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## Philosophy as the Basis of Sustainable Life: Insights from *Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇam*

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**Abstract**

Human being always efforts to make his life beautiful and meaningful with his intelligence. It is from this effort that philosophical thought emerges in the human mind and he attempts to establish it in behaviour. This Philosophical thought becomes the basis of all aspects of Indian Knowledge System, such as knowledge, science, dharma, politics, health awareness in all fields. This Philosophical thought helps people who are unhappy with worldly matters to find the eternal happiness. Karma Yoga, *Jñāna* Yoga and Bhakti Yoga are among the paths that have been seen in Indian philosophy as a means of attaining the *puruṣārthas*; dharma, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*. The Ramayana contains many philosophical thoughts about the world and life. At the beginning of the Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇam, this question is raised by Maharṣi Vālmīki that-

“ko nvasmin sāmpratam loke guṇavān kaśca vīryavān |

Dharmajñaśca kṛtajñaśca satyavākya dṛḍavrataḥ ||

cāitreṇa ca ko yuktaḥ sarvvabhūteṣu ko hitaḥ |”<sup>1</sup>

This statement clearly shows that Indian philosophy placed special importance on the formation of human character and on his duties. In response, Maharṣi Nārada said, born in the lineage of *Ikṣāku*, Rāma is the one who is *niyatātmā*, *mahāvīryo*, *dyutimān*, *dhr̥timān*, *budhimān*, *nītimān*, *vāgmī*, *dharmajñah*, *satyasandhaśca*, protector of dharma and *prajā*. Rama's character and feats made his lord Rāma and his fame spread beyond the borders of Bhārata to the outside world. Various aspects of human life and the world are revealed through many characters in many stories of the Rāmāyaṇam. In the present situation: during the decline of civilization and culture, it is absolutely necessary to follow the path shown by the Rāmāyaṇam.

**Keywords :** Rāmāyaṇam, *puruṣārtha*, Indian philosophy, life, duty.

The most intelligent and curious individuals, realizing the diversity and mystery of the life and the world, strive to uncover the underlying truth and, in doing so, find an eternal quest. By realizing this truth, they are no longer bound to the cycle of birth and death, and they attain eternal liberation which is called *Mokṣa*. In this context, these areas that are considered as the subject matter of Indian philosophy are Metaphysics (reality and being), Ethics (knowledge and truth), Axiology (aesthetics & ethics), Logic (argumentation and reason) and political philosophy (the state and government). In short, philosophy encompasses all mater related to the world and life, conscious and unconscious, visible and invisible. external and internal. Due to ignorance, he cannot feel this eternal truth and he becomes disoriented and indecisive. In today's era of moral decay, the thinking on *Jīvana-darśana* is necessary. In this context, the *Rāmāyaṇī kathā* is so relevant for reforming and for restoring ancient Indian culture.

Human-behaviour plays a vital role in both the welfare and degradation of this world. According to the scriptures, behaviour that is beneficial to the world is considered dharma, and its opposite is adharma. The ten signs of dharma mentioned in Manusmṛiti-

“dhr̥tiḥ kṣamā damosteyaṃ śaucamindriyanigrahaḥ |

dhirvidyā satyamakrodho daśakam dharmalakṣaṇam ||”<sup>2</sup>

Self-possession, forbearance, self-control, non-stealing, purity, sense-control, intellectual efficiency, learning and knowledge, truthfulness and non-anger are ten characteristics of dharma. These moralities of human beings are the fundamentals of society, polity, *vidyā*, *darśana* and other fields. This has been stated by the king Daśaratha nicely- “kṣamā yasmin tapastyāgaḥ satyam dharmmaḥ kṛtajñatā | apyahimsā ca bhūtanām tamṛte kā

gatirmama ||”<sup>3</sup> A person with all these dharmas becomes a ‘*puruṣottama*’. The people of Ayodhyā praised Rāma as ‘*puruṣottama*’-

“ānṛṣaṃsyamanukrośaḥ śrutam śīlam damaḥ śamaḥ |

rāghavam śobhayantye ṣaḍguṇāḥ puruṣarṣabham ||”<sup>4</sup>

Ramasya ayanam- Ramayanam. The influence of his deeds is worldwide. He never shirks his duties under any circumstances. The importance and impact of *karma* is discussed in all scriptures. Ishopaniṣad said-

“kurvanneveha karmāṇi jijīviṣecchatam samāḥ | evam tvayi nānyathetosti na karma lipyate nare ||”<sup>5</sup> According to scripture, the good deeds bring good results and bad deeds bring bad results. ‘*janmāntarvāda*’ or rebirth is based on this ‘*karmavāda*’ in Indian philosophy. The world is nourished and governed by *karma*. Lord Krishna said in Gītā, the karma is essential for the welfare of *jagat*, *śarīryātrā*, *lokaśikṣā*, and it leads to *jñānamārga*. In Taittirīya Upaniṣada, at the end of study, the guru would give these advices to his disciples-

“ṛtaśca swāddhyāyapracane ca | satyaśca swāddhyāyapracane ca | ...damaśca swāddhyāyapracane ca | athithayaśca swāddhyāyapracane ca | mānuśca swāddhyāyapracane ca |”<sup>6</sup> In ancient times, this karma was accomplished through the scriptural Varnashrama system and the ecological balance was maintained. The role of the householder was most significant for the world. The five major sacrifices (*mahāyajnas*) prescribed for them- A unique example of an *atithisatkāra* in the Rāmāyaṇam, where Bharata and his army were served by Bharadwāja Rsi.

*Rājā* Dasharatha ruled the kingdom according to the principle and respected people of all castes. Before the coronation, his advice to Rāma was-

“bhūya vinamāsthāya bhava nityam jitendriyaḥ |

kāmakrodhasamutthāni tyajaswa vyasanāni ca ||”<sup>7</sup>

To fulfil his royal duty, Rāma killed the female demon Tārak and exiled his *pavitṛā* wife Sītā to the forest. At that time no one usually violated their dignity. The Sage Vishvāmitra could have destroyed the demons Mārīca and Suvāhu through curse, but he wanted to do it through Rāma. Since he was initiated into the *yajna*, it was inappropriate to curse.

As a social being, it is the responsibility of humans to follow the rules of society. So, a person, Siddhartha said in the context of Kaikeyī’s unjust claim- “lokotopi hite rakṣyaḥ parivādaḥ śubhānane ||”<sup>8</sup> Women have a special and dignified place in the family and society. Seeing Sītā getting ready to go to the forest with Rāma, the sage Vaśiṣṭha told Kaikeyī,

“na gantavyaṃ vanaṃ devyāsītayā śīlavarjite |

anuṣṭhāsyti rāmasya sītāprakṛtamānasam ||

ātmā hi daraḥ sarvveṣāṃ dārasaṃgrahavartinām |

ātmeyamiti rāmasya pālayiṣyati medinīm ||”<sup>9</sup> The wife is the soul of every household and is the half of the husband, as mentioned in many scriptures. Lord Manu also focused this topic in Manusmṛiti- where women are worshipped, gods are worshipped. The husband was also worshipped as a God by his wife. Thinking of her husband, Kauśalyā refrained from going to the forest with Rama. The feelings of all women about her husband are expressed in Sita’s word-A woman without a husband is not able to enjoy happiness even she has a hundred sons; only a husband can give her immeasurable happiness. Also, the sweet relationship between father and daughter is nicely focused in Ādikāṇḍa (33 Sargaḥ) on this epic through the story of Kuśanābha and his hundred daughters. This verse revealed what family relationships should be like in Indian culture and tradition-

“jyeshtho bhrātā pitā vāpi yaśca vidyām prayacchati |

trayaste pitaro jñeyā dharme ca pathi vartinaḥ |

kanīyānātmanaḥ putraḥ śiṣyaścāpi guṇoditaḥ |

putravatte trayaścintyā dharmascaivātra kāraṇam ||”<sup>10</sup>

Lakṣmana could only recognize Sītā’s two nupurs, because he only saw her feet during the *carāṇa-bandanā*, not any other body parts.

Character is the identity of a person. In this context, Rāma said to Jāvālī- “kulīnamakulīnaṃ vā vīraṃ puruṣamāninam | cāritrameva vyākhyāti śucim vā yadvāśucim ||”<sup>11</sup> The main goal of Indian education system is to make a characteristic person. These ethical values are the basis of Indian society, philosophy, politics etc. When moral values degrade in a person’s character, disaster comes to his life. Bālī was killed by Rāma for marring his

brother's wife Rumā. Rāvana was also killed by Rāma for abducting Sītā. So, 'vyāsana' is always abandoned and self-control is required for this. Rāma asked Bharata, who came to return Rāma to Ayodhyā, if he is free from vyāsana as it is an obstacle to politics. This topic is discussed in detail in the chapter 'Rājadharmā' of the 'Manusmṛiti'. This topic is explained in a simple and clear way by Sītā-

“trīṇyeva vyāsānānyadya kāmajāni bhavanttyuta |

mithyāvākyantu paramaṃ tasmādgurutarāvubhau ||”<sup>12</sup>

The consequence of this *vyāsana* is *śoka* (grief). Kaushalya- patience, knowledge, everything is spoiled from *śoka*, there is no like the *śoka*.

This *śoka* arises from *kāma*. The impact of *kāma* is revealed by Bālī's wife Tārā- Aa lustful (*kāmāsakta*) person cannot -judge the *deśa*, *kāla*, dharma and *artha*, and even ascetics become lustful and are captivated by the pleasures of wife (*strī*). Mahāmāti Lakṣmana also advised Rāma, who was infatuated with Sītā- the *śoka* comes from *kāma* which destroys *samādhi*. This grief should be overcome by the *samādhi*. The key to attaining *samādhi* is *cittaprasāda* and *snānādi-kriyā*. The power or *sāmarthyā* is produced through worship of God. When the mind is controlled, the other senses are controlled, since the relationship between the two is very close. The words of Daśaratha, who was mourning his son, are relevant in this regard in- just as the flame of a lamp goes out due to lack of oil, in the same way, all the senses are exhausted due to mental fatigue, so mental grief is destroying him.

A person with a restrained mind is entitled to *ātmajñāna*. So, in Indian philosophy, the subject of sense restraint is considered to be a very significant topic. The human mind is as fickle as the wind and it is very difficult to control it. The movement of the mind is nicely revealed in Yogashastra- “cittanadī nāma ubhayato vāhinī, vahatī kalyāṇāya, vahatī papaya ca | yā tu kaivalyaprāgbhārā vivekaviṣayanimnā sā kalyāṇavahā | saṃsāraprāgbhārā avivekaviṣayanimnā pāpavahā ||”<sup>13</sup> So, Rāma advised Bharata in to practice Yoga as a means of controlling the senses. This topic is very extensively described in the Vedas, Upaniṣads, Yogasāstra etc.

*Ātmajñāna* is necessary to understand the essence of the world and life. Due to ignorance or *antaḥripu* of the mind, the human being cannot feel the nature of the life and world. Lord Krishna guided Arjuna on the right path by giving advice on *ātmattva*. In the Ramayana, it is also seen that this *ātmattva* is presented by Rāma to Bharata, who is grieving over his father's death, so that he can be free from this grief. The essence of life is beautifully presented through Maharshi Vashistha in simple language-

“trinī dvandvāni bhuteṣu pravṛttānyaviśeṣataḥ |

teṣu cāparihāryeṣu naivaṃ bhavitumarhasi ||”<sup>14</sup>

Realizing this, Rāma also advised Bharata-  
“hr̥ṣyantarttumukaṃ dr̥ṣtvā navamivāgatam |

ṛtunām parivarttana prāṇinām prāṇasaṃkṣayṣḥ ||”<sup>15</sup>

No creature in this world can overcome death. So, it is inappropriate to mourn for our deceased father.

The cosmology is considered an important topic in Indian philosophy. This scientific thought revealed in the Ramayana- in the past, everything was covered with water, and then the earth was created in that water. Then svayambhu Brahmā emerged with the gods and along with his son Dakṣa, began to create all the *sthāvara* (immovable) and *jangama* (movable things). Also

“pṛthivī vāyurākāśamāpo jyotiśca... |

Svabhāve Saumya tiṣṭhanti śāśvatam mārgamāśritāḥ ||”<sup>16</sup>

The immeasurable powerful *kāla* controls the life and world. All beings are under powerful *kāla*. The impact and power of *Kāla* is revealed by Ramachandra- ‘na nūnam daivatam kiñcit kālena valavattam |’<sup>17</sup> Śītādevī also said about the immeasurable power of *Kāla* in 6/48/19- There is no *karma* that is impossible for *kāla*, no one can overcome *kāla*, and it gives the result of their good and bad deeds.

The Rāmāyaṇam is the repository of ethical values. Morality is the base of Indian culture i.e. character, family, society, dharma, *darśana*, politics etc. Indian morality teaches us to feel ourselves in everyone. Difficult tasks are possible with the collective efforts of everyone, that is why difficult task like rescuing Sītā are accomplished with the help of Sugrīva, Hanumāna, Vibhīṣana etc.

The consequence of unethical behaviour is also presented in this epic. This is the reason for the destruction of Bālī and Rāvaṇa. Manodarī said about the consequence of *karma* after Rāvaṇa's death that those who do good deeds get good results and those who do bad deeds get bad results. So, Vibhīṣana becomes happy and Rāvaṇa falls into sorrow. The topic of the failure of *nītijñāna* has been presented by Kumbhakarṇa-

“yaḥ paścāt pūrvvakāryāṇi kuryādaiśvaryyamāsthitaḥ |

pūrvvaṃ cottarakāryāṇi na sa veda nayānayaḥ ||”<sup>18</sup>

The vidyā or knowledge becomes fruitful through application. This quote by Maharṣi Kaṇāda is very relevant in this context-“driṣṭanam driṣṭaprayojananam driṣṭabhavo ... prayogebhyudayah ||”<sup>19</sup> All the aspects of Indian philosophy find fulfilment through the behaviour of Rāma and other characters. ‘Rāma-rājya’ is desirable for all to us. So, the path followed by Rāma is worthy of all to follow. The story of the Rāmāyaṇam has become immortal for the deeds of the truthful Rāma, and the story of the Rāmāyaṇam has spread beyond the borders of India and throughout the world fulfilling the blessing of Vālmiki-

“yāvat sthāsyanti girayaḥ saritaśca mahītale |

tāvad rāmāyaṇīkathā lokeṣu pracariṣyati ||”<sup>20</sup>

**End note:**

- <sup>1</sup> Rāmāyaṇam 1/1/2-3
- <sup>2</sup> Manusmṛiti 6/62
- <sup>3</sup> Rāmāyaṇam 2/12/33.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid. 2/33/12
- <sup>5</sup> Ishopanishad 2
- <sup>6</sup> Taittirīya Upaniṣad 1/9/1
- <sup>7</sup> Rāmāyaṇam 7 2/3/42-43.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid. 2/36/30
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid. 2/37/23-24
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid. 4/18/14
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid. 4/18/14
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid. 3/9/4
- <sup>13</sup> Yogabhāṣya 1
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid. 2/78/23
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid. 2/105/25
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid. 6/22/23
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid. 2/88/11
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid. 6/63/5
- <sup>19</sup> Vaiśeṣikasūtra 6/2/1.
- <sup>20</sup> Rāmāyaṇam 1/2/36

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