేకమైనట్లు, మరే జాతి సమ్మిళితం కాలేదనిపిస్తుంది. తెలుగు నేలపై ఆమమేకత అణువణువున అభాసిస్తుంది. తెలుగుజాతి రామకథాసుధాబ్జిలో మునిగితేలింది. తెలుగుభాష 'పావనరామ నామ సుధారసపానం'తో పవిత్రమైంది.

తెలుగు నేల పల్లెపల్లెలో రామమందిరాలు రామభజన బృందాలు దర్శనమిస్తాయి. శ్రీరామాయణం తెలుగు వారికి నిత్యపారాయణం. సదా శరణ్యం. వారు శ్రీరామ అని వ్రాసిన తరువాతే దేనినైనా వ్రాస్తారు. చంటిపాపలకు సైతం నీళ్ళుపోస్తు 'శ్రీరామరక్ష- నూరేళ్ల ఆయుస్సు' అంటూ ఆంధ్ర మాతలు గోముగా పలుకుతారు.

మ. శ్రమషాందన్, క్షుధయున్ బిషాసయునుదీరన్ గ్రిష్టకార్యాంత వి

శ్రమమొందన్, నిదురింపబుండు కొన, నిద్రన్ మేలుకొన్నన్ వ చో

గ్రిమ భాగంబుల సర్వభూ ప్రజకుః దండ్రి! రామచంద్రా! యట

న్న మహావాక్యమె గోచరించె సుమహానందంబు సంధించుచున్ అన్న కల్పవృక్షకారుడి వాక్యాలు తెలుగు నేలపై సర్వేసర్వత్ర ప్రతిబింబిస్తుంటాయి.

హృద్యమైన రామకథ పద్యంగా, గద్యంగా, చంపూగా, హరికథగా, యక్షగానంగా, జానపదగీతంగా, దండకాలుగా, కీర్తనలుగా తెలుగుసాహిత్యంలోని వివిధ ప్రక్రియలలో ఒదిగిపోయింది. కవిజన బక్తబృందాల మదిలో ఓలలాడింది. నన్నయ కాలం నుండి నేటిదాక రామకథా సాహిత్య వాహిని విమల వియన్నదీ తరంగాలుగా తరలివస్తున్నది. ఎందరినో తరింపజేస్తున్నది.

తెలుగులో తొలిగా రామాయణము రూపుదిద్దుకునే సమయానికే సంస్కృతంలో రామ కథ పురాణాలలోనూ కావ్య నాటకాదులలోనూ నవీన కల్పనా చమత్కృతులతో సుందర ఆకృతి దాల్చింది . దానివల్ల తెలుగు రామ కథపై వాల్మీకి

రామాయణం లో పాటుగా అధ్యాత్మ రామాయణం ఇతర ఆర్థ రామాయణాలు పురాణ కావ్య నాటకాది ప్రభావం కూడా ప్రత్యక్షంగా కనిపిస్తుంది వాల్మీకి వచించని విషయాలు ప్రాంతీయ ఆచార వ్యవహారాలు నవ్య కల్పనాధులు మొదలైన అంశాలు తెలుగు రామ కథలో చోటుచేసుకున్నాయి.

ఏ ఏ ప్రక్రియలలో రామ కథ తెలుగులో వెలుగు చూసిందో వాటిని వరసక్రమంగా తెలుసుకుందాం.

చంపూ కావ్యాలు

గద్యము పద్యము కలసిన రచనకి చంపూ అని పేరు. తెలుగులో సముద్భవించిన చంపూ రామాయణాల గురించి తొలిగా తెలుసుకుందాం.

తెలుగులో వెలుగు చూసిన తొలి రామాయణంగా తిక్కన సోమయాజి పితామహుడైన భాస్కర మంత్రి (క్రీ.శకం.1190-1220) రచించినదేనని, ఆంధ్ర సాహిత్య చరిత్రకారులు చెబుతున్న మాట. అయితే ఈ కావ్యం అలభ్యం. లభ్యతలో ఉన్న తొలి రామాయణంగా గోన బుద్ధారెడ్డి రచించిన రంగనాథ రామాయణం పరిగణించబడుతున్నది. ఇది దేశీ కవిత సంప్రదాయాన్ని అనుసరించి వెలువడిన కావ్యం.

అటుపై సర్వ లక్షణ సమన్వితమై రూపుదిద్దుకున్న తొలి రామాయణం భాస్కర రామాయణం. ఇది చంపూ కావ్య కోటిలోకి చేర్చబడినది. దీని కర్త హుళక్కి భాస్కరుడు (14వ శతాబ్దం). అటు పై వెలసిన చంపూ రామాయణాలుగా మొల్ల రామాయణం (కవయిత్రి మొల్ల, 14వ శతాబ్దం), రామా భ్యుదయము-అయ్యల రాజు రామభద్ర కవి (క్రీస్తుశకం 1540), రఘునాథ రామాయణము-తంజావూరు రాజు (క్రీస్తు శకం 17 35 నుండి 16 73 వరకు) అచ్చ తెలుగు రామాయణం-కూచి మంచి తిమ్మకవి (17వ శతాబ్దము), శ్రీమదాంధ్ర వాల్మీకి రామాయణము శ్రీ వావికొలను సుబ్బారావు(వాసుదాసు గారు, ఆధునికలు), గోపినాథ రామాయణము వెంకట కవి . చంపూ రామాయణం ఋగ్వేద కవి వెంకటాచలపతి, శ్రీమదాంధ్ర చంపూ రామాయణము, అల్లమరాజు రంగశాయి రామోదయము, రంగయ్య కవి. కౌసల్య చరితము, లయగ్రాహి గరుడాచల కవి మాలికా రామాయణము, షటకవి ప్రణీతము(ఆకుండి వెంకట శాస్త్రి, పంతుల. లక్ష్మీనారాయణ శాస్త్రి, దేవ గుప్తాపు వెంకట రమణ, కవిరాజు చింతలపూడి సన్యాసిరావు, మూలా పేరన్న కవి, ఉష్మాక నారాయణమూర్తి), శ్రీ యోగానంద ఆంధ్ర రామాయణము చిల్లరిగె యోగానందయ్య పంతులు, శ్రీ జనమంచి శేషాద్రి శర్మ రామాయణము, శ్రీ వెంకట పార్వతీశ్వర కవుల రామాయణము, రామాయణ కల్పవృక్షం కవి సామ్రాట్ విశ్వనాథ సత్యనారాయణ, మొదలైనవి .

ద్విపద రామాయణాలు

తెలుగులోని పద్య కవిత్యం వృత్తాలని, జాతులని రెండుగా విభక్తమైంది. అందులోని జాతి చందంలో "కంద భేదములాటుగాక యుత్సాహము తరువోజు మధ్యమాక్కటలునైదు దీపియు మంజీరద్విపదపత్రి పదచతుష్పద.. అని అప్పకవి చెప్పినట్లు షడ్విధకందాలు, ఉత్సాహం, తరువోజు, అక్కర, ద్విపద, త్రిపద, చతుష్పద, పంచపద షట్పద, రగడ, కళిక, ఉత్కళిక అనేవి విరాజిల్లుతున్నాయి. వాటిలోని ద్విపద జాతిచందానికి చెందింది.

ద్విపద పేరును బట్టి రెండు పాదాలు కలిగి ఉండేదని తెలియక పోదు. సాధారణంగా పద్యానికి నాలుగు పాదాలుంటాయి. వైదిక చందలో మూడు పాదాలున్నట్లు ఈ ద్విపదకి రెండు పాదాలుంటాయి. విన్నకోట పెద్దన్న అనే లాక్షణికుడు ద్విపదను ద్విపదిగా పేర్కొన్నాడు. అలాగే కావ్యాలకార చూడామణి కర్త పెద్దిరాజు కూడా ద్విపదిగానే అన్నాడు. రానురాను ఈ ద్విపదియే, ద్విపదగా మారినట్లు, చంద పరిశీలకులు. ద్విపద నన్నయగారి కాలం కన్నా ముందే వ్యాప్తి, దీప్తిని పొందింది. పొల్కూరి సోమనాథుడు ద్విపదలో రచనారంభం చేసిన ఆద్యుడైగా పరిశీలకులు అభివర్ణిస్తారు.

ప్రతిపాదంలోను మూడు ఇంద్రగణాలు, ఒక సూర్యగణం వరుసగా ఉండటం, ప్రాసనియమం కలిగి ప్రతి పాదంలోని మూడవ గణం యొక్క మొదటి అక్షరం యతిస్థానంగా కలిగి, ద్విపద పాదంలో నాలుగు గణాలలో మొత్తం 15 మాత్రలకు తగ్గకుండా 18 మాత్రలకు ఎక్కువ కాకుండా ఉంటుందని లాక్షణికులు ద్విపద లక్షణాన్ని పేర్కొన్నారు. అయితే చాలాకాలం ఈ ద్విపద మంజరీ ద్విపదలో, తరువోజులో, ద్విరదగలరగడలో కలిసిపోయి ఉండి, తరువాతకాలంలో ఓ స్వతంత్ర చందః ప్రక్రియగా పరిణామం చెంది, సీసం, ఆటవెలది, తేటగీతలాంటి ఉపజాతులకు ఊపిరులూదంటారు విద్యుత్తల్లజులు,

అలాంటి ద్విపదలోనే తెలుగులో లోలిగా రామకథా గర్భితమైన కావ్యం రచించబడింది. అది గోనబుద్ధ రాజ కృతమై, రంగనాథరామాయణంగా రాజిల్లింది. అటుపై ఈ ద్విపదలోనే అన్నమాచార్యుడు, కట్టావరదరాజు, గణపవరపు వేంకటకవి, భోసల ఏకోజి, చాడ రాఘవరెడ్డి, ఏలేశ్వరపు సుబ్రహ్మణ్యశాస్త్రి, మొదలైనవారు వాల్మీకిరామాయాణాన్ని అనువదించారు, అనుసరించారు, కొందరు స్వతంత్రించినారు. ఇటీవల కాలంలో కూడా ద్విపద రామాయణాలను రచించినవారు సుమారుగా పదిమందికి పైనే ఉన్నారు. సంస్కృతంలో అనుష్టుప్ ఎంత ప్రాథమిక వృత్తంగా భావించబడుతుందో అలా తెలుగులో ఈ ద్విపద అంతే ప్రాథమికంగా సంభావించబడుతున్నది.

శ్లేష రామాయణ కావ్యాలు

ఆంధ్ర భాషలో రామ కథ చంపూ, ద్విపద మొదలైన ప్రక్రియలలో ఏ విధంగా ప్రభలు ప్రదర్శించిందో, అలానే శ్లేషకావ్యాలలో కూడా విశేషంగానే వెలుగులీసింది.

శ్లేష అంటే ఒక శబ్దానికి రెండు అంతకుమించి అర్థములు కల కవిత్వ ప్రక్రియ. ప్రధానంగా ఈ శ్లేషకావ్యాలు పాండిత్య ప్రధానమైన అలాగే వ్యంగ్య ప్రధానమైనవి కూడా ఒక శబ్దానికి బుద్ధి విశేషంతో వేరే వేరే అర్థాలు చెప్పటం సామాన్య విషయం కాదు. కేవలం అమోఘమైన పాండిత్యంలోనే అది సాధ్యమవుతుంది. ఒక పద్యం అంటే ఏదో విధంగా చెప్పవచ్చు. కానీ ఒక కావ్యం రచించాలంటే అందులో ఎంత కష్టం ఉంటుందో తెలుస్తుంది. అలాగే కవి యొక్క ప్రతిభ ప్రతిపద్యంలోనూ కనిపిస్తుంది.

అలాంటి శ్లేష కావ్యాలకు పుట్టినిల్లు సంస్కృత భాష. ఒక శ్లోకంలో రెండు అర్థాలు వచ్చేలా కావ్యాలను రచించారు. కవిరాజసూరి రాఘవ పాండవీయం, హర దత్త సూరి రాఘవ నైషధీయము, చిదంబర సుమతి రాఘవ పాండవ యాదవము, మేఘ విజయ గని సప్తసంధాన మహాకావ్యం మొదలైనవి మనకి సంస్కృతంలో కనిపిస్తాయి.

ఈ శ్లేష కావ్యాలనే అనేకార్థ కావ్యాలు అని కూడా పిలుస్తారు అంటే ఒకటి కన్నా ఎక్కువ అర్థాలు కలిగిన కావ్య రచనలు . అలా రెండు మూడు నాలుగు కావ్యాల అర్థాలు ఒకే కావ్యంలో నిబిడికృతం చేయడం .రెండు కథలు అయితే ద్వ్యర్థికావ్యమని, మూడు కథలు ఉంటే త్ర్యర్థికావ్యమని, నాలుగు కథలు ఉంటే చతుర్థికావ్యమని పిలుస్తారు మరోలా చెప్పాలంటే వాటిలోని ఇతివృత్త సంఖ్యను బట్టి ఆయా పేర్లు ఏర్పడ్డాయి . అయితే వాటిలోని ఇతివృత్తాల సంఖ్యతో నిమిత్తం లేకుండా అన్నింటినీ ద్వ్యర్థికావ్యములు అనే వ్యవహరిస్తున్నారు. పరిమితమైన పదాలను ఉపయోగించి అపరిమితమైన అర్థ ప్రయోజనాన్ని సాధించే అనేకార్థక కావ్యాలు ప్రధానంగా శ్లేష అనులోమ విలోమ కవిత్యం, గర్భ కవిత్యం, క్షుతక చిత్రము మొదలైన పద్ధతులను అనుసరించి రచింపబడుతున్నది.

అనేకార్థ సాధనకు అనులోమవిలోమ రచన మరియొక విధానము. ఈ పద్ధతిలో రచింపబడిన కావ్యాలలో శ్లోకమును మామూలు పద్ధతిలో పైనుండి క్రిందికి చదివినప్పుడు ఒక అర్థము, దానినే విలోమ పద్ధతిలో క్రిందినుండి పైకి చదివినప్పుడు మరియొక అర్థము ఏర్పడతాయి. ఈ విధంగా ఏర్పడిన రెండు శ్లోకాలలో రెండు కథలు ఇమిడి ఉంటాయి. ఈ అనులోమ విలోమ కావ్యాలను ,గతి - ప్రత్యాగతి కావ్యాలు, ప్రతిలోమ కావ్యాలు అని కూడా అంటారు. ఇది మిక్కిలి దుష్కరమైన రచనా విధానము. తెలుగులో ఇటువంటి కావ్యములు లేవు. కాని పింగళి సూరనగారి కళాపూర్ణోదయ కావ్యములో ఒక అనులోమవిలోమ పద్యమున్నది.

తెలుగులో అనేకార్థక కావ్యరచన అత్యంత క్లిష్టతరం. బాష పై విశేష అధికారం ఉంటేగానీ ద్వ్యర్థికావ్యాలు రచించలేరు. ఏదోవిధంగా పద్యాలలో కుస్తీపట్టి కావ్యార్థాలనుసాధించినా, కవితా ప్రతిభతో ఆహా అనిపించలేరు. కానీ, పింగళి సూరనామాత్యుడు ఇవన్నీ సాధించి, ప్రాచీన కవులలో ఒక ప్రత్యేకత కలిగిన మహాకవిగా కీర్తి గడించాడు.

తెలుగులో తొలిగా శ్లేష కావ్యాన్ని రచించింది వేములవాడ భీమకవి ఈయన రాఘవ పాండవీయం అనే ద్వ్యర్థికావ్యాన్ని రచించాడు అయితే అది లభించడం లేదు . ఆ తరువాత 16 శతాబ్దం వాడైన పింగళి సూరన రచించిన రాఘవ పాండవీయం తెలుగులో తొలి శ్లేష కావ్యం/ద్వ్యర్థికావ్యంగా ప్రసిద్ధి చెందింది. అసమాన ప్రతిభ శాలి అయినా పింగళి సూరన్న కవి-

. రెండర్థంబుల పద్య మొక్కటియు నిర్మింపంగ శక్యంబు గా కుండుం దధ్ధతిఁ గావ్య మెల్ల నగునే నోహో! యనం జేయదే పాండిత్యంబున నందునుం దెనుఁగుకబ్బం బద్భుతం బంధ్రు ద క్షుండెవ్వాఁ డిల రామభారతకథల్ జోడింప భాషాకృతిన్ (పీఠిక-10)

రెండర్థములతో నొక్క పద్యమును వ్రాయుటే కష్టము; తెనుగున రామాయణ భారత కథలను కలుపుచూ కావ్యము వ్రాయుటకు సమర్థుడెవరు? ఇటువంటి పోలికలొక లోండురెండు కనబడునుగానీ కావ్యనిర్మాణమున నట్టి సన్నివేశములు లేవని చెప్పుటకు సందేహమక్కరలేని పాండిత్యముగల సమర్థుడే సూరనకవి. అని తన ప్రతిభను చాటుకున్నాడు.

ఈ కావ్యం రామాయణార్థంగా, భారతర్థంగా ఉన్నటువంటి ఒక పద్యాన్ని ఉదాహరణగా చూద్దాం.

అనుపమ దివ్య విక్రమ సమగ్రుఁడు రామవిభుండు జిఘ్ఘఁడా యనితర బేద్య రౌద్ర ధనువశ్రమభంగిగ వంచి బాహులీ ల నెరసి నభ్రగానిమిషలక్ష హృదంబకవృత్తి నుర్వరా జన హృదయాక్షివర్తనముఁ జాలఁగ నద్భుతవార్ధిన్ ముంచుచున్2-56

రామాయణం: అనుపమ దివ్యవిక్రమ సమగ్రుడు = సాటిలేని అద్భుత పరాక్రమశీలి, జిష్ణుడు = జయశీలుడు, అయిన రామవిభుడు = శ్రీరామచంద్రుడు, ఆ అనితరభేద్య = ఇతరులు ఎక్కువెట్టుటకు శక్యముగానిదైన, రౌద్రధనువు = రుద్రసంబంధమైన ధనుస్సును, అనగా శివధనుస్సును, ఆశ్రమభంగిగ = అనాయాసముగా విరుగునట్లుగ, వంచి = విరిచి, అభ్రగ = ఆకాశ మార్గమున తిరుగు, అనిమిష = దేవతలయొక్క, లక్ష హృత్-అంబకవృత్తి = లక్షలాది హృదయము మరియు కన్నులయొక్క వ్యాపారముచే, ఉర్వరాజన = లోకములోని జనుల, హృదయ+అక్షివర్తనము = హృదయము, కనుల ప్రవర్తనను, చాలగ = మిక్కిలి, అద్భుతవార్తిన = ఆశ్చర్యమనెడి సముద్రములో, ముంచుచు, బాహులీలన్ = భుజశక్తిచే, నెరసె = ప్రకాశించెను.

తాత్పర్యం: సాటిలేని అద్భుత పరాక్రమశీలి అయిన శ్రీరామచంద్రుడు జయశీలుడై ఇతరులకు దుర్భేద్యమైన శివధనుస్సును అవలీలగా విరిచి లక్షలాది దేవతలను భూలోకవాసులను ఆశ్చర్య సముద్రంలో ముంచుచు తన భుజశక్తిచే ప్రకాశించెను.

భారతం: అనుపమ దివ్యవిక్రమ సమగ్రవిభుడు, రామవిభుడు = అందమైన ప్రభువు, జిష్ణుడు = జయశీలి అయిన అర్జునుడు, ఆ అనితరభేద్యమైన, రౌద్రధనువు = భయంకరమైన ధనుస్సును, అశ్రమభంగిగ వంచి = అవలీలగా ఎక్కువెట్టి, అభ్రగ = ఆకాశమున తిరుగు, అనిమిష = మత్స్యయంత్రమును, లక్ష = గుఱిని (లక్ష్యం లక్షం శరవ్యంచ అని అమరం), హృత్ = హరించునట్టి, అంబక = బాణముయొక్క, వృత్తిన్ = వర్తనముచే అనగా ప్రయోగముచేత (అనగా మత్స్యయంత్రమును భేదించి) ఉర్వరాజన = లోకములోని జనులందరి హృదయములు, చూపులు అద్భుతసముద్రములో మునుగునట్లుగా తన భుజబల శక్తిచే ప్రకాశించెను.

తాత్పర్యం: అనుపమదివ్యవిక్రమ సమగ్రవిభుడు, అందగాడు, జయశీలి అయిన అర్జునుడు. ఆ భయంకరమైన ధనుస్సును అవలీలగా ఎక్కువెట్టి, ఆకాశమున తిరుగునట్లు ఏర్పాటు చేసిన ఆ మత్స్యయంత్రమును గుఱిచూసి భేదించి లోకములోని జనులందరి హృదయములు, చూపులు అద్భుతసముద్రములో మునుగునట్లుగా తన భుజబలశక్తిచేత ప్రకాశించెను.

ఇలా ఒకే పద్యంలో రామచంద్రుడు చేసిన శివ ధనుర్భంగం గురించి అదే విధంగా అర్జునుడు చేసిన మత్స్య యంత్ర భేదనం గురించి కవి చిత్రించాడు.

ఈ కావ్యాన్ని అనుసరిస్తూ తరువాత అనేక శ్లేష కావ్యాలు రామాయణపరంగా వచ్చాయి.

రామకృష్ణ విజయము - మరిగంటి సింగరాచార్యుడు. అచలాత్మజా పరిణయము తిరుమల - ఋక్కపట్టణము'కిరీటీ' వెంకటాచార్యుడు. ధరాత్మజా పరిణయము - క్రొత్తలంక మృత్యుంజయుడు. శివరామాభ్యుదయము - పోడూరి పెదరామాయాత్యుడు. లంకావిజయము (రావణ దమ్మీయము)పిండిస్త్రోలు లక్ష్మణకవి. రాఘవ వాసుదేవీయము క్రొత్తపల్లి సింగరాచార్యుడు . రామకృష్ణాపాఖ్యానము - శ్రీపాద వెంకటా చలపతి. ఖలకర్ణవిషాయన రామాయణము- పన్నాల బ్రహ్మాన్న. నిర్వచన భారతగర్భ రామాయణము- రావిపాటి లక్ష్మీనారాయణ. ఆంధ్ర రాఘపాండవీయము రావూరి దొరస్వామి శర్మ. రాఘవనైషధీయము - రావూరి దొరస్వామి శర్మ . రాఘవ పాండవయాదవీయము ఎలకూచి బాల సరస్వతి. యాదవ

రాఘవపాండవీయము నెల్లూరి వీరరాఘవకవి. రామకృష్ణార్జున రూపనారాయణీయము- ఓరుగంటి సోమశేఖర కవి. రాఘవ పాండవయాదవీయము అయ్యగారి వీరభద్రకవి. నలయాదవ రాఘవపాండవీయము మరింగంటి సింగరాచర్యులు.

త్ర్యర్థికావ్యం

అలా విశేషంగా సాగిన ద్వ్యర్థికావ్యములలో సంతృప్తి చెందక ఆ తరువాత మూడర్థాలు లేదా మూడు కథలు ఇతివృత్తాలుగా కలిగిన త్ర్యర్థికావ్యాలు కూడా ఉద్భవించాయి వాటిలోని యాదవ రాఘవ పాండవీయం అనేదానిని నెల్లూరి వీరరాఘవ కవి రచించాడు. ఈ కావ్యం లోని ఒక ఉదాహరణ

ఆ. "శ్రీల కిరవు బహుళసీతభానుకులులకు నాటపట్టు సజ్జనాస్పదంబు మహి నయోధ్య కాంతి మధురసాలోజ్జ్వల నాగ పురి దనర్చు నవ్యలీల.

యాదవ :- శ్రీలకు + ఇరవు = సంపదలకు స్థానము, బహుళ+ సీత + భాను + కులులకున్ + ఆటపట్టు = పలువురు చంద్రవంశప రాజులకు ఉనికిపట్టు, సజ్జన + ఆస్పదంబు = సుజనులకు చోటు, మహిన్ = భూలోకమున, కాంతిన్ తేజమున, అయోధ్య= జయింప నలవికానిది, సాల + ఉజ్జ్వల = ప్రాకారములచే శోభావంత మైనది, మధుర + నాగ + పురి = మధుర అనే పట్టణము, నవ్యలీల = నూతన విలాసములతో, తనర్చు = ఒప్పు.

రాఘవ :- బహు + లసీత + భాను కులులకు = విఖ్యాతిగాంచు సూర్యవంశ క్షత్రియులకు ఆటపట్టు, మహిన్ అయోధ్య + నాగ + పురి తనర్చు = అయోధ్య అను పట్టణము కలదు, కాంతిన్, మధుర + సాల + ఉజ్జ్వల.

పాండవ :- మధుర = ఇంపైనది, నాగపురి = హస్తినా పురము, నవ్యలీల + తనర్చు = ఒప్పును.

కవి తన కావ్యమును చిత్రవ్యంగ్య చమత్ క్రియలతో శోభిల్ల జేసినట్లు కూడ పేర్కొనెను.

తిట్టుకవిత్వంలో రామకథ

తెలుగు సాహిత్యం వివిధ శాఖలలో విస్తరిల్లింది అందులో తిట్టు కవితాన్ని ప్రత్యేకమైన స్థానం. ఇది కూడా శ్లేష కావ్య ప్రక్రియలలో ఒక భాగంగానే చెప్పవచ్చు. రస హృదయులైన కవుల మనసు ఇతరుల వల్ల గాయపడినప్పుడు లేదా వ్యధ చెందినప్పుడు దూషణ రూపంగా వెలువడిన కవిత్వమే ఈ తిట్టు కవిత్వం. ఇందులో కూడా రామ కథ ప్రముఖ స్థానం లోనే నిలిచింది .

ఈ ప్రక్రియలో పిండిస్త్రోలు లక్షణ కవి లంకా విజయం అనే రెండు ఆశ్వాసాల కావ్యాన్ని రచించాడు ఈ కవి తన సొంత విషయంలో పాటు రామ కథను కూడా ఈ కావ్యంలో చిత్రించాడు. అలాగే పన్నాల బ్రహ్మన్న ఖళాకర్ణ విషాయన రామాయణాన్ని తిట్టు కవిత్వ ప్రక్రియలోనే రచించాడు.

ఉపాఖ్యానాలలో రామ కథ

వాల్మీకి మహర్షి సంస్కృతంలో రామాయణాన్ని రచించిన తరువాత, వ్యాసభగవానుడు రామ కథను అనేక పురాణాలలో ఉపాఖ్యానముగా చిత్రించాడు భాగవతం నవమస్కంధంలోనూ, భారతం అరణ్యపర్వంలోనూ మనకి రామ కథ కనిపిస్తుంది. అదేవిధంగా తెలుగులో కూడా ప్రత్యేక రామాయణాలు విలసిల్లినా , రామ కథను తమ కృతులలో ఉపాఖ్యానంగా చిత్రించారు. భారతాంతర్గత రామోపాఖ్యానము . భాగవతాంతర్గత రామోపాఖ్యానము ,హరివంశాంతర్గత రామ కథ, యయాతి చరిత్రలో రామ కథ ఇలా ఉదాహరణలుగా చెప్పబడే కావ్యాలు.

ఖండ కావ్యాలలో రామ కథ

మహా కావ్యాలుగా చిత్రించబడిన రామ కథ ఖండకావ్య ప్రక్రియలో కూడా రూపాంతరం చెందింది.సాహిత్య దర్పణలో పద్య కావ్యాలను మహాకావ్యం, ఖండకావ్యం, కోషం అని మూడు విధాలుగా పేర్కొనడం జరిగింది సర్ల బంధాత్మకమై , పంచసంధియుక్తమై వర్ణనను కలిగి ఒక్క అంగీరసం వివిధ అంగరసాలలో కూడింది మహాకావ్యం . ఖండకావ్యం మహాకావ్యం యొక్క ఒక భాగం మాత్రమే 'ఖండకావ్యం భవేత్ కావ్య స్వైక దేశాను సారించ' అంటూ విశ్వనాథుడు ఖండకావ్యం యొక్క లక్షణాన్ని తెలియజేశాడు ఖండకావ్యం ముక్తకావ్యాలు కలిపి లఘుకావ్యాలని పిలుస్తారు . ఖండకావ్యాన్ని క్షుద్ర కావ్యం గా కూడా పేర్కొన్నారు . అయితే క్షుద్ర అనేటవంటిది నీచమైనటువంటి అర్థంలో కాదు . క్షుద్ర అంటే అల్పమైన లఘువు అయిన నది అని మాత్రమే అర్థం తీసుకోవాలి. లఘుకావ్యాలు కూడా చాలా ఆదరణ పొందాయి . అలా రామ కథ లఘు కావ్యాంగా చెప్పబడే ఖండకావ్యం లో కూడా అభివర్ణించబడింది. సంధ్యా సావిత్రి ఉడత భక్తి మొదలైనవి తెలుగులో రామ కథలో సంబంధం ఉన్నటువంటి ఖండకావ్యాలు. అలాగే రామాయణంలోని చిన్న చిన్న అంశాలను కథా వస్తువుగా తీసుకొని వచ్చినటువంటి ఖండకావ్యాలు కూడా అనేకం ఉన్నాయి.

ఉత్తర రామ కథ

రామాయణంలోని ఉత్తరకాండపై ప్రత్యేక కావ్యాలు నెలకొన్నాయి వాటిలో తిక్కన వ్రాసిన నిర్వచనోత్తర రామాయణం, కాశమాపతి విఠల రాజు ద్వీపదలో కూర్చిన ఉత్తర రామాయణం కంకంటి పాపరాజు రచించిన ఉత్తర రామాయణం, గోవింద రామాయణం ,నిర్వచనోత్తర రామాయణ శేషం మొదలైనవి వెలువడినాయి.

జానపద సాహిత్యంలో రామ కథ

జానపద సాహిత్యానికి రామ కథ ఊపిరులూదింది అని చెప్పడంలో అత్యుక్తి లేదనిపిస్తుంది. కూచికోండ రామాయణము, శారద రామాయణము, ధర్మపురి రామాయణము, రామకథా సుధార్ణవము, మోక్ష గుండ రామాయణము, సూక్ష్మ రామాయణము, సంక్షేప రామాయణము, గుత్తినదీవి రామాయణము, అధ్యాత్మ రామాయణము, చిట్టి రామాయణము, శ్రీరామదండములు, రామాయణ గొబ్బిపాట, శ్రీరామ జావలి, అడవి, శాంత, పెండ్లి సేతు, గోవింద నామములు, ఊర్మిళాదేవి నిద్ర ,లక్ష్మణ దేవర నవ్వు పుత్రకామేష్ఠి పాతాళ హోమము, కుశలవ యుద్ధము, కుశలాయకము, ఇత్యాదులు జానపద వాఙ్మయ వాటికలో విరబూసిన రామకథా - ప్రసూనాలు. వీటిలోని చాలా పాటలు జనాల నాలుకలపై నేటికీ నర్తిస్తున్నాయి.

సంకీర్తనలలో రామ కథ

నవవిధ భక్తిరీతులలో సంకీర్తన ఒకటి భగవంతుడు యొక్క గుణగానాన్ని చేసి ఎంతోమంది వాగ్గేయకారులు తమ పాటలలో పరమపదానికి బాటలు వేశారు వారు తరించడమే కాక ఎందరినో తరింపజేశారు .అలా సంకీర్తనలలో సంక్షిప్తంగా రామ కథను రచించి తరించిన వాగ్గేయకారులు ఎందరో ఉన్నారు వారిలో అన్నమయ్య, భక్త రామదాసు గారు ,త్యాగరాజ స్వామి ,తూము లక్ష్మీ నరసింహ దాసు గారు, క్షేత్రయ్య, నారాయణ తీర్థులు, అధ్యాత్మ రామాయణ కీర్తనలు ,పరాంకుశ దాసు కీర్తనలు ప్రయాగ రంగశర్మ గారి కీర్తనలు సోటి సీతారామయ్య గారి కీర్తనలు, మైసూరు వాసుదేవా చారి గారి కీర్తనలు, పట్నం సుబ్రహ్మణ్య అయ్యర్ రచించిన కీర్తనలు ఇలా ఎంతోమంది మహనీయులు రామ కథను కీర్తనలలో రచించి శ్రీరాముడి పదసన్నిధికి సమర్పించారు.

యక్షగానంలో రామ కథ

పేరుకి సంస్కృత పదంగా వినపడే యక్షగానం పూర్తిగా దేశీ సంబంధమైన సంగీత ప్రక్రియకు అద్దం పడుతుంది తెలుగువారికి సొంతమైన ఈ యక్షగానం లో కూడా రామ కథ ఒదిగిపోయింది. వేల్పురి వెంకట కవి రామలీల యక్షగానము , ముమ్మడి దేవుల తిరుమల కవి గీత రఘునందనము, శిర్నాడు వెంకటరాయ కవి కృతమైన రామాయణ యక్షగానము ,మిల్లి బసవ రెడ్డి శ్రీమద్రామ వర మాయన యక్షగానము ,ఊగిరాల పాపయ్య రామనాటకక్షగానము, నిడదూరు వెంకటాచార్యకవి సమగ్ర రామ నాటక యక్షగానము, ధర్మపురి రామాయణం, అధ్యాత్మ రామాయణము, మిట్టి మరి రామాయణము ,సుగ్రీవ విజయం ,కొమ్మలపాటి రామాయణం ,సుందరకాండము, సీతా స్వయంవరం ,సీతా కళ్యాణం, రామాయణం శ్రీరామ నాటకం, రామ పట్టాభిషేకం, శాంతా కళ్యాణం ,అహల్య సంక్రందనం, శ్రీరామ విజయం, రామదాసు నాటకం, వీధి భాగవతములు ,భాగవతుల హరి పదములు ,బొమ్మలాటలు సంత వేలూరు కుశలవ నాటకం, ఇలా మొదలైనవి యక్ష నాటక ప్రక్రియలలో రామ కథను మలచిన రస రమ్య గీతాలు.

హరికథ లో రామ కథ

తెలుగువారికి సొంతమైన హరికథ చాలా విశేషమైనది అటుగీతంలోనూ ఇటు వచనం లోను కూడా ఉండి ఆలకించే వారికి ఆనందాన్ని అందించే భగవత్ కథ, గుణ ,నామాలను వీనుల విందుగా అందించే విశిష్ట ప్రక్రియ హరికథ ఈ హరికథలో రామ కథ సుధలాగా ప్రవహించింది .మోక్షగుండా రామాయణము, యదార్థ రామాయణం ,మొదలైనవి వెలువడ్డాయి ఆ తరువాత రామాయణ కథలోని ఒక్కొక్క ఘట్టం గురించి ఒక్కొక్క హరికథలు సుమనోహరంగా హరికథకులు చెప్పారు .

బుర్రకథలో రామ కథ

తెలుగువారికి మాత్రమే సొంతమైన వాటిలో బుర్రకథ కూడా విశేష ప్రాచుర్యాన్ని పొందింది సర్వజనరంజకంగా సాగే బుర్రకథలు పద్యాలు లోహరాలు, వచనాలు, రాగతాళములతో ఉన్న కీర్తనలు ,ఇలా కలగలిపిన విశేష ప్రక్రియ బుర్రకథ. ఈ బుర్రకథ లో కూడా నదీరా సంపూర్ణ రామాయణం, శ్రీరామ జననం, సీతా కళ్యాణం, పాదుకా పట్టాభిషేకం, సుగ్రీవ విజయం ,లంకాదహనం

రావణసంహారం లవకుశ అనే బుర్రకథలు విశేష వ్యాప్తిని పొందాయి . ఇవే కాక తరువాత ఎన్నో రామకథ ఇతివృత్తంతో కూడుకున్న బుర్రకథలు ఉద్భవించాయి.

ఇలా రామ కథ నాటకాలుగా, శతకాలుగా, వచనాలుగా, బహురూపాంతరాలను చెందింది అంతేకాక సామాన్య స్త్రీలు మాట్లాడుకునే జాతీయాల వరకు అది చేరుకుంది. అగస్త్యబ్రాత, అంగరాయభారం, అలో లక్షణ ,రామ రావణ యుద్ధం, కలియుగ రావణాసురుడు, ఉడతా భక్తి, చుప్పనాతి సూర్యనఖ, తా జెడ్డ కోతి వనమంతా చెడిచింది ,సీత పుట్టుక లంకకు చేటు, కట్టే కొట్టే తెచ్చే, రామాయణమంతా విని రాముడికి సీత ఏమవుతుంది అన్నట్లు, రామబాణం ,రామరాజ్యం ,విశ్వామిత్ర సృష్టి ,లంకలో పుట్టిన వారెల్లా రాక్షసులే, వాలి సుగ్రీవులలా ఉన్నారే, ఇంటిగుట్టు లంకకు చేటు, మొదలైన జాతీయాలు నేటికీ కూడా జనాల నాలుకలపై నర్తన చేస్తూనే ఉన్నాయి. రామ కథను అడుగడుగునా అణువణువునా నింపుకున్నది తెలుగుజాతి.

The people's Ramayana: Voices across castes and regions in Karnataka

Dr Jyothi Shankar, KSOU Kannada professor,

Vidushi in Karnataka classical music

Ramayana is the **Adi Kavya-Amara Kavya** of our nation. The Ramayana authored by Maharshi Valmiki has influenced all the geographical parts and languages of our country. This is because of Ramayana's meaningful messages, principles and Darshana. It completely exalts Satya and Dharma, and thus is relevant across ages and areas. We can find the temples of Rama - Sita, and particularly the temples and shrines dedicated to Hanuman across the length and breadth of our country. To bring Samanvaya in society, Rameshwara-Raamesha-Ramalingeshwara deities are also present. We can find at least ten persons who are named after the characters of Ramayana in every city/village. The legends of Ramayana are thus available starting with folk traditions all the way till formal literary works. It is also the torch bearer of our culture. Ramayana based Dance, Drama, Music, Bhajan, Devaranama – all of these are being performed from time immemorial. Ramayana is inherently bred within the hearts and minds of people, especially in Karnataka. The people of Karnataka have been loving Ramayana incessantly. Rama Taraka Yajna, Samrajya Pattabhisheka Mahotsava and Sita Kalyanotsava are celebrated with vigor during Rama Navami.

The Ramayana tradition of Karnataka can be widely classified as follows:

- Formal literary Jain Ramayanas
- Ramayanas apart from that of Jain Ramayanas
- Ramayanas written in the modern times
- Ramayanas in folk literature
- Ramayana in various forms

Ramayana has created an impact on the whole of Karnataka. We have various Ramayanas that belong to Jaina Ramayana Kavya category during the era where Jainism was predominantly thriving in Karnataka. The foremost Kavya among them is the “**Ramachandra charita Purana**”, also known as “**Pampa Ramayana**”. (Latter part of 11th Century – Early parts of 12th

Century). It describes the Ramakatha through Jaina parampara and has the story of Udatta Raghava. The content of this Kavya differs from that of the Valmiki Ramayana in many ways. The Rama from this Kavya is Baladeva, one among the **Tri Shashti Shalaka Purushas**, Lakshmana is Vasudeva, and Ravana is Prati Vasudeva. Here, Lakshmana is the one who kills Ravana, and not Rama. Sita is not depicted as Ayonije, rather she is the sister of Prabhamandala, and the actual daughter of Janaka. Sugriva, Hanuman et al are not Kapis, rather bear the flag of Kapi and thus are **Kapi dhwajas**. They cross the ocean as they know **Akashagamini Vidya**. Kapi dhwajas are the relations of Rakshasas. Hanuman is described as the son-in-law of Ravana's sister. Ravana is the king of **Khecharas**, the people who move in Akasha, and not the king of Rakshasas. Hanuman is not Brahmachari (celibate) here, rather is a Grihasta. There is no mention of Putra Kameshthi Yaga, Maya Jinke and Manthara episodes. Ravana is an ardent follower of Jainism. All of his battles are for the establishment of Jainism. Ravana is depicted as one who is virtuous and follows the rule of **Parangana virativrata**. Uparambhe, the wife of Nalakubara of Durlanghyapura had heard of Ravana's qualities and got infatuated with him. However, Ravana advises her to live with her husband. But, his Vrata got broken when he saw Sita. This is because of the plot of **Vidhi**, and not because of Ravana's bad qualities. In the end, he develops respect towards Sita and plans to hand her over to Rama after winning the war. But the same Vidhi's deceit makes Lakshmana kill Ravana. Kumudendu Ramayana too is written among similar lines. Thus, Jaina Ramayanas take creative liberty and have developed their own versions of Ramayana.

Torave Ramayana (1500 A.D) was authored by Kumaravalmiki. This Kavya is very close to the original Valmiki Ramayana and based on Vaidika Tattva. Veerashaiva **Battaleshwara's Ramayana** reflects Shaivism. It is also called as **Koushika Ramayana**. Kanakadasa's "**Ramadhanya Chaitre**", though do not depict the story of Ramayana directly, has the story of a fight between **Bhatta** (paddy) and **Ragi** (millet), to which Rama himself gives a judgement. This is a direct depiction of the clashes between social stratification. Rama finally decides that the Ragi itself is the greatest one.

In the modern era, **Ramayana Darshanam** by Kuvempu is another great epic which accepts the Avatara tattva of Rama. Though it has the same story of

Valmiki Ramayana more or less, the pattern of Putrakameshthi Yajna is performed in a different way, the character of Manthara takes a different course and she is shown as the whirlpool of Mamata. Female characters like Vibhishana's daughter Anale, Lakshmana's wife Urmila are characterized beautifully. It has other legends like Dashanana Swapna siddhi which make it popular. In the end, Rama too does the Agni Pravesha along with Sita, and this is the major change from Valmiki Ramayana. **Shudratapaswi** by Kuvempu takes Rama into a different version. Shambooka is accepted as a tapaswi by Rama.

Ramayana is deeply rooted in the folk traditions of Karnataka too. Various art forms are performed by different castes and creed of the society, such as Yakshagana, Bayalata, Doddata, Sutrada Bomeyata and Togalu Gomebeyata have themes deeply ingrained in the Ramayana. Though they have their own versions, distinctive from Valmiki's Ramayana, each art form gives a fresh perspective on the characters. It also helps better understand the viewpoint of the common man who sees and extrapolates the characters of his/her fellow human beings on the characters of Ramayana. Each art form's Ramayana gives an insight into the sociological aspects of those art forms and their respective regions. The Lavanis sung by the village folk and tribes often highlight the prowess the female characters of Ramayana like Sita and Kausalya.

Yakshagana is a traditional art form deeply rooted in the folk tradition of Karnataka. It is a beautiful blend of dance, drama, music and dialogue. This art form takes inspiration from the Itihasas and Puranas. There are many Prasangas which are inspired from the Ramayana. The characters and their various shades are explored elaborately, leading to deeper appreciation of the subtleties of those characters. Many prasangas are performed for five to six hours, and sometimes may start from night and go on till dawn. Many popular prasangas like Kausalya Parinaya, Krauncha Shambooka, Sita Parityaga, Mandodari Parinaya, Ramashwamedha yaga are widely known.

Togalu Gombeyata is another traditional folk art form of Shadow puppetry. Leather puppets are intricately made and are translucent so that it can

be manipulated behind a screen. This art form too is deeply indebted to the Ramayana. The stories and presentations are often based on the popular stories from Ramayana like Rama's exile and Ravana's defeat.

“The art of leather shadow puppetry flourished in different parts of India, including Odisha, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and in Kerala, but gained much popularity particularly in the Southern India, possibly originating as early as twelfth century CE based on the Kamba Ramayana. In Kerala, the leather puppets are called as Tolpava Koothu, while the counterparts in Andhra Pradesh are the Tholu Bommalattam and Togalu Gombeyatta marionettes belong to Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Similar kinds of tradition are followed in Odisha, called as the Ravanachhaya, and the Charma Bahuli Natya in Maharashtra.” ([Visual Manifestations of Ramayana in Folk Performances | Sahapedia](#)).

Karnataka shares a very special connection with Rama. It is widely accepted that the Kishkindha kingdom was in present day Karnataka. Hampi, which is the erstwhile capital of the Vijayanagara Kingdom, is considered sacred because of the same reason. Many temples in Hampi have intricate carvings of stories from Ramayana. Anjanadri Hill which is located on the banks of the Tungabhadra river has a beautiful Hanuman temple at the summit and is considered the birthplace of lord Hanuman. The Rushyamooka Hill too is said to be located near the same region. Pampa Sarovara, which is considered divine in the Ramayana, too is present near Hospet. Pampa Sarovara is the region where Shabari, the devotee of the highest order, served Rama. There are many places across Karnataka, where Rama is set to have set his foot during his exile. Though historical records cannot be provided for these, the emotion behind these legends prove that every place wants to establish a connect with Rama. This is specifically seen in Karnataka, which prides itself to be the birthplace of Hanuman. Lots of regional folk songs, tribal songs and Haridasa Keertana represent different Vritti dharmas based on Ramayana.

“Some historians say that Lord Ram gave Lakkundi village to pundits and scholars during his Vanavasa and it is mentioned in Srimad Lokkigundi

inscription. The sculpture depicting Hanuman carrying three hillocks is rare as in many other places Hanuman is depicted as carrying a single hillock. Hence there is a demand for more research.”([Karnataka: Lakkundi’s connect with Ramayana](#))

Ramayana is ingrained in the hearts and minds of people across Karnataka. Ramayana can be seen in all aspects, from formal literature, folk traditions, traditional vrata and ceremonies, rangoli patterns to temple architecture and grand Ramanavami celebrations. Though the storylines differ from version to version, the core values of Ramayana remain intact. Ramayana is revered and relevant across timescales. It is the **Itihasa** of our nation and is rightfully leading the moral compass of our country.

The people's Ramayana: voices across castes & regions

Ramayana Traditions in Kerala

**Dr. Harikrishnan, Assistant Professor Sanskrit, Amrita Vishwa
Vidyapetham- Kollam, Mentor at IKS- New Delhi**

Ramayana is one of the foremost itihāsaḥ in Indian literature. It has been not only translated into Indian languages but also into many languages across the world and has been rewritten in various forms. In some of these retellings of the *Ramayana*, apart from Valmiki's *Ramayana*, certain additional events can also be seen.

The verse "Janani Janmabhoomischa", the story of Lakshman Rekha, the effort of a squirrel during the construction of the bridge, and the praise of Rama's virtues—these events are not found in the *Valmiki Ramayana* but can be seen in some regional or vernacular versions.

Similarly, such variations can also be seen in some literary works inspired by the *Ramayana*. However, despite these differences, the core storyline of the *Ramayana* remains unchanged.

Here, a brief introduction is given regarding the *Ramayanas* that are prevalent and propagated in the state of Kerala, along with the related literature.

Kerala is situated in the southwestern corner of India. To its east lies the Sahya Mountain range, while to the west is the vast Arabian ocean. In this narrow strip of land, Malayalam language emerged during the Sangam period. Its earliest form, influenced by Tamil and Sanskrit, is known as *Manipravalam*.

Literature written in *Manipravalam* existed in the past and is still available today. Over time, due to regional and temporal influences, Malayalam language evolved, leading to literary creations in the language. Within this rich and vast literary tradition, various versions of the *Ramayana* were also composed.

In Malayalam literature, several versions of the *Ramayana* have been composed, reflecting the cultural and linguistic adaptations of the itihāsaḥ in Kerala. Some of the most notable *Ramayanas* in Malayalam include:

1. Adhyatma Ramayanam Kilippattu – Thunchaththu Ramanujan Ezhuthachan

- This is the most popular and widely revered Malayalam version of the *Ramayana*.
- Written in the *Kilippattu* (Bird song) style by Ezhuthachan, considered the father of Malayalam literature.
- It has had a profound impact on Kerala's culture, language, and spiritual traditions.

Although many *Ramayanas* were composed in Kerala both before and after this, Adhyatma Ramayanam Kilippattu holds the highest literary and linguistic significance among them.

Unlike earlier works that followed *Manipravalam* (a blend of Sanskrit and Tamil), this text was written entirely in Malayalam. Additionally, Ezhuthachan introduced innovative narrative techniques in the form of Kilippattu (Bird Song), a unique storytelling style. This method later influenced many subsequent literary creations in Malayalam literature.

It presents the spiritual and philosophical essence of the *Ramayana*, emphasizing devotion (bhakti) and Advaita philosophy. This text, central to Kerala's Hindu tradition, is widely recited during Ramayana Month (*Karkidakam*). Unlike Valmiki's version, it portrays Rama as an incarnation of Vishnu, blending devotion, wisdom, and poetic elegance, making it an enduring spiritual and literary masterpiece in Malayalam literature.

2. Ramacharitam – Cheeramakavi

- One of the earliest known works in Malayalam, composed in the 12th century.
- Written in a mixture of Malayalam and Tamil, called *Paṭṭu* (a form of poetry).
- It narrates the *Yuddha Kanda* of the *Ramayana*.
- It follows the style of Champu Kavya, which blends prose and poetry.
- The language used is heavily influenced by Tamil and Sanskrit, making it a crucial text in the history of Malayalam literature.
- *Ramacharitam* provides insight into early Malayalam grammar, vocabulary, and poetic forms.

3. Kannassa Ramayanam – Niranam Ramapanikkar

- A poetic retelling based on *Valmiki Ramayana* composed in the 14th century.
- Written in the *Manipravalam* style (a blend of Sanskrit and Malayalam).
- This version follows the original Sanskrit *Ramayana* closely.

Kannassa Ramayanam is a 14th-century Malayalam retelling of the *Ramayana*, composed by Niranam Rama Panicker, one of the renowned Kannassa poets. Written in the *Manipravalam* style, blending Sanskrit and Malayalam, it follows Valmiki's *Ramayana* while incorporating regional influences and poetic elegance. The text is divided into sections and showcases deep devotion (bhakti) alongside literary brilliance. It played a crucial role in the evolution of Malayalam literature, marking a transition from Sanskrit dominance to a more accessible native poetic tradition. Kannassa Ramayanam remains a revered classic, celebrated for its lyrical beauty and spiritual depth in Kerala's literary heritage.

Additions and interpretations

Several Malayalam versions of the *Ramayana* include additional stories and interpretations that are either absent or less emphasized in Valmiki's *Ramayana*. These additions often reflect Kerala's regional traditions, Bhakti (devotional) influences, and folk elements.

Here are some of the keys added or modified stories in Malayalam Ramayana versions:

1. Lava-Kusha's Devotional Recitation (Rama Nama Japam)

- In Ezhuthachan's *Adhyatma Ramayanam*, Lava and Kusha, Rama's sons, are described as chanting "Rama Nama" as part of their daily practice.
- This aspect is highly emphasized in Kerala, aligning with the Nama Japa (chanting of divine names) tradition.

2. Hanuman's Journey to *Patala*

- Some Malayalam retellings describe an additional adventure of Hanuman in the *Patala*, where he rescues Rama's ring, which had fallen there. This story is not found in Valmiki's Ramayana but appears in later devotional versions.

3. Sita's Devotion and the Golden Idol of Sita

- Some Malayalam versions describe Rama commissioning a golden idol of Sita to perform *Ashwamedha Yaga* in her absence.
- While this is a later addition in many Bhakti-based retellings, it has a significant place in Kerala's Rama-worship traditions.

4. Hanuman's Presence at Sita's Exile

- Certain Kerala temple traditions narrate that Hanuman secretly watched over Sita during her exile in Valmiki's ashram, ensuring her safety.
- This story is an added devotional element not found in Valmiki's version.

5. The Story of Mango Tree and Sita's Chastity Test

- According to some Kerala folklore, Ravana gives Sita a mango while she is in Lanka.
- When Sita drops the mango on the ground, it withers instantly, proving that her mind is untouched by desire, reinforcing her purity.
- This story is an extension of Sita's *Agni Pariksha*.

6. Hanuman Testing Rama's Devotion

- In a Malayalam folk tale, Hanuman, wanting to test Rama's unwavering love for Sita, pretends to pluck a single strand of Sita's hair and drops it in water.
- When Rama notices this, he experiences deep sorrow, showing that even a small parting from Sita affects him.
- This story is not present in Valmiki Ramayana but is found in devotional versions.

7. Sita's Motherly Affection for Hanuman

- A unique Malayalam retelling describes Sita feeding Hanuman like a mother after the battle in Lanka.

- She blesses him as her own child, reinforcing the maternal aspect of her character, which is not explicitly stated in Valmiki's Ramayana.

8. The Kerala Connection – Lord Ayyappa as Rama's Son?

- Some Kerala folk traditions associate Lord Ayyappa (Hariharaputra) with Rama's lineage.
- While not part of mainstream Ramayana texts, there are speculative narratives linking Rama, Sita, or Hanuman to Ayyappa's divine birth.

Ramayana in Malayalam Folklore

- Pattu Ramayanam – A traditional folk song (pattu) style narration of the Ramayana, especially popular in rural Kerala.
- Thottam Pattu – These are devotional songs sung during temple rituals and performances like Theyyam, often incorporating episodes from the Ramayana.
- Vadakkan Paattu – Though primarily known for North Malabar's warrior ballads, some Ramayana episodes appear in these traditions as well.

Ramayana in Ritual & Performance Arts

- Kathakali & Koodiyattam – Many performances in these classical art forms depict major Ramayana episodes like Bali Vadham, Ravana Vadham, and Seethapaharanam.
- Ottamthullal – Satirical retellings of the Ramayana often appear in this performance art, sometimes with humorous or social commentary.
- Padayani & Theyyam – Folk deities and spirits related to Ramayana characters are honored in these traditional rituals.

Ramayana's Impact on Modern Malayalam Literature

The *Ramayana* continues to be a major literary and cultural influence in modern Malayalam literature. Writers, poets, and scholars have reinterpreted, adapted, and critically analysed the itihāsaḥ in contemporary contexts, exploring its philosophical, social, and literary dimensions.

Ramayana in Contemporary Poetry and Novels

- Many modern Malayalam poets have drawn inspiration from the *Ramayana*, reinterpreting its characters and themes in new ways.
- P. Kunhiraman Nair, Vyloppilli Sreedhara Menon, and Sugathakumari have written poems reflecting the spiritual and emotional depth of the itihāsaḥ.
- Modern Malayalam literature has re-examined the roles of Sita, Mandodari, Surpanakha, and Ahalya, questioning traditional gender narratives.
- The *Ramayana* is also used as a lens to analyze social justice, caste, and human rights issues.

Ramayana in Drama and Cinema

- The themes of the *Ramayana* have influenced modern Malayalam theatre and films, adapting the itihāsaḥ's conflicts to contemporary storytelling.
- Directors like G. Aravindan and K. G. George have used *Ramayana*-inspired themes in their works.

Ramayana Masam and Popular Culture

- The tradition of reading the *Ramayana* during *Karkidakam* (Ramayana Masam) has gained renewed interest, with audiobooks, TV adaptations, and digital platforms popularizing it among younger generations.
- Various modern translations and commentaries have made the *Ramayana* accessible to a wider audience.

Conclusion

Malayalam versions of the *Ramayana*, especially *Adhyatma Ramayanam*, blend Valmiki's itihāsaḥ with regional devotional elements, introducing new stories, miracles, and divine interventions. These variations emphasize Bhakti (devotion), Rama Nama Japam, and Sita's purity, making them integral to Kerala's *Ramayana* tradition and temple worship. The *Ramayana* remains a living tradition in modern Malayalam literature, continually evolving to reflect changing social, philosophical, and artistic perspectives. Its influence extends beyond religious devotion, shaping critical thought, gender discourse, and cultural identity in Kerala.

Jatayu's Ancestry

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I prostrate at the lotus feet of SitaRama and my Guru Dr. Ranganji, without whom not even a single word in this humble article is possible. I am humbly submitting this small article to that selfless devotee of Sri Rama- Jatayu.

सर्वत्र खलु दृश्यन्ते साधवो धर्मचारिणः
शूराश्शरण्यास्सौमित्रे तिर्यग्योनिगतेष्वपि। ॥3.68.24॥

மனிதரில் மட்டுமா மாண்புமிக்கோருளர்
பறவை பிறவியிலும் உள்ளனரே
சுயநலமற்றே சிறகை சிதறி
எனக்காக எய்தினார் உயருலகம்

- ஸ்ரீ ராமகானாம்ருதம் - Dr. Ranganji

Jatayu — A Symbol of Dharma and Sacrifice

- Jatayu is seen as a **symbol of unwavering dharma** — the duty to protect the innocent and uphold righteousness.
- His sacrifice shows **moral courage**, emphasizing that **standing up against wrong is more important than survival**.

Darwin's Evolution theory & Jatayu's ancestry:

Based on the book Ramayana Insights by Dr. Ranganji, the Evolution theory of Darwin and the Jatayu's ancestry explained in Valmiki Ramayana have a great commonality. Though the 14th chapter of Aranyakanda of Valmiki Ramayana, which explains Jatayu's ancestry, looks like a story, it subtly references how all beings are siblings. By narrating the family tree of Kashyapa, we can understand all the beings that belong to one family. By understanding that beings belong to the same family, we will tend to respect them. By respecting, we can be open enough to understand their wisdom. In this way of inclusiveness, humans become complete. Maintaining a relationship of give and take, a symbiotic relationship will be maintained. Their wisdom will make humans give up the prejudice that of world is built only for them. Taking beings for granted will not only be a loss for us, but it will also destroy the resources for us and others. The only solution for this is to respect and love others with an eye of equality. That's how Rama pays his tribute to that Jatayu who fell selflessly for a good cause. Rama recognises the importance of inclusiveness and shows love and respect.

As Dr. Ranganji says, Ramayana seldom has digression. If it is there, then it is for a purpose. When Rama, in Aranyakandam of Ramayana, tries to travel towards Panchavati, he meets a big bird, Jatayu, on a banyan tree. When Rama enquires about the bird about his lineage, he gives a detailed account of the entire creation. Creation of all beings opens our eyes to how Sama dharma - commonality for all in terms of resources and opportunities is important. Mithra bhava - looking at all with the eyes of affection will let us live and let others live. We can learn from others' wisdom.. Rama, the man who is not bound by these boundaries such as caste, creed, gender, species, time and place, teaches "All are one".

Wisdom of bird-brothers in Ramayana:

Sampati: - Brother of Jatayu:

अस्माकं विहिता वृत्तिर्निसर्गेण च दूरतः।

विहिता पादमूले तु वृत्तिश्चरणयोधिनाम्।।4.58.32।।

By our nature and birth and the food we take, we can see up to a long distance. Thus necessity leads to invention. This is the basis of the evolution too.

Jatayu:

स भारस्सौम्य भर्तव्यो यो नरं नावसादयेत्।।3.50.17।।

तदन्नमपि भोक्तव्यं जीर्यते यदनामयम्।

यत्कृत्वा न भवेद्धर्मो न कीर्तिर्न यशो भुवि।।3.50.18।।

शरीरस्य भवेत्खेदः कस्तत्कर्म समाचरेत्।

न शक्तस्त्वं बलाद्धर्तुं वैदेहीं मम पश्यतः।।3.50.21।।

हेतुभिर्न्यायसंसिद्धैद्धृवां वेदश्रुतीमिव।

One should not eat the food which will make one tired and which will not be easily digested. One cannot understand the Vedic wisdom by logic and reasoning. When Ravana was abducting Sita, Jatayu advised Ravana of the above things. Beautifully, he gives the above example. Jatayu can connect on how Vedic wisdom can't be forced upon Sita, can't come under Ravana's control. We can learn many things from these birds. So, instead of thinking others are of no use if we are open

enough, we can learn many things from the world of all beings and by that, a person can humble himself. It will lead to proper growth and expansion.

Jatayu's introduction in Ramayana:

Bird - Human friendship:

वत्स मां विद्धि वयस्यं पितुरात्मनः॥3.14.3॥

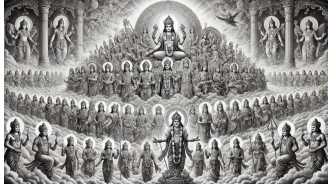



One of the unique virtues found in Ramayana is "inclusiveness". The main virtuous characters in Ramayana, like Rama, Dasaratha, Bharatha, etc, treat all beings equally, whether they are from their species or other species. One such example of a relationship beyond the human species is the Dasaratha-Jatayu and Rama-Jatayu relationship. Though Jatayu belongs to an avian group, the father and son duo maintained a very good relationship with him. They honored and valued such friendship. This explains the ego-free, species-free and prejudice-free relationship that existed during the period of Ramayana.


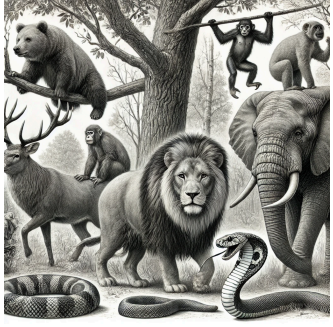
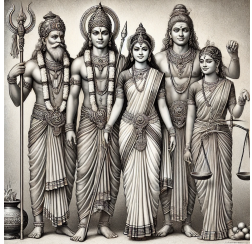
Rama meets Jatayu:

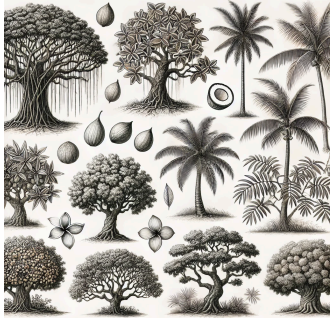
When Rama meets with Jatayu for the first time in the forest, he asks about the latter's name and the lineage - स तस्य कुलमव्यग्रमथ पप्रच्छ नाम च॥3.14.4॥

There Jatayu gives an account of all the lords of creation starting from Kardama prajapati- the lord of all lords. When the 8 daughters of Daksha Prajapati(one another lord) got married to sage Kashyapa, the detailed creation of all beings sprang into existence.

Kashyapa's Family:

#	Wife of Kashyapa	Offsprings
1.	Adithi 	33 Devas- (12 Adithyas, 8 Vasus, 11 Rudras, Ashwins-2)
2.	Dithi 	Daityas
3.	Dhanu 	Danavas like Ashwagriva
4.	Kaalika 	NarakaH, KalakaH
5.	Taamra	Krounchi, Bhasi, Shyeni, Dhruatarashtrii, Shukii 1. Krounchi – UlookaaH (Owls) 2. Bhasi - BhasaaH (Vultures) 3. Shyeni - ShyenaH(Hawks) & GrudhraH(Eagles)

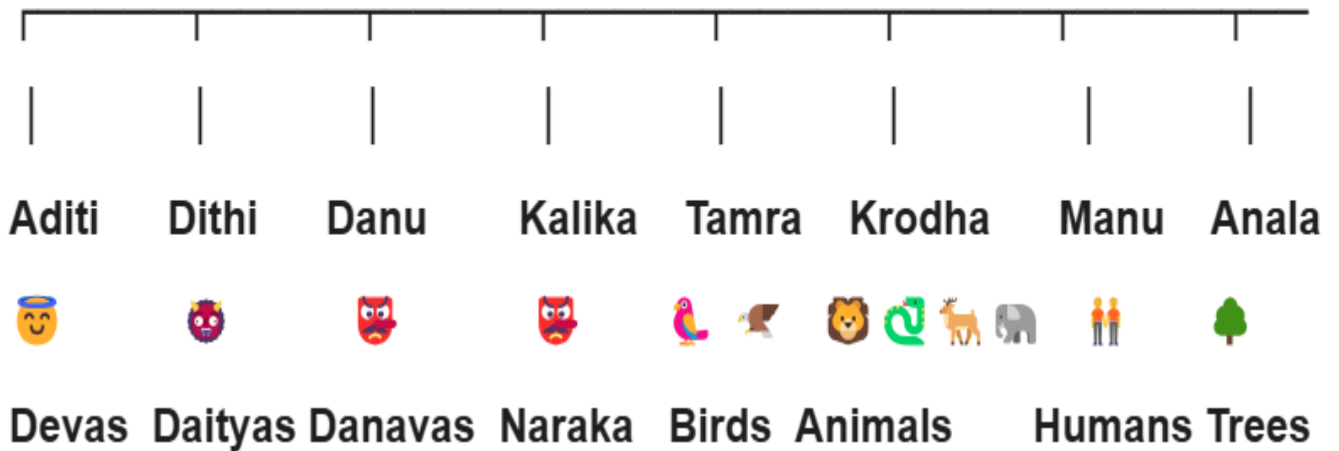
		<p>4. Dhrutharashtrii - HamsaaH (swans) & ChakravaakaaH (Ruddy Ducks, waterfowls)</p> <p>5. Shukii - Nata ->Vinata -> ArunaH ->JatayuH</p>
6.	<p>Krodhavasha</p> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mrugii - all animals 2. Mrugamandha - RkshaH(Bears), SrumaraH(Deer), ChamaraH (kind of deer) 3. Harii - HarayaH(Lions) & VanaraH (Monkeys) 4. Bhadramadha - Iravati - Airavata(elephant) 5. Matangi - MatangaH (elephants) 6. Shardooli - Golangulas(type of monkeys) 7. Shweta - DishagajaH (Guardian of 8 quarters) 8. SurabhiH - Rohini and Gandharvi 9. Surasaa - Nagas (Cobras) 10.Kadruka - PannagaH - Adhishesha,serpents
7.	<p>Manu</p> 	<p>Manushyas (Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudras)</p>

8.	<p>Anala</p> 	Trees
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The pictorial representation of the same is as below:

Jatayu's family tree - Pictorial representation:

Kashyapa 🧙



KASHYAPA + TAAMRA

└─ Shuki

└─ Nata

└─ Vinata

└─ Aruna

└─ Sampati

└─ **Jatayu**

└─ Garuda



Aruna with Sampati & Jatayu

The careful observation of the above chart explains about the birth of various species such as Devas(the celestial beings), Danavas, Asuras, Rakshasas, Birds, all animals like deer, lion, tiger, elephant, monkeys, humans and Trees. This family tree explains the evolution of many beings, covering major groups. This shows how the entire creation is one family. All are equally created. Different species are like siblings. So the entire world of resources is common for all. Here, this account of family tree emphasises the need for all beings should be treated with respect, love and honour as one another's family members.

From the time Rama entered Aranya ie the forest, he encountered superhuman beings ie Rakshasas like Viradha. During wars among superhuman beings like Devas and Asuras, many human kings like Dasaratha used to participate. Even Rama has conquered the son of Danava, Sambara and got celestial weapons as gifts from Brahmadeva for the same.

ददौ चास्त्राणि दिव्यानि यस्मै ब्रह्मा महौजसे।

दानवेन्द्रं हतं दृष्ट्वा तिमिध्वजसुतं रणे॥2.44.11॥

There was correspondence and confrontation among the super beings. Humans were also involved in those matters. But from Aranyakanda we will be seeing an extensive correspondence with all kinds of beings with our hero Rama. Especially after Rama reaches Panchavati, his connection with other species like birds, monkeys, and bears will also enhance. Our Guru Dr. Rangan ji speculates that “probably due to this reason in this place in Ramayana, we are getting an account of world history about the evolution of species, providing a bridge course to whom we meet ahead in this story”.

Jatayu's bravery and selfless -sacrifice:

When Rama was away for bringing back the golden deer that Sita was interested in, Ravana, the king of Rakshasas, forcefully abducted the lady Sita, who was alone in the forest. When she was carried off brutally, Jatayu came to her help. Though he was old and tired when compared to Ravana, who had a lot of weapons and strength, Jatayu fought bravely, giving his all to save her.

This shows the moral fibre he was made up of. He explains Dharma to Ravana not to indulge in robbing others' wives. When Ravana turned his deaf ear, Jatayu fought vigorously with him to prevent him from seizing away the tearful, helpless lady Sita.

Jatayu challenged Ravana mid-air, attacking him with sharp claws and beak, destroying parts of Ravana's chariot and scaring his mules.

Ravana, enraged, fought back and severed Jatayu's wings with his sword, leaving him to die.

Gravely injured, Jatayu fell to the earth but held onto life to convey Sita's abduction to Rama and Lakshmana.

Rama's Tribute:

Upon finding the dying Jatayu, Rama was deeply moved, calling him a father figure and performing final rites himself, granting him moksha (liberation).

राजा दशरथश्श्रीमान्यथा मम महायशाः ।

पूजनीयश्च मान्यश्च तथाऽयं पतगेश्वरः ॥3.68.26॥

This lord of the birds for me is as worthy of reverence and honour as the famous and prosperous king Dasaratha.

या गतिर्यज्ञशीलानामाहिताग्नेश्च या गतिः।

अपरावर्तिनां या च या च भूमिप्रदायिनाम्।।3.68.29।।

मया त्वं समनुज्ञातो गच्छ लोकाननुत्तमान्।

गृध्रराज महासत्त्व संस्कृतश्च मया व्रज।।3.68.30।।

Oh Mighty lord of Eagles, go to the world of those who perform sacrifices and ardent fire rituals, the world of soldiers who never run away from the battle, the world of land donors for righteous deeds. Being cremated by me, may you go to those great worlds, taking leave of me.

Righteous beings in all species- सर्वत्र खलु दृश्यन्ते :

Jatayu's Bravery signifies him as a symbol of Duty (Dharma)- he fulfilled his duty to protect Sita, defending righteousness at the cost of his life. His selfless sacrifice indicates that standing up for good doesn't require youth or strength—a courageous heart is enough. He is a messenger of Truth-by informing Rama of Sita's abduction, Jatayu played a pivotal role in the Ramayana's course. The essence of Jatayu's Bravery is - "It is better to die protecting Dharma than to live in fear and inaction."

Upon seeing such Jatayu, Rama remarks we can see valiant souls who are courageous, righteous, honest and who protects the refugees at any cost can be found everywhere. We are now seeing one such great soul in avian beings. These words of Rama, ie “souls of high morality can be found everywhere” stamps importance to all species and all beings.

Summation:

Family tree explained by Jatayu reflects **interconnected lineages of divine and natural beings** in Hindu cosmology.

The character Jatayu in Ramayana represent **virtues like sacrifice, Dharma, and wisdom**, possibly reflecting **evolution of consciousness** beyond species barriers.

All beings need to be understood as one huge family related to each other with their honour and pride. With this eye of perception, everyone is to be respected and loved equally. That's what we see in Rama when he finally hugged and cried upon Jatayu's death and cremated him with all the rituals.

This shows the important virtue in Rama that he doesn't disdain or disrespect anyone. He treats everyone equally. That is the samadharma we find in Ramayana.

न चावमन्ता भूतानां न च कालवशानुगः॥२.१.३०॥

He doesn't disrespect any beings, and he doesn't subjugate to the pressure and limits of time. He is beyond time and beings.

At the same time, he corresponds to them well, not being controlled by time or any being. He honours but won't be cornered. Though he flows through time and beings, he won't be restrained by the same. Since Rama is unbiased, he is common to all.

From the ancestry description of Jatayu we find the worth of all as equal and from Rama's relationship with Jatayu we understand how to be empathetically courteous and equal to all .

Jai Sitaram.

Shabari – The Tribal Thapasvini: An illuminate of Equality in the Ramayana

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Introduction

Ramayana is more than just the journey of Lord Rama it is Dharmic guide that teaches human values. It stands tall for dharma, devotion , human values and equality. Among the many compelling figures in the epic, the character of **Shabari**, a tribal ascetic (thapasvini), stands as a testimony to Rama’s inclusivity and deep-rooted commitment to treating all beings as equal. Shabari is introduced by Kabandan to Rama AK 73.25¹ as a long living mystic and a person who serves the disciples of Matanga Rishi. Such was her glory that Kabanda knew about her austerity even while being so far away from Pampa where she was expected to depart to the heavens on attending Rama the venerable divine to all.

Rama’s Arrival and the Sweet conversation

As described in **Valmiki’s Ramayana (Aranya Kanda, Sarga 74)**, Lord Rama, accompanied by Lakshmana, arrives at Shabari’s hermitage² AK 74.4 in a moorland which is west of Pampa as described by sage Valmiki. Overcome with joy, she welcomes them with tears of bliss and reverence touching the feet of Rama AK 74.6³. She offered water and made them comfortable. AK 74.6⁴. She shared with Rama that she had collected various fruits that ripen on the moorlands on Pampa for his sake. AK 74.17⁵ This is one of the most poignant moments in the Ramayana, **Rama, true to his divine nature, joyfully accepts her offerings**, recognizing her devotion. This moment underscores **His rejection of discrimination and emphasis on pure love and devotion.**

Rama, who is in Dharma knowing Shabari’s true self, addresses her as **sweet speaker**. AK 74.7⁶. He enquires to know about her conquering of hindrances such as wrath and uncontrolled food intake in the path of spirituality and the growth of her austerity while gaining inner peace. AK 74.7⁷ Such is the kind of conversation Rama conducts with the

¹ श्रमणी शबरी नाम काकुत्स्थ चिर जीविनी ॥

² तौ पुष्करिण्याः पंपायाः तीरम् आसाद्य पश्चिमम् ।
अपश्यताम् ततः तत्र शबर्या रम्यम् आश्रमम् ॥

³ तौ दृष्ट्वा तु तदा सिद्धा समुत्थाय कृतांजलिः ।

पादौ जग्राह रामस्य लक्ष्मणस्य च धीमतः ॥

⁴ पाद्यम् आचमनीयम् च सर्वम् प्रददात् यथा विधि ।

⁵ मया तु विविधम् वन्यम् संचितम् पुरुषर्षभ ॥

तव अर्थे पुरुषव्याघ्र पम्पायाः तीर संभवम् ।

⁶ पाद्यम् आचमनीयम् च सर्वम् प्रददात् यथा विधि ।

⁷ कच्चित् ते निर्जिता विघ्नाः कच्चित् ते वर्धते तपः ।

कच्चित् ते नियतः कोप आहारः च तपोधने ॥

tribal Shabari in which there is no such hint of doubt to the reader of Valmiki Ramayana which does not reserve any eligibility to a particular being, if devotion is pure and sincere. Knowing that she is waiting for her final departure upon His arrival, Rama again checks with her if her service to her Gurus, Matanga and other rishis is fructified finally. Shabari understands the depth of this questions and astoundingly answers that her austerity and birth has been fructified upon seeing Rama and that her Gurus are honoured. AK 74.9⁸, AK74.10⁹, AK 74.11¹⁰

In *Aranya Kanda* (74.18¹¹, 74.19¹²) of *Valmiki Ramayana*, Rama speaks to Shabari, acknowledging that she is not ignorant of esoteric knowledge. He mentions that he has heard about her greatness and that of her Guru from Kabandha. He then expresses that if she wishes, she may show him around *Matangavana*, as he would like to see the woodland as she presents it.

This passage clearly reveals that esoteric knowledge is not confined to a particular class or creed. Instead, it is attained by those who have conquered their senses, practiced austerity, and cultivated a pure state of mind. Notably, Rama does not assume that Shabari would automatically comply with his request simply because he is the much-awaited divine being she wanted to meet before she left the mortal world.

The tone of this chapter in *Aranya Kanda* resonates with themes of freedom, equality, and respect, particularly in the way Rama interacts with Shabari, the tribal *tapasvi*. His humility in this exchange emphasizes that spiritual wisdom and devotion are not bound by social status but are accessible to all who seek them with sincerity and dedication.

She says to Rama that she would reach her Gurus who she served, and who stay in the eternal worlds. AY 74.29¹³. Rama rejoices hearing her with Lakshmana and exclaims it as “astonishing!” in his own words. AY 74.30¹⁴ Rama himself tells her that. He is honored by her through her devotion. Rama endowed her with his saying that she would go to the

⁸ कच्चित् ते नियमाः प्राप्ताः कच्चित् ते मनसः सुखम् ।

कच्चित् ते गुरु शुश्रूषा सफला चारु भाषिणि ॥

⁹ अद्य प्राप्ता तपः सिद्धिः तव संदर्शनात् मया ।

अद्य मे सफलम् जन्म गुरवः च सुपूजिताः ॥

¹⁰ अद्य मे सफलम् तप्तम् स्वर्गः चैव भविष्यति ।

त्वयि देव वरे राम पूजिते पुरुषर्षभ ॥

¹¹ एवम् उक्तः स धर्मात्मा शबर्या शबरीम् इदम् ॥

राघवः प्राह विज्ञाने ताम् नित्यम् अबहिष्कृताम् ।

¹² दनोः सकाशात् तत्त्वेन प्रभावम् ते महात्मनः ॥

श्रुतम् प्रत्यक्षम् इच्छामि संद्रष्टुम् यदि मन्यसे ।

¹³ तेषाम् इच्छामि अहम् गन्तुम् समीपम् भावित आत्मनाम् ।

मुनीनाम् आश्रमो येषाम् अहम् च परिचारिणी ॥

¹⁴ धर्मिष्ठम् तु वचः श्रुत्वा राघवः सह लक्ष्मणः ।

प्रहर्षम् अतुलम् लेभे आश्चर्यम् इदम् च अब्रवीत् ॥

cherished worlds, where she could be in peace with her Gurus. AY 74.31¹⁵. Taking leave from Rama, Shabari cast herself into the sacred fire which she created out of her own austerity, attaining divine liberation in front of Rama. Like a flaring fire, she ascends to heavens, alone. AK 74.33¹⁶. She appears as an angel decorated with celestial ornaments, garlands and robes. AK 74.34¹⁷. She resembles lightning and ascends to the realms where Gurus of virtuous deeds sport with the self. AK 74.35¹⁸. She goes there through her restful alertness of the self is what Valmiki describes here. Thus, she had executed her destiny in full control and the way she intended at the time she wanted to shed her body in front of the eyes of Rama, having Him as the witness.

Her departure signifies the ultimate reward of unwavering devotion to her Guru, illustrating that austerity and devotion, not caste or birth, determines one's spiritual destiny.

Rama's Philosophy of Equality

The *Valmiki Ramayana* portrays Shabari as an individual of great spiritual merit, not bound by societal labels. The conversation reflects an environment where spiritual worth is recognized over birth or status, reinforcing the theme that devotion and knowledge are accessible to all. Ramayana reflects a broader theme of equality embedded throughout the epic. Despite being a prince from the Ikshvaku lineage, Rama never distinguishes between high and low status. May it be His interactions with people of tribal origin like Guha and Shabari, the sages, and even Hanuman, a vanara, or Jatayu the bird, Rama demonstrate his **principle of universal respect and inclusion**.

It reveals Rama as a divine being who sees all beings as equal, regardless of their social standing. His acceptance of Shabari's devotion aligns with his larger mission of Dharma and equality of all.

Current day Relevance of Shabari's experience

In today's world, where discrimination and inequality persist, Shabari's spiritual experience holds immense relevance. This chapter unravels the truths as below:

1. **Devotion is Universal** – Spirituality is beyond caste, gender, or social status.

¹⁵ ताम् उवाच ततो रामः शबरी संश्रित व्रताम् ।
अर्चितो अहम् त्वया भद्रे गच्छ कामम् यथा सुखम् ॥
¹⁶ ज्वलत् पावक संकाशा स्वर्गम् एव जगाम सा ।
¹⁷ दिव्यम् आभरण संयुक्ता दिव्य माल्य अनुलेपना ॥
¹⁸ दिव्य अंबर धरा तत्र बभूव प्रिय दर्शन ।
विराजयन्ती तम् देशम् विद्युत् सौदामिनी यथा ॥
यत्र ते सुकृत आत्मानो विहरन्ति महर्षयः ।
तत् पुण्यम् शबरी स्थानम् जगाम आत्म समाधिना ॥

2. **True Equality Lies in Respect and** – Rama’s acceptance of Shabari’s offering exemplifies how **leaders should embrace inclusivity**.
3. **Patience and unconquerable perseverance Yield Divine’s Grace and makes one Divine by itself** – Shabari waited years for Rama, embodying perseverance and trust in the divine and controlled her destiny making the divine as the witness for her departure from the current world.

Conclusion

Shabari, the simple, old, tribal ascetic woman, remains an **eternal symbol of devotion, credence, and equality**. Her experience in the Ramayana is not merely a tale of an individual’s devotion but a **powerful statement on inclusivity**, reinforced by Lord Rama’s acceptance of her love. In a world often divided by social hierarchies, her story serves as a timeless reminder that the divine sees only the heart’s purity, not societal labels.

Through Shabari, Valmiki’s Ramayana throbs to deliver an apparent message—**true devotion and austerity transcends all barriers, and in the eyes of divine, all are equal**.

Sama Dharma Impact of Rama on Ramanuja Sampradaya

Equality attribute of Rama and Ramanuja

Sri Vasan Srirangachari, M. Tech. Translator of various rare Sri Vaishnavite Manipravalam- works into Hindi & English

Srimate Ramanujaya Namaha

Though the topic given to me is to narrate how Rama and Ramanuja had exhibited the equality attribute in them, I would like to show one similarity between Rama and Rangaji here before proceeding. Sri Rama transformed a blade of grass into a Brahmastra. Our Sri Rangaji made me stand here and talk. You may ask how can I compare myself with Brahmastra? Yes, it is such a commendable task to make me who is a tiny blade of grass to talk to this August audience. With his and Sri Anna's grace, I will try to present the thoughts on the subject matter.

Ramarajya of Sri Rama was envisaged by Sri Ramanuja. Samataa or equality was the highlight of Ramarajya. Sri Ramanuja followed the footsteps of Sri Rama in establishing equality in Srivaishnavism.

Sri Rama is celebrated as gunavaan, embodiment of virtues in Bala kaanda. The main guna is sheela guna. It is named as King of all gunas by Srivaishnavite acharyas. Srivaishnavite Poorvaachaaryaas explained the sheela guna as the one in which a person of higher status mingles freely with a person of lower status. It is like water in a cup getting mixed with water in another cup and not like mixing of oil and water. Sri Valmiki says how Sri Rama used to behave with the citizens of Ayodhya. Brusham bhavati dukhitaha. Sri Rangaji explains this virtue by an example. A person might overcome the sorrow of losing his father 10 days after his death. But Sri Rama used to continue to mourn for his death. This is irrespective of the status of the citizen.

Here I want to mention how Sri Ramanuja was more miserable by seeing the misery of jivas who had not realised their miserable state.. He did sharanaagati to the Divya Dampati on behalf of all jivas. Can you find such an acharya anywhere?

Sri Rangaji always mentions that nowhere in Ramayana, discrimination based on caste or even species is mentioned and Ramayana is an epic of equality. In Sri

Ramanuja's theology also, all discriminations take a back seat as far as a vaishnavism is concerned.

Sri Ramanuja was of the opinion that Varnaashrama Dharma is a saamaanya Dharma and Vaishnavism is a Vishesha Dharma.

This sheela guna is seen throughout Sri Ramayana.

In Ayodhya Kaandam, we see this guna when Valmiki says that the Nishad raja, the king of hunters is equal to Sri Rama from the point of view of Sri Rama. Aatmasama sakhaa. Sri Ramanuja went one step ahead and considered Sri Kanchipoorna who belonged to the third varna as his acharya.

In Aaranya Kaandam, Sri Rama introduces himself to shoorpanakha like he used to introduce Himself to a sage by saying Abhivaadya. Sri Ramanuja also introduced himself to a hunting couple when he was lost in the deep jungle in the same way.

Sri Rama accepted fruits from Sabari, a tribal woman because of her acharya sambandham. Here srivaishnavite acharyas say that the fruits were first bitten by her before offering them to Sri Rama to test its taste. This Shabari's tasting of the fruits was also first written by Srivaishnavite acharyas as per Sri Rangaji's research.

Sri Ramanuja wanted to take the remnants of the food of Sri Kanchipoorna. He gave such an importance to the remnants that he renounced his wife as she was against this. She was a follower of saamanya Dharma. She could not digest the vishesha Dharma of Sri Ramanuja.

Again in Aaranya Kaandam, Sri Rama grants moksha to a bird Jatayu by performing the Brahmamedha ritual which is generally performed for the great brahmanas.

Here I will like to talk about the incident of performance of last rites of Maaranera Nambi :

On the instruction of his acharya Sri Yamunaachaarya, last rites of Maaranera Nambi a Harijan by Sri Mahapoorna following the rituals of Brahmameedha Samskaram which is usually done for a great vedic brahmana. Disciples of Sri Ramanuja inquired the acharya the reason for transgression of scriptures. Though Sri Ramanuja was aware of the reason, he wanted his disciples to hear from Sri Mahapoorna himself and he took them to the Acharya. Sri Mahapoorna said, " I didn't do anything new. Rama had done this for Jatayu. Maaranera

Nambi was a human being but Jataayu was a bird. The great Rama did Brahmedha Samskaram for Jatayu. But where is the question of transgression when I followed Sri Rama's footsteps ?

Here I would also like to mention that Srishailshaacharya, the acharya of Sri Manavala Maamuni observed the austerities of a disciple when he heard that Vilaanjolai Pillai had left his body. Villanjolai Pillai was an Harijan disciple of Sri Pillai lokacharya. Hence the concept of caste discrimination didn't exist among the vaishnavites during the period of Poorvaachaaryaas.

In Kishkindha Kaandam, Sri Rama makes friends with the Monkey King Sugreeva. He takes his army's help in the war with Ravana. Sri Ramanuja also took help from the Harijans to protect Sampath Kumar from the Muslim soldiers. Like Sri Rama felicitated them after the victory in the war, Sri Ramanuja also felicitated the Harijans by permitting them to enter the temple at Melkottai. It was a daring act in those days. Here I would like to mention an incident involving Nadaadoor Azhwan :

Nadaadoor Azhwan was a cousin of Sri Ramanuja. He was walking on the street of Srirangam holding the hand of a brahmana Srivaishnavite. Seeing a Harijan srivaishnavite walking towards them, the brahmana said to the harijan, "Get away from our path". Hearing this, Sri Nadaadur Azhwan fainted. When he regained his consciousness, his disciples asked the acharya the reason for fainting. The Acharya replied, " Can this person who has got initiation in Vaishnavism and fortunate enough to live in Srirangam be considered as untouchable? I am only untouchable as I have stolen the aatma which belongs to Bhagavan from time immemorial. " See the Acharya's thoughts. He is considering the Harijan vaishnavite superior to himself who was a brahmana.

In Sundaram Kaandam, Sri Rama embraces Hanuman after he returns from Lanka. Sri Ramanuja also does a similar act but in a different context in the form of holding the hand of Dhanurdas after a bath. While going to Kaveri for a bath, Sri Ramanuja used to hold the hands of brahmana disciple for support but after the bath used to hold the hands of Dhanurdas. When his disciples asked the reason for this act of their Acharya, Sri Ramanuja replied, "We all being Brahmanaas will have subtle ego of high caste. But Dhanurdas being not a brahmana is always humble. Hence I thought by getting the touch of him, I too will get that virtue of humility. "

In Yuddha Kaandam, it is said that Sri Rama had meals with Hanuman. Again it is a vishesha Dharma. Here I would like to narrate an incident from Nadaadur Ammal's life which is as follows:

Once, a disciple visited the house of Nadaadoor Ammaal. He was shocked to see his acharya taking food along with a non brahmana srivaishnavite. Nadadoor Ammaal said, "Vaishnavites belonging to any caste are supposed to be treated on par with brahmana- srivaishnavites. Otherwise it is a big offence."

Sri Rama's associates included people from various classes like Nishad, Sabari, Sugreeva, Vibheeshana etc..

Sri Ramanuja had innumerable disciples belonging to various castes who were treated on par with brahmana disciples. Here I would like to mention on the chanting of Divyaprabandham by them along with brahmana srivaishnavites on the streets of Srirangam during the procession of acharya's divine body. This is recorded in the 13th century text Guru Parampara Prabhavam.

An incident of housewarming can be narrated again as an act of equality. Sri Yamunacharya was renovating his house. One of his disciples Sri Maranera Nambi (belonging to down trodden caste) went inside the house just to see it. When the acharya heard about the visit of his disciple, he cancelled the housewarming ritual saying, " Housewarming is done by the dust of the holy feet of the outcaste disciple who is a great vaishnavite. "

Sri Rama equally bestowed attainment of Vaikunta on all citizens of Ayodhya irrespective of caste, gender etc. because of their love for Him.

Sri Ramanuja opened the doors of Vaikuntam to all people without any discrimination by preaching the path of Prapaatti because of their eagerness to get liberated.

Equality of kanyakams: Sri Rama accepted the service of a squirrel in building the bridge equal to that of big army of monkeys. This kanyakam is beautifully described by Sri Thondaradipodi Azhwar in his work " Tirumalai ". Azhwar says that a squirrel thought, " These monkeys are very slow in building the bridge. Rama had breakfast here. He should reach the other side of shore for meals. How is this possible? Hence let me expedite the work by plastering the stones by pouring sand between them. " Then it made its body wet with sea water and then rolled on the shore so that maximum amount of sand grains will stick to its body. It then used to shed that sand in the middle of the boulders. Sri Rama saw

if from a distance and asked Laxmana to get the squirrel to Him. He felicitated it by patting it on its back.

Sri Ramanuja showed mercy on Dhanurdasa, a wrestler and showed him the divine eyes of Ranganatha. Having seen it, he got engrossed in it for hours together. This episode showed everyone is eligible for Bhagavad Anubhavam. Acharya has nominated ten groups of vaishnavites to do different kankaryams in Srirangam temple involving every section of the society in Kankaryam. There were people from different communities like potters, flowermen, tailors, painters etc. in these groups.

Irrespective of the person, the one who does kankaryam is felicitated by Ranganatha. This system was begun by Sri Ramanuja in Srirangam.

Sri Rama felicitated the squirrel, sugreeva, Hanuman, Vibheeshana for their different kankaryams.

Sri Ramanuja asked a yadava woman who offered buttermilk to him in Tirumalai about her desire. She said she wants to attain Paramapadam. Acharya prayed to Venkateshwara and she got it soon. This is similar to the prayer by a boatman to Rama. Thus Rama and Ramanuja were equally compassionate and thought that everyone was eligible for liberation which is sought after by great sages.

In Srivaishnavism, it is peculiar to note that Azhwars mostly were inclined towards Krishna Bhakti whereas the poorvaachaaryas were inclined more towards Rama bhakti. Even to explain the verses from Divyaprabandham which talk of Shringaara rasa of Krishna, they were search in nook and corner of Ramayana to present the shringara rasa between Rama and Sita.

Here I would like to narrate an incident during the Bhagavata Mela conducted by Sri Anna at Mumbai in 1991. On the last day, Sri Anna asked Sri Hariji to speak and he spoke on the soulabhya guna of Krishna and said no one can equal Him in soulabhya guna. During his speech, we all could see how desperate Sri Rangaji was to snatch the mike and prove that Rama was more sulabha. At that time, he was hardly 12 years old. He said Krishna was sulabha for a Kubjaa, florist only but Rama extended his Soulabhya guna to even monkeys, bears and squirrels also. There was a big applause from the Bhaktas in the audience. That sapling of Rama-bhakti of Sri Rangaji has taken a form of a huge banyan tree like in Panchavati giving shelter to millions of Rama bhaktas.

In Sri Vaishnavism we say, in our daily prayer for last 1000 years, "Ramanuja's order should reach all directions for the welfare of the world." If we introspect, have we taken the order of our Purvacharyas, I don't think we have done it. One of the main reasons of not reaching of it is the caste discrimination found in some persons of Sri Vaishnava tradition. This has to go. In the heart of our Purvacharyas, caste discrimination had no place in Sri Vaishnavism. I take the opportunity of this platform to express my opinion.

Srimathe Ramanujaya nama.

Sama Dharma Impact of Rama on Ramananda Sampradaya

Sri Vishal Pandey, Disciple of Padmavibhushana Svami Ramabhadracharya, Researcher in IKS in IIT Kanpur, contributing in remodification of Valmiki Ramayana commentaries & digitisation and translation of Avadhi manuscripts related to Sri Ramananda Sampradaya

रामं स्वादिगुरुं नत्वा परंब्रह्मसनातनम् ।
द्विभुजं जानकीनाथं सच्चिदानन्दविग्रहम् ॥
सीताञ्चादिगुरुं नत्वा चिद्रूपां रामवल्लभाम् ।
श्रीरामसानिध्यवशात्सृष्टिस्थित्यंतकारिणीम् ॥
समस्त निगमाचार्य्यं सीताशिष्यं गुरोर्गुरुम् ।
सर्वविद्याधिनाथं हि हनुमन्तं प्रणम्य च ॥
श्रीसीतानाथ समारम्भां श्रीरामानन्दार्यं मध्यमाम् ।
अस्मदाचार्य पर्यन्तां वन्दे श्रीगुरु परम्पराम् ॥
जयति कवि कुमुद चन्द्रो हुलसी हृद्दर्षवर्धनस्तुलसी ।
सुजन चकोर कदम्बो यत्कविता कौमुदीं पिबति ॥
श्री गुरु चरण सरोज रज, निज मनु मुकुरु सुधारि ।
वरनऊँ रघुवर विमल जसु, जो दायकु फल चारि ॥

I pay my humble obeisances to my Gurudeva's lotus feet, his worshippingable deity, Sri Chitrakut Viharini Vihari Ji and Sri Goswami Tulasidas Ji Maharaja, who is the foremost Acharya of the Ramananda Sampradaya after Sri Svami Ramanandacharya.

I have been requested by Ranganatha Svami Ji to address the topic "Impact of Sri Rama's Samadharma on Ramananda Sampradaya."

Therefore, I would like to remember srirangaraghava bhagvana by offering this chaupai at his lotus feet :-

बार बार वर मांगिहौं हरषि देहु श्रीरंग ।
पद सरोज अनपायिनी भगति सदा सत्सङ्ग ॥

May sri ranga raghava bhagvan bestow upon me uninterrupted bhakti of his lotus feet and satsanga of ramaprapannas like you all.

Introduction to Ramananda Sampradaya

To begin with, I would like to give a brief introduction to the Ramananda Sampradaya. This Sampradaya is a lineage of Sri Rama Shadakshar Mantraraja, which originated from Sri Sita-Ramachandra Himself. In the beginning of creation, Sri Rama gave His divine mantra to his eternal consort Sri Janaki. Later, Sri Janaki Ji initiated Sri Hanuman Ji into Sri Rama Mantra. Sri Hanuman Ji then initiated Brahma Ji. Through the successive lineage of Acharyas, including Vashishtha, Parashara, Vyasa this Rama Mantra was eventually passed down to Svami Raghavanandacharya, who later gave this mantra to Svami Ramanandacharya Ji, who appeared almost 725 years ago in Teertharaj Prayaga.

He is considered as major propounder acharya of the Rama Mantra in the medieval Bhakti period. This parampara is also known as Sri Sampradaya or Sri Janaki Sampradaya as Sri Janaki who is "Sri" is the primeval acharyaa of this sampradaya. This fact is stated in Valmiki Samhita as follows :-

इमां सृष्टिं समुत्पाद्य जीवानां हितकाम्यया।
आद्यांशक्तिं महादेवीं श्रीसीतां जनकात्मजाम् ॥
तारकं मन्त्रराजं तु श्रावयामास ईश्वरः ।
जानकी तु जगन्माता हनुमन्तं गुणाकरम् ॥
श्रावयामास नूनं स ब्रह्माणं सुधियांवरम् ।
तस्माल्लेभे वशिष्ठर्षिः क्रमादस्मादवातरत् ॥
भूमौ हि राममन्त्रोऽयं योगिनां सुखदः शिवः ।
एवं क्रमं समासाद्य मन्त्रराजपरम्परा ॥

Valmiki Ramayana also states Sri Rama to be guru of Sri Janaki as follows :-

यो मे भर्ता स मे गुरुः – Sri Janaki herself says that Sri Rama is my Svāmī and Guru.

The Sampradaya is also known by other names such as "Vairagi Sampradaya" or "Ramavat Sampradaya."

The devotees who take initiation into Rama Mantra from Ramananda Sampradaya are called Ramanandīs. Some older works like Shakti Sangama Tantra define the word Ramanandī as:

"सर्वत्र समरूपश्च रामानन्दी प्रकीर्तितः"

Ramanandīs are well known for their equanimity towards all beings.

Another interpretation is found in a Tantric work named Gopala Paddhati, which states:

*"हृदयाम्भोज मध्यस्थे श्रीरामे परमात्मनि ।
आनन्दं भजते यस्तु रामानन्दी स उच्यते ॥"*

"One who worships Paramātmā Sri Rāma situated at the center of his lotus personified heart, is known as a Ramanandī."

Samadharmā of Sri Rama Reflected in Ramananda Sampradaya.

Being ekantika upasakas of Sri Rama, Ramanandīs embody the virtues of Sri Rama. Valmiki Ramayana states:

"आर्यः सर्वसमश्चैव सदैव प्रियदर्शनः"

Sri Rama always maintains equanimity towards all entities. Commenting on this verse, Govindaraja Svami says:

"जातिगुणवृत्त्यादि तारतम्यं विना सर्वेषामाश्रयणीयत्वे तुल्यः"

This means that Sri Rama is equal in being worthy of refuge for all, without distinctions based on caste, qualities, or conduct.

This principle is the fundamental basis of the Ramananda Sampradaya, which Svami Ramanandacharya Ji expresses in his major work "Sri Vaishnava Matabja Bhaskara" as follows:

*"सर्वे प्रपत्तेरधिकारिणः सदा शक्ता अशक्ता पदयोर्जगत्प्रभोः ।
अपेक्ष्यते तत्र कुलं बलञ्च नो न चापि कालो न च शुद्धतापि वै ॥"*

All are eligible for Sharanagati (surrender) unto lotus feet of Jagatpati Bhagavan Sri Ramachandra at all times—whether strong or weak. Neither lineage, nor strength, nor even purity is a prerequisite.

Svami Ramanandacharya further states:

*"उत्कृष्टवर्णैरपि वैष्णवैर्जनैर्निकृष्टवर्णः स तदीयसेवने ।
तथानुसर्तव्य इतीष्यते बुधैः शास्त्रैर्विधेये विधिगोचरैः परैः ॥"*

learned scholars who are well versed in prescribed rituals declare that in regard to devotional service of bhagavan, even those of upper varnas must humbly follow the footsteps of prapannas belonging to lower varnas who are firmly fixed in unwavering devotion of Sri Sitaramachandra equally as vice versa.

Achāryacharana gave equal right to all in receiving imprints of bhagvadayudhas saying

*"पञ्चायुधाङ्का भुवि वैष्णवा ये मुखाग्रजक्षत्रियवैश्यशूद्राः ।
स्त्रियस्तथाऽन्येऽपि च विष्णुरूपा जगत्प्रवित्रप्रपवित्रिणस्ते ॥"*

any brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya shudra, men or women and even those who doesn't fall in the above category, if they are adorned with ramaprapatti, are abode of all teerthas. Purifying the world by their presence and sanctifying even the teerthas, they are embodiment of sarvavyapaka bhagavan Sri Rama.

Holding this nature of equanimity towards all the beings, Svami Ramanandacharya states:

*"श्रयन्ति धर्मास्तु तथा पृथक् स्थितान् सुवक्रगाः सिन्धुमिवापि निम्नगाः ।
काष्ठस्थवह्नेरिव घातको हरेश्वराचरस्थस्य च जन्तुहिंसकः ॥"*

just as rivers flowing non rectilinearly also meet in sea, all the virtues takes shelter of those who are widely apart from materialistic violence. Slayers of innocent living beings are like slayers of hari who is pervading animates and inanimates like fire residing inside wood.

However, this non-violence should not be misunderstood as the one propagated by Gautama Buddha or Mahavira. The Ahimsa stated here is explained by Goswami Tulasidas Ji as:

"परम धर्म श्रुति बिदित अहिंसा"

Here, "Shruti-Vidita Ahimsa" (vedic non-violence) is the supreme Dharma. It involves eliminating those who slay innocent beings and disrupt Vedic Yajnas.

Practicing Vedic Ahimsa, one becomes humble towards all living entities, yet strong in opposing Adharma. This makes a person more generous and compassionate, as stated in Valmiki Ramayana:

"रामोपि परमोदारः"

Sri Rama is Parama-Udara (supremely generous).

The Compassion and Inclusivity of Sri Ramananda

Svami Nabhadasa, the author of the exemplary work Bhaktamala, which entails the charitra of several bhaktas from various sampradayas, glorifies Sri Ramananda as:

रामानन्द उदार सुधानिधि अवनि कल्पतरू ।

Sri Ramananda is a reservoir of immeasurable compassion and generosity, a spiritual benefactor for the whole world.

This generosity is evident in an incident recorded in the Bhavishya Purana (Pratisarga Parva, 21st chapter):

*रामानन्दस्य शिष्यो वै चायोध्यायामुपागतः ।
कृत्वा विलोमं तं वैष्णवांस्तानकारयत् ॥*

भाले त्रिशूल चिह्नं च श्वेतरक्तं तदाभवत् ॥
कण्ठे च तुलसीमाला जिह्वाराममयी कृता ॥
म्लेच्छास्ते वैष्णवाश्चासन् रामानन्द प्रभावतः ॥
संयोगिनश्च ते ज्ञेया रामानन्दमते स्थिताः ॥
आर्याश्च वैष्णवा मुख्या अयोध्यायां बभूवुरे ॥

During the rule of the Yavanas, Bharatavarsha was suffering heavily, and conversions were at their peak. Witnessing this, one disciple of Svami Ramananda went to Ayodhya and brought many back to Sanātana Dharma, initiating them into Vaishnavism by adorning them with Urdhvapundra Tilaka (white and red marks in the form of a trident) on their foreheads. Those who were once Mlechhas became Vaishnavas under the influence of Svami Ramananda. These devotees came to be known as Sanyogins, who firmly adhered to the doctrine of Svami Ramananda. They became exalted Vaishnavas and settled in Ayodhya.

Unconditional Bhakti and Equality in Ramananda Sampradaya

In the Valmiki Ramayana, Sri Rama not only bestows immense love but also grants his supreme abode to Jatayu, a meat-eating vulture. Following this bhāva, Sri Krishnadasa Payohari Maharaja, the grand disciple of Svami Ramananda, demonstrated an extraordinary act of selflessness at Galata Teertha in Jaipur.

Once, while engaged in tapasya, he was chased by a hungry tiger seeking flesh. In response, Payohari Ji offered a portion of flesh from his own thigh to the hungry tiger. Witnessing this supreme sacrifice, the tiger prostrated at his feet. Moved by the surrender of the tiger, Svami Ji bestowed Pancha Samskāra upon him, giving him Rāma-sambandhi Nāma, Dhanurbāna Mudrā, Tulasi Māla, Urdhvapundra Tilaka, and the most exalted Rāma Mantra.

This incident, recorded in Bhaktamala by Svami Nābhādāsa, affirms the Samadharmitā of the Ramananda Sampradāya.

Among Rāmānandīs, the following saying is very popular:

"राम भजन और साधु सेवा दे गए रामानन्द"

Sri Ramananda gave Rāma Bhajana and Sādhu Sevā to the whole world.

Any temple served by Rāmānandīs invariably contains a Shivalinga, as Mahadeva is regarded as the Āchārya of the Rāma Mantra and the Paramānurāgi of Sri Ramachandra. Therefore, even being an Ekāntik Upāsaka of Sri Sita Ramachandra, Sri Gosvami Tulasidas has given almost equal if not more respect to Sri Mahadeva, to whom he attributes his exemplary work, Sri Rāmācharitmānasa. He glorifies Mahadeva as his spiritual guru and father saying :

"गुरु पितु मातु महेश भवानी"

Thus, keeping Sri Sita Ramachandra at the epicenter of their devotion, Rāmānandīs, see this entire cosmos as Sharīra of Sri Rāma and pay their obeisances with folded hands:

सीयराम मय सब जग जानी । करहु प्रनाम जोरि जुग पानि ॥

Ramananda as the Bridge to Bhakti Beyond Caste Distinctions

Svāmi Nābhādāsa in his Bhaktamala states :-

"(श्री) रामानंद रघुनाथ ज्यों दुतिय सेतु जगतरन कियो ॥
अनंतानंद कबीर सुखा सुरसुरा पद्मावती नरहरी ।
पीपा भावानंद रैदास धना सेन सुरसुर की घरहरी ॥
औरो सिष्य प्रसिष्य एक ते एक उजागर ।
जगमंगल आधार भक्ति दसधा के आगर ॥
बहुत काल बपु धारी के प्रनत जनन को पार दियो ।
(श्री) रामानंद रघुनाथ ज्यों दुतिय सेतु जगतरन कियो ॥"

Just as Sri Raghunatha built a bridge to cross the mighty ocean, Sri Ramananda, instead of constructing a physical bridge became the bridge himself, uplifting Saṃsāra by spreading Rāmabhakti without any Jātibheda (caste distinctions).

He accepted disciples from all Varnas:

Svami Anantananda and Sursurananda were Brahmins.

Svami Pipa, the king of Gagraungarh province in Rajasthan, belonged to the Kshatriya clan.

Dhanna Jaat was from the Vaishya community.

Svami Ravidas was Shudra by birth.

Svami Kabirdas was not even born a Hindu but was a Muslim weaver.

Among female disciples were Queen Padmavati, wife of King Pipa and Sursuri Devi, the wife of Svami Sursurananda.

Among these disciples, Svami Kabirdas and Svami Ravidas were the most influential in spreading Rāmabhakti among marginalized sections of society. They preached Samadharmā across all sections, keeping Sri Rama at the epicenter of Bhakti.

Hanuman Garhi and the Transformation of Nawab Shuja-ud-Daulah

The present-day Hanuman Garhi temple was built by Nawab Shuja-ud-Daulah of Avadh. Before that, this place was known as Rāmkot, where, in the early 18th century, a Rāmānandī Sādhu, Svami Abhayarāmadās, used to perform Tapasyā and serve the Vighraha of Hanuman Ji.

Once, the Nawab's youngest son fell severely ill with an undiagnosable stomach ache. In desperation, the Nawab's wife brought the child to Svami Abhayarāmadās Ji Maharaja, pleading for his life. Out of compassion, Svami Ji gave the Prasāda of Hanuman Ji Maharaja, and upon consuming it, the child was instantly cured.

The Nawab, who had earlier imposed heavy taxation on Hindus and temples in Ayodhya, was struck with guilt. He came for Darshana of Svami Ji and requested permission to build a large temple at Rāmkot, which became the present-day Hanuman Garhi. He also constructed Rajdvara Mandir in front of Hanuman Garhi and donated generously for the upkeep of many temples in Ayodhya.

This incident highlights how preaching Samadharmā through Rāmabhakti results in the sustainable welfare of society.

Gosvami Ji says that if someone wants to know, he should know that Sri Rama only gets pleased through unconditional love.

“रामहि केवल प्रेम पियारा ।
जानि लेहु जो जान निहारा ॥”

Sri Rama's rule is characterized by unconditional compassion, justice, and total inclusivity, which is what has formed the core of Ramanand Sampradaya. This divine parampara emphasized that Bhakti and Prapatti is universal and accessible to all, transcending social boundaries and welcoming every soul into ultimate refuge of Sri Sitaramachandra.

Keeping Sri Sita Ramachandra in my heart and the Charanapadukas of sri sadgurudeva on my head, I take my leave after chanting this Upadeshātmaka Shloka spoken by Sri Hanuman Ji Maharaj in Srimad Bhagavatam:

"सुरोऽसुरो वाप्यथ वानरो नरः सर्वात्मना यः सुकृतज्ञमुत्तमम् ।
भजेत रामं मनुजाकृतिं हरिं य उत्तराननयत्कोसलान्दिवमिति ॥”

श्रीसीतारामचन्द्रार्पणमस्तु

Sri Aravindhan Neelakandan

**(Senior editor Swarajya, Governing Board Member of Auroville Foundation,
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History of India)**

The gradual conquest of India by the East India Company and its subsequent takeover directly by the British in India happened over the period of almost three centuries. This colonial Raj on India precipitated a multifaceted crisis, characterised by ten interconnected and deeply damaging consequences. These were not isolated features, but a systemic and fundamental assaults on Indian people, their culture and religion and their economy – each reinforcing the other.

What are these ten Asuric faces of British colonialism?

- 1) *Systematic Deindustrialisation and Economic Exploitation*: The deliberate dismantling of indigenous industries, coupled with the systematic draining of copious wealth, formed the bedrock of colonial economic policy.
- 2) *Bureaucratic Suppression of National Economic Development*: The systematic stifling nascent Indian economic initiatives by a rigid colonial bureaucracy hampered the growth of a self-reliant economy and suppressed the spirit of *Swadesi* entrepreneurship.
- 3) *Disruption and Distortion of Agrarian Systems*: The natural evolution of India's agricultural networks was disrupted, leading to the destabilisation of rural economies. Its indigenous infrastructure for irrigation and related human resource allocation became increasingly dysfunctional under colonial administration which was obsessively tax-centric.
- 4) *Amplification of Agrarian Inequalities and Creation of Collaborating Vested Interests*: Existing inequalities within agrarian relationships were intensified, fostering localised power structures that served colonial interests.
- 5) *Sustained Food Insecurity and Recurrent Famines*: Colonial economic policies contributed to a significant increase in food insecurity, resulting in devastating and recurrent famines.
- 6) *Intensive Social Stagnation with Exacerbation of Social Hierarchies*, whose most malignant form being Untouchability: Colonial policies often reinforced and amplified the negative elements in the existing social divisions, most notably the oppressive practice of untouchability, thereby deepening societal stratification.
- 7) *Alienation of Indigenous communities from Natural Resources*: Forest-dwelling populations, the Vanvasis and Janjaatis, deemed obstacles to British resource control, were unjustly criminalized. This brutal designation facilitated the egregious violation of their fundamental human rights. Furthermore, the imposition of taxes on essential commodities, such as salt, bred pervasive networks of systemic corruption, further eroding the social fabric.
- 8) *Erosion of Indigenous Educational Institutions*: The systematic undermining of traditional Indian educational systems impeded the transmission of knowledge and cultural heritage. Centralised and capital intensive educational system strangulated the indigenous system and resulted in what Mahatma Gandhi termed the 'felling of the beautiful tree.'

9) *Disruption of Religious and Cultural Diversity*: Colonial policies, including those associated with aggressive proselytisation, challenged the existing theo-cultural diversity of the Hindu nation.

10) *Ruthless Imposition of Political Imperialism*: The subjugation of Indian political autonomy under colonial rule denied the nation self-determination. This also resulted in the curtailment of basic human rights, including freedom of expression and assembly, was a hallmark of colonial administration.

I

Even in its nascent stages, the corrosive nature of colonialism was keenly perceived by the Indian national consciousness. In 1809, amidst the burgeoning British East India Company's protectorate over Travancore, Iyya Vaikundar was born. While local Nair officials managed direct tax collection, the East India Company, acting as a proxy for British interests, reaped the lion's share of the increased revenue, with a portion redirected towards missionary activities. The marginalized, burdened by oppressive taxation and the arbitrary power of collectors, also suffered from pre-existing social restrictions. This confluence of economic exploitation, political subjugation, and theo-colonialism created a fertile ground for dissent.

Iyya Vaikundar, proclaiming himself a divine emanation of Vishnu, challenged both colonial exploitation and aggressive proselytization. Employing the rich symbolism of Puranic narratives, he articulated a potent critique of the encroaching colonial stranglehold. He strategically utilized the Ramayana as a framework for indigenous Dharmic resistance.

His narrative, as presented in the *Akila Thirattu*, reimagines the epic's core elements. Sri Rama's mission against Ravana, the embodiment of tyranny, serves as an allegory for the struggle against colonial oppression. Ravana, even in defeat, attributes his downfall to Vibhishana's alliance with Rama, prompting a further cycle of destruction. In the *Kali Yuga*, Ravana reincarnates as 'white-imperialism' (Ven-Neech) and internal social stagnation (Kali-Neech). This white-Asura, devastating continents and communities, cannot be defeated by physical force, but through knowledge and virtue – by upholding Dharma.

This Puranic allegory, though deeply rooted in indigenous symbolism, clearly conveys Vaikundar's critique of colonialism. The oral tradition of reciting the *Akila Thirattu* ensures that the narrative's intended message resonates with its audience, preserving its potent social commentary. Perhaps this is the first use of Ramayana imagery to specifically build an anti-colonial discourse.

விருச்சமுள்ள நீசன் வேசை நசுநாணியவன்
வையகங்களெல்லாம் வரம்பளித்த மாநீசன்
நெய்யதியச் சான்றோரின் நெறியெல்லாந் தான் குலைத்துப்
பேரழித்துத் தானம் பூப்பியமுந் தானழித்து
...
தானமழித்து சான்றோரின் கட்டழித்தான்

Contemporaneously, in the Andhra Pradesh region, Ranjana Anantayya led a tribal uprising against British authority, naming his followers the 'Rama Dandu,' or Army of Rama. He sought support from the Maharaja of Jaipur, articulating a vision that extended beyond immediate Indian concerns. Anantayya possessed a nuanced understanding of the global political landscape and proposed leveraging international circumstances to advance Indian Swaraj, envisioning himself as a modern-day Sri Rama in this endeavour.:

'Is it good, if the English be in our country? ... We ... should wage war with the English. The Russians are also troubling the English. If the assistance of men and arms are supplied to me, I will play Rama's part.'

In the rugged heartlands of tribal resistance, Bhagwan Birsa Munda ignited a conflagration of defiance, casting the British and their collaborators as the malevolent Ravana. He further imbued his rebellion with potent symbolism, portraying the British queen as Mandodari, their effigies consigned to the flames of righteous indignation. This uprising, unfolding in the twilight of the 19th century, resonated with the timeless echoes of epic struggle. Birsa Munda, adorned with the sacred thread, wielding the bow and arrow, and surrounded by the venerated presence of the Tulsi plant associated with Vishnu, unmistakably embodied the archetype of Sri Rama Bhakta, a warrior-saint rising to vanquish tyranny. In his speeches Bhagwan Munda spoke of his own coming back as coming back of Hanuman. His was a passionate invocation of ancient dharma, a fiery testament to the enduring spirit of resistance against colonial oppression.

From the sun-drenched shores of India's southernmost tip, where Iyya Vaikundar proclaimed his divine lineage, to the rugged terrains of Andhra where *Ranjana Anantayya* rallied his Rama Dandu, and thence to the verdant depths of the northern-central forests where Birsa Munda's rebellion blazed—a profound and unifying narrative unfolded. And this is only a representative sample.

Each, in their distinct milieu, claimed divine emanation from Vishnu, anchoring themselves in the hallowed lineage of Sri Rama, while casting the British as the embodiment of Ravana's oppressive might. This remarkable convergence, spanning vast distances and diverse cultural landscapes, reveals the indomitable strength of the Rama tradition as one of the vital cores of the collective national psyche. Sri Rama personifies a spiritual unity that transcends the barriers of language, habitation, ethnic identity, and clan affiliation. Rama Bhakti transforms during national necessities into Rashtra Bhakti.

II

Swami Vivekananda, the cyclonic Hindu monk not only inspired generations to serve India and her downtrodden millions as the highest Karma Yoga, but also provided the spiritual blueprint for the liberation of India. He received the sacred Sri Rama Mantra from his Guru, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. This mantra, a profound inheritance of Guru Deva himself, ignited in Vivekananda a surge of ecstatic devotion, prompting him to circumambulate the house, chanting the divine name of Rama. Later in soul-stirring words Swami Vivekananda would exhort the youth to embody the fearless and selfless dedication of Hanuman as their ideal when serving the nation and presented Sita as the embodiment of ideal Indian womanhood.

Bharatiya resistance that was the swirling flames in the *Yajna Kunda* of cultural and spiritual fervour, found its most potent expression in the veneration of the Goddess. *Vande Mataram*, invoking the Motherland, alongside the formidable figures of Maha Kali and Bhavani Durga, became rallying cries, embodying the fierce spirit of defiance. Yet, as the struggle for independence broadened, a subtle, profound shift occurred—a transition from the fiery *Shaktam* to the serene *Vaishnavism*. The impassioned cry of *Vande Mataram* harmonised itself with the contemplative hymn, *Vaishnav Janto*.

The emotional surge ignited by the Bengal Partition, coupled with the deepening agrarian crisis and British-deepened social fissures, increasingly permeated the national movement. Amidst this confluence of forces, the ideal of *Rama Rajya* gradually emerged as a powerful emotional anchor. This ascendancy was not solely attributable to Mahatma Gandhi's advocacy. Rather, it arose from the crucible of suffering endured by Indians under the worst forms of exploitation they suffered

right from the tribal forest lands in the interior India to the indentured populations toiling in the distant strange lands.

III

The British, through engineered famines and economic duress, forced countless Indians into indentured labour—a form of quasi-slavery marked by dehumanizing conditions. In the face of this abject subjugation, Indians, men and women alike, clung to their spiritual fortitude as a bulwark against despair.

Accounts from Fiji's Indian diaspora bear witness to this resilience. Colonial machinations often resulted in a deeply exploitative gender ratio within the indentured workforce, with women subjected to horrific abuses. Faced with such degradation, many chose the path of self-annihilation rather than surrender their dignity. The hardships endured by Indians in Fiji were a testament to the depths of colonial cruelty.

Yet, they preserved their familial bonds and upheld their moral integrity. This unwavering fortitude stemmed largely from the sustaining power of *Bhakti*, most notably expressed through the recitation of Gowami Tulsidas's *Sri Ramcharitmanas* and the enactment of Ramlila. These sacred traditions provided a vital source of spiritual nourishment, enabling them to withstand the crushing weight of oppression.

John D Kelley is an anthropologist studying Indian population in Fiji. He primarily does this within the Western framework, including Western postcolonial studies, the Gramscian school, and the study of the evolution of capitalism. Yet in his seminal work, *A politics of virtue: Hinduism, sexuality, and countercolonial discourse in Fiji* (University of Chicago Press, 1991, p.43) he writes:

(Hindus and Muslims) also participated in Ram Lilas, dramatic reenactments of the Ramayan narrative, which in indenture days was told as a tale of Ram's exile, climaxing with the burning of a giant effigy of Ravan symbolizing destruction of the evil in the world. In these rituals the Indians found their social identity in relations to God outside of, and in tension with, the colonial racist and economic definitions of the "coolies." The reading and hearing of texts became a noncoercive basis for an open community; within that framework, the Ramcharitmanas of Tulsi Das rose in social prominence through salient readings of its teachings. In the example of Ram, this version of the Ramayan epic provided a paradigm for the struggle of the good in an evil world; in the example of his wife Sita, a model of devoted chastity under pressure; and in the example of their enemy Ravan, a model of the delusions of powerful evil. All the rituals of the indenture period provided a basis for self-respect in antagonism with colonial moral measures. The Tulsi Das text became more: it became a weapon against indenture itself.

A Ramanandi Sadhu made himself an indentured labourer and lived with the suffering Indians. He learnt first hand their hardship and gave a political voice of emancipation to these suffering Indians. He was Baba Ramchandra. He had concealed his Brahmin identity in order to come as indentured labourer to Fiji. He wrote extensively on the suffering of Indian women in Fiji islands. They were sexually abused. Pregnant women also had to work. While catering to the spiritual strength of the people by organising *Ram Lila* in Fiji, he made the world become aware of their suffering through

political channels. Baba Ramachandra thus verily became the Hanuman who communicated the suffering of the Hindu women in exile to the outside world.

For the Fiji indentured Indians, the rules of pollution which had become strong because of social stagnation, could not rob their dignity. They were in exile like Ram himself. They were denied freedom like Sita herself. They are hence as pure as Sita and the British and their henchmen were nothing but Ravan and his mighty forces. But they believed that deliverance would come through Bhakti. It held them together. It held them with dignity and finally the colonial shackles did break down and freedom did come.

IV

Within India's heartland, the imagery of Sri Rama, the aspiration for Swaraj as the establishment of Rama Rajya, and the depiction of the British as Ravana, began to stir a potent national awakening. British intelligence, acutely aware of this undercurrent, meticulously observed the Ramlila festivals—the dramatic re-enactments of Sri Rama's triumph over Ravana. At times, the heroic figures of the 1857 uprising would subtly, yet powerfully, manifest within these performances. In 1908, at Rampayali, a town steeped in Maharashtrian history, a young orator, during the 'burning of Ravana' celebration, boldly equated British rule with the demonic king, demanding its destruction. Accused of sedition and restricted he, Dr. Hedgewar, the future founder of the RSS, remained undeterred.

Baba Ramachandra returned from Fiji and he also worked in Central and Northern Indian regions awakening people through the imagery of Ramrajya. He emphasised equality and egalitarian relations in the agrarian production systems. 'Jai Ramji' and 'Siya Ram' became salutations of egalitarian spirituality. They replaced Salaam – a greeting an inferior used to make to a superior.

When Mahatma Gandhi made the vision of *Ram Rajya* and the singing of *Ram Bhajans* part of his arsenal against the imperial might of the British, he was not innovating, but rather, drawing from the deep, inexhaustible wellspring of the grand spiritual tradition of India. Throughout the Non-Cooperation movement, his speeches vibrated with the conviction that Satyagraha was nothing less than a Dharmic battle, a righteous struggle against the British Ravana for the liberation of Mother India. Mother India under British became the Sita in Asokavana. Every Satyagrahi became the soldier of Ram Sena. Mahatma Gandhi was the great Hanuman. Sri Rama the very primordial source of absolute liberation – Para Brahman Itself. On April 13, 1919 the massacre of Jallianwallabagh happened. The sequence of the events started with *Sri Ram Navami* that year which was on April 9th. That day was celebrated together by Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims in a show of national solidarity. This was followed by attacks of the police and arrests of national leaders. This in turn led to a peaceful meeting at Jallianwallabagh subsequently.

Rama Bhakti became the guiding light of the freedom movement. Gandhi while not pressurising his Muslim followers to join in the Rama Nama recitation, always pointed out that they should not have any real objection to taking the name of Sri Rama as the name of the Divine Oneness. His Rama was at once the impersonal all pervading Truth. But Gandhi would not allow such abstraction and philosophising, rob the personal spiritual charm and power of transformation that Saghuna Brahma Rama has. So he also simultaneously emphasised that his Rama was also the very Sri Rama of Sri Ramcharita Manas of Tulsidas.

Thus Sri Rama is the enduring every living Shakti of the Nation while also the primal archetype for every son, every husband and every ruler. He is all this and more. He is the very Source. As the Source of the Universe He is Truth and Liberty, Justice and Universal Empathy. He is the very personification of Dharma. Naturally Sri Rama Bhakti is the undying spirit of Mother India.

